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Integration of Professional Identity and Christian Religious Identity in Undergraduate Social Work Students

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INTEGRATION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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Undergraduate social work programs are responsible to prepare students who will practice in accordance with the NASW *Code of Ethics*. Such preparation is not simply limited to developing a body of knowledge or set of skills but extends to adoption of a professional identity. Several research studies point to religious values as a significant motivational factor in choosing social work as a profession, yet little research has been conducted to investigate the integration of religious identity with an emerging professional identity. The current study sought to explore the experience of professional identity formation in undergraduate Christian social work students for whom religion was a central part of life. Narrative interviews were conducted with nine BSW students, aged 19-24, enrolled at public universities in the Midwest. Sociological and psychological identity theories, along with developmental theories, were utilized to examine challenges to professional identity and methods utilized for overcoming challenges. Data analysis revealed common storyline and themes in professional identity development, as well as in integration of religious identity with professional identity. This study demonstrated that conflict with religious identity, among other factors, can pose a threat to emerging professional identity. Participants, however, employed a variety of coping mechanisms to manage conflict between professional identity and religious identity while ultimately

voicing a commitment to uphold values and ethics of the social work profession. Further research of undergraduate professional identity development, with religious and non-religious students, is recommended to better understand how social work faculty may assess, support, and intervene in this professional development.

INTEGRATION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS
IDENTITY IN UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Social workers operate from a core set of professional values, knowledge, and skills as outlined in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 1996/2008). Undergraduate social work programs are responsible to train students who will practice in accordance with the Code of Ethics. Such training is not simply limited to developing a body of knowledge or set of skills but extends to adoption of a professional identity (Campinini, Frost, & Hojer, 2012). The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE, 2015b) 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) suggest graduates from both accredited bachelor of social work (BSW) programs and master of social work (MSW) programs will be able to "demonstrate ethical and professional behavior" (p. 7). Specific demonstrations of such behavior can be seen in Figure 1.

Social workers will:
- make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context;
- use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations;
- demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication;
- use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and
- use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior.

(Council on Social Work Education, 2015b)

Figure 1. Behaviors demonstrating CSWE standard for ethical and professional behavior.

The 2015 EPAS also delineates between a social work program's explicit curriculum comprised of courses intended to teach core competencies and its implicit curriculum intended to provide a learning environment that models values of the profession (CSWE, 2015b). The explicit and implicit curriculum are supported by the process of professional socialization which ideally results in a student who perceives the self as one who can act in accordance with the norms, values, and culture of the social work profession (Miller, 2013).

Social work literature discussed development of the professional self as early as the 1940s, yet research exploring the process of how professional identity is formed is limited (Barretti, 2004b; Miller, 2010). Professional identity includes representing the mission and values of the profession with social workers being expected to "use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations" (CSWE, 2015b, p. 7). Although a growing body of research exists examining personal and professional values among social work students and practitioners, minimal research places those values within the context of professional identity formation. Several research studies point to religious values as a significant motivational factor in choosing social work as a profession (Graff, 2007; Osteen, 2011; Ressler & Hodge, 2003). The core values of the profession (service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence) are values shared by many of the world's major religions (Spano & Koenig, 2007; Stewart, 2009). Despite the importance of religion in some social work students' lives, very little research has been conducted to investigate the integration of religious identity with an emerging professional identity.

Research examining religious demographics of U.S. college students indicates a significant number claim Christianity as their religion of preference. According to surveys conducted from 2003-2007 with over 112,000 students entering their freshman year at 236 secular and faith-based colleges and universities across the U.S., nearly 75% of students identified Christianity as their religious preference (Higher Education Research Institute, 2011). Rosenbohm's (2011) nationally representative survey of 412 students enrolled in Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programs displayed similar religious preference rates with 54.6% of participants identifying as Christian Protestant and 19.2% identifying as Christian Catholic. The CSWE (2011), accrediting organization for U.S. social work programs, reports that almost 37% of baccalaureate social work programs in the U.S. are housed in private-religion affiliated institutions.

Contemporary social work literature, meanwhile, highlights tension that exists between the primarily pluralist worldview of the profession and the worldview commonly associated with Christian social workers who hold orthodox religious beliefs. While the predominant worldview of the profession aligns with a humanist, relativistic approach in which multiple truths are possible, the traditional Christian worldview operates from a more exclusivistic approach in which there exists one divine Truth (Stewart, 2009). Much of the literature has focused on philosophical debate. Spano and Koenig (2007) describe the competing worldviews and suggest a six-stage model for resolving differences between a personal worldview and that of the NASW *Code of Ethics* which ultimately uses the professional code as the deciding voice. Adams (2008) argues that Spano and Koenig elevate the NASW *Code of Ethics* above competing worldviews, giving it the status of truth and narrowing the interpretability of the code in

ways that may be unduly unfair to Christians with orthodox beliefs or those with other

varied worldviews. Stewart (2009) also writes of the conflict suggesting a truly

pluralistic stance becomes exclusionary in practice resulting in competing exclusivistic

worldviews. The impact on values clarification and ethical decision-making for students

and practitioners is emphasized in Stewart's work as well.

Practical interpretation of values and ethical principles as stated in the NASW

Code of Ethics is often inconsistent and fluctuates according to personal worldview.

Further, social work ethics in the U.S. have changed over time both in focus and level of

formalization, developing through four primary eras: (1) the morality period, (2) the

values period, (3) the ethical theory and decision-making period, and (4) the ethical

standards and risk management period (Reamer, 1998). In the morality period of the late

nineteenth century, social work was not yet recognized as a profession in the U.S. and

existing social services were highly influenced by religion (Hugman, 2013; Midgley &

Sanzenbach, 1989). The institutions generally viewed as forerunners of contemporary

social casework agencies, Charity Organization Societies, based services on a Christian

obligation to rid society of immorality and were often staffed with social workers who

believed character reform and spiritual guidance were more important to the helping

process than material assistance (Karger & Stoesz, 2010). At this time, ethical standards

had not yet been codified and the prevailing focus of ethical concern was the client's

morality as opposed to the ethical practice of social workers (Reamer, 1998). Still in the

early twentieth century, the settlement house movement partially shifted the social work

spotlight from client immorality to the need for societal reform (Reamer, 1992) and

caseworkers began to emphasize development of intervention strategies and treatment

models that would differentiate the profession from psychology (Reamer, 1998).

Meanwhile, Abraham Flexner's (1915/2001) report suggesting social work was not a

profession due to its lack of an ethical code spurred Mary Richmond, as well as various

chapters of the American Association of Social Workers (AASW), to draft the first codes

of ethics during the early 1920s (Dolgoff, Loewenberg, & Harrington, 2009). Although

the AASW did comprise the largest organization of professional social workers at the

time, these localized codes did not provide a unifying document for the overall profession

(Dolgoff et al., 2009).

     During the middle part of the twentieth century, the values period of social work

ethics appeared which largely shaped the first nationwide code. The National Association

of Social Workers (NASW) formed in 1955 by merging several smaller professional

organizations and published the first nationwide social work code of ethics in 1960

(Congress, 1999). In the midst of the civil rights era, social work literature increasingly

referred to values of social justice, social equality, and freedom from oppression as being

foundational to the profession (Reamer, 1995). It was from this value base that the first

Code of Ethics was adopted, reaching only one page in length, and being comprised of

vague, idealistic constructs for professional practice (Congress, 1999). Other than the

addition of a nondiscrimination section in 1967, the Code of Ethics remained the same

for nearly two decades (Dolgoff et al., 2009) until the profession's ethical focus shifted to

theoretical foundations and decision-making (Reamer, 1998).

     Social work ethics in the late 1970s and 1980s was highly influenced by medical

ethics, particularly the new field of applied and professional ethics which attempted to

provide models for applying ethical principles in challenging, real-life situations

(Reamer, 1998). At the same time, social workers were calling for a revised code that would provide more effective guidelines for resolving ethical dilemmas than did the existing code (Dolgoff et al., 2009). As the discipline worked to establish itself as a profession with a knowledge base supported by the scientific method, positivism and empiricism became undergirding philosophies (Stewart, 2009), although Stewart (2013) also contends the profession has never clearly articulated or even determined its philosophical foundation. At the same time, the Judeo-Christian values which were formerly embraced as foundational to social service work came under scrutiny as the opposing views of humanism and liberalism became more predominant (Stewart, 2009). Ethics discussions in the literature moved beyond that of professional values to examination of ethical theories and strategies for resolving hypothetical dilemmas (Reamer, 1998).

Finally, the ethical standards and risk management period of ethical evolution began in the 1990s as the knowledge base of professional ethics had grown significantly and common ethical issues in social work were becoming more apparent (Reamer, 1998). Revisions made to the Code in 1996 were extensive including expanded ethical standards meant to guide social work practice behavior, protect clients, and reduce risk of malpractice (Congress & McAuliffe, 2006; Reamer, 1998). For the first time, the Code included cultural competence and social diversity as an ethical principle suggesting social workers should strive to understand clients' cultures, provide culturally sensitive services, and recognize oppression related to variables of social diversity such as race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, political beliefs, and religion (NASW, 1996/1999, 1.05). The

purpose statement of the Code also addressed potential values conflicts for social workers

stating:

> Social workers also should be aware of the impact on ethical decision making of
> their clients' and their own personal values and cultural and religious beliefs and
> practices. They should be aware of any conflicts between personal and
> professional values and deal with them responsibly. (NASW, 1996/1999, p. 3)

Despite its increased specificity, the Code has continued to be critiqued as being

ineffective in truly assisting social workers to resolve complex ethical dilemmas (Sanders

& Hoffman, 2010).

Many professional codes of ethics today contain directives for honoring client

cultures and refraining from imposing personal values on clients. Some argue, however,

that social work is unique in that it uses core values as a defining aspect of the profession

(as opposed to knowledge or skills) and justifies its practice based on a moral worldview,

particularly one of social justice (Stewart, 2013). Buila (2010) examined this worldview

by conducting textual analysis of 55 national and international codes of ethics from

various health, mental health, and education professions. Although she found 16 codes

which contained language on nondiscrimination and five codes, including the social work

code, which discussed the mandate to promote social justice, the NASW *Code of Ethics*

was unique in its statement that professionals

> should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people
> have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they
> require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers
> should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should
> advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in
> order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. (NASW, 1999, as
> cited in Buila, 2010, Sec. 6)

Perhaps most importantly, Buila found that social work was the only profession which

specifically listed vulnerable populations for which social workers must advocate, not

only individually but in the larger societal context. Diverse sexual orientation, for example, is specified within the code as a factor in vulnerability and discrimination. Such obligation to advocate for policy benefiting vulnerable populations (e.g., marriage rights) poses an ethical challenge to social workers who morally oppose same-sex marriage relationships (Thaller, 2011).

In the past ten years, this tension in worldviews within the social work profession has also been debated in the realm of federal and state conscience protection laws. A conscience protection law is a "legislative provision that allows a person to claim an exemption from compliance, usually on religious-freedom grounds" (Black's Law Dictionary, as cited in Parr, 2009, p. 622). Such policies are aimed at protecting the health care worker's (including social workers) right to refrain from participation in or provision of services held as objectionable based on moral or religious beliefs (Guttmacher Institute, 2012; Parr, 2009; Pope, 2010). The substance of federal conscience law lies in the threat of an institution losing Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) funding should it punish employees for refusal to provide a service deemed to be personally morally objectionable (Collins, 2006). Initially, conscience protection laws did not attract much public attention. By 2008, however, societal culture wars, along with proposed changes to federal conscience protection laws, brought about great controversy (Constable, 2013). These changes in federal conscience protection laws sparked debate within the social work community as to how and if social workers are and should be protected. The NASW issued a legal issues brief in 2010 contesting the ability of social workers to refuse to provide referral services based on moral or religious beliefs (National Association of Social Workers, 2010). In response, Adams (2011) argued the

NASW was failing to protect the conscience rights of its members by encouraging them to hold professional duty above private conscience. Constable (2013) suggests the "personal conscience and professional conscience need to be able to live together" (p. 126) and claims the Code of Ethics supports a social worker's right to refuse making a direct referral to abortion services in its discussion of client self-determination as stated below:

> Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients' right to self-determination when, in the social workers' professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others. (NASW, 1996/2008, 1.02)

Constable contends that the fact abortion services are a legal service which clients have the right to choose does not outweigh a social worker's personal belief that abortion poses an imminent risk to the fetus. He, therefore, maintains the conscience line may be drawn between helping a client think through options and actually making a referral to services. Although abortion services originally prompted conscience protection laws, other potential areas of personal-professional conflict have been noted in the literature. A case of adoption services social workers in Great Britain refusing to place children with same sex couples due to their religious beliefs resulted in the initial removal of the workers and considerable debate about protection of worker rights versus protection of client rights (Hayes, 2013). Considering a nationally representative survey of BSW students in the U.S. reported thirty-eight percent of students believe homosexuality is a sin, serious thought must be given as to how these students may one day practice in an increasingly diverse society.

In addition to managing moral dilemmas posed by differing worldviews, social work students may also experience stigma related to religious discrimination. A stigma is created when an attribute, such as religious belief held by a person, is strongly discredited or disparaged within specific social contexts (O'Brien, 2011). Concern regarding the potential discrimination of religious social workers and students has been well documented in literature. The National Association of Scholars (NAS) published Irving's 2007 report based on textual analysis of primary documents (e.g., mission statements, description of programs) housed on social work academic program websites at ten different U.S. universities. The conclusion of the report was that "schools of social work are betraying the pursuit of knowledge and systematically perverting the education of their students" (Irving, 2007, p. 24). While admitting other university programs rely heavily on specific ideology and promote advocacy, social work was singled out by NAS for what was viewed as systematic indoctrination. Additionally, in a study of graduate social work students conducted by Hodge (2007), evangelical and theologically conservative Protestant students were found to be more likely to report religious discrimination as a problem within social work education programs than were students who claimed no faith. Perhaps the most important related finding was that conservative students believed the discrimination was ingrained throughout the program. People with stigmatized social identities attempt to interact with others in ways that will diminish the social cost associated with the stigma and, if the stigma is not managed well, the stigmatized individual may suffer both psychological burden and social sanctions (O'Brien, 2011). Thus, the stigma of possessing specific religious beliefs within the

context of a social work academic program may pose significant challenges to professional identity development.

Value incongruence and identity dissonance can occur for students as broad base values are taught and framed through the lens of a professional worldview which may differ from the personal worldview (Osteen, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Urboniene & Leliugiene, 2007). Personal-professional conflicts can occur for any social work student. Unfortunately, the traditional model of teaching professional values to BSW students likely fails to adequately support them in conflict resolution. According to Haynes (1999), the primary approach for teaching social work values is rooted in socialization theory which focuses on role acquisition. From this theory, social work students are taught behaviors which fit the role of a social worker. Although desired behaviors are connected to core professional values, the socialization theory approach does not attempt to influence the students' core values. Moreover, the socialization approach requires that faculty and students possess comparable perspectives or worldviews (Haynes, 1999). This approach may assist students in understanding how a social worker is expected to act within the guidelines of the *Code of Ethics*. However, socialization theory provides an inadequate foundation for addressing significant conflicts between personal and professional values (Haynes, 1999). In the absence of an approach that acknowledges the intense personal-professional conflict some students experience and supports them in processing these conflicts, BSW students run the risk of repressing views which run counter to those espoused by faculty or parroting the perspectives they believe are valued by faculty.

Problem Statement and Study Purpose

Professional identity development is deemed to be of importance for social work students particularly as it relates to an ability to provide effective, ethical services and to uphold the value base of the profession (Clare, 2006; Oliver, 2013). Research examining personal-professional conflict and its relationship to student professional identity development is sparse. Only three studies addressing identity dissonance for religious social work students were found in the literature and they focused on the MSW student population (Costello, 1999; Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011). Studies examining identity dissonance specifically related to religious identity in BSW students were not located within the literature. At the same time, research indicates that some religious students do hold views which run counter to professional mission and values. For example, Swank and Raiz's (2010) national survey research of 629 BSW students reported a positive correlation between frequency of religious service attendance and negative attitudes toward those of diverse sexual orientation. In addition, Hancock's (2008) qualitative study of 29 BSW students revealed that some religious students believed oppression of certain people groups within society is acceptable because it serves to maintain God's order. Recognizing this potential for incongruity between religious identity and professional identity, the question of how Christian students within undergraduate social work programs develop professional identity and manage potential identity dissonance is an important one.

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand professional identity formation of traditional-age undergraduate social work students from a Christian background in social work education programs. For purposes of this study, social work

professional identity is defined as vision of oneself as a future social worker and application of training-oriented knowledge, values and skills (Cohen-Scali, 2003). The study is also intended to explore the lived experience of personal-professional identity management along with ways in which students negotiate conflicting identities.

Rationale for the Study

Several factors point to the potential significance of this research study. First, a gap exists in the social work literature in regard to professional identity management of social work students in general and particularly as related to negotiation of religious identity and professional identity. Second, demographics report a large proportion of social work students claim a religious affiliation and that social workers in the U.S. increasingly serve a diverse clientele. Relatively little is known regarding how social work students mediate difference between religious worldview and the profession or client worldview. Third, the literature that does exist regarding religious identity and professional identity focuses on MSW students. Considering BSW students become entry level workers of the profession, the need to better understand and support their professional identity formation is significant.

Rationale for Methodology

Identity formation and the negotiation of multiple social identities are complex, multi-layered phenomena. Therefore, a social constructivist approach with narrative interviewing was employed to allow for rich exploration of both individual and contextual factors which play into professional identity development. Further, religious students in social work programs have reported feeling marginalized within the

profession (Hancock, 2008; Hodge, 2007; Todd & Coholic, 2007). The methodology utilized in this study provided opportunity for Christian students to give voice to their experience within academia. Finally, studies indicate many students choose the profession of social work because it serves as a vocation connected to deeply held religious beliefs (Costello, 1999; Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011) yet little is known about how students integrate vocation and religious beliefs. Qualitative methodology then afforded latitude in examining an untapped research area and laid foundation for future mixed methods approaches.

It is noted that personal and professional identity conflict may occur for social work students of varied cultural, religious, or philosophical backgrounds. My position as social work faculty at a Christian liberal arts university has allowed me to observe this conflict among some Christian BSW students. Being geographically positioned in the Midwest also lends to Christianity being the predominant religious group among students. Restricting the study population to one particular religious group helped to minimize religious difference as an influencing factor on identity management. However, because the primary intent of the study was to examine how students experience and negotiate personal-professional identity conflict, it is believed findings will increase understanding of professional identity formation in the general BSW student population.

Research Questions

The overarching question of this study centers on the lived experience of Christian students within social work education. In other words, what is it like for students who believe in and practice an orthodox Christian worldview to be educated for

their profession from an alternative worldview? Specific research questions are as follows:

1. How do Christian undergraduate social work students with strong religious identity experience the formation of professional identity?

2. How do Christian undergraduate social work students with strong religious identity attempt to manage conflict between religious identity and professional identity?

Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and a section of appendices. The first chapter provides background information and a problem statement in the area of social work identity and value conflict, the rationale for the study, the rationale for the methodology, and the research questions. Chapter II presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature. The third chapter describes research methods including role and background of the researcher, sample description, recruitment strategies, theoretical foundation for and applicability of the narrative approach, forms of data collection, forms of data analysis, validation strategies and potential ethical issues. Chapter IV reports findings of the study with highlighting of major themes and subthemes found in the data. The fifth chapter then offers discussion of the findings, limitations of the study, and implications for future research and social work education.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To further understanding of professional and religious identity management among social work undergraduate students, several areas of literature were examined. First, relevant theories for how identity is formed and managed are reviewed. Second, religious identity and professional identity are conceptualized followed by an analysis of empirical studies of professional identity within social work. Third, socialization processes related to the formation of professional and religious identity are included. Lastly, the developmental theories of Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Fowler are highlighted in order to recognize moral decision-making and emerging identity within the young adult population of traditional-aged BSW students.

Identity Formation and Management

Early identity theory in psychology relied heavily upon the works of Freud (1938) and Erikson (1950, 1968) and claimed that healthy adults had learned during adolescence how to successfully manage multiple identities into one cohesive sense of self (Saari, 1993). Although Freud's theory of psychosexual development was revolutionary, his theory did not account for social experience in shaping identity. Expanding upon Freud's work, Erikson proposed eight stages of psychosocial development which are patterned, occur throughout the lifespan, and are shaped by social interaction (Erikson, 1950). Each stage is initiated by a crisis which must be resolved in order for an individual to move into the next stage. Erikson (1968) first coined the term "identity crisis" to refer to

existential questioning and movement toward differentiation of the self during

adolescence and young adulthood. According to Erikson (1968), the achievement of a

self-concept that flows from the past, is consistent across various life domains, and is

comfortable within one's cultural context is the primary task of adolescents and young

adults. Individuals who are unable to resolve conflict between multiple identities are

believed to experience *role confusion*. Erikson (1968) also believed establishing an

occupational identity was of particular importance during adolescence. He suggested all

societies enact a psychosocial moratorium or time period in which adolescents are

allowed to engage in playful adventure without taking on adult commitments yet which

often leads to the beginnings of adult identity and commitment. Although Erikson viewed

this moratorium as taking place during adolescence, contemporary social psychologists

argue the moratorium period has extended in length due to a longer education-to-work

transition than what was experienced in previous generations (Cote, 2006). Therefore,

traditional aged college students are likely to still be engaged in a critical period of

identity formation.

Using Erikson's theoretical foundation, James Marcia (1966) focused his research

on identity development among adolescents and conceptualized a framework of identity

status which allows for empirical study of identity formation. Marcia suggested identity

is based on *occupation* which is a particular role an individual plays (e.g., student,

daughter, etc.) and *ideology* which is the individual's foundational beliefs about politics,

faith, and religion. Based on results from semi-structured interviews and a quantitative

measure of ego identity, Marcia proposed four identity statuses or descriptions of the

varying degrees to which a particular identity is set within an individual: (1) diffused,

(2) foreclosed, (3) moratorium, and (4) achieved. Each status represents a level of

commitment to ideology and occupation as well as the adolescent's experience in

engaging with a psychosocial crisis. Individuals with diffused identity may or may not

have experienced a psychosocial crisis and lack commitment to either occupation or

ideology, having little sense of who they are and what they believe. A foreclosed identity

is one in which the individual has not experienced a crisis yet unquestioningly assumes

the ideology of parents or others and develops sense of self in accordance with that

ideology. This status is often rigid and, therefore, insufficient in meeting the challenge of

life crises. Both diffused and foreclosed identities are believed to be the least mature of

the four statuses. Moratorium is an intermediate status and describes someone who is

presently in crisis but does not possess a strong commitment to occupation or ideology.

This person actively "tries on" different beliefs and roles in an effort to develop self-

concept and resolve the crisis. Lastly, the achieved status is seen in the person who has a

firmly developed belief system and set of occupational goals which have been developed

through a process of questioning and individuation. The achieved status allows an

individual to feel secure in his/her capability to make significant life decisions such as

career direction. Marcia discovered identity status was associated with both self-esteem

and authoritarian values. Although Marcia hypothesized individuals with identity

diffusion would fare the worst in terms of self-esteem, the data indicated those in

foreclosure were the most sensitive to negative information about the self and possessed

the most unrealistic goals for themselves. They also displayed higher investment in

authoritarian values than did any other group. Since Marcia's initial introduction of the

four statuses, many empirical studies have been conducted using the model and

investigating movement between the four statuses. Meta-analysis of 74 such studies suggests progressive movement to higher functioning identity status is common during late adolescence and young adulthood, yet a large percentage of young adults have not reached identity achievement (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

Using a sociological lens, social work students' identity management may be viewed through symbolic interactionist theory. From this perspective, identity is linked to social structure as a person's sense of self is experienced and developed through interactions with others (Turner, 2013). Several identity subtheories are identified in contemporary sociological literature. Stets and Burke (2000) argue that the basis of identity is the role acquired within a group context. By taking on a role, individuals perceive the self as needing to act and think in accordance with the role. Beyond simply playing a part though, the authors assert that the individual integrates into the self the definitions and expectations that come with the particular role. As individuals act on the meanings they have associated with a particular role, they then look to others to affirm the identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). From this perspective, dissonance comes about when others who are important to the role identity provide feedback signaling the individual has not successfully realized the standards and expectations of the role. The individual responds in turn by altering his or her behavior in an effort to fulfill a particular role identity in the eyes of others (Turner, 2013).

Other identity theories, such as that developed by Sheldon Stryker (1968, as cited in Stryker, 2008), focus on a reciprocal influence between people and social structures. Stryker's social structural model of symbolic interactionism expanded on the work of George Herbert Mead and claimed social structure devises identities and identities in turn

reshape social structure (Applerouth & Edles, 2012). Identities form as individuals are social objects that internalize position designations ascribed to them through various social structures. Being confronted with a myriad of social situations and interactions results in individuals engaging in "role choice" which is determining what role expectations one will conform to in any given situation. Stryker further posited that role choice was enabled by what he termed "identity salience." Identity salience refers to a hierarchy of identities unique to each person and which is used to choose which identity will be acted upon when two or more identities are in conflict (Stryker, 2008). Finally, identity salience is borne out of commitment to one's social networks. As the need for relationship with another person or a group of others increases, a commitment to play the role associated with that relationship increases (Stryker, 2008).

Social identity theory also emphasizes the reciprocal influence of individuals and societal structure but focuses on identification with social groups as key to identity. Social identity is the awareness that one fits in a particular social category (e.g., race, gender, etc.) or group (e.g., religious community, professional organization) (Stets & Burke, 2000). People engage in social comparison of self to others in the same category or group (in-group) and to those in other categories or groups (out-group). Such comparison provides a framework for identity in that the in-group conveys how we need to think, feel, and act in order to remain a member of the group while the out-group serves to differentiate us from the "other" (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2010). Individual identity is reinforced by interactions with both the in-group and the out-group (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). Early research focusing on the concept of social identity primarily examined a single in-group and out-group categorization without recognizing

the interaction of multiple in-group identities. Roccas and Brewer (2002) introduced the concept of social identity complexity which recognizes humans as operating within multiple overlapping group identities throughout the lifespan. This concept suggests multiple social identities interact and sometimes conflict with each other. If multiple group identities have a high degree of convergence, a fairly simple identity structure evolves for an individual as members of various life groups tend to be relatively homogenous. For those persons who experience conflicting group identities, a more complex and inclusive identity structure must develop to accommodate varying beliefs, values, and norms (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Religious Identity and Professional Identity: Theory and Empirical Research

Religious Identity

Varied definitions of religious identity are found within literature but tend to come from one of two primary perspectives. Psychological perspectives often view religious identity as a status to be developed and achieved while the symbolic interactionist perspective posits religious identity is an ongoing process of exploration and commitment to a religious belief system (Balkin, Schlosser & Levitt, 2009) which is shaped within sociocultural contexts (Moulin, 2013). Religious identification is differentiated from religious affiliation in that identification includes self-concept and behavior whereas affiliation simply denotes alignment with a religious group that may or may not be internalized or regularly practiced (Francis, 2007). Additionally, some authors use the term "religiosity" interchangeably with religious identity but religiosity has typically been interpreted and measured as the way in which religion is lived out such as in church attendance and prayer (Balkin et al., 2009). For the purposes of this research,

religious identity is defined as the extent to which one holds the belief system, values, and practices of a religion as central to self-concept and decision-making.

Research regarding religious identity was highly influenced in the second half of the twentieth century by Gordon Allport's (1966) exploration of religious orientation and prejudice. Social science research of the 1950s and 1960s indicated that churchgoers were more likely to hold racial and religious prejudicial attitudes than those who were non-churchgoers (Allport, 1966; Wilson, 1960). Allport observed wide differences among churchgoers in regard to discriminatory beliefs and, therefore, sought to examine what specific religious factors contributed to prejudicial thinking. One such factor was regularity of church attendance. Prior studies indicated those with the highest levels of church attendance tended to exhibit lower levels of prejudicial thinking than those who claimed a religion but engaged only intermittently with the religious community (Allport, 1966). Although Allport recognized theological and sociocultural influences as providing context in which prejudicial attitudes developed, he believed exploration of the personal-psychological context was crucial to understanding the relationship between religion and prejudice. He theorized the difference between consistent church attenders with lower levels of prejudice and inconsistent attenders with higher levels of prejudice centered on individual motivation for religious practice which he ultimately termed "religious orientation" (Allport & Ross, 1967, p. 432). Motivation for religion was viewed as being based upon extrinsic or intrinsic values. Those with irregular church attendance were said to possess an extrinsic orientation in which religious motivation is primarily based on rewards such as social status, social support, comfort, or self-justification. Within this orientation, people use religion to fulfill other needs. Allport then believed that those with

high levels of attendance and involvement possessed an intrinsic religious orientation in which the religion was an end in and of itself. People with this orientation are religiously motivated to deepen their own relationship with the divine as well as to serve others. Intrinsically motivated people integrate their religious ideals into all areas of life whereas extrinsically motivated people tend to compartmentalize religion from other aspects of life (Allport, 1966; Allport & Ross, 1967).

Based on this hypothesis, Allport and Ross (1967) developed the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS) which measures the two orientation types as two separate factors and has been widely used in studies of religious commitment (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger & Gorsuch, 2003). Religious orientation has remained as a significant construct within the psychology of religion; however, empirical research promoted several changes through the years. Originally Allport viewed the two orientations as being on opposite ends of a continuum until further research revealed intrinsic and extrinsic orientation were not negatively correlated (Allport & Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985; Spilka et al., 2003). For instance, some people scored high on both intrinsic and extrinsic measures. Later, the research of Batson (1976) added a third orientation called "religion as quest" or interactional. The quest orientation is demonstrated by individuals who willingly wrestle with the complexities of religious belief as opposed to accepting absolute truths provided by a faith community. Subsequent studies showed quest orientation to be negatively correlated with prejudice (Batson, Flink, Schoenrade, Fultz, & Psych, 1986; Batson, Naifeh & Pate, 1978) and positively correlated with altruistic motivation for helping (Batson & Gray, 1981; Batson et al., 1989). Intrinsic religious orientation has also been shown to be associated with identity achievement in high school and college students

while an extrinsic orientation is associated with diffused or moratorium identity status (Fulton, 1997; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001; Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996).

Despite the growing amount of social work literature emphasizing spirituality and religion among clients, students, and practitioners, studies exploring impact of religious orientation are rare. Hugen (2007) uses the construct of religious orientation to investigate protective factors of religious orientation for those with persistent and severe mental illness. However, he neglects to use a validated scale for measurement of orientation and simply relies on participant description of religious commitment. Similarly, Edwards (2006) utilized case study analysis to explore the use of cognitive behavior therapy with religiously-oriented clients yet does not measure religious orientation. Examination of religious orientation in social work students was not found within social work literature.

Returning to sociological perspectives, social identity theory emphasizes group membership as key to identity with some group memberships having greater significance to self-concept than others. Religious identity differs from other social identities in that it offers beliefs about the limits of human knowledge as well as beliefs about our very existence (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). In addition, when the benefits of group membership (e.g., increased self-esteem) are merged with impacting emotional experiences and deference to an unquestioned divine moral authority, the importance of religious identity in comparison to other social identities is unparalleled (Ysseldyk et al., 2010). However, Lim and Putnam's (2010) research proposes that the only manner in which religious groups differ from other social groups is according to the level of importance of religion in one's life. Further, the importance of religion to self-concept is associated with life

satisfaction but only when it is reinforced by the religious group. In other words, the combination of religion and community seems to be instrumental in shaping religious identity (Lim & Putnam, 2010).

Understanding religious identity of young adults is also furthered by Hogg's (2000) uncertainty-identity theory. Hogg postulates that individuals experience cognitive and emotional discomfort when they are uncertain about the self and are, therefore, motivated to decrease uncertainty in order to increase a sense of stability and predictability. Because resolution of uncertainty requires significant energy, we tend to focus energy on uncertainties which pose the greatest threat to identity. Using a foundation of social identity theory, Hogg, Adelman and Blagg (2010) argue identifying with a group is one of the most effective manners for decreasing identity uncertainty. Highly entitative groups which have clear boundaries, distinct attributes, and shared goals reduce self-uncertainty better than do low entitative groups. Studies suggest people are more likely to identify with a group when feeling uncertain of themselves (Hogg & Grieve, 1999; McGregor, Nail, Marigold, & Kang, 2005) and people facing high uncertainty, such as young adults or those in a life crisis, are more susceptible to engaging in extremist groups (Hogg et al., 2010). Religions are highly entitative in that they provide a worldview which then prescribes expected beliefs, values, and behaviors. In addition, religion is argued to construct an "all embracing master identity" (Hogg et al., 2010, p. 72) because it speaks to ultimate meaning in life and connection with the sacred. Characteristics of the social work profession such as codified values and ethics, licensing requirements, and a strong professional culture suggest a high level of entitativity as well. What happens when an individual perceives the values or beliefs of

two highly entitative groups as conflicting? Hogg et al. (2010) contend the perception of not fitting into a highly entitative group increases self-uncertainty which then further diminishes identification with that group. Young religious adults feeling an increased sense of self-uncertainty while exploring a potential new career in social work may then struggle to identify with a profession whose worldview conflicts at times with the religious worldview and thereby increases uncertainty in identity.

Professional Identity: Conceptualization, Theory, and Empirical Research

      Conceptualization and theory. Professional identity or "occupational identity" is generally defined as one's sense of belonging to a profession coupled with a commitment to enact the skills, beliefs, values, and norms espoused by the profession (Bogo, Raphael, & Roberts, 1993; Campinini et al., 2012; Carpenter & Platt, 1997). Further, Carpenter and Platt (1997) suggest professional identity requires self-awareness as practitioners operate from a holistic model incorporating the personal self that is contained within professional boundaries. Although membership to a professional organization or completion of an academic degree from a professional program serve as formal and legitimatized aspects of professional identity, intentionally taking on the "cloak" of the profession is important in acting in accordance with the profession's culture. Loeske and Cahill (1986) assert professional identity is not merely an alignment with the knowledge, values, and skills of the profession but an ability to persuade both oneself and others of one's authority in the professional role.

      Professional identity has been explored from various sociological perspectives with primary theoretical emphases changing over time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, macrosociological theory posited by Weber, Durkheim, and Marx

focused on how organization of work within large bureaucratic and economic structures altered workers' sense of self and personal goals (Leidner, 2006). While these theories were important in placing professional identity within a large societal context, they were often critiqued for missing the lived experience of the individual worker (Liedner, 2006). Focus shifted in the 1950s to a structural functional approach in which workers were believed to develop professional identity through the process of professional socialization (Costello, 2005). From this approach, when individuals determine to take on a specified role within society (e.g., doctor, engineer, social worker, etc.), they agree to conform to that role and it is the responsibility of professional programs and schools to train the individual in competent performance of the role. Within this view, professional identity is unconsciously built as the professional role is practiced. A primary weakness of structural functionalism is that in viewing professional identity as part of a formal societal structure, factors such as individual will, power differences, or diversity are unaccounted for in the formation of a person's professional identity (Barretti, 2004a; Costello, 2005).

The theory of symbolic interactionism then came to the forefront in professional identity literature of the 1960s, viewing individuals as being conscious actors in their own identity formation and attempting to account for individual differences in identity development (Costello, 2005; Leidner, 2006). Whereas functionalism portrays a linear approach in which students are simple clay readily molded by a professional program, symbolic interactionism asserts that students bring pre-existing identities along with their own interpretation of the professional role to the learning experience. Conflict between the student's interpretation and that proffered by the professional program potentially impacts both student and program as identity is negotiated or recreated (McSweeney,

2012). Although contemporary professional identity literature within social work often cites symbolic interactionism as guiding theory, the macrosociological and psychological theories are also reflected in various research studies.

Empirical studies in social work students' professional identity. A search of the *Social Work Abstracts Database* and *Scopus* was conducted using the following terms: "social work" + "professional identity;" "social work identity;" "professional identity" + "religious identity;" and "professional identity" + "religion." Limiting the search to scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles yielded 112 results. Articles were further narrowed for review by including only those that reported an empirical study of professional identity with social work students or practitioners. Finally, citations from these articles were examined for other sources of potential inclusion. The search resulted in 13 relevant studies as shown in Table 1.

Research regarding professional identity of social work students lacks cohesion and replication. Relatively few empirical studies exist and those that do vary according to target population (undergraduate vs. graduate), methodology, definition of professional identity, and area of focus. For purposes of review, studies will be organized according to three relevant themes in findings: (1) struggle to define and achieve professional identity; (2) impact of environmental forces (e.g., educational process, licensing process) on professional identity formation; and (3) integration of personal and professional spheres of self. It should be noted that a significant amount of literature exploring professional identity of social work students originates outside of the U.S. Differences between countries exist in terms of degree required for practice. As a result, some literature

Table 1

Empirical Studies of Professional Identity in Social Work Students

Author/Year	Population	Research Method	Primary Focus
Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark (2006)	1st year undergraduate health and social care students in England ($N = 1254$)	Quantitative questionnaire	Influencing factors of PI
Bogo, Raphael, & Roberts (1993)	MSW in Toronto ($N = 230$)	Quantitative questionnaire	Student commitment to disadvantaged populations as component of PI
Campanini, Frost, & Hojer (2012)	BSW in England, Sweden, and Italy ($N = 14$)	Phenomenological with semi-structured interviews; longitudinal	Student perception of PI development in 3 different educational systems and welfare regimes
Cascio & Gasker (2002)	BSW ($N = 27$) and MSW ($N = 31$)	Experimental design with convenience sample	Impact of email peer mentoring program on PI
Clare (2006)	MSW and practitioners ($N = 20$)	Phenomenological with semi-structured interviews; longitudinal	PI transition from student to practitioner
Costello (1999)	MSW program and law program at U of C, Berkeley; 1st year students	Qualitative with historical research, cultural analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation	Identity dissonance/consonance of students in professional programs
Hackett, Kuronen, Matthies, & Kresal (2003)	BSW and MSW in Finland, Germany, Slovenia & the UK ($N = 163$)	Questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions	Student motivation, view of social worker role, qualities of "good" social worker, and career aspirations
Holmstrom (2012)	BSW in England ($N = 19$)	Mixed methods- focus groups and quantitative questionnaire	Experience of younger students (first enrolled under age 21) in developing PI
Loeske & Cahill (1986)	BSW ($N = 14$)	Case study	Student effort to identify as professional social worker
Osteen (2011)	MSW ($N = 20$)	Qualitative with semi-structured interviews	Integration of personal identity and PI
Shlomo, Levy & Itzhaky (2012)	BSW in Israel ($N = 160$)	Quantitative questionnaire	Impact of organizational, personal, and environmental resources on PI
Thaller (2011)	Practitioners ($n = 6$) and MSW ($n = 1$) who self-identified as Christian	Qualitative with semi-structured interviews	Potential challenge of religious identity in schools of social work and in work settings
Wiles (2013)	BSW in England ($N = 7$)	Semi-structured interviews with discourse analysis	Impact of professional registration on PI

Note. PI = professional identity.

describes the sample as "first year students" without differentiating the undergraduate or graduate degree. Because developmental influences are a significant component of this study, effort has been made to accurately identify the degree level of international students when not clearly stated by authors. Further, some social work educational systems in other countries use the designation Master of Arts (MA) and Bachelor of Arts (BA) as opposed to MSW and BSW.

   Struggle to define and achieve professional identity. Several studies within social work literature suggest understanding and acquisition of the professional identity does not come easily to students. The first empirical study of professional identity found in social work literature utilized a dramaturgical approach in which students were revealed as actors struggling to find their character. Loeske and Cahill's (1986) qualitative study of students in field placement revealed significant challenges to students' acquisition of a professional identity. One such challenge was that students had difficulty finding a shared identity as they were placed in a variety of field settings (e.g., hospital, prison, elementary school, etc.) with differing tasks and responsibilities. As a result, when students met as a group to tell their experiences, a common professional narrative which would bind them together did not exist. Another challenge surfaced as some tasks assigned in the field placement were not perceived as actual social work tasks by students and thus diminished their professional identity. Lastly, students were unable to identify as a social worker through symbols such as props or distinct language that were unique to the profession. Subsequent studies have supported Loeske and Cahill's finding that social work students possess somewhat vague notions of what it means to be

a professional social worker (Clare, 2006; Hackett, Kuronen, Matthies, & Kresal, 2003; Wiles, 2013).

Professional identity also seems to be compromised for BSW level students due to questioning of individual capability or qualifications. For instance, Holmstrom (2012) found that traditional-aged BSW students generally viewed themselves as bringing significant experience into their academic program but subsequently reported a decrease in self-confidence as their experience was discounted or minimized by nontraditional students or faculty. Students in both Loeske and Cahill's (1986) and Hackett et al.'s (2003) research viewed social workers in terms of character traits such as being personable, understanding, respectful, or patient. Many of these students believed such traits came naturally to social work practitioners and reported internal conflict as they experienced professional situations in which they did not naturally feel or exhibit the desired traits.

Even when students do perceive themselves in a professional light, they may lack a clear sense of connection to the broader social work community. A survey of 1254 health and social care undergraduate students in England compared the professional identity of ten different professional groups (e.g., audiology, nursing, occupational therapy, social work, etc.) using identification with a professional group as the definition of professional identity (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006). Of the multiple variables studied (e.g., related work experience, self-reported knowledge of the profession, gender, etc.), profession was found to be the most significant variable to influence professional identity Of particular concern in this study was that social work students displayed the weakest professional identity of the ten participating professional groups. Clare (2006)

also discovered student disconnect with the larger social work community when she examined perception of professional identity in the transition from MSW student to practicing professional. She proposed professional identity was comprised of four dimensions, one being a personal philosophy of practice grounded within a larger professional context. Clare's interviews generally revealed students as able to articulate a personal-professional philosophy for their practice, yet their description of a philosophy was primarily couched in personal language and lacked connection to the broader social work profession.

Impact of environmental forces on professional identity. Another theme within social work professional identity literature focuses on the potential impact of environmental factors within educational programs, the overall profession, and the larger social welfare system. Hackett et al. (2003) compared undergraduate and graduate social work students in four European countries on several variables of professional identity including their perception of the role of social worker. Although students in the four countries showed more similarities than differences in their perceptions, findings did show some minor differences in groups likely owing to distinctive emphases in educational and social welfare systems. One environmental factor which posed a concern within the profession during the 1980s and 1990s was the influence of a clinical model which some feared encouraged students to abandon traditional social work in favor of private practice. Purporting that a commitment to working with disadvantaged populations is a hallmark of social work professional identity, Bogo, Raphael, and Roberts' (1993) examined the primary professional interests of MSW students. Contrary to the authors' primary hypothesis, findings showed students were highly interested in

working directly with clients, working in multicultural settings, and working with those who are disadvantaged. An environmental factor which seems to positively influence student professional identity formation is opportunity for formalized connection to the social work community. Wiles (2013) explored the potential impact of required professional registration on the professional identity of undergraduate social work students in England. One theme that emerged from the data was a "collective sense of being a social worker" (p. 859). Professional registration seemed to play a part in strengthening a shared identity with students reporting membership in a professional group helping them to feel more like a professional.

Other studies exploring the impact of environmental factors have focused more directly on students' educational experiences. Students perceive social work faculty and field placement supervisors as being responsible to assist in building a sense of professional competency and resiliency that will carry over into the many challenging and diverse employment contexts faced by social workers (Campanini et al., 2012). Investigating the impact of organizational, environmental, and personal resources on professional identity, Shlomo, Levy, and Itzhaky (2012) surveyed 160 Israeli students at the completion of their BSW degree. Among all of the resource variables, satisfaction with field placement supervision showed the highest level of correlation with professional identity. Field experiences may also have a negative effect on professional identity as evidenced by Loeske and Cahill's (1986) research. These authors suggest development of a professional identity requires an "audience" which aids in establishing a sense of competency. Students in their study, however, complained that other professionals in the field setting devalued their role and unappreciative clients lessened a

sense of effectiveness. Only one study was found which used experimental design to examine impact of a specific educational intervention on professional identity among social work students. Cascio and Gasker (2002) investigated the potential role of peer mentoring within social work academic programs on development of professional identity. Defining professional identity as the acquisition of values, the authors' quantitative analysis revealed an increase in professional identity among BSW students who received mentoring as compared to those who did not receive mentoring. Although this study had significant limitations such as use of a non-validated instrument and failure to provide mentoring training to graduate mentors, the findings warrant further investigation into the potential impact of peer mentoring on professional identity of students.

*Integration of personal and professional spheres***.** Perhaps the predominant theme in studies of social work students and professional identity is the blending of the personal and professional self as related to beliefs, values, and practice behavior. Students report integration of the personal and professional self is a significant component of professional identity (Campanini et al., 2012; Osteen, 2011). Several studies indicate personal experience or worldview as a motivating force for selecting social work as a profession (Hackett et al., 2003; Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011). Some students report feeling a personality fit with the social work profession or even viewing the profession as their "calling" (Hackett et al., 2003, p. 171). One of the themes found in Wiles (2013) research was the personal process each student experienced in forming professional identity. For example, a pattern was noted in which personal relationships were disrupted by students' adoption of political ideology or cultural stances that fit with

the profession but that conflicted with the views of family or friends. Such external conflict proved discomfiting to students who were attempting to integrate personal and professional identity (Wiles, 2013).

Qualitative research of professional identity among social work students has enriched awareness and understanding of the complex process of integrating the personal and professional self. Costello's (1999) mixed methods research with social work and law graduate students provides a substantive exploration of consonance and dissonance in personal-professional identity through semi-structured interviews and two years of participant observation. This study revealed students as having one of three identity statuses: identity consonance, positive identity dissonance, and negative identity dissonance. Students possessing identity consonance felt a strong fit between self and the profession as portrayed in the academic program, acculturated into the program quickly, were not distracted by identity issues, and were high academic achievers. Those with positive identity dissonance reported conflict between personal and professional identity but viewed the conflict as an avenue for growth and further believed such growth was an important part of the educational process. Although these students embraced identity dissonance as beneficial, they still experienced adverse effects such as distraction from studies, requiring more time to complete work, struggling academically, and anxiety and physical symptoms related to managing the dissonance. Over half of the students in Costello's research were labeled as negative identity dissonant and appeared to prefer personal identity to the professional identity. Many of these students held to socially conservative ideologies and identified as Christian. It should be noted though that some

students in the MSW program who were experiencing negative identity dissonance viewed themselves as more socially liberal than their faculty and peers.

Several methods for managing the cognitive dissonance were identified in Costello's (1999) research. The least common method for management was openly displaying defiance which was only observed in males. Censoring self-expression in order to fit in with the group appeared to be the most utilized management method. Some students sought out like-minded individuals from whom they could garner support and others attempted to manage the conflict by engaging minimally with peers and faculty. Of those students who engaged minimally, some were bothered by a sense of alienation while others accepted alienation from the group by viewing themselves as superior to peers and faculty. Costello also observed the majority of students as using more than one identity management method.

Osteen's (2011) exploration of motivations, values, and professional identity in MSW students also discovered personal-professional conflict with a tendency for students to prioritize personal values in highly conflictual circumstances. Students spoke of their desire to help as originating from specific personal experiences, religious or spiritual beliefs, and/or values instilled by family. Viewing professional identity through the lens of commitment to social work values, Osteen classified students as possessing one of three identity statuses: integrated, nonintegrated, and evolving. All students reported having experienced at least one incident of conflict between personal and professional identity, although for some students the incident was an external conflict with other students who they believed did not espouse social work values. For those students who experienced internal conflict, they managed the conflict either by

minimizing the relevancy of the conflict (e.g., will choose employment settings where they believe conflict is unlikely to be present) or acknowledging the conflict and subsequently rejecting or integrating the social work value. Osteen's analysis does not provide insight as to how or why the social work value is either rejected or integrated. However, he does report that the majority of students in the study indicated personal values would trump professional values if the conflict was unresolvable.

Finally, Thaller's (2011) examination of the integration of religious identity and professional identity has great relevance to the current study. Although the sample was primarily made up of practitioners with just one MSW student included, all participants were asked to reflect on challenges to religious identity that were experienced during their social work education. Participants reported experiencing more challenges to religious identity in social work education programs than in employment settings particularly viewing their religious beliefs as having been unwelcomed in the classroom. They also indicated efforts to disclose their personal views were discounted or confronted in ways that then led to self-censorship or disengagement from class discussion. Interestingly, participants viewed their personal identity as an integration of faith and profession citing their religious beliefs as providing great support to their emotionally difficult work. In negotiating conflicts between personal and professional values in practice, most participants deferred to the social work value of client right to self-determination. All participants suggested they would refer a client elsewhere if they believed their personal religious beliefs would jeopardize services to the client. Perhaps one of Thaller's most interesting findings was that participants spontaneously spoke of also feeling at odds with some of the religious doctrine of their faith community and

perceiving themselves as being atypical church members. The ways in which they spoke about challenging their faith community (e.g., more outreach, greater inclusiveness, etc.) resonated with values of the social work profession possibly suggesting a high level of integration between religious and professional identity. Thaller suggests further research is warranted to better understand the complexities of identity formation and to formulate teaching practices that enable students to negotiate personal-professional identities.

Summary and limitations of empirical studies with social work students. An overview of social work literature on professional identity in students reveals several items of learning pertinent to the current dissertation proposal. First, evidence suggests social work students struggle in defining and forming professional identity (Adams et al., 2006; Clare, 2006; Hackett et al., 2003; Holmstrom, 2012; Loeske & Cahill, 1986). Specific obstacles to professional identity highlighted in the literature were the overall profession's difficulty in self-definition (Loeske & Cahill, 1986) and student perception of the self as lacking in either important personal traits, such as empathic ability (Loeske & Cahill, 1986), professional knowledge (Adams et al., 2006) or experience (Holmstrom, 2012). Holmstrom's research also indicated professional identity is jeopardized when a student views the self as being different in some negative manner from the majority group in an academic program. Second, students look to faculty, field supervisors, and peers in helping to shape professional identity (Campanini et al., 2012; Cascio & Gasker, 2002; Shlomo et al., 2012). Third, student motivation for choosing social work includes an aspect of personal identity (Hackett et al., 2003; Loeske & Cahill, 1986) and students often recognize the need to integrate personal and professional identity in a meaningful and responsible manner (Cascio & Gasker, 2002; Hackett et al., 2003). Fourth, conflict

between personal and professional identities is viewed as an opportunity for growth by some but is often emotionally painful and carries negative consequences interpersonally, relationally, and academically (Costello, 1999; Osteen, 2011; Wiles, 2013). Finally, students utilize a variety of methods to manage or negotiate identity conflict with preference given to personal identity when the conflict presents an impasse (Costello, 1999; Osteen, 2011).

The body of social work literature regarding professional identity with students also reveals shortcomings. One such shortcoming is a lack of consensus in how professional identity is conceptualized. Social work quantitative studies, in particular, tend to limit definition and measurement of professional identity to adoption of specific values, sense of self-efficacy, or identification with the larger social work community rather than exploring a complex interaction of all three identity components. In addition, the relatively few studies that exist represent a variety of research questions, methods, and cultural settings which limits generalizability and cohesive knowledge-building. Lastly, although social work literature acknowledges the importance of personal-professional integration, research in undergraduate students has failed to provide indepth examination of potential conflict and negotiation of professional and religious identity.

Practitioner studies. Professional identity of social work practitioners is not a primary focus of this dissertation proposal. However, because professional identity is believed to evolve and change with practice (Hotho, 2008; Ibarra, 1999; McSweeney, 2012), a brief overview of research focused on social work practitioners is warranted. Thaller's (2011) research described earlier was the only study found which investigated religious identity and professional identity among practitioners and suggested religious

identity served as both a source of support and conflict for some social workers. Graham and Schier (2011) explored subjective well-being and spirituality among social workers in Canada. Their qualitative research revealed professional identity as one of five factors important to social workers' subjective well-being. Further, how social workers viewed themselves as practitioners was influenced by a spiritual dimension, particularly the way in which they gave meaning to their work while facing significant work-related stressors (Graham & Schier, 2011).

Other themes in practitioner studies appear to be similar to those in the student research. One such theme is the concern that social workers in private practice do not identify with the profession or its traditional values. A comparison of licensed clinical social workers in agency settings, private practice, or a combination revealed that those in private practice were less likely to label themselves or their services with traditional identifiers such as "social worker" or "casework" than were those working in agency settings (Borenzweig, 1981). Groves and Kerson (2011) reported MSW-level social workers in private practice were reluctant to engage in case management services that would assist with clients' social support needs even though they recognized these needs as important to clients. Another theme in the social work literature on professional identity among practitioners examines the impact of changing work or policy environments. Carpenter and Platt's (1997) survey research of the impact of marketplace realities on mental health social workers' professional identity revealed that fit between personal and professional values was stronger for participants in private practice than for those who worked for family agencies or Department of Mental Health (DMH) agencies. Liu, Lam, and Yan (2012) explored professional identity of new social workers in China

finding lack of public support and undefined roles as major challenges to development of professional identity. These similar themes in findings between student and practitioner studies suggest concerted efforts be made to further knowledge of professional identity formation and management.

Socialization Processes: Religious and Professional

Religious Socialization

Religious socialization is a process whereby individuals' religious beliefs, values, and practices are influenced by interaction with social agents (Sherkat, 2003). Empirical evidence suggests the religious influence of primary agents in one's life, such as parents, becomes internalized and forms a foundation for religious commitment in young adulthood (Spilka et al., 2003). Although parental influence has shown to be particularly significant in shaping religious beliefs and practices, other influences such as denomination, peers, and education play a role in socialization. Separating out such factors proves to be a difficult research task (Sherkat, 2003).

Relevant to the issue of religious identity among social work undergraduate students is the potential socializing influence of higher education. Empirical research displays mixed findings on religious change of students during their college years (Spilka et al., 2003). Some authors cite secular education and antireligious sentiment in higher education as influencing college students toward decreased religious commitment (Sherkat, 2003) while others suggest such religious change is actually more likely to occur during the high school years (Hunsberger, 1978). In addition, studies which do show a decrease in religious commitment among college students cannot account for other potential influencing factors such as developmental change or being outside of

parents' direct control for the first time in life (Spilka et al., 2003). Although the exact nature of religious socializing factors remains unclear, researchers in the fields of sociology of religion and psychology of religion maintain these factors are pivotal in shaping religious beliefs and commitment.

Professional Socialization

As professional identity is the desired outcome for students of social work, professional socialization is thought to be the process whereby such an identity is acquired. The socialization process is complex, starting in childhood as family, friends, and school influence perceptions of task-related roles which provide a cognitive foundation for adolescents to then assess and compare professions according to an acquired set of stereotypes (Cohen-Scali, 2003). In the past sixty years, a significant amount of empirical research has been conducted on socialization within professional training programs with original attention focusing on medical schools (Barretti, 2004a). Although the term "professional socialization" was typically not used in the social work literature, research regarding students' acquisition of professional values and beliefs first surfaced in the 1960s (Barretti, 2004b) and remains largely underdeveloped today despite Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2015b) standards that clearly call for educational programs to produce graduates that identify with the profession (Miller, 2013; Mosek & Ben-Oz, 2011).

Most of the empirical research on the professional socialization of social work students utilizes a structural functionalist theoretical approach that measures student attitudes/values and assumes desired attitudes/values are primarily a product of the educational program's influence (Barretti, 2004b). This research presents mixed findings

with some studies pointing to changes in student attitudes/values over the educational

process (Frans & Moran, 1993; Merdinger, 1982; Mosek & Ben-Oz; 2011; Van Soest,

1996) and other studies indicating social work education has little influence on student

attitudes/values (Barretti, 2004b; Enoch, 1989). The capacity for professional ethical

decision-making is purported to be an essential learning outcome for social work

graduates, yet Landau's (1999) study of ethical judgment in first-year and third-year

social work students demonstrated no difference in ethical judgment between the two

groups. In addition, religiosity of the student was found to be the only background

variable that did impact ethical judgment. It should also be noted that some research

reveals negative changes in social work attitudes/values particularly at the graduate level

and in practitioners (Abbott, 1988; Cryns, 1977; Pike, 1996). Further, several studies do

demonstrate that younger social work students are more susceptible to changes in

attitudes and values than are older social work students (Judah, 1979; Miller, 2013;

Varley, 1963).

Relatively few empirical studies regarding social work professional socialization

use a symbolic interactionist approach which focuses on how students adjust to demands

of the educational program and merge previously acquired identities with a new

professional identity. Barbour (1985) utilized semi-structured interviews and participant

observation of MSW students to examine how participants were socialized within various

social settings (e.g., classroom, family, etc.) in ways that influenced identity as

professional and student. Barretti's (2004a) case study of BSW seniors used a symbolic

interactionist foundation in asking how professional role modeling impacts the

professional socialization process. Findings from this research suggest professional

socialization begins prior to formal social work education, is a process that contains various orderly phases but is riddled with conflict, and occurs largely in unofficial modes of learning such as modeling of field supervisors. Similarly, Miller's (2013) survey research of 489 social work students and practitioners attempts to capture the multifaceted aspects of professional socialization by measuring individual, educational, and practice factors. Miller essentially concludes social work students are most effectively socialized through the combination of an explicit curriculum which directly teaches ideals of the profession and an implicit curriculum which models ideals of the profession.

Developmental Models Relevant to Ethical Decision-Making

As noted earlier, a significant concern regarding students with strong religious identification is willingness or capacity to operate from professional values and ethics when they conflict with personal religious values and ethics. This concern is particularly relevant for traditional-aged undergraduate students who are believed to be at critical developmental stages in both identity formation and moral decision-making. Perhaps the most widely known theory of moral development is Kohlberg's (1976) six stages of moral reasoning. Kohlberg expanded on Piaget's (1932) biological and cognitive model to focus on how people know and judge the social world. Kohlberg believed individuals at the earliest stages of reasoning, called *pre-conventional morality*, use internalized cultural norms and avoidance of punishment as the basis for making moral decisions. At the level of *conventional morality*, individuals are able to take on the perspective of others and base moral decisions on anticipated disapproval from others or the avoidance of shame. Finally, individuals who have matured to *post-conventional morality* make

moral judgments rooted in universal principles of justice and equal respect for all (Kohlberg, 1976). Social workers encounter complex ethical situations requiring post-conventional reasoning yet questions remain regarding the effectiveness of social work education in fostering high levels of reasoning (Kaplan, 2006).

Gilligan (1982) later argued that psychological and moral developmental theory has largely been constructed within a masculine paradigm thereby neglecting the feminine perspective and placing women within a model that is likely to portray them as morally and psychologically underdeveloped. Prior to Gilligan's work, the predominant research approach involved asking participants to describe the appropriate course of moral action in a specific situation. Believing this focus on people's thinking about how to best resolve moral conflicts provided limited understanding of morality, Gilligan designed her own research to include participants' definitions of moral problems as well as description of circumstances in their own lives that they perceived as presenting a moral dilemma. The traditional developmental theories relied on the central premise that separation or individuation is necessary for moral growth yet Gilligan's research revealed women often perceive reality, truth, and moral judgment through the lens of connection. As a result of her findings, Gilligan developed the "ethic of care" which places moral development within the context of relationship as opposed to abstract notions of justice or rights. Although her work intentionally sought a feminine perspective in moral development, Gilligan emphasizes her theory is not gender-based but theme-based in that it provides an alternate theme for development that potentially broadens understanding of moral development and choice. Several studies show social work students are more likely

to use the ethics of care approach to moral reasoning as opposed to Kohlberg's ethics of justice (Juujarvi, 2005).

Fowler's (1981) faith development theory builds upon the models of Erikson (psychosocial) and Kohlberg (moral reasoning) to provide a six-staged universal model for faith maturation. Fowler's theory would place most traditional-aged students in Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional or Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective. Most teenagers are believed to enter the Synthetic-Conventional stage as they develop a faith belief system which pulls together their expanding social systems. People at this stage tend to allow individuals, groups, and the image of an external divine being to shape their identity, values and decision-making processes. At the Individuative-Reflective stage, adults critically reflect upon their own value system as they are confronted by differing beliefs and values. Truly moving into Stage 4 requires distancing oneself from the previous value system and locating authority for moral decision-making within oneself (Fowler, 1981). Fowler's model then has significant potential for increasing understanding of religious and professional identity dissonance in traditional-aged undergraduate students.

Literature Review Summary

Contemporary sociological and psychological identity theory suggests identity formation and management is a complex process that involves a nuanced interplay of social and individual factors. Professional identity and religious identity are believed to have formative roots in childhood and are shaped by significant social institutions. Conflict between two important identities creates a sense of inner dissonance that a person attempts to resolve utilizing a variety of strategies. Adolescence and young adulthood are critical times in identity formation as youth begin to move away from strict

adherence to family, social, and/or religious definitions of who they are. Social work

literature on professional identity formation is sparse and research related to integration

of two meaningful identities is very scarce. The research that does exist primarily focuses

on graduate level students who may have already established a stronger sense of self than

their traditional-aged BSW counterparts. Finally, much of the social work research on

professional identity uses quantitative approaches that are limited in understanding

complex identity integration processes.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to understand professional identity formation of traditional-age undergraduate social work students who come from a Christian faith perspective. The study was also intended to explore the lived experience of personal-professional identity management including ways in which students negotiate conflicting identities. Specific research questions were as follows:

1. How do Christian undergraduate social work students with strong religious identities experience the formation of professional identity?

2. How do Christian undergraduate social work students with strong religious identity attempt to manage conflict between religious identity and professional identity?

This chapter will describe the method of inquiry and procedures used to address the research questions. Contents include rationale and conceptual framework for the methodology, participant criteria, recruitment procedures, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Two sections within this chapter were written from the first person perspective (Reflective Journal in Data Collection section and Data Analysis) to more fully reflect the symbolic interactionist framework utilized in the study. First person description of these sections allows the reader to better understand interactions between the researcher and participants, as well as interactions between researcher and the data.

Rationale for Methodology

Identity formation and the negotiation of multiple social identities are complex, multi-layered phenomena. Therefore, a social constructionist approach with narrative interviewing was employed to allow for rich exploration of both individual and contextual factors which play into professional identity development. Further, some students who express a Christian perspective in social work educational programs have reported feeling stigmatized and unable to discuss their faith in relationship to classroom discussions (Hancock, 2008; Hodge, 2007; Todd & Coholic, 2007). The methodology utilized in this study, then, provided opportunity for Christian social work students to give voice to their experience within academia. Finally, studies indicate some students choose the profession of social work because it serves as a vocation connected to deeply held religious beliefs (Costello, 1999; Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011), yet little is known about how social work students integrate vocation and religious beliefs. Qualitative methodology then afforded latitude in examining an untapped research area. This methodology also laid the foundation for further qualitative research (e.g., comparison to students at faith-based universities) and quantitative study (e.g., connection between religious beliefs and sense of professional fit).

Conceptual Framework

This research study utilized social constructivism as its theoretical foundation because it aligns well with contemporary identity formation and management theory (see Figure 2). According to social constructivism, multiple "truths" exist related to any particular event, process, or phenomena according to individuals' subjective and contextual experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, the voice of research

participants is considered to be vital within this framework for constructing knowledge regarding management of multiple social identities. In addition, social constructivism posits that individuals come to understand the world and self through social interactions, making it important for the researcher to explore social and historical contexts through which individuals form identity and attach meaning to identity (Creswell, 2007). This approach also recognizes that both researcher and participants bring their own biases to the research process. Therefore, the research process itself is examined as one of the contexts through which meaning has been socially constructed (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Social Constructivism

Multiple interpretations of reality

Symbolic Interactionism

Meaning through language and symbols

Need to understand how Christian undergraduate social work students with a high level of religious identity experience professional identity formation:

- How might students perceive professional identity of a social worker?
- How might students view themselves as a social worker and a Christian?
- How might students negotiate conflict between their perception of what it means to be a social worker and what it means to be a Christian?

Proposed method of data generation:

- Semi-structured interviews within a narrative approach which enable students to construct a story of their experience and convey meaning attached to that story

Figure 2. Philosophical foundations for study methods.

More specifically, the research tradition of symbolic interactionism was chosen to frame this study for three reasons: (1) symbolic interactionism falls under the umbrella of social constructivism, (2) it has been widely used in contemporary research of identity, and (3) it coincides with the "person-in-environment" concept which is integral to social work practice. From the symbolic interactionist perspective, individuals come to know and perceive the self through interpretation of social experiences (Turner, 2013). This tradition focuses on how individuals ascribe meaning to the external and internal world through common symbols, particularly language (Hays & Singh, 2012). Such a model was particularly well suited for identity exploration as it attended to the complexity of multiple identities within multiple social contexts along with attending to the changing nature of identity. Using the symbolic interactionist tradition, participants' interpretations of professional identity and religious identity, along with methods for negotiating the two identities, were examined in light of social experiences in family, peer groups, faith communities, and social work educational programs. This approach also reflects the social work guiding principle of "person-in-environment" which places an individual in the context of environment for both assessment and intervention purposes. The person-in-environment concept has strong historical roots in social work and is meant to convey the reciprocal interaction of people and social structures, each reshaping the other (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008).

The primary research method used to investigate professional and religious identity among Christian BSW students was narrative interviewing. The term "narrative" can refer both to the process of telling a story and to the end product of that process, which is the story itself (Polkinghorne, 1988). From a symbolic interactionist perspective,

narratives shape identity, are socially constructed, and provide contextualized meaning in plots and subplots (Creswell, 2007). Although several questions were used by the researcher to elicit a storyline of professional and religious identity formation and management in each student (Appendix A: Interview Protocol), the interview schedule was administered in a flexible manner allowing participants to create the narrative and thereby reducing the likelihood that the narrative reflects preconceived notions of the researcher. Such narrative interviewing emphasizes importance of the participants' voices and provides for indepth understanding between the researcher and participants (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Participant Criteria

Purposive, criterion sampling was utilized to recruit nine participants following Creswell's (2007) sample size guidelines for narrative studies. Potential participants were recruited from public university undergraduate social work programs located in the Midwest. As Haynes (1999) contends, the traditional socialization approach used by BSW educational programs for instilling professional identity requires faculty and students to possess a similar worldview. Because Christian BSW students at public, non-sectarian universities are more likely to encounter faculty and students whose worldviews differ from their own than they are at private, Christian colleges and universities, these students may be more likely to experience dissonance between the professional identity and religious identity. Five universities located in three different states, yet geographically convenient for the researcher, were chosen as potential recruitment sites in an effort to recruit participants from various BSW programs.

Inclusion criteria for participants included age (19-24 years), sophomore, junior or senior status in the social work program, English speaking, self-identification as Christian, and self-identification as religion/faith being central to one's life. Age was deemed an inclusion criteria because various identity theories suggest young adulthood is both a significant and vulnerable time period for identity formation (Cote, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Kroger et al., 2010; Marcia, 1966; McGregor et al., 2005) and over sixty-eight percent of full-time BSW students are under the age of 25 years (Council on Social Work Education, 2015a). Initially, restriction to junior or senior year in the program was included as these students were likelier to possess accurate knowledge and understanding of the social work profession than were students in the first year of a social work program. Due to challenges in recruitment (described later in this chapter), the criterion of year in the program was broadened to include sophomore students as well. Because semi-structured interviews constituted a significant portion of data collection and the researcher was limited to English, potential participants needed to be English speakers. Potential participants needed to identify as Christian to be included because the study specifically addressed this population. Finally, because the study addressed integration of professional identity and Christian religious identity, potential participants needed to identify as having a strong connection to their religious identity. Therefore, a participant was only included if s/he reported his/her religion/faith as central to life.

Recruitment Procedures

In order to obtain permission to recruit students, the researcher first contacted research compliance officers at each university. Although none of the universities required Institutional Review Board approval from their own institution, all recruitment

sites required Western Michigan University (WMU) Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) approval as well as approval of the university's BSW program director or department chair. Phone and/or email contact was made with program directors or department chairs at each university. Of the five potential sites, one was eliminated due to lack of response to phone or email contact from the researcher. BSW program directors at each of the other four universities provided consent to recruit students from their programs pending WMU HSIRB approval.

After approval was granted from WMU's HSIRB, the BSW program director at each university was contacted (Appendix B: Program Director Email Script) and asked to email the study announcement (Appendix C: Initial Student Email Recruitment Script) to students in the BSW program as well as post on the program's Facebook page (Appendix D: Facebook Announcement) and place recruitment flyers (Appendix E: Recruitment Flyer) in campus locations where social work students congregate. In addition, leaders of Christian student organizations on campus (i.e., Navigators and InterVarsity) were contacted through organizational websites and asked to distribute recruitment materials to members. All recruitment materials included a web address at which potential participants could access study information, informed consent material, and a brief electronic questionnaire (Appendix F: Electronic/Paper Questionnaire) utilized to determine if a student fit the inclusion criteria. The recruitment flyer also included a QR code that potential participants could scan with a smartphone and directly be taken to the website containing study information and electronic questionnaire. Follow-up phone calls were then made to ensure program directors had received and distributed the recruitment materials.

Recruiting presented several challenges. The first challenge was that program directors altered recruitment protocol in ways that might impact the participant sample. For example, although program directors were instructed to email the study announcement to all BSW students, one director chose instead to email the announcement to social work faculty and suggest they give the announcement to students they perceived as appropriate for the study. This change posed the concern that faculty might only invite students to participate whom they believed would represent their program well. Fortunately, this alteration was discovered through phone contact with the program director before any data collection had occurred. The director then agreed to follow recruitment protocol and study announcements were sent to all students in the undergraduate social work program. Some program directors gave recruitment materials to other program staff (e.g., administrative assistant) for dissemination to students which led to the process being slowed down or uncompleted. A second challenge to recruitment resulted from less than ideal timing. IRB approval was granted at the end of spring semester in 2015. Although students were still on campus at all of the institutions, both they and faculty were preparing for or completing final exams. As a result, the study was likely given little attention by both faculty and students at that time. One BSW program director stated a preference to wait until fall for dissemination of materials. Other directors were willing to disseminate materials in the spring but voiced concern as to participation levels. Perhaps the greatest recruitment challenge was the tendency of people to view the electronic questionnaire but not complete it (see Figure 3). The electronic questionnaire was closed after thirteen months. At the time of its closure, the electronic questionnaire had 275 views with just thirteen people starting the questionnaire

and five completing it. Of the five that completed the questionnaire, one did not provide contact information to pursue a follow-up interview and one provided contact information but did not respond to communication efforts. As a result, the online questionnaire yielded just three interview participants.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ 275 online views = 3 actual │
│      study participants      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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Recruitment materials sent to BSW Program Director → Students receive study announcement → Interested students access and take electronic questionnaire ↓ **Students access but don't take**

Researcher contacts eligible students ← Generated list of eligible students
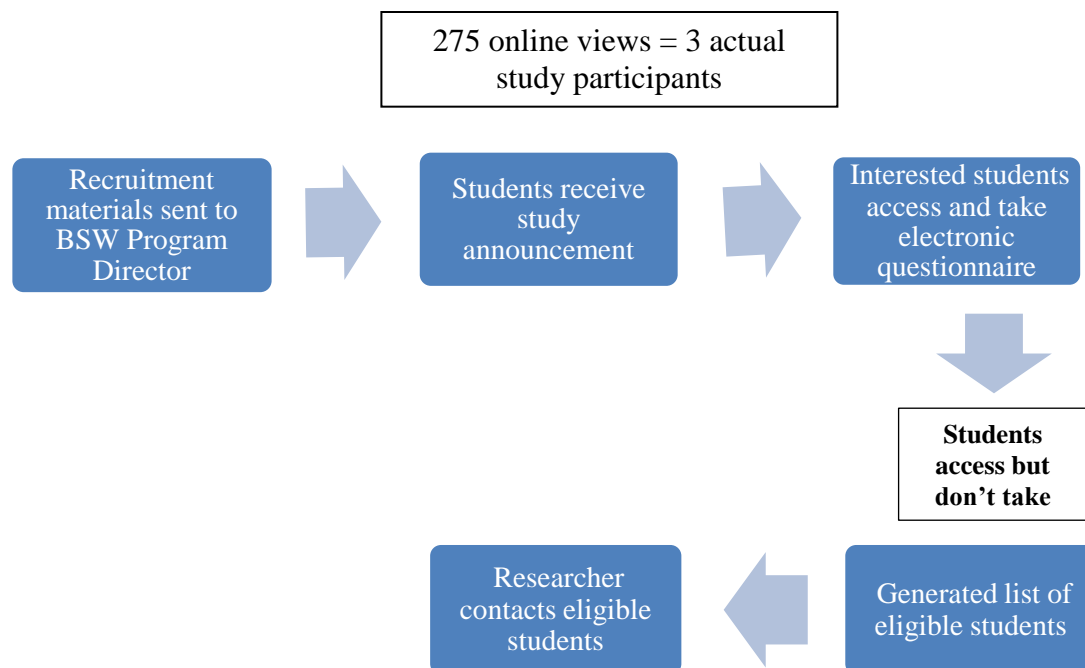
Figure 3. Intended recruitment process with point of challenge.

Effectively combatting these challenges required changes in the recruitment protocol. The first change made was to broaden the potential pool of participants. The original protocol restricted participation to students in the junior and senior year of the social work program. The decision was made to also recruit sophomore students who would have had introductory social work classes and, therefore, would have sufficient knowledge of the profession. The electronic questionnaire was altered to allow inclusion of students in the sophomore year of the program. Interestingly, this alteration did not

increase the number of participants. No sophomore students participated by completing the electronic questionnaire. Another change in recruitment protocol was to engage the help of an "advocate" in each university social work program. These advocates were social work faculty members, other than the program director, with whom the researchers had personal connection and who were willing to assist with dissemination of recruitment materials. The last protocol change consisted of the researcher making brief in-person classroom announcements (Appendix G: Classroom/Student Organization In-person Recruitment Script) in courses with upper division social work students and providing opportunity for students to complete a paper version of the initial questionnaire. Generally, announcements in the classroom were made at the end of the class session with opportunity for students to ask questions about the study. Students were then told they could complete the questionnaire before exiting the class or simply give the researcher contact information if interested in participation.

This in-class form of recruitment was much more successful in yielding participants than was the online questionnaire. Of the nine participants, six joined the study through this method. One possibility for the difference may be related to topic sensitivity. Students in the classroom may have felt a higher level of safety in potentially discussing their religious beliefs with a researcher they had actually met than those students who only knew of the researcher through print or online study announcements. Convenience of the in-class study announcements may have also been a factor as students were able to complete the questionnaire immediately rather than access an online questionnaire later. Another possible reason for the increase in participants from a classroom visit was the study announcements were made in social work research courses

with students who may have had increased interest due to their own study of research methods. Finally, interview participants themselves provided insight as to why students may have been more likely to participate based on the classroom study announcement than the electronic announcement. Two participants noted that college students are sent electronic requests to complete surveys on a regular basis. Some of these requests come from the university while many come from their peers conducting course research projects. As a result, students may eventually come to ignore survey requests. The large number of people who did open the questionnaire suggests interest in the topic area. It should be noted, however, electronic surveys may not be the best route for actually engaging those who are interested.

One other interesting note regarding recruitment was that timing of the announcement in classrooms appeared to make a difference in student willingness to participate. At one university, three class presentations were completed. For the first two presentations, the study announcement was conducted at the end of class. Because all students were leaving the classroom, those interested in participation could easily express their interest without drawing much attention to themselves. In the third presentation, however, the announcement was made at the beginning of the class with the course instructor telling students they could follow the researcher into the hallway if interested in participation. Showing interest in the research study required students to leave the room in front of their peers, thus identifying themselves as "Christian." While eleven students completed the questionnaire in the first two classes, only one student in the third classroom expressed interest and completed the questionnaire. This difference may reveal a perception among some Christian social work students of being stigmatized within

social work educational programs. The one student who did leave the classroom in front of peers to complete the questionnaire later expressed in the interview that she generally did not fit in with her social work peers and was not bothered by her lack of belonging. Students for whom belonging to the peer group is important may have been unwilling to identify themselves as Christian. This possibility was supported by interview participants who expressed reluctance to be identified as Christian in their social work program due to negative stereotypes ascribed to Christians (described further in Chapter IV: Findings).

Students who accessed the electronic questionnaire or completed the paper questionnaire in the classroom were required to indicate understanding of the informed consent statement. If a student met the inclusion criteria and was interested in learning more about the study and possibly participating in the interview, s/he was asked to provide contact information. The researcher then made phone and/or email contact with each potential interview participant to answer questions and arrange a date and location to meet with the participant for purposes of providing informed consent for a potential interview (Appendix H: Interview Invite Phone/Email Script). Four electronic questionnaire participants provided contact information but only three responded to phone/email contact from researcher to complete the interview portion of the study. Of the twelve students who completed the paper questionnaire in the classroom and provided contact information, six responded to researcher email/phone contact and participated in interviews.

Efforts at snowball sampling were also used for recruitment but found to be ineffective. Participants who met for the interview were asked to provide the researcher with names and contact information of other students they believed might be interested in

participation. This recruitment method did not prove to be successful. Some participants

reported they did not know of any other Christian students in their social work program,

although other students in their program were already participating. This lack of

knowledge regarding other Christian social work students may again demonstrate

students' tendency to not identify as Christian within their social work program. Some

participants appeared to be uncomfortable with providing names of students to the

researcher and suggested alternatives (e.g., make a personalized announcement on

Facebook page or speak directly with other potentially interested students). One

participant did provide a name but it was the name of a student who had already

completed the paper questionnaire and given contact information. In the end, the

snowball method did not add any new participants.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

For this study, data was collected in the forms of electronic/paper questionnaire,

semi-structured interviews, and researcher reflective journal.

Electronic/Paper Questionnaire

The electronic/paper questionnaire (Appendix F: Electronic/Paper Questionnaire)

served two primary purposes. First, it served as a tool for screening out potential

participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria. Second, the questionnaire contained

the New Indices of Religious Orientation short form (NIRO) (Francis, 2007) which

measures religious motivation. The researcher used results of the NIRO for triangulation

of data with subsequent interview data.

The initial electronic/paper screening questionnaire included three demographic

questions (age, year in social work program, and whether an English speaker), one self-

assigned religious identification question ("Do you identify as Christian?" with answers "no" or "yes"), one self-assigned religious commitment question ("Do you consider your religion or faith to be a central part of your life?" with answers "no" or "yes"), and the NIRO Short Form (Francis, 2007). The survey questionnaire was constructed so that students who identified as being 19-24 years old, who identified as a sophomore, junior, or senior in the social work program, who answered "yes" to being an English speaker, who answered "yes" to the religious identification question, and who answered "yes" to the religious commitment question were instructed to complete the NIRO. Students who did not identify in the aforementioned ways were thanked for their participation and were exited from the electronic questionnaire without taking the NIRO (Francis, 2007). All students who completed the paper questionnaire did fit the inclusion criteria and completed the NIRO (Francis, 2007).

The New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO) (Appendix F: Electronic/Paper Questionnaire) was developed by Leslie Francis (2007) as a means of more specifically conceptualizing the constructs of religious orientation previously developed by Allport and Ross (1967) and furthered by Batson (1976). The NIRO is based on Batson and Schoenrade's (1991) identification of three conceptual components within each religious orientation (see Table 2). This instrument is most useful when utilized with individuals who describe themselves as religious because it measures differences in motivation for religiosity (Francis, 2007). Several studies have shown the NIRO short form to display strong construct validity and internal reliability (Francis, 2007, 2010; Kamble, Lewis, & Cruise, 2010; Williams, 2010). The NIRO short form is comprised of 18 items which are scored on a Likert-type scale as follows: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3),

disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). Two items make up each of the three conceptual

components of religious orientation. The possible score for each religious orientation

(intrinsic, extrinsic, quest) ranges from six to thirty with the maximum conceptual

component score was ten. Cutoff scores have not been established for the NIRO but

higher scores are meant to indicate a stronger level of orientation (Leslie J. Francis,

personal communication, October 19, 2014). For each participant, the intrinsic, extrinsic,

and quest scores were totaled and recorded. In addition, each conceptual component was

scored and recorded. The NIRO was used in this study to understand the participants'

motivation for religious commitment.

Table 2

Batson and Schoenrade's (1991) Conceptual Components of Religious Orientations

Religious Orientation	Conceptual Components
Intrinsic	- Integration of religion in life - Public religion significant to religious ends - Personal religion significant to religious ends
Extrinsic	- Compartmentalization of religion in life - Religion as means for social support - Religion as means for comfort
Quest	- Ability to acknowledge complexities of existential questioning - Self-criticism and self-doubt regarding religious beliefs - Willingness to change

Semi-structured Narrative Interview

Interviews were conducted in a private setting on or off campus as determined by

the researcher and individual participant. Informed consent information was provided

verbally and in writing to potential participants. They were then given the opportunity to

ask questions regarding the process. Participants offered consent by signing the form before proceeding with the interview (Appendix I: Interview Consent Form). Interviews were audiotaped using interview mode on an Android phone.

Although the interview process was intended to be open-ended, thus allowing participants freedom to construct their personal story of identity integration and management, several guiding questions and prompts were utilized (Appendix A: Interview Protocol). The questions were constructed in such a way as to build a past, present, and future aspect to the narrative. Beginning questions asked participants to reflect on personal origins of professional identity and religious identity. Questions focused on the present asked participants to reveal the lived experience of being both a social work student and a Christian. One future-oriented question required participants to imagine the self with an integrated identity of practicing social worker and practicing Christian. Several questions were worded in terms that would access perceptions of self-identity (e.g., "How do you see yourself as…").

The interview protocol was also constructed to contain three sections of questions: (1) professional identity, (2) religious identity, and (3) integration of the two identities. In the first interview it became apparent participants' responses would not neatly fall into compartmentalized sections. Some students could not talk about their professional identity without also talking about their religious identity. In essence, their stories reflected an identity integrative process already at work. As a result, flexibility in the interview protocol was required to not interrupt or redirect participants' responses in a way that might have altered their narrative responses.

While the overall construct of interviews remained intact, questions were revised throughout the process in order to gain information most relevant to the research questions. The following researcher journal entry exemplifies one such change:

> When I asked how she (participant) pictured herself as a social worker in the future, she responded by talking about a specific role and practice setting. While this information can be part of the identity picture, I also want to know more about how they see themselves as an effective social worker. Will work on question wording.

This particular reflection led to the addition of the question, "What does an effective or good social worker look like?" Asking this question prompted participants to envision an ideal for themselves and also express thoughts and feelings about reaching that professional ideal. Two questions were also added to obtain a richer description of challenges in identity formation. Those questions were: (1) What would have made that situation better? and (2) What would have made that situation worse? Along with expanding description of the challenge, these questions prompted participants to reflect upon what might have prevented the challenge or may have assisted them in overcoming the challenge.

The interviews then ended with several closure items. First, participants were asked if they had anything else they would like to say about being both a social work student and a Christian. They were then provided contact information for the researcher and encouraged to call or email if they had follow-up questions or concerns. Participants were also asked whether the researcher could later contact her/him for clarification of anything said in the interview. Follow-up contact was made with several participants in order to clarify information provided within the interview. Finally, participants were provided with a $10 gift card as thanks for participating in the study.

Audio-recording files were transferred from the Android phone to computer, labeled by pseudonyms, and then transferred to a flash drive for transcription purposes. The recordings were stored on the researcher's computer and an external hard drive. After initial transcription, the researcher listened to each interview two times to correct mistakes and add in process notes such as voice inflection or unusually long pauses. The original transcription along with the revised copy for each interview was also stored on computer and external hard drive.

Ethical considerations in the interview process. The study was reviewed by Western Michigan University's Institutional Review Board (institution at which researcher is a PhD candidate). In addition, the researcher completed necessary steps to assure compliance with each university from which subjects were recruited. Although there were no identifiable risks for participants in this study, the researcher was sensitive to participant emotional reactions in discussing topics which were sensitive at times. Referral information to campus counseling services, chaplaincy services, and the North American Association of Christians in Social Work was provided to participants if warranted. In order to decrease power imbalance inherent in the interview process, the researcher assured participants verbally and in writing of their right to stop at any point during the interview process without consequence. Participants were also instructed to construct a pseudonym which was used on transcript data, interview notes, and in this dissertation in order to protect confidentiality.

Reflective Journal

Following Creswell's (2007) assertion that "All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance" (p. 179), I maintained a reflective journal of thoughts and feelings related to the

research process and topic. Researcher reflexivity is critical in qualitative research design to improve credibility and trustworthiness (King & Horrocks, 2010). Hays and Singh's (2012) three core conditions for reflexivity were utilized as a guiding tool for reflection and included the following categories and sample questions:

- authenticity (What do I expect to find in the data?)

- unconditional positive regard (What judgments do I have about the subject or participants?)

- empathy (Am I having reactions to the study I have been avoiding or not wanting to accept?)

After each interview, I journaled about my perception of the participant, the interview process, and my own thoughts/feelings that emerged during and after the interview. These reflections were reviewed and used during the data collection process to understand contextual and interpersonal factors within interviews (e.g., participant asked about my religious symbol tattoo after recording had stopped), to recognize and challenge biases I may have brought into the interview, to pinpoint weaknesses within interview process (e.g., poorly worded questions) and to make necessary revisions to subsequent interviews. The journal was also used in the analysis process to better understand how my own perspective influenced interpretation.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized to examine the data. This method was chosen because it focuses on understanding lived experience through the voice of study participants (King & Horrocks, 2010). Aligning with the framework of social constructivism, IPA examines the study participant's interpretation of events and

also recognizes that the researcher then views that interpretation through his/her own perceptions (Frost, 2011). IPA takes cultural and historical context into consideration as data are explored, recognizing that both the study participant and researcher interpretations are framed within larger contexts (Frost, 2011). IPA contains four primary stages: (1) several readings of the transcript with beginning notation of potentially important text, (2) identification of potential patterns or themes within a single case, (3) organization of clustered themes into a summary table, and (4) identification of themes across cases (King & Horrocks, 2010). Because the interview schedule was constructed to obtain a storyline of professional identity development, I decided to look for narrative themes along with content themes. In addition, I modified the IPA process to include an early stage (between noting important text and identifying potential patterns) of noting my impressions of the participants' presentation in the interview along with NIRO (Francis, 2007) scores. The following paragraphs describe this modified process in more detail.

To start the analysis process, I read and reread transcripts several times in order to gain familiarity with the interview content and process. Seemingly important aspects of the interviews were noted with first draft comments made in the margins of the transcript. Second, "big picture" notes, including overall impressions of participants and their presentation of self, were recorded separately. The researcher reflexive journal was particularly helpful during this phase of analysis in extending my understanding of the participant and interview content particularly as related to my own conceptions and assumptions. Big picture notes also included participant NIRO (Francis, 2007) scores

with preliminary notes regarding possible connection between interview responses and religious orientation.

Since the interview schedule was constructed in narrative form, a storyline of professional identity development, including integration of religious identity, surfaced as I read each transcript. In addition, participants responded in storyline format when given the prompt, "Tell me about your faith background." In order to explore potential development patterns within and across cases, three storylines were constructed from each transcript: religious identity development, professional identity development, and integration of professional and religious identities.

After big picture notes and storylines were constructed, I reread each interview carefully for meaning units which were noted in the left hand margin of the transcript. Shorthand descriptions of meaning units were recorded in the right hand margin as potential categories such as "affirmation of professional identity." During this stage of analysis, peer debriefing was used to increase validity of findings. Two colleagues, one with a qualitative sociological background and one with specialization in spiritual formation, were given a clean copy of the transcript for a first review and a copy of the transcript with my preliminary notes. Their feedback, both in written form and through verbal discussion, was useful in challenging my own presumptive interpretation of interview content and also provided interdisciplinary perspective.

As I moved through each individual transcript, similarities and differences emerged between cases. Therefore, constant comparative analysis was used to validate emerging patterns as well as highlight unique aspects of each case. Specific aspects compared were pivotal events in the identity formation narrative, patterns within and

across narratives, themes in the content of the narrative, meaning ascribed to events in the story, and the way in which the story was told. Similar to the manner in which interview questions were reshaped as unanticipated information was gleaned, the data analysis process was revised as potential categories in storyline and content were revealed.

Color coding was then used to identify portions of the transcript that connected to major categories and subcategories (see Table 3). Although I did not develop a rationale for matching specific colors with specific categories, upon reflection I realized my choices did possess some measure of meaning. For example, I chose the color green to code religious identity because green symbolizes life and growth to me. In addition, yellow conveys a sense of excitement for me and was, therefore, attached to professional identity text. Reflection upon this simple step in the analytic process further revealed how my own perspective shaped interpretation.

As transcripts were reviewed within this particular construct, the overlap and interweaving of data became evident, making categorization more complex than originally anticipated. One example of overlap could be seen in motivation for social work and professional social work identity. Participants tended to talk about themselves as a social worker in relation to *why* being a professional helper was of importance to them (motivation). Conversely, they also tended to view their motivations for becoming a social worker as being directly linked to identity as a helper. Therefore, some pieces of data were placed in multiple categories and other pieces of data prompted new subcategories.

This interweaving between categories required a flexible and reiterative analysis process to avoid making simplistic conclusions or minimize the integrative structuring of identify formation and management.

Table 3

Color Coding Categorization

Primary Categories	Subcategories
Motivation for social work (light blue)	• View of self • View of profession
Professional social work identity (yellow)	• Social context • Definition of a social worker • View of self as a social worker • Challenges to professional identity
Christian religious identity (green)	• Social context • Definition of a Christian • View of self as Christian • Challenges to religious identity
Relationship between social work and religion (pink)	• Perceived fit • Perceived conflict
Management of professional and religious identities (grey)	• Methods of managing conflict (intentional and implied) • Methods for integration (intentional and implied)

To best organize the data for further understanding, I constructed four major categorical tables: (1) professional identity development (which included motivation), (2) religious identity development, (3) fit between professional identity and religious identity, and (4) conflict between professional identity and religious identity. Each table then contained potentially important subcategories discovered in the transcripts. For example, the professional identity development table contained a subcategory titled "Past

Experiences Leading to Interest in Social Work." The tables were continually modified as each transcript was reviewed and revealed a new subcategory. These tables provided a visual format for seeing themes across cases as well as individual differences in cases. I then examined the tables, big picture notes, and storylines for themes that described the essence of professional identity formation and management of multiple identities. The final step of analysis involved going back to the transcripts for specific color-coded material and quotes to demonstrate themes in the experience of professional identity formation as a Christian BSW student.

Summary

This study utilized narrative interviewing among undergraduate social work students at non-sectarian universities to explore the lived experience of personal-professional identity management as well as ways in which students negotiate conflicting identities. Purposive sampling of sophomores, juniors, and seniors age 19-24 was conducted to recruit a fairly homogenous sample that could provide an indepth perspective of professional identity development and management. Although recruitment proved to be challenging, possibly due to the sensitive topic area, evidence of interest in the research questions was evident in online questionnaire views and response to in-class study announcements. Face-to-face study announcements yielded the best results in recruitment. Finally, this study required a structured yet flexible and evolving data analysis process to more fully capture participants' voices regarding their life as a social work student and a Christian.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Because the research questions focused on undergraduate social work students' experience of professional identity formation and negotiation between professional identity and religious identity, results are presented in four primary sections. The first section highlights participant demographics, study setting context, and researcher context. The second section reveals a common storyline and themes in participants' professional identity formation. In a similar fashion, the third section presents a common storyline and themes for religious identity formation. Finally, major content themes regarding conflict and management of professional/ religious identities are described. While the majority of this chapter is written in third person, some subsections utilize a first person approach fitting with interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). As stated in the Methods chapter, IPA emphasizes both the study participants' interpretation of events and the researcher's interpretation of participants' accounting (King & Horrocks, 2010). Using my own voice at times provides a sense of authenticity in understanding the study and its findings.

Participant Demographics, Setting Context, and Researcher Context

Participant Demographics

Nine BSW students enrolled at three different state universities participated in the study (see Table 4). The percentage of male students participating in the study (22%) was two times higher than the national percentage of male students enrolled full-time in BSW

programs (Council on Social Work Education, 2015a). Although race/ethnicity was not

included as a formal study question, two students (22%) self-identified in the interview

process as being "black" which aligns with 23.9% of students enrolled full-time in BSW

programs identifying as African American/Other Black (Council on Social Work

Education, 2015a). Only two participants had practicum experience, one having just

finished his practicum and the other being in the first semester of a two semester

practicum course. The majority of participants had had little to no social work internship

experience. In regard to religious background, most participants had been raised with a

religious affiliation, although with varying degrees of religious involvement and activity

displayed within their family of origin.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Year in SW Program	Religious Affiliation as Child/Adolescent	Religious Church Affiliation
Anne	Female	22	Senior	Roman Catholic	United Methodist
Bertha	Female	22	Junior	United Methodist	Presbyterian
Charlotte	Female	22	Senior	Roman Catholic	United Methodist
Jenna	Female	21	Senior	Jewish	Non-denominational
Jennifer	Female	21	Senior	Apostolic	Non-denominational
John Paul	Male	22	Senior	None	Roman Catholic
Kendall	Female	22	Senior	Assembly of God	Nondenominational
Rose	Female	21	Junior	Apostolic	Apostolic
Roy	Male	24	Graduated 1 week prior to interview	Christian Reformed	Christian Reformed

Note. Names are pseudonyms chosen by participants.

Setting Context

The three universities at which participants were enrolled were mid-size state universities located in two states within the Midwest. Two of the universities were located in relatively small urban areas (pop. 70,000-75,000) and the third university was located in a major metropolitan area (pop. 835,000) (U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The university located in a major metropolitan area offered BSW, MSW, and PhD in Social Work degrees. A second university offered BSW and MSW degrees while the third university offered just the BSW degree. Seven of the nine participants were enrolled at one university. Another important note of context relates to timing of participant interviews. Interviews were conducted in the fall of 2015 when religious freedom bills were being introduced and debated in various states around the nation. These state-level bills provided protection from governmental interference in an individual's exercise of religion. Both states involved in this study had passed religious freedom legislation that was controversial due to the concern business owners would be protected in refusing goods or services to someone based on differing religious or moral views. This legislation became a point of discussion in social work classrooms and several students specifically noted the legislation as the subject of what was perceived to be intense and contentious classroom debate.

Researcher Context

I identify as Christian and was raised in the Church of God based in Anderson, Indiana. Established in 1881 by Daniel S. Warner, the church came out of the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, was originally committed to pacifism, and was ahead of its time in placing women in leadership roles (Callen, 2005). Further, the Church of God is unique

in that it defines itself as a "movement" as opposed to a denomination, claims no formal creed other than the Bible, and does not have formal membership (Callen, 2005). Such a stance has allowed for a variety of theological views to be held and debated among its "members."

I have experienced being a Christian social work student at a Christian university (undergraduate) as well as at a non-sectarian, public university (graduate). I did not experience significant tension between my own religious identity and professional identity in either university setting, which may be partly attributed to having been raised in a church and home that allowed for theological flexibility. My father was a pastor in the Church of God for over 35 years and theologically instilled in me a desire for grace and mercy over that of judgment. As a result, my own tendency is to "judge the judger." My greatest points of tension during study interviews were experienced when students portrayed non-Christians as being the "other," with the implication of the other being inferior. I also realized I tended to assume I understood participants' meanings when they used common religious language. Keeping a reflective journal throughout the research process helped me to recognize my own perspective, move beyond assumptions, and remain open to participants' perceptions and meanings during data analysis.

As a clinical social worker for over twenty years, I previously provided mental health services to students in a small, Christian, liberal arts university in the Midwest and have served as a full-time faculty member in that university's BSW program for the past twelve years. In my position as a mental health therapist to college students, I frequently assisted students for whom developing identity conflicts were a significant component of their mental/emotional health challenges. Most often, these conflicts surfaced as they

attempted to individuate from parents or guardians in order to make significant life decisions such as choosing a career or marriage partner. Sometimes that individuation process included a deconstruction of religious beliefs that seemed to be both a freeing and painful experience. Coming from a Western ideology of individualism and separation from family of origin as a healthy developmental process, my practice often focused on helping students to explore their evolving sense of self and develop tools for asserting that sense of self with others.

Moving into a faculty role then placed me in the position of socializing students toward a professional identity. Teaching at a faith-based university also added a learning objective that students develop the capability to integrate faith with their chosen career. Facilitating classroom discussions, reading reflective essays, and having private discussions initiated by social work students about issues of integrating their religious beliefs or practices with professional practice led me to observe several points of conflict or tension for students. I have engaged with students who, from their own perspective, have successfully resolved conflict between religious and professional identity, as well as with students who reveal a lack of resolution upon graduation. Understanding the process for successful integration of the two identities in a way that provided for ethical and professional social work practice then became a blending of my own identities as mental health social worker, teacher of emerging social workers, and researcher. As I began discussing this research topic with educators and practicing social workers, along with reading related literature, I found what I perceived to be assumptions in how social work students form professional identity. This dissertation project, then, began as my attempt

to explore how a particular subset of students came to identify themselves as social workers.

Professional Identity Storyline and Themes

"Once upon a time there was what there was, and if nothing had happened there would be nothing to tell" (De Lint, 1993, p. 249). Social work students in this research study had something to tell. They often spoke of their journey to social work with great energy and self-reflection. As one might expect, no two stories were just alike. Each story contained its own set of characters and subplots that served to both affirm and challenge students' developing sense of a professional self. Although each individual professional identity narrative was unique, a common storyline emerged among participants that included an iterative process of discovering the self and discovering the profession of social work (see Figure 4).
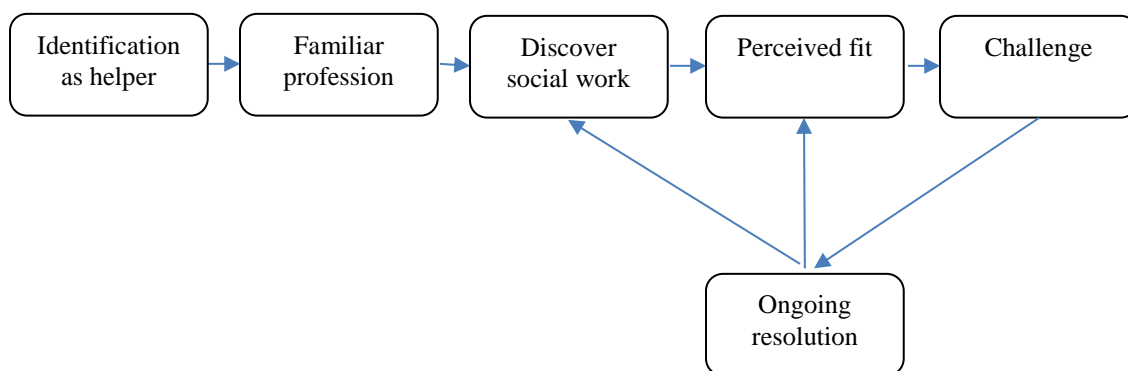
Figure 4: Social work professional identity storyline.

Six primary storyline components emerged from the data and are as follows: (1) identification as a helper; (2) selecting and then deselecting a familiar helping profession; (3) an initial discovery, exploration, and choice of social work; (4) perceiving

the self as fitting with social work; (5) emergence of challenges or concerns with social work as knowledge of the profession deepens; and (6) ongoing resolution of those challenges and concerns. The storyline generally displayed a linear process until participants were enrolled in social work classes and moving through the program. At that point, the storyline becomes more fluid and even circular, with participants moving back and forth between seeing their fit with social work, having challenges to that fit, attempting to resolve the fit, and then reshaping how they view the profession and themselves within it. The following section then further describes each storyline component.

Component 1: Identification as a Helper

The story of forming a professional social work identity began with an important self-discovery: I am a helper. Participants saw caregiving as an essential part of who they were and had identified this part of themselves at a young age. Four participants pinpointed having this sense "as a child" and four other participants reported recognizing the helping desire in middle or high school. Two primary themes emerged in this process of self-discovery: availability of helping roles and affirmation by others as a helper.

Formal and informal helping roles appeared to be pivotal in providing opportunities for participants to recognize a desire to be a professional helper. Often these helping opportunities came in the context of family, church, or school. Anne, Rose, and Charlotte cited experiences with siblings as having instilled a sense of responsibility and caretaking. Anne stated:

> My siblings are all at least eight years younger than me. I have four younger siblings. I've always just been in that like natural like 'I want to help you. I want to take care of you' kind of role.

Rose also attributed her tendency toward caretaking as related to being the oldest sibling of several children. Charlotte's desire for helping, however, originated with a specific sibling's personal issues:

> I wanted to be an addictions counselor first and foremost because I have — like my sister has a history of drug addiction and we were best friends growing up so I had to be like firsthand being right in the whole entire process.

Charlotte's statement conveyed a desire to help as well as a sense of obligation to take on the role of helper ("I had to be like firsthand…"). Although these family roles were not strictly voluntary, all three women portrayed the role as having been beneficial to them and specifically related to their choice of a helping profession.

Educational and religious settings also provided context for shaping professional identity as a helper. During high school or early college years, three participants engaged in formal helping roles which prompted the desire to make helping their career. Jenna commented:

> I did a lot with like mentoring like freshman and sophomores when I was like junior and senior in high school and I really liked that just — you know, what people are going through in high school. It's difficult and I don't know. I definitely just have a passion for that…being that like role model I guess for them that kind of drew me to be like a positive influence on other people's lives and so kind of eventually led me to wanting to do some sort of counseling or helping people, I guess.

Jenna's description speaks of a motivation that is different from perceiving the self as a natural helper. Use of words such as "difficult" and "passion" seem to convey emotional connection with her mentees' struggles in adolescence. Jenna sees pain in the world and feels compelled to act to diminish that pain.

Roy found his calling to help in a church setting. He clearly stated his professional identity was in ministry and had chosen to major in social work as the best

degree one could get at a public university that would be a solid foundation for ministry.

Roy's lifelong background in the church provided his primary formative helping

experience:

> I should say that the entire time that I was thinking of picking social work… was my direction in wanting to work in ministry. I had worked with youth that had been in a position of, you know, depression and, um, going through things like that, going through, um, divorce, going through, you know just going through all the challenges that they face in high school and middle school of, um, you know, growing up…um, and I had wanted to be able to do that as a professional…

Roy still wanted to engage in professional ministry but his opportunity to work with

youth awakened a desire for helping that would come to shape his vision of ministry.

The second theme of identifying as a helper was having significant people

verbally recognize the helping tendency. For participants who had adopted helping roles

within the aforementioned social institutions, these verbal messages helped cement

identity as a helper. For instance, as Rose spoke of her journey toward becoming a social

worker, she commented, "…my mom always like told me that she could see me like

help." Other participants who did not identify being in helping roles within family,

church, or school found such messages to be particularly important. John Paul received

feedback from his mother that he would make a good teacher, due to his caregiving traits.

When he chose social work instead, his mother was supportive because she had "always"

seen him in a helping role. These positive messages seemed important to the participants'

professional identity development. Interestingly, though, negative messages regarding a

helping identity were also formative. In recalling her earliest memories of wanting to

help, Bertha reported:

> I have always been like more concerned about other people than myself. As a child I was very selfless, almost like to a fault. My parents would get so annoyed

with me: (mimicking them) "Worry about yourself. Don't worry about other people."

Even though this message was delivered as a caution to Bertha, it was significant in shaping her identity as one who cares for others. These experiences, both engaging in caregiving and being labeled as a caregiver, suggest social institutions such as family, school, and church provide important contexts for early professional identity formation.

Component 2: Selecting and Deselecting a Familiar Helping Profession

Once participants recognized themselves as helpers, the storyline continued as they attempted to figure out how they might make the role of helper into a career. Although they eventually chose social work, getting to that choice was not a straight path. One theme that was revealed in this portion of the story could be labeled as *I don't know what I don't know*. Participants tended to envision themselves in helping careers that were known to them and social work typically was not on the list of known careers. Just two of the nine study participants had envisioned themselves as social workers before college. Rose reported childhood memories of playing teacher as a child, but it was her encounter with health care social workers during a family member's hospitalization that led her to identify social work as a potential profession. For Kendall, the other student who considered social work before college, career assessments in high school suggested social work as one of three professions most suited to her. Because she was unaware of the array of job possibilities in social work, however, she initially thought she might enroll in social work as preparation for missions. It wasn't until she took her first social work class that she started to picture herself in more traditional social service settings. Rose and Kendall had some familiarity with social work. Most study participants,

however, were not familiar at all with social work when they were first forming ideas in childhood or adolescence about what type of occupation they might engage in as adults.

The lack of knowledge regarding social work as a potential helping career led to the second theme in selecting a helping profession: *I will choose what I do know*. Because social work had not yet appeared as an option, the majority of participants originally identified with a different helping profession. Six participants began their college education in a major other than social work (see Table 5). These participants had coupled their early desire for helping with professional identities for which they had a social construction.

Table 5

Participants' Early Vision of Professional Self and Major at Matriculation

Participant	Childhood/Teen Vision of Professional Self	Major at Matriculation
Anne	Teacher	Elementary Education
Bertha	Teacher	Elementary Education
Charlotte	Substance Abuse Counselor	Psychology
Jenna	Counselor	Psychology
Jennifer	Nurse	Nursing
John Paul	Teacher	Telecommunications
Kendall	Missionary	Social Work
Rose	Social Worker	Social Work
Roy	Minister	Social Work

Jennifer's story exemplifies this theme quite well. She knew she wanted to help others and originally chose a major that fit with her model for helping:

> Well, ever since I was little, I just thought I wanted to be like a nurse or a doctor just because that's what you see on TV all the time. You don't really see — I mean, you might see social workers; but I mean as a kid I really didn't understand what a social worker did but I always saw nurses.

Television portrayals of health care professionals provided a helping role that Jennifer could understand cognitively, even if somewhat inaccurately. Similarly, Anne believed she would be a teacher because her primary models for professional helping were her teachers. For other participants, some helping professions were familiar because they had observed family members in those roles. Jenna thought she would be a psychologist because that was the helping profession her older sister chose. Roy's grandfather was a pastor and Bertha was raised in a family of teachers and nurses. In addition to seeing these familiar professions modeled, participants also received affirmation from family and friends regarding their desire to be a teacher, nurse, or pastor.

The third theme related to selecting a profession was *I do not like what I know*. For the seven participants who began a major other than social work, once they enrolled in classes of the familiar profession, they discovered a lack of personal fit. Typically, the tasks associated with that familiar profession did not provide a sense of fulfillment. Bertha's first two years in the university's elementary education program prompted her to realize teaching was not the form of helping in which she felt most engaged:

> I discovered that one, I wasn't super passionate about teaching and also that I was way more engaged in like the students' multiple worlds and finding out like how to, you know, there are kids, you know, that aren't even getting breakfast and, so looking at ways of like implementing things to help them out before they get to school. So I got way more excited about that stuff.

Bertha's realization displayed a growing awareness and definition of self. She knew she wanted to help the children, recognized there could be other ways to help, and identified those other ways as being more closely aligned with her own desires. In the same

manner, Anne thought she wanted to be a teacher but found her interest in children did

not coincide with the responsibilities of a teacher:

> …I was actually like working in the kindergarten class (assistant), I was like, I
> don't want to teach them these things…and I was like, *OH*, I don't want to be a
> teacher (laughing)! I don't care about the other things. I want to make sure your
> needs are being met and I was like — I talked to my professor about that and she
> was like, that, you know, that's — that's a social work thing.

For three participants, realization that the familiar profession did not fit them provoked

anxiety initially. Like Bertha and Anne, though, most participants reported a sense of

relief and excitement for a new opportunity.

In addition to disliking tasks of the familiar profession, some participants disliked

the profession's theoretical foundation. For example, the two students who had been

psychology majors and who both wanted to be counselors saw psychology as the logical

route to having a counseling practice. Once in psychology classes, however, they

perceived themselves as not agreeing with a strictly psychological approach to human

behavior and helping. In recounting her story of switching from psychology to social

work, Charlotte stated:

> I thought I wanted to know what it was like to have — like what their brain was
> doing and like learn the chemical imbalances inside their brain. And throughout
> my psych major, I had to have an elective and my adviser was like, "you should
> just try social work. Just try that as an elective." And then I tried it and then I was,
> well, I actually don't care at all what their brain is doing. I care more of what the
> person is feeling than like finding the core problem. So I just kind of switched
> over to social work because it seemed like a better fit for what my end goal was in
> my career.

It is important to note participants' descriptions of what they did not like in the familiar

profession were significant tasks (e.g., teaching a subject) or disciplinary perspectives

(e.g., focus on brain vs. environment in human behavior). Part of shaping professional

identity as a social worker then was trying on the tasks and perspectives of another

discipline. Such professional roleplaying assisted these students in more clearly defining who they were, what they wanted, and what they did not want in a life's career.

Component 3: Initial Discovery, Exploration, and Choice of Social Work

After realizing what they did not want as a profession, students had the task of discerning what helping profession might better align with who they were and what they did want. Participants' storytelling of how they came to choose social work contained three primary themes: *introduction to the idea of social work; superficial exploration of the profession; and pragmatic reasons to choose social work.*

Introduction to the idea of social work. The first theme highlights a crucial point in the professional identity storyline. Since most participants were unfamiliar with social work, other people became essential in pointing them toward the profession. Family members, friends, college instructors, or church members were cited as those who introduced the possibility of becoming a social worker to study participants. Bertha had friends that were social work majors who "talked it up" to her. Bertha reported these friends suggested she was cut out for social work by saying, "You know, you clearly care more about social justice issues and stuff like that. This is probably a better path for you (than teaching)." Her friends' message proved influential for her as she believed they understood both the profession and her as a person. When Jennifer became dissatisfied with nursing, she was guided toward social work by a simple question from her Bible study leader: "What are you good at?"

> You know, he made me identify things that I was really good at …helping people and talking to people and like I was a really good listener… So kind of just identifying what my strengths were and then he was like, "Well, have you ever thought about social work?" And I was like, "No." But, you know, when I went to look at what social workers do, it was like everything lined up, like that's exactly what I want to do.

Jennifer's Bible study leader not only made her aware of social work but also initiated a personal connection for her with the profession by asking her to reflect on her talents and skills. In essence, trusted people in participants' lives assisted them in bringing together "who I am" with "what I can do."

Superficial exploration. A second theme in the discovery of social work was *superficial exploration* in determining whether social work was the right career choice. In light of not knowing much about the social work profession and attempting to make a major life decision such as career, we might assume students would rigorously research that profession to determine fit. This assumption, however, was not accurate in most storylines. Four participants cited using the internet to generally learn more about the field with two of those participants using just the university's social work website. Three participants had family or friends of family that were social work students or practicing social workers. Roy gathered most of his information from his wife who was a social work student one year ahead of him in school. His older sister-in-law was a practicing social worker with whom he had conversation about the profession. Rose was able to talk with and shadow a friend of the family who was a medical social worker. Charlotte knew her friend's father was employed with Child Protective Services and viewed his work in a positive fashion, although she never talked directly with him about it. Two participants, Bertha and Rose, learned about the profession through other students who were social work majors. Interestingly, just one student reported using multiple methods to research the profession and none of the participants spoke with social work faculty in this process. Overall, general information about social work along with recommendation from people within trusted social groups swayed students to choose it as their profession.

Pragmatic reasoning. The third theme within choosing social work over similar helping professions such as family studies or psychology was *pragmatic reasoning*. Eight participants reported having been influenced toward social work due to practicalities. The most often cited practical influence was the variety of potential jobs available with a social work degree. Three participants used the word "broad" to describe the profession and its opportunities. Charlotte discovered this perceived benefit as she completed the introductory social work course.

> And so like after I started really digging into what social work was, I saw all the different layers. Like if I wanted to work with kids later, I could. If I wanted to work with older adults, I could or disabilities or mental health…

The breadth of the profession appeared to provide a sense of job security as well as respite from the pressure of thinking they were choosing one job setting for the rest of their careers. Jennifer chose social work over psychology because, "I realized that you could do a lot more with a bachelor's in social work than you can with a bachelor's in psychology." Jenna also cited this realization as being one reason she switched from psychology to social work. Another practical reason for choosing a social work degree was for the practical skills that could be developed in the educational process. Both Roy and John Paul acknowledged benefits of the interpersonal skills they had learned in the social work program. Roy, in fact, chose social work based on what he believed to be a financially prudent way to achieve skills needed for his goal of working in youth ministry:

> I wanted to find a career that I could take at a secular university (p) that was, um, uh, a university that wasn't very expensive. Um, I started off going to college at the community college level, um, taking courses that I could, you know, pay out of pocket and that sort of thing, and I didn't want to spend a lot of money on a private university and I wanted to have a degree that I thought would be, um, (sigh) kind of more of a jack-of-all-trades kind of degree…

Roy described his choice of a social work education as a cost-effective means to an end. Two other pragmatic reasons cited by one participant each were: (1) social work provides licensing, and (2) the perception that the academic load for social work will be less challenging than psychology. Charlotte, who cited the second reason, remembered thinking "…well, I actually hate writing all these papers that psych makes me write so I might as well go to social work. But now I'm writing like 25 page papers so really I didn't escape that at all (laughs)." These practical reasons seemed important to students in choosing social work as their educational path as opposed to related majors such as psychology, family studies, or counseling.

In summary, students' identity as a helper did not change when they discovered the familiar profession was not a good fit. Therefore, they moved into examining other potential careers that would help preserve the identity of helper. Since participants were largely unaware of social work as a career, other people in their personal lives became important in guiding them to social work. To better understand what social work entailed, participants looked primarily to peers and internet resources for initial understanding of the profession. Finally, practicalities of the education and degree were persuasive in selecting social work.

Component 4: Perceived Fit with Social Work

As students discovered social work and began taking introductory level courses, they tended to view the profession as being a good fit with their personal identity. At this point, the perception of fit was largely based on general or even superficial knowledge of what the profession entailed. Nonetheless, this component of the storyline is significant for assisting students in claiming a professional identity. Three primary themes emerged

within perceived fit: (1) *affirmation of fit by emotion, perspective, character traits, and values;* (2) *affirmation of fit by others*; and (3) *perception of divine affirmation.*

Affirmation of fit by emotion, perspective, character traits, and values. As participants discussed ways in which they were drawn to social work and/or perceived it as a good fit for them personally, they tended to cite emotional experiences, perspective agreement, character trait sharing, and values agreement as evidence of that fit. In regard to emotional affirmation, five participants suggested they understood social work was the best profession for them based on the excitement or "passion" they felt in classes or in considering work with a particular population. When asked if she had experienced any doubts transitioning into social work from elementary education, Bertha stated, "Honestly, it's been like — the most affirming thing has been getting in classes and learning about the stuff that we are learning about and just feeling really excited about it." Bertha seemed to believe feeling passion about one's work was necessary and a strong indicator of fit. Because she wasn't "super passionate" about elementary education and teaching didn't "tap into my passions," she believed education was the wrong helping profession for her. Similarly, Jennifer viewed excitement as significant to her fit with a profession:

> I mean I know this is school and people aren't generally that excited but I feel like if I don't have the passion for it (nursing) now… I kind of just feel like I'm just here just trying to, you know, make it through. I don't think I'm going to be passionate when it comes to actually being in the workforce. And so once I discovered like social work and I started taking social work classes, I actually did have that excitement and I was like, yeah, like this clicks. Like this is really good.

Jennifer seemed to be projecting her lack of enthusiasm for nursing into her future work life. She did not want work she would have to tolerate but wanted work she would enjoy.

Anne viewed herself as having a "passion" for interacting with children which made

social work the "natural road" to follow. Jenna expressed concern that she did not naturally feel a "passion" for working with the poor which proved to be a challenge to her professional identity (discussed further in the following section). She did, however, feel "at peace" with being a social worker due to philosophical alignment with the profession. Jenna's peace provided the feeling of fit needed to believe she had made the right career decision. Finally, Rose did not use idealistic words such as "natural" or "passion" to describe her personal sense of fit. Instead she simply stated, "I just really enjoyed the (introductory social work) class and liked the different activities and like I just could picture myself like, you know, helping children…" As with the others, Rose's emotional experience helped to convince her that social work was the appropriate profession for her to join.

Another way participants experienced fit was more closely related to perspectives of the social work profession with which they agreed. These perspectives primarily focused on causes of human suffering and methods for improving human functioning. As mentioned in an earlier section, Jenna did not agree with a purely psychological view of human suffering. When she became enrolled in the introductory social work course, she discovered theoretical viewpoints that resonated with her experience of the world:

> I think I liked how REAL life it is. Like it — it takes into account like the way that the world actually works; like with — how people are disadvantaged and how that makes life harder for them just to get basic needs… It just made sense to me and I just agreed with it a lot more and there — I mentioned before like systems theory — that just like, yes, I've seen that that's how it works and you have to work with the people around you and where you're living and you have to get them food or shelter first.

Jenna's statement displayed cognitive agreement between personal and professional

ideology which enhanced her sense of fit. Another participant, Jennifer, also discovered

such cognitive agreement, although through the lens of an experiential learner:

> Um, well, when I first got into the classes, there were a lot of theories and there were a lot of things that were just like – at first it wasn't really clicking; but then when we got into the classes that were more hands on, volunteering, just interviewing, case studies, things like that, it made a whole lot of sense about like how the social worker — like what their role is when it comes to clients and how they are not really there to fix the client's problems. I kind of thought that that was the — the main goal. You've just got to fix their situation and like, you know, everything will be fine. But they kind of taught me that it's more about like equipping a person and making sure that they have these skills and that after, you know, they do meet with you and after they do get their services, they should be able to basically go out on their own and be productive in society on their own and so I liked it because it's not so much about enabling people as it is about equipping people.

The social work empowerment perspective of human change was so significant for

Jennifer that she referenced it four additional times in her interview. This agreement in

perspectives allowed her and other participants to more clearly picture themselves in an

effective professional helping role.

In addition to perceiving fit through emotional experience and perspective

agreement, some participants referenced having personal character traits or abilities they

associated with being a social worker. After the first three study interviews were

conducted, the question "How do you picture an effective social worker" was added to

the interview protocol. The first three participants interviewed had been asked how they

viewed themselves as a social worker in the future and they tended to respond in terms of

a client population or agency setting. Adding the additional question regarding perception

of an effective social worker allowed for comparison in how participants viewed

themselves and how they viewed an effective social worker. Table 3 displays this comparison. Overall, participants tended to describe themselves in a similar fashion to how they would describe an effective social worker. Many times, participants used different words or phrases that conveyed a very similar meaning. For instance, when asked how she pictured an effective social worker, Rose immediately stated, "I would say mostly just justice and comfort — like feeling — like if they can make you feel safe…" Earlier in the interview when discussing why she believed social work to be a good fit for her, she talked about having a heart for children and being protective. Although her phrasing was different ("they can make you feel safe" vs. "protective"), Rose was describing analogous character traits. Another example can be found in Charlotte's description of herself as both "caring" and "blunt." She viewed herself as confrontational and expressed concern she might come across to clients as not caring enough. When asked to describe an effective social worker, she first focused on the attribute of caring and compared the social worker to "the cute little grandma (who) is like nice and nurturing and loving." She then quickly suggested that social workers needed a "hard part" to their personality as well. As shown in Table 6, participants generally saw themselves as having character traits comparable to those of an effective social worker. This character trait and ability model also served to raise concerns about fit which will be discussed in the following section.

Table 6

Participant Description of Effective Social Worker vs. Description of Self

	Description of Effective Social Worker	Description of Self
Bertha	- Giver - Personable - Empowers	- Selfless - Loves engaging with others in conversation - Social justice-oriented
Jenna	- Passionate - Good listener - Multitasker - Able to assess client needs	- Good interpersonal skills - Strengths-based - Able to "connect the dots" in understanding client and needs
John Paul	- Loving - Respectful - Service oriented - Tough	- Respectful - Does what's "right" even when difficult
Rose	- Makes others feel safe - Comforter - Social justice-oriented - Knows available resources	- Protective - Heart for vulnerable children - Open minded
Charlotte	- Caring - Optimistic - Humble - Nurturing - Tough	- Helper - Positive thinker - Caring - Blunt - Confrontational
Jennifer	- Strengths-based - Doesn't impose own beliefs - Client-focused - Has integrity	- Good listener - Culturally competent - True to self

Finally, participants often reported a fit between their personal values and those of

the profession. Although they sometimes spoke of religious values that fit well with

social work (described in a later section), participants also referenced their own more

general values or moral principles coinciding with professional values. For example,

Bertha mentioned a personal orientation toward the value of social justice. The profession's strong social justice position, then, assisted her in believing she belonged in social work. Another example was provided in John Paul's personal connection to the NASW *Code of Ethics*:

> I think that like moral standings on like how a lot of social workers do (social work), just lined up with me a lot as well so it wasn't like a hard transition to like look at the Code of Ethics and be like, oh, I disagree or like — I was like, yeah, I agree totally with that. Like, there's *certain* aspects of social work that sometimes I struggle with but for the most part like the general core of social work, it just lined up with my values I felt… a ton… so it was like a smooth transition.

Despite experiencing conflict with some "aspects of social work," John Paul's ability to identify with the social work profession was strengthened by a foundational values agreement. In addition, this agreement helped John Paul move more easily from another professional identity to that of social work. This point may be particularly significant considering participants often changed from a familiar field of study to one that was relatively unknown.

Perceiving social work as being a good fit for themselves personally was important for students as they shifted into a new educational major. Some participants recognized fit through positive emotional experiences connected to classroom activity and improved understanding of the profession. Other participants described fit in terms of professional ideology that made sense in connection to their own perception of reality. Finally, participants' discovery that the profession's core values, made known in introductory social work courses, aligned well with their personal core values also supported professional identity development.

Affirmation of fit by others. As participants were exploring the possibility of social work or had newly declared it as a major, they were attentive to messages from

people they trusted regarding their fit with the profession. Although many participants heard concerns from others about the profession itself (discussed in Challenges section), they also heard assertions of it being a good match for them personally. Affirmation of fit came from family ($n = 5$), friends ($n = 3$), and faith community ($n = 2$). Kendall reported a broad base of affirmation, stating "anyone that knows me" said social work would be a good fit. Bertha also experienced significant support, stating "everyone" was "really cool about it." An especially pivotal point in Bertha's professional identity storyline was having friends and family say, "…duh, like of course, this (social work) makes way more sense than teaching." Bertha's statement seemed to suggest those who knew her were surprised they had missed picturing her as a social worker.

Not all participants received affirmation as quickly as Bertha and Kendall received their affirmation. Although Charlotte had frequently been told she was a "natural counselor," her family had identified computer work as one of her strengths and encouraged her to pursue that career for financial reasons. As they learned more about social work, however, her family agreed "that out of everything I could be doing, this would be the best." Similarly, John Paul's mother had envisioned him as a teacher and was concerned social work would be too emotionally difficult. As he moved through the program though, she told him "This is exactly where you need to be in your career." John Paul referred to his mother and grandmother as "the two biggest people in my life." Therefore, their view of him and approval of his career choice was especially important.

As mentioned earlier, two participants highlighted affirmation of fit by their faith community. Jennifer's Bible study leader, along with a female mentor from the church, provided ongoing reinforcement for her identity as a social worker by pointing out ways

in which she was suited for the profession. For Roy, members of his church knew he wanted to pursue ministry but "they understand completely why I would pick social work…I think the way they kind of view it is…is, um, again that helping field. That field where you're going to go into the darkness and bring light…" Even though Roy was not studying ministry, his faith community believed social work to be a good match for his pursuit of professional helping. Participants also mentioned receiving general support from church, family, and friends but the direct messages of fit with social work appeared to play a larger role in confirming and supporting professional identity.

Perception of divine affirmation. Believing God affirmed one's identity as a social worker provided powerful assurance of fit for the profession. Two participants referenced a social work career as being part of God's plan for their lives. Bertha expressed her sense of divine affirmation saying, "I just feel like it's the right place that God has like plopped me." Bertha not only believed God approved of her choice but had engineered it as well. John Paul viewed divine affirmation as offering consolation whenever he questioned his choice:

> So that's been kind of my striving thing is like, when I get kind of down I'm like, 'hey am I doing the right thing?' Like, I just look at my family and look how like happy they are for me, it's like I need to have that joy as well because this is exactly where God wants me to be.

John Paul, much like Bertha, believed God desired for him to be a social worker. This belief, however, was utilized differently to cement professional identity. Bertha's statement, and the manner in which she voiced it, indicated her belief in divine affirmation gave her feelings of excitement and satisfaction. John Paul, on the other hand, referenced divine affirmation more as a call to obedience (i.e., Social work is where God

wants me, so I need to follow and be happy with it). In both cases, perception of divine affirmation played an important role in strengthening professional identity.

Component 5: Emergence of Challenges or Concerns with Social Work

As described in the previous section, participants perceived a fit between themselves and the social work profession that allowed them to enter into and proceed with a social work education. At this point in professional identity formation, though, the storyline became less linear as participants experienced challenges to that fit or sense of professional identity. These challenges generally emerged as students revealed their professional plans to others and as they became more knowledgeable about the profession itself. The storyline then weaved back and forth between challenges, resolution, new challenges, etc.

It should be noted challenges related to conflict between religious beliefs and social work perspectives are referenced but not fully addressed in this subsection. Conflict between personal and professional beliefs or values certainly did present as one challenge for participants. Because such conflict and management of it is the second primary research question though, those findings are discussed in depth in a later section on integration of the two identities. This subsection will instead focuses on challenges to strengthening identity that may be present for both religious and non-religious students.

Examination of the data revealed two major themes in challenges to professional identity: *receiving negative messages* about choice of profession and *self-doubt* about capability for the profession. Four categories then emerged within each theme and are presented below (see Table 7).

Table 7

Challenges to Professional Identity

	Anne	Bertha	Charlotte	Jenna	Jennifer	John Paul	Kendall	Rose	Roy
Receiving negative messages									
Low salary (*n*=6)	√		√	√	√		√	√	
Emotional impact (*n*=6)	√		√	√	√	√		√	
Job availability (*n*=3)	√				√			√	
Fit (*n*=2)			√						√
Self-doubt									
Setting bias aside (*n*=5)	√	√					√	√	√
Perceive self as different (*n*=4)		√	√	√					√
Competency (*n*=3)	√		√	√					
Personal emotional issues (*n*=2)			√				√		

Receiving negative messages. Even though most participants had heard positive

messages about their decision to become a social worker, they also heard negative

messages from extended family, acquaintances, and occasionally from social work

faculty. The most common negative messages heard centered on social work being a low

wage profession as well as an emotionally difficult profession. Jenna reported that when

she told coworkers or other students what her major was, they often responded with "oh,

that's really good for you; like that is so needed. They — it's such a hard job. You'll

make no money." This message was confusing for Jenna as it supported the role of social

worker in society yet magnified potential downsides of the profession. Another participant, Jennifer, expressed fear of what her family would think when she chose social work because they had often encouraged her toward nursing for "good pay" and job stability. When she did tell her family she had switched to social work, her parents were supportive but her grandmother suggested, "you need to go ahead and stick with being, you know, a nurse or a nurse practitioner because they make more money and you're not going to be able to find a job." The six participants who discussed low pay as a potential concern appeared to accept the concern as a factual aspect of the profession, although it did not prevent them from continuing with their social work education.

In terms of the emotional impact of profession, four participants were told the profession would be "hard" and three were warned of potential "burnout." Interestingly, participants reported such comments came from people outside of the profession. Rose captured this concern well stating:

> …like a lot of people say social work is like a hard profession and stuff like that. And like it hasn't really hit me yet as far as being hard. I don't know if it's cause I'm not really in the field. Like I hear stories and stuff like that. Not like on the research end or anything but like — I hear like stories about how it's hard and stuff… So that's one thing that was kind of a challenge, like the burnout and like being hard. I'm like I don't want that to happen to me.

Rose's statements appeared to convey an internal struggle resulting from others' negative depictions of the profession. She acknowledged her evidence for burnout came from "stories" and not "the research end," yet also seemed to accept the premise her work would be emotionally taxing and that she needed to accept that premise ("…it hasn't really hit me *yet…*"). Charlotte's concern regarding burnout appeared to have been fostered by social work faculty who "pressed" the need for self-care "all the time." She commented:

> I think self-care is the most terrifying part of social work because — because I AM such a helping person, I feel like it's going to be very — and I already — this is one of my biggest downfalls; but maybe it's also a strength too. But like I take the weight of all — everyone else around me's problems and I don't really focus on myself a lot.

Charlotte identified her social work professors as being very caring and encouraging in their suggestions for self-care, yet their suggestions appeared to provoke anxiety for her.

Along with low pay and possible burnout, three participants perceived others as suggesting jobs would not be available to them and the jobs they did find would be unstable. Jennifer heard this message from her grandmother and claimed the negative messages impacted her "just a little bit." Later in the interview however, when asked if she had ever questioned her decision to pursue social work, she stated:

> Where the issue comes in is the fact that I really want to work with sexual assault victims and victims of domestic violence and then when I get emails… like right now (named local agency) has recently sent me an email about how they are trying to cut this bill that is for domestic violence funds and they're trying to put it toward something else and they were encouraging us to call the — to call the representatives and things like that to try to make sure that this bill doesn't get passed because then — I mean, it would just take this huge chunk out of the budget for domestic violence because of things like that and so the simple fact of the matter that people don't value the services and things like that for domestic violence, sexual assault, things like that. The fact that it's not that important to them and they're just like, "oh, we'll just take this from this. It's not important. We'll just put it over there." That concerns me and that worries me because I know people who don't get paid some weeks where their bosses have to pay them out of pocket because there's not enough money and funding. That scares the mess out of me.

Jennifer's stated concern about job instability appears significant, however, she did not connect it to her grandmother's warnings. Other study participants, Anne and Rose, had both been told from concerned others that they would not be able to obtain a job without a graduate social work degree. Again these messages came from people outside of the profession yet served to instill insecurities in social work students.

The last category of negative messages received was that of fit. Just two participants received negative messages about their fit with the social work profession and, in both cases, the people sending the messages were social work faculty. Roy did not report direct statements from faculty but commented that "none of them got" why he would choose to major in social work if he wanted to become a minister. Charlotte heard a much more direct message, stating a professor "straight up told me she doesn't think I'm cut out for social work." She indicated she did not know what was meant by the statement and "at first it really bothered me and I really contemplated whether I was in the right spot." Although she did continue on a social work path, Charlotte admitted the professor's comments "really hurt my feelings actually." A difference in tone was apparent between Roy and Charlotte's portrayal. Roy laughed as he mentioned his faculty's impression of him while Charlotte clearly conveyed negative emotion and impact. This difference represented well the variety of reactions participants had to negative messages.

Self-doubt. The second theme of challenges was *self-doubt* experienced by participants. Seven participants acknowledged concern about ability to fulfill some aspect of the professional role. Categories of self-doubt included ability to set biases aside, perceiving oneself as different from other social workers, general competency, and having personal issues that might interfere with effective social work practice. Charlotte expressed having three of the four concerns, which may have been related to the professor's message described earlier. Three other participants reported two concerns related to self-doubt and the remaining reported just one.

The ability to set personal bias aside in order to serve the best interest of clients was the most frequently cited self-doubt concern among participants. Anne was particularly worried about her ability to do so, saying:

> …so often we talk about not having a bias and making sure that, you know, when you are talking to a client you give them all their options no matter what you believe personally. Like each client has the right to make these decisions for themselves and, you know, make those choices and so I've done a lot of soul-searching. Like can I really sit there and be like, "okay, well, here are the options that you have and I really don't care which one you pick even though inside I have a very strong belief that you should pick this one but I can't tell you that." And so, I just — I struggle with that. Will I be able to put those biases aside and just be like, okay, I'm just here as a person trying to help you?

Anne further commented she did not yet have personal experience with this personal bias dilemma but that "you hear it talked about all the time in all of the classes and so — it's — in my head it happens every day and I'm going to have to face all of my biases like all the time." Similar to Charlotte's concerns regarding burnout and self-care, Anne interpreted her faculty's emphasis on personal bias as indicative of constant challenge. Rose expressed a lower level of self-doubt as she considered what it would be like to work with people for whom she carried a negative perception:

> I know there's going to be like challenges to me like when, you know, like we have to like follow a certain — you know, like the Code of Ethics or like follow a certain protocol like no matter what the individual did. Like, as far as like when I'm working with DCS like if the parents, you know, did whatever, like I know that I have to set my biases aside and like my beliefs aside and just say like okay they went through all the proper steps to get their child back or whatever.

Perhaps a positive note in this concern is that Charlotte and Rose appeared to understand the profession's mandate to recognize personal bias and not allow that bias to influence service. They, like the others who noted this challenge, could recognize their own potential bias yet were not yet confident they could "set it aside."

A second self-doubt concern was viewing oneself as different from other social

work students or practicing social workers. Within this study sample, difference was most

often related to religious ideology and is discussed later in this chapter. While Jenna did

express feeling different from other social work students due to her religious beliefs, she

also wasn't sure she fit the image of the social worker activist:

> I started to get to know like some of the personalities and like interests of the
> people in my classes and I just realized there are some that are a lot more
> passionate about it than I am and it really like — I don't know if it makes sense,
> but like to the core like the — NASW core values and like for everyone's service
> and (changed voice in chant-like manner) — which is amazing like, but I just had
> realized like I'm a little bit more like reserved about it… just not as like focused
> and not "yeah, let's go help everyone like." Let's stick to what I can learn and
> realistically do.

Jenna recognized the function of advocacy in social work and her peers' passion for it.

Because she did not feel that passion herself though, she questioned herself as a social

worker. Charlotte viewed herself as different from her peers because of her strong

advocacy for people who identify as transgender. She also perceived classmates as

feeling more connected to social work faculty than she did. She described a classroom

exercise in which students were instructed to write about whether or not anyone in the

social work profession had inspired them. Charlotte stated, "I just said, no. And I was the

only one that said no in the whole class…we didn't write our names on them, but they

were like going through the answers and I was the ONLY one that said no." This feeling

of difference may have been especially challenging as it not only separated her from

peers but highlighted some separation from social work faculty and professionals.

Charlotte's portrayal of this story indicated a belief she was supposed to feel motivated

and inspired by social work faculty but did not.

One important note regarding participants feeling a sense of difference was that they did not always experience self-doubt related to their difference. In fact, both Charlotte and Roy implied feeling a level of pride or acceptance regarding ways in which they differed from peers or social workers in general. What is not clearly understood, though, is how or if that sense of difference jeopardized professional identity.

The final two specific points of self-doubt were competency and personal emotional issues. Three participants identified fears about their ability to perform certain tasks well. Jenna viewed social workers as having to be excellent multi-taskers and complex thinkers as they assess and intervene with clients. She was not confident she was up to the task:

> It just seems like a lot to juggle so I think of someone who really — they understand where they're at. They can, you know, in their head while they are interacting with a client or doing whatever work they are doing, they can think about all those things at one time. So it's a little scary. THAT'S scary to me. I can't do all that.

Jenna compared herself to the image of an experienced social worker and could not picture herself at that level of competency. Jenna also voiced concern that her youthful look would lead others to not trust her competency. Finally, Jenna worried about being culturally competent, saying:

> I've definitely learned…how we ARE different or like what it means that I'm like a white woman if I'm counseling, you know, an African-American man, what is — what does that mean? Like what are those differences? What does that mean for our professional relationship and — I don't know.

Jenna wasn't confident she would effectively engage with someone she viewed as different but she knew doing so was an important social work skill.

Charlotte's fears about her competency focused on the skill of confronting with empathy. Charlotte saw herself as being "blunt," saying, "But that's just my personality.

That's who I've always been. So I don't really know how to change that." She expressed

belief that effective social workers should not "candy-coat" what they have to say to

clients. At the same time, though, she worried about hurting people's feelings. Because

she identified herself as naturally confrontational, she questioned her ability to confront

in a caring manner.

In contrast to Jenna and Charlotte's specific competency concerns, Anne simply

worried about her preparedness for the profession in general:

> I'm not competent enough to be a social worker. Like you spend so much time
> focusing on like what the textbook says and doing this homework assignment and
> I — I just — that's not the way I learn and that's not the way I process things…
> It's actually leading up into practicum and I'm like, do you think I'm ready to go
> and do these things? Cause *I* don't feel ready to go do these things.

Anne's statements seem to be directed toward faculty who she perceived as having not

prepared her effectively and is now asking how they could possibly view her as prepared.

As can be seen in these examples, participants had varying concerns regarding their

ability to provide effective service.

Only two participants mentioned academic performance as a challenge to their

development as a social worker. Charlotte hypothesized that the negative message she

received from a professor regarding her fit for the profession may have been based on her

underperformance in several classes at the time. She indicated the classes in which she

was enrolled were particularly difficult and that she likely wasn't doing her "best work."

She did not voice any other concerns about her academic capability. Part of Anne's

insecurities around her professional preparedness were related to the event she portrayed

as most significantly challenging her identity as a social worker. Anne had been awarded

a child welfare scholarship that not only assisted financially but would also guarantee her

a job with the Department of Children's Services upon graduation. During junior year,

her grades fell below the scholarship requirement. Losing the scholarship then provoked

great self-doubt and anxiety:

> …I was like did I make a terrible decision? Oh, my gosh. Like, what am I going to do? I was the one who had everything figured out and I was ready to graduate and like it was all set in stone and then WHOOSH! Everything kind of like slipped out from underneath me and I was like, maybe I'm not competent. If I was competent enough, I would have done better…And so that really shook me spiritually, professionally. I was like — I thought about switching majors.

As Anne further described her experience, a negative perception of her professional

relationships began to surface as well. She compared herself unfavorably to peers who

had maintained the scholarship. For a time period, she avoided discussing the matter with

faculty due to embarrassment and concern her incompetency would become more visible.

Anne teared up in the study interview several times as she discussed this point in her life.

Although academic challenge was not revealed as a common professional identity

challenge in this study, its potential impact on sense of competency and connection to

other professionals/students appeared profound for Anne.

Also related to competency, Charlotte and Kendall verbalized some insecurity

related to how their own personal issues might impact them as a social worker. Kendall

voiced a history of physical and emotional health problems that had posed potential

obstacles for her stating, "what has been challenging for social work was *I* just needed to

work through some things in myself. It all kind of happened like while I've been in the

social work program…." In a similar fashion, Charlotte identified a personal struggle to

set boundaries and a history of depression, both of which she feared would jeopardize

effectiveness and her own emotional health. These participants displayed solid self-

awareness in voicing their self-doubts. Self-awareness is generally viewed as a strength

and its development is encouraged within the profession. The challenge for participants in the study, however, seemed to be a result of judgment that was attached to self-awareness. As Charlotte poignantly stated, "I don't want to be another *bad* social worker."

All participants identified questions or concerns about being a social worker. Some of these questions were a result of direct or indirect messages from others about the profession or the participant's ability to be effective in the profession. Other questions surfaced as participants compared themselves unfavorably to their developing image of a capable social worker. Such concerns were not as impactful to some as they were to others and all participants persisted in the social work educational program. What then assisted them in overcoming challenges to their professional identity?

Component 6: Ongoing Resolution

The phrase "ongoing resolution" likely appears as an oxymoron, yet it aptly describes the final component of participants' professional identity stories as documented in this study. As challenges to professional identity occurred, *intentional action* and *unintentional coping mechanisms* were utilized to strengthen social work identity. Professional identity, however, was not simply obtained at the end of the story. Even though participants had stayed in the social work major and had generally come to view themselves as future social workers, new challenges or questions surfaced as they interacted with family, peers, faculty, practicing social workers, faith communities, and even new ideas.

Participants utilized various identity resolution methods for managing possible threats to professional identity (see Figure 5). Some of the methods were not strategized

nor even identified by the participant as a way of coping with an identity threat.

Therefore, methods were placed in three categories: intentional action, conscious coping, and unconscious coping. Some methods were classified as intentional action because participants described a purposeful initiative taken on their part to manage challenge. Conscious coping mechanisms were methods used by the participant that were not planned but able to be identified in hindsight as participants verbally processed challenging experiences. Unconscious coping mechanisms then were those methods that participants did not purposefully enact nor did they express it as a way of coping. In effect, the participant did not recognize s/he was employing a mechanism for coping with threat to identity. These mechanisms were instead identified by my interpretation of interview content and participant presentation of the content. Figure 5 displays the seven primary methods utilized and their categorization. As shown, some methods fall into two or even three categories. For example, sometimes students identified in hindsight (conscious coping) a way in which they had positively reframed a certain challenge, yet at other times they positively reframed without realizing they had done so (unconscious coping). Specific methods are described below.

Practice. The method of practice in this context refers to purposeful engagement in an activity that was intended to build professional skills and served a secondary purpose of decreasing anxiety related to identity challenge. Anne's belief that she was not adequately prepared to be successful in social work practicum led her to take action: "I threw myself into volunteering experiences because I was like I want to get hands on. I want to know all facets of what I'll be doing." As an experiential learner, volunteerism helped Anne try out basic social work skills she was learning in the classroom and

afforded some security that she knew what to anticipate in a social work career. Although

several participants voiced competency-related challenges, only Anne reported using this

direct method for decreasing competency-related anxiety.
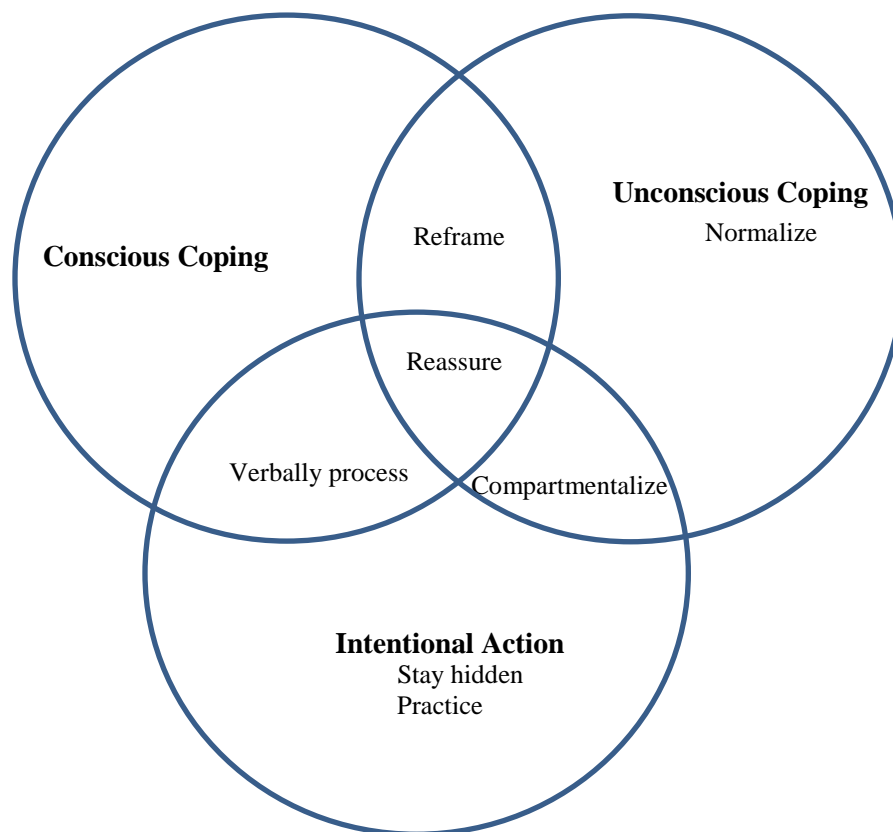
Figure 5. Professional identity resolution methods.

Stay hidden. This method involved purposefully hiding something about oneself

to keep others (most often faculty and peers) from seeing a perceived professional

weakness. Jenna chose this action to prevent social work faculty from realizing she

wasn't strongly interested in working with impoverished populations.

> I mean, to be honest, I don't really care what my other classmates think. I guess
> it's more like all of my professors have been in the field… One of my professors I
> feel like has worked literally with every population and, um, I guess it's kind of

> like you don't want to like complain about, or not complain, but you don't want to like speak poorly about things…because it shows like there would be like negative sides to your personality and you don't want them to like judge you for that so I think I wouldn't want to share with my professors because I don't want them to think like I'm closed off and not really into it.

Although hiding her thoughts and feelings allowed her to maintain a professional image she thought professors expected, this action wasn't necessarily effective in resolving her internal angst.

> …so I don't want to work with like super deep impoverished… and then like homeless and, to me, I'm like those people are so very needy. And so I think personally I'm like I can't — I'm like it looks so bad on my part that I don't want to work with these people. So I'm like… I can't share them with it — like that with them.

Jenna's follow-up statement suggested a continuing challenge to her identity as a social worker. Faculty approval was important to her professional identity and she did not want to risk losing it. Even though her professors did not know how she felt, she remained concerned it was "bad" to avoid working with impoverished populations.

Anne intentionally hid from both faculty and other students for a time. After losing the child welfare scholarship, she seriously questioned her place in the social work profession. Discussing her concerns with anyone in the program felt threatening to her:

> I was afraid to admit that I had failed. And I was afraid she (academic adviser) was going to chastise me and be like, "well, you really messed this one up." And I was like, I just — I don't — I had already beaten myself up so much about it. I was like I cannot deal with somebody else being like, "ah, you suck." So I was like, no, we won't go about it and I didn't talk with my professor who was in charge of the child welfare program… So I was like — I just avoided it and I didn't tell a lot of my friends about it for a very, very long time because I was like I don't want to admit that I failed at something.

This passage displays Anne's fear that her faculty and peers would be as disappointed in her as she was in herself. An important difference between Anne's and Jenna's resolution efforts is that Anne did eventually discuss her concerns with faculty. In doing so, she

discovered them as a source of encouragement which helped her reclaim her vision of

being a social worker:

> I'm pretty sure I walked out of that meeting and just like sat in the lobby and just cried because I was like oh, thank you, God. I finally made it. I was like I don't feel so stressed any more.

Staying hidden was not a frequently used method in dealing with general professional

identity issues. As will be discussed later in this chapter, though, it was more frequently

used in managing conflict between professional identity and religious identity.

Compartmentalize. One way participants managed professional identity

challenges was to categorize conflicting values, spheres of life, or even people in a

manner that allowed them to minimize internal tension. This method of

compartmentalization served as a useful tool for Rose in decreasing anxiety about

professional burnout. Having been repeatedly warned about the possible emotional

burden of social work, she pictured herself controlling that burden by drawing distinct

boundaries between personal and professional life:

> …like me personally I just want to be able to separate my work life from my home life. So like in the future, I just want to leave it all at work like and not have to worry about like, you know, like whatever's going on there.

Rose appeared committed to this vision of herself and did not express worry that such

separation might actually be difficult to implement. Nonetheless, her conviction that she

could compartmentalize personal and professional life allowed her to feel confident as a

future social worker.

Compartmentalization was also constructive in separating oneself from negative

messages. This method was utilized by five participants who had received negative

messages either about the profession itself or their fit with the profession. Typically,

people were separated into categories of importance or emotional closeness in participants' lives with the messages of those who were less important being easily dismissed. For example, Jenna portrayed her immediate family as supportive of her choice for social work because they understood her, while it was "random" people and extended family who made negative statements to her. Similarly, Roy believed professors didn't understand his choice of social work but his student peers, who affectionately called him "P (pastor) Roy," did understand. Essentially, these participants were compartmentalizing people into two groups: "those who affirm my professional identity because they know me; and those who don't affirm my professional identity because they don't know me." Use of compartmentalization granted them the ability to give significant weight to the positive messages and little weight to the negative messages thereby continuing the perception of self as a social worker. This method of managing identity challenge was utilized intentionally by Rose but as an unconscious coping mechanism in the other examples.

Verbally process. Talking through professional identity challenges with others was reported to be an effective management method by two participants. For Anne, discussing her concerns was an intentional act meant to aid her in decision-making or simply to garner emotional support. Her conversation with the academic adviser mentioned earlier fulfilled both of these purposes. In addition, Anne regularly spoke with her mother, particularly when she lacked confidence in her ability to become a social worker. In fact, it was conversations with her mother "at all random hours of the day" that Anne credited for reminding her "I do want to be a social worker." Unlike Anne, Jenna did not intentionally seek out people with whom she could process professional

identity concerns. Instead, she discovered this tool through what she referred to as "side conversations' with other social work students that came about unexpectedly. In these conversations, Jenna realized she was not the only student in her social work program that lacked a passion for working with impoverished populations, as she stated, "I feel like I'm the only social work major that like doesn't really want to work like – at like a homeless shelter; but I've met other people that feel the same way."

Recognizing others had similar thoughts as her did not come from classroom discussion. Jenna hypothesized other students may have been as hesitant to speak up about their lack of passion for the poor as she was. Talking through this particular concern then came about as Jenna and other students took risks outside of the classroom in relationship with one another. Verbally processing afforded her the opportunity to view other students, whom she respected and could picture as future social workers, as similar to her.

Normalize. One method for allaying professional identity concerns was to represent one's challenge as normal because it was shared by others or because one was accustomed to the challenge. Normalizing manifested as an unconscious coping mechanism and helped participants to believe their challenge was surmountable. Bertha used this method as she discussed ongoing conflict with her parents around political views. Although her parents were supportive of her transition from elementary education to social work, they often disagreed with Bertha's political views, which were bolstered by her social work education. She reported her father, when in argument, would sometimes comment she was "just going to one of those liberal schools." Bertha's parents indirectly challenged her professional identity as they called into question what she was

learning within her professional program. Rather than allow their disagreement to alter

her views or commitment to social work ideals, Bertha normalized the relationship

dynamic saying,

> I kind of like don't take it too personally. Um (p), because I have like enough I guess belief in myself and in my — it's (relationship with parents) always had that like contention there so — it's not really anything new with being in social work.

Viewing conflict with her parents as common for their relationship granted Bertha the

ability to minimize its impact to professional identity.

Normalizing appeared to be a helpful method for Jenna in decreasing her fear of

professors' disapproval of her not wanting to work with the poor. She did so by

imagining them at her point in professional development and deciding they may not have

been so different from her:

> I guess when I think about it, I'm like they probably — I mean, they're — I'm sure they have populations that they didn't want to work with or they could relate when they were in college… that they were intimidated by some setting or population or who knows?

The manner in which her statement began implied this realization was new for Jenna.

Imagining her professors as college students gave her a developmental perspective that

suggested her own experience was likely typical. This image also enabled her to draw a

connection between herself and competent professionals. Normalizing offered one way

for both Jenna and Bertha to perceive the identity challenge as less threatening.

Reframe. Another way in which participants coped with potential threats to

professional identity was to positively reframe their experiences. One powerful example

of this method came from Rose who responded to an interview question by changing my

wording. After she described ways in which social work classes helped confirm her fit

with the profession, I asked, "Have there been things in your classes that you've been

presented with that you feel like don't fit you?" Rose responded by saying, "Um, I mean, I wouldn't say don't fit me; but I know there's going to be like challenges to me." At one level, Rose was simply altering language to more closely represent her experience. On another level, though, she had minimized conflicts by labeling them as "challenges" rather than a lack of fit. The term "challenge" conveys something to be overcome whereas "not fitting" may convey that something is unworkable. For Rose, reframing allowed her to be a social worker with challenges rather than a person for whom social work may not be a good fit.

Another example of reframing came from Kendall's experience with extended family who did not understand why she would pursue a relatively low wage career. Although her tone of voice and facial expression initially conveyed frustration with her family's remarks, she quickly placed a positive spin on this challenge saying, "And so it's been interesting to kind of like have to explain that a little bit to them. But it's just been neat to be able to educate them on social work and what it is." Kendall chose words such as "interesting" and "neat" rather than "annoying" and she reframed receiving negative messages as an opportunity for her to help others learn more about the profession. This reframe not only provided an optimistic view of the challenge but it also placed ownership of the problem on her relatives (i.e., their ignorance vs. her poor choice).

Reassure. The last resolution method was the method observed most frequently in participants. All participants utilized self-reassuring messages regarding their identity as a social worker. Anne labeled these messages as her "pep talks" but most participants did not directly identify these messages as a tool for managing professional identity concerns. Sometimes participants' self-talk was related to their faith perspectives and

other times it was not. Nonetheless, internal conversation appeared to be important to

countering negative messages from others and one's own self-doubt.

When faced with messages about low wages or emotional burdens of the

profession, participants often reminded themselves of their primary motivation for

choosing social work. Rose talked about the "gratification" she would receive from

working to help others while Charlotte viewed social work as a way to "follow my heart."

Jennifer was able to overcome her grandmother's warnings using this method:

> I mean, I put that thought in the back of my mind like, "oh, wait, what if I did get
> burned out really easily? What if I do — do not get a job that can support the type
> of lifestyle that I want to live and the funds that I will need" and all that. But it
> was very short-lived. Like those fears and insecurities, like they didn't outweigh
> like the fulfillment that I feel like I would have gotten for being a social worker.
> So, it didn't impact me that much.

Like Rose and Charlotte, Jennifer appeared to have successfully diminished her anxieties

by assuring herself contentment in her work would outweigh the burden. Anne, who

continued to experience ongoing negative messages from her father, spoke emphatically

as she described her external and internal response to him:

> I get really defensive and I just get angry. I'm just like — just let me be my own
> person! And I told you (father) from the beginning like I've never been in it
> because I wanted to make a lot of money. Never have I ever thought, "man, being
> a social worker, I'm going to be a bajillioniaire." I was like, I know all these
> things going into this profession. It will be a lot of hard work. It will be a lot of
> weird hours and it won't be a lot of money. But for me it's always been the reward
> of seeing someone's life be different. That change. That's what it's always been
> about. Even if it's something so minuscule what it seems to everybody else. To
> me like that one tiny little change — that just makes me feel like, man, I can — I
> can really have an influence on someone's life. And so, I just get really angry
> because I feel like being a social worker is so, I guess, ingrained in who I am as a
> person.

Anne's final statement poignantly portrays the union of personal and professional

identity. She perceived her father as not understanding who she was at her core. Even

though her emotional description indicated this challenge was not completely resolved,

Anne's self-talk was serving to strengthen her vision of self as a social worker.

Reassuring self-talk was also used by participants to decrease fears of

incompetency. Charlotte expressed fear of "ruining" someone's experience with a social

worker by saying or doing "the wrong thing." Her concern was twofold: she might be

unhelpful to a client and she might represent the profession poorly. She reminded herself,

"But at the same time if you don't practice, you can't get better." Another example of self-

reassurance was seen in Jenna's tendency to reflect on past challenging experiences and

recognize how she had succeeded previously. In considering her fears about competency,

she talked about a difficult summer job:

> And it was a really hard job for me just because there was a lot of – like more
> responsibility than I had had in a job before. I had always had someone there
> above me…and some days were really hard and I felt like it was more than I
> could handle and I just had to, you know like, know that I could do it and be
> confident and take it step by step and just like relax. And so I think I learned that
> you can handle a little bit more than you think you can handle even if it is really
> hard sometimes, you don't want to do it; but it — so it's like — it's (competency)
> still a concern but it's not as like I should change my major..

By looking back at a past success, Jenna affirmed for herself that she was capable of

being a responsible social worker. This type of reassurance seemed effective for Jenna as

she utilized it two additional times in the interview process. As noted earlier, all

participants utilized some form of self-talk to address a variety of challenges. In Anne's

case, self-reassurance was sometimes intentional. In other cases, participants became

aware of this tool only in retrospect or remained unaware that it was protecting

professional identity.

In summary, narrative interviews with undergraduate social work students

revealed a common storyline in developing professional identity. Through varied social

contexts, participants came to perceive themselves as helpers and sought out a career that matched that identity. After exploring and dismissing professions that were familiar, they discovered social work and, at a somewhat superficial level, believed it to be a good fit. As participants then entered into social work education, challenges to a social work identity emerged. A mixture of methods was then used to decrease threat to professional identity resulting in students who were committed to the vision of self as social worker despite ongoing challenge.

Religious Identity Storyline and Themes

> Yeah, it's…it's my identity. It really is…I mean it's the main reason I get up in the morning (Roy).

Describing religious identity formation of participants was not a primary aim of this study. In hearing participant stories, however, an unexpected discovery was brought to light and warrants some description. The discovery related to a narrative theme that was threaded through participant accountings of their religious and spiritual histories. Despite differing religious backgrounds, participants' stories of religious identity development followed a strikingly similar path (see Figure 6.). Similarities can also be seen between the religious identity storyline and the professional identity storyline. This section of findings is offered to shed light on religious identity development as well as to provide background information for the following integration section. In addition to describing religious identity storyline and themes, NIRO (Francis, 2007) scores and accompanying discussion are included.
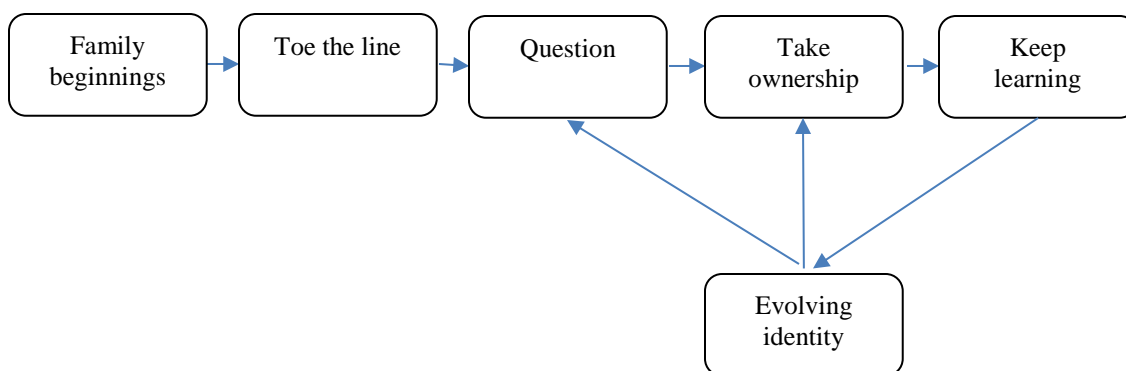
Figure 6. Religious identity storyline.

Five primary components of religious identity development emerged from the interview data: (1) family beginnings, (2) toe the line, (3) question, (4) take ownership, and (5) keep learning. The first four components of the path generally were told in chronological order based off of the interview prompt, "Tell me about your faith background." Similar to the professional identity development process, religious identity development became less linear and more cyclical as the process moved along. Although many participants experienced an intense period of religious or spiritual questioning at some point in their journey, new questions surfaced after having taken ownership of their beliefs and practices. These questions gave participants a sense they would always be learning and refashioning their religious identity. Therefore, much like professional identity, religious identity was ever evolving.

Family Beginnings

Most participants began their story of religious identity development within the context of family. John Paul was the only interviewee that started his story later in life and outside of the context of family. One interesting aspect of the family beginnings

component was the natural way in which it was woven into the religious identity story.

Generally, participants were not asked specifically to discuss their families. Most often,

they were simply given the prompt "Tell me about your faith background" which led

eight out of nine participants to begin their story in childhood with the nuclear family.

One might anticipate that each of these participants came from a family with high

religious involvement, yet this did not prove to be true in every situation. Four

participants did report "growing up" in the church with active, ongoing involvement in

religious activity. Although Kendall's grandparents and extended family did not claim

Christianity, her own parents became Christians shortly before she was born and made

church events a regular part of life. The other three participants who grew up attending

church described a deeper family legacy of religion. Roy's grandfather was a pastor and

both parents attended faith-based universities. Religious activity was a regular and

consistent part of his life. Jennifer saw herself as having been a Christian "since birth"

because her parents dedicated her in the church their parents attended. She recalled

switching churches at age six:

> …my grandfather had a church and so he preached there and then my dad
> preached and my uncle and then my aunt sung and my other aunt played the
> piano. My brother played the drums. So it was just basically family. A bunch of
> family in the church and it was – the word that I think of honestly was "boring" to
> me. (laughs).

For Jennifer, church and family appeared nearly inseparable. In spite of her perception

that church was boring, the manner in which she recounted her experience conveyed

appreciation and fondness for the connection between her church and her family. Rose

reported a similar history of having always attended the church her father had been raised

in by his aunt and uncle. She stated, "yeah, so I've just always gone my whole life."

Rose's simple statement nicely reflected these participants' introduction to Christianity and religious activity as a way of life.

The other four participants who referenced family as a starting point for their religious development were also introduced to religion by parents. A significant difference in their storyline, however, was a change in religious involvement due to family disruption. For example, Anne's parents were Roman Catholic and her mother took her to church every Sunday. Her parents divorced and her mother later converted to Protestantism when she remarried. This change in family structure led to less church involvement for Anne during adolescence. Charlotte was also raised in a Roman Catholic home and "Always had to go to church. No exceptions." As her older siblings grew to resist church involvement, Charlotte's mother stopped requiring the children to attend. When Charlotte was in sixth grade, her father revealed himself to be transgendered and subsequently divorced her mother. Charlotte reported, "the church shunned her, like truly shunned her because she got a divorce and that's like not allowed at all in the Catholic church." Charlotte's connection to church through family stopped at that point and, although she later claimed Christianity on her own, her family is not actively involved in religious activities. Family disruption appeared to be a significant factor in Jenna's religious upbringing as well. She reported both maternal and paternal sides of her family as being Jewish but that her mother "never was super like deep in her faith for Judaism." Jenna's biological father died when she was preschool-aged and her mother remarried a man who identified as Christian. Jenna reported having learned little about the teachings and practices of Judaism and, even though her mother converted to Christianity, religion was not emphasized in the home. She believed her parents were intentional in

downplaying religion because they did not want to "push" a particular faith onto their

children. In discussing her own life as a Christian, Jenna did not reference her parents as

influential but did portray them as supportive of her. Finally, Bertha's religious

upbringing was disrupted by family financial circumstances. She was also introduced to

the church through her mother and attended regularly until middle school when her

mother took weekend work to increase the household income. Since her father was

agnostic, as Bertha described him, the family stopped attending church. Bertha seemed to

have a clear picture of her father's spiritual beliefs describing him as "Believes there's a

God. Doesn't believe He has anything to do with our lives personally." Her mother's

beliefs, on the other hand, proved more difficult for Bertha to articulate:

> My mom is (p) — my mom would say — like she's a Christian; but she hasn't
> been to church in like five years — at least. Just very like — work has become the
> most important thing to her. And so it's just like — that's a tricky one. So she
> would say she is a Christian so that's what I'll — I'll say she's a Christian.

Bertha's experience as a Christian was one of being "just totally surrounded" by other

Christians and religious activity. Her statement above conveyed doubt regarding her

mother's claim to Christianity, yet it was her mother who first introduced her to the

religion.

Participants' religious identity development appeared to have been rooted in the

family, regardless of the family's current relationship to religion. The family acted as a

launching pad for faith development. Furthermore, participants' tendency to begin their

own narrative with the story of family may suggest a belief that family is the primary unit

for cultivating faith development or, at the very least, initiating it.

Toe the Line

The second component of the religious identity storyline related to motivation.

Since the majority of study participants had been introduced to religion in the family,

they often referenced familial expectations as the guiding force for religious involvement

as a child. Five participants specifically referenced Christianity in their childhood as an

obligation or expectation. In other words, their Christian identity was constructed around

towing the line religiously. Jennifer described this obligation, saying:

> And I mean, it was honestly just something that you did. Like you had to go to church every Sunday. Like that was just a part of the schedule. That's just a part of life. You don't question it. You don't say you're tired. Of course — especially at the age of, you know, five or six. It's just what you do.

Her portrayal of religious life at a young age revealed trust in and obedience to her

parents. Bertha's picture of herself at this age was of a "people pleaser":

> But I didn't have a relationship with Jesus. I like knew *about* Him. But I didn't know Him. It was more of like a — this is what I am supposed to do. These are the things that I'm supposed to do because that will make people like me.

Bertha reported she was "the Bible smart kid" who knew all the answers and her

motivation for doing so was related to approval from others. Her statement above

highlights another point regarding this component of the storyline. Participants appeared

to tell this part of the story as narrative set up for their later, more spiritually mature

discoveries. In Bertha's statement above, we hear her suggesting she now knows what

Christianity is truly about: "knowing" Jesus. Roses' accounting of church attendance as a

child versus attendance as a young adult highlights this point further:

> Like when I was younger, it's not like my parents like forced me to "get up" (said in voice mimicking parents) but it was like I knew I didn't have a choice, you know, like — now, I technically kind of have a choice. Like it's like now that I'm older like I can just — if I was out like with my friends Saturday night, like I'm tired. Like I don't feel like getting up this morning. Like even being in college

> really like I don't have to because not like my parents are like" get up," you know.
> But I just think from younger like, you know, kind of having to go and now just
> being my own choice of going is just kind of like a big part of what I think a
> Christian is — is going to church every Sunday.

Rose portrayed herself as always having attended church regularly but suggested

attendance as a young adult was different because it was based in personal desire. This

somewhat subtle emphasis on difference between the child-Christian and the young-

adult-Christian appeared to be important in participants' sense of Christian identity. The

emphasis also provided an opportunity to move the story along with a dramatic turn, as if

someone reading or hearing the story might wonder what had brought about the change

from childhood to young adulthood. That very question led to the third storyline

component.

Question

The third common plot component in participants' religious identity development

was a period of questioning their religious beliefs and what they had been taught in the

church. For some, the questioning was portrayed as mild and nonthreatening. Both Roy

and Rose questioned why "bad" things happen if God truly exists and if they had prayed

for good outcomes. Rose downplayed her questioning, though, stating it wasn't really

"doubting" but just "challenges." Roy somewhat dismissively described his spiritual

questions as "you know…all of the questions that the world continues to ask all the

time." Both his words and tone suggested he viewed such questioning as normal and felt

fairly comfortable asking tough spiritual questions. Jennifer's primary question came as

she searched for a church in her campus community and thought,

> …okay, I need to figure out why I'm even going to church, like what is the point?
> Because at this — at this point it's not like mom and dad are telling me that I have

to go — like so, if I'm going to be going every Sunday, I want to know WHY I'm going.

Jennifer recounted this questioning in a manner that conveyed it as an important process, albeit a logical, somewhat unemotional process.

Others, however, described this part of their story as difficult or even painful.

Anne cried as she recounted the event that led to her questioning:

> I felt like I had a good relationship with God and then when I was 12, my best friend was killed and whoop, that's it! So — I try not (tears up) — It's one of those things that it took me a really long time to deal with. And I'd always felt like something was missing in my life but I never knew what it was. I still went to church every once in a while but it was because I had to. When I would visit my mom, she was like, "you have to go to church." And I was like, fine. So I would sit there and stare at my legs or, you know, anywhere I could possibly — anything I could do not to listen.

Anne had experienced tremendous loss and did not know how to reconcile the loss with her image of God. Just being in church after her friend's death proved to be emotionally and spiritually challenging. Kendall was also prompted to ask how God works (or seemingly doesn't) when she suffered significant health issues and bullying in high school. As she reflected on this painful time in her adolescence, Kendall reframed the experience as ultimately helpful in her faith development, stating it "just pushed me more towards understanding my faith and what it meant to have a walk with God." Kendall's reframe points at the likely purpose of questioning in the storyline. Questioning religious beliefs became a way of leaving the somewhat naïve and uncritical religious identity of childhood behind. In high school, when Bertha came to believe many Christians "hated" lesbians and gays, she distanced herself from the religion and explored other religious traditions. After deciding "I might as well just be an atheist," a traumatic betrayal by friends led her to a critical spiritual juncture:

> I was like, you know, what, whatever. I'll just pray. Is that what you want dear nonexistent God? And I am like — I'm just being very defiant in that moment and then that turned into like an actual honest prayer of like — God, I don't know where you are; but I am struggling and I need you —

The period of exploration coupled with a painful life event compelled Bertha to examine Christianity more deeply than she had in the past. Even John Paul, who enthusiastically chose Roman Catholicism as a young adult, experienced a brief period of leaving after having been baptized:

> So it came to Easter and I was baptized, confirmed and finally got to taste like the Eucharist and have the body and blood of Christ. It was a BEAUTIFUL thing and then I kind of fell away from my faith actually. So, I struggled a lot. I kind of fell into like that party scene at college. And then it wasn't until I actually got voted out of my fraternity for not making grades because I let everything slip that I finally turned to God and was like," what do you want? What do you want right now?" So I went to my first confession about — it was October of that year and I was confirmed in March so it was a long span before and I was terrified and went and that confession — I found Christ truly in confession and just was on fire with the Holy Spirit after that.

John Paul describes a transformational experience borne out of "falling away" and suffering much like Bertha's experience.

Questioning appeared to be an inciting force in the religious identity storyline. All participants in the study pointed to a period of questioning, although this period was described with varying intensity and spiritual significance. Most significantly, perhaps, having questioned previously held religious beliefs allowed participants to move into the next part of the storyline.

Take Ownership

Having recounted ways in which their faith and religious identity had been challenged, participants often then noted that they were now in charge of their own religious life. They were no longer children who went to church out of obligation or

control by parents. As Charlotte stated, "I'm a very strong believer. I still go to church almost every Sunday. I mean, no one makes me. I'm a college student." Quotes from Rose and Jennifer cited in earlier sections of the religious identity storyline also exemplify participants' desire to see themselves as owning their religious activity. In addition to church attendance, five participants spoke of their process in finding a church to attend while in college. Exercising the ability to choose their own faith community and regulate their level of involvement appeared to be empowering and one part of taking ownership.

Beyond religious activity, some participants expressed this ownership by delineating how their Christian experience and perspective was different as a young adult from what it had been when they were younger. Oftentimes the change involved coming to view God and self in a relational context. Bertha commented:

> So before then I would have like said that I was a Christian, but it was more like that's just my kind of going through the motions for me, not to give you my whole testimony; but just when I came to college is when I started acting in faith and placed my faith in Christ.

From Bertha's perspective, her Christianity had matured because it combined religious activity ("the motions") with an attitude of trust in God. Her use of the phrase "trust in" implies an active relationship. In a similar fashion, John Paul reported that, before his conversion and confession experience, he had assumed God existed but "never really knew him." He further portrayed his earlier spiritual understanding as superficial saying, "…It was like I never took my faith as my own." John Paul viewed his "falling away" as having prompted a deeper and more genuine spiritual life, one in which he could know God by being in relationship with God. Kendall also stressed a relational aspect to her religious identity declaring, "…It wasn't until high school that I started to like grasp that,

oh, like I actually need to have a relationship with God and it not just be like something that my parents talk about." For participants such as Kendall who grew up in religiously involved families, pinpointing religious beliefs that were meaningful and not solely the adoption of their parents' religious constructs appeared to be important.

Although participants referred to themselves as being independent in their exercise of religion and religious practices, one might wonder if the primary sphere of influence had simply switched from family to peers. Five participants referenced well-timed invitations from friends to attend church or another religious organizational meeting as being pivotal in their introduction or return to Christianity. Six participants spoke of extensive involvement in Christian campus organizations. John Paul credited his fraternity for helping him to reclaim faith, citing his fraternity big brother as being "a huge influence on my life." Anne, Bertha, Charlotte, Jenna, and Jennifer all portrayed themselves as being immersed in religious activity with peers and mentors acquired while at college. Overall, participants referenced family as they shared their religious identity storyline in childhood but switched to referencing peers most often as they discussed adolescence and young adulthood. Although peers were important characters in the storyline, their influence was certainly less controlling than what parental influence had been and, therefore, allowed participants to maintain their sense of ownership.

Keep Learning

Owning one's religious identity was not the end of the story. Participants tended to view themselves as lifelong learners that would always be gaining new understanding of what it means to be Christian. When asked if she had ever had challenges to her faith, Kendall reported having faced "…challenges that make you lean… more into your

faith… life is always going to be happening, so it's just a matter of how I choose to deal

with it, is what is going to define my walk with God...” Kendall believed she would

continue to experience difficulty in life and that she would continue learning how to do

so in the context of her religious beliefs. Other participants also used words such as

“walk” or “journey” to convey the evolving nature of both their religious identity

development and their relationship to the divine. Charlotte clearly described this picture

of self as a spiritual lifelong learner:

> I know there's a LONG way for me to go and be like a better Christian. But I'm
> like okay with that journey because I think the journey never stops. And I think
> that at some point in every Christian's life they probably — not the same exact
> thoughts but I think that a lot of Christians can empathize with my feelings of the
> internal struggle. So I think that like it's just going to be a process that I process
> my whole life. I really — I mean maybe ten years down the road I'm not going to
> be able to sit here and have the same conversation and be like, listen
> I'm unconventional because this, this and this. You know, maybe I'll be like, yeah,
> I changed my mind since then. I don't know. I think it's just going to be an
> ongoing process.

Charlotte recognized the potential for altering her own beliefs. This recognition was

likely related to the fact she had been wrestling spiritually for some time with how to

respond to her father's identification as a transgendered person. Similarly, Jenna saw

herself as not having all of the answers but being changeable:

> …it's just I make mistakes all the time in my walk like with the Lord and if I
> think like if I develop this like perspective… or like this is what I believe about
> this topic or something, if I'm wrong like our — you know, like I have to ask for
> forgiveness that I'm like of the wrong perspective.

The phrase “walk with the Lord” denoted a spiritual journey that takes place in the

presence of God. Further, Jenna's statement provided a glimpse of how she pictures her

religious identity story in the future: erring, seeking forgiveness, and moving forward.

Similar to the iterative process in professional identity development then, young adults

appears to cycle back and forth between questioning (in response to life situations), owning their questions and answers (as part of a belief system), and opening themselves to further learning opportunities.

Participants' in this study considered their religion to be central to identity. Stories of their identity development resembled one another in plotline. Family was the springboard for religious idea and activity. Participants recounted their obedience to the family's religion almost as a foreshadowing of the questioning that came with adolescence and young adulthood. The crisis of questioning then provided for the dramatic turn toward defining and owning their beliefs. Finally, the process of questioning and owning led participants to view their religious identity development as open-ended. Although the electronic questionnaire measured students' orientation to religion, the interview protocol allowed for students to tell their stories of religious identity development which led to a richer understanding of religious identity.

NIRO Scores and Discussion

The New Indices of Religious Orientation or NIRO (Francis, 2007) was utilized in this research study to triangulate interview data. This instrument does not measure religiosity but rather ways in which a person is religious. Therefore, it is best utilized with people who describe themselves as religious, which was the case with this study's sample. The NIRO (Francis, 2007) measures extrinsic, intrinsic, and quest religious orientations by breaking each construct down into three conceptual components (see Table 8). The orientations measure distinct constructs and are independent of each other, meaning a person can score high in all orientations. Scoring low in all three orientations indicates a low level of religiosity overall. Each conceptual component is scored with a

possible range of 1-10. In addition, each orientation construct is scored with a possible

range of 3-30. The author does not provide threshold scores or score ranges to denote

level of orientation but higher scores are meant to convey a higher level of religious

orientation. Table 8 displays participants' scores as well as group averages.

Table 8

Participant NIRO (Francis, 2007) Scores

	Anne	Bertha	Charlotte	Jenna	Jennifer	John Paul	Kendall	Rose	Roy	Avg Score
Extrinsic total	**22**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**17**	**21**	**20**	**25**	**14**	**20.2**
• Compartmentalization	5	5	3	6	3	3	6	5	2	4.2
• Social Support	8	8	9	8	8	8	8	10	6	8.1
• Personal Support	9	7	9	8	6	8	6	10	6	7.7
Intrinsic total	**27**	**25**	**26**	**22**	**25**	**29**	**27**	**29**	**30**	**26.7**
• Integration	9	7	7	8	8	10	10	10	10	8.8
• Public Religion	9	9	9	6	9	10	7	9	10	8.7
• Personal Religion	9	9	10	8	8	9	10	10	10	9.2
Quest total	**20**	**25**	**21**	**24**	**23**	**20**	**17**	**13**	**13**	**19.55**
• Existentialism	8	9	6	9	9	9	8	4	4	7.3
• Self-criticism	4	8	8	8	8	6	6	3	6	6.3
• Openness to change	8	8	7	7	6	5	3	6	3	5.9

The study sample shows relatively high scores for each religious orientation, with

intrinsic orientation being considerably higher in most cases than either extrinsic or quest.

High intrinsic scores suggest a person who incorporates religion into all areas of life,

engages in a faith community in order to feel closer to God and other people, and places

importance on private religious practices such as prayer as a way to nurture a relationship

with God (Francis, 2007). The three highest group scores for any single conceptual

component (personal religion, 9.22; integration, 8.77; and public religion, 8.33) all fell

into the intrinsic orientation. This finding corresponds with participants' description of

being "all in" with their religion. This approach can be seen in Anne's description of

claiming Christianity:

> Like, we're not doing this half way. If I'm going to do it, I'm going to go to Bible
> studies. I'm going to go to as many different organizations as I can. I'm going to
> figure out what it is I'm getting myself into. And so I received Christ that night
> and I haven't looked back since.

Overall, the participants in this study did perceive religion as a core part of who they

were and how they lived. They often spoke of their religion in terms of being in

relationship with God and expressed desire to "know Him" better.

The extrinsic orientation is held by someone who separates out religious life from

other areas of life, gets involved in communal religious activity for social support, and

engages in private religious practices in order to receive personal support. The lowest

average score of any conceptual component was that of compartmentalization, which

pertains to a person's tendency to separate religion out from other areas of life. Low

compartmentalization scores make sense in light of the group's high integration scores.

Even with low compartmentalization scores, participants still scored fairly high on the

extrinsic orientation because they derived both personal and social support from their

religion.

High scores on the quest orientation denote someone who believes religious

questioning is important and these questions are often related to life experiences. These

people also are aware of their own limitations and view doubting as important, if not

necessary, for growth. Lastly, people high in quest scores envision themselves as

evolving, not static in their beliefs. Participant scores in this orientation prove to be a bit

perplexing. The conceptual component, existentialism, displayed the highest group score on this construct. Existentialism denotes an ability to "face existential questions without reducing the complexity of such questions" (Francis, 2007, p. 598). Interview data indicated participants viewed a period of intense questioning as important in moving them from their childhood religion to one that was more independent of others. Even though the existentialism score was the highest on the quest construct, this score was still on the lower end of the scale for the study sample. This contradiction between interview data and NIRO score may reflect participants' ability to value questioning in hindsight but not embrace it as an essential tool for spiritual growth. Another contradictory finding was in openness to change. During interviews, participants generally portrayed themselves as open to new ideas. This score, however, was the lowest of the quest components and the second lowest of all conceptual components. Openness to change was comprised of the following two statements: (1) As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change; and (2) I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs. The first question showed a range of scores from 1-5 while the range for the second question was just 1-2. Although participants presented themselves as open to new perspectives and always growing spiritually, the NIRO score did not support this presentation. One explanation for this discrepancy is likely use of the word "constantly" in the second question. Participants may have perceived the statement as too extreme even if they did view questioning as an essential aspect of their faith. In addition, participants may have felt uncomfortable acknowledging the tendency to question their faith in a survey, but felt free to discuss it in an interview once trust had been established with me. A third possible explanation could be linked to a developmental perspective.

Most participants spoke in a manner that suggested their religion served as a fixed point in which they were inserting themselves and attempting to better understand themselves within that fixed point. The first statement in Openness to Change reads as if religion is malleable. Participants in this study were not likely to resonate with the idea of a growing and changing religion.

To sum up, NIRO scores indicated the group of students interviewed for this study were highly religious and primarily viewed religion as an end in and of itself. They did, however, use religion in a secondary manner to meet social and personal needs. Participants clearly strived to make their religion permeate all of life and, while they appeared to value tough spiritual questions as a means for growth, they were not likely to intentionally seek out opportunities for questioning.

Professional and Christian Religious Identity Fit, Conflict, and Management Themes

One of the primary aims of this research study was to explore how Christian BSW students integrated professional identity and religious identity. Despite an interview protocol that neatly divided discussion into three separate categories (professional identity, religious identity, and integration), study participants quickly launched into integration. As they recounted their path to becoming a social work student, they often described the ways in which faith played a part. Two participants actually apologized for delving into religious matters before I had asked any specific questions related to their identity. This interrelated manner of conversation seemed to point to an integrative identity process at work. The professional and religious components of their lives were not easily compartmentalized.

The narrative interviews were constructed to solicit descriptions of ways in which participants perceived good fit between profession and religion as well as points at which they perceived conflict between the two identities. In addition, participants were asked to reflect on ways in which they attempted to resolve conflict and how they pictured practicing as a social worker and Christian. This section is therefore reported in three subsections: identity points of fit, identity points of tension, and identity management methods.

Identity Points of Fit

Participants generally viewed social work and Christianity as being compatible (see Figure 7). Everyone in the study, with the exception of Rose, identified at least two specific points of fit. Rose did not specify how her religion and her profession aligned which may have been due to her tendency to compartmentalize the two identities (discussed further in section on resolution attempts). All points of fit were highlighted by at least two different participants and are displayed in Figure 7 according to frequency of identification by participants with highest frequency at the top and lowest frequency at the bottom. Description and supportive quotes are provided for each point of fit.

General values. This point of fit represented somewhat vague statements from participants regarding an alignment of values between religion and profession. Two participants connected social work values with their own personal moral code. John Paul referred to Christianity and social work as having similar "moral standings" even suggesting this similarity allowed him to make a "smooth transition" into social work education. Likewise, Anne stated, "a lot of the core values line up with what I believe is morally right as a Christian." Jennifer used the phrase "overarching goals" to describe the

fit but then used specific value examples such as "the dignity and worth of a person" to expand upon her meaning. Charlotte provided an especially poignant description of this perceived fit between social work and Christianity declaring, "I mean—I think they are one and the same."
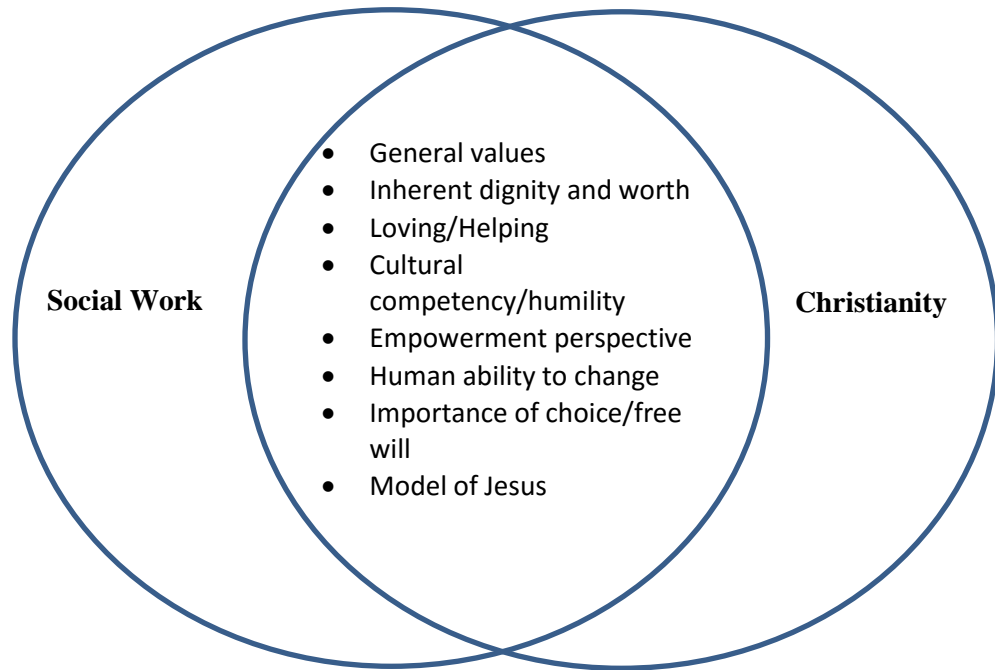
Figure 7. Points of fit between social work and Christianity.

Inherent dignity and worth. Recognizing value and unconditional positive regard for all people is a fundamental value of the social work profession. Four participants cited this value as a significant value within Christianity as well. Roy described this perception of fit in the following manner:

> …(social work) follows very closely with a lot of what Christianity believes in the sense that all people are of value and that value can never be taken from them. It's intrinsically ingrained inside of them because they're human and no matter what mistakes they make, what gender they are, what race they, excuse me, what ethnicity they are, um, that's always going to be part of them, so um… that person is still 100% as valuable as anybody else is.

Roy's tone and affect in relaying his perception suggested a strong personal commitment to recognizing worth in others. Not long after making the above statement, Roy referenced his Christian identity as being more significant than was his social work identity and that "first and foremost I want to minister." Because his understanding of Christianity and the social work profession aligned so strongly on one of his core values, he was able to also envision himself in future social work roles.

Loving/helping. Providing assistance to others as an act of love was another commonly cited point of fit in the study. Four participants noted these behaviors as important to both social work and Christianity. Anne recounted her experiences of hearing sermons that reminded her of social work and hearing classroom lecture that reminded her of her faith:

> I just see so many things when we're talking about, you know, different theories in classes. I'm like, oh, well, look at that. I can apply that, you know, to my faith and things that I — we learn about, you know, we talk about in church services. I'm like, huh, and I can apply this in my — you know, in my client situations, you know. Loving one another and, you know, giving back and being charitable.

Anne's description not only highlights this particular point of fit, but it also provides a glimpse of her internal integrative process. Charlotte's primary thoughts regarding fit between profession and faith centered on helping:

> And so I think that like as Christians too like we're supposed to like be so — like people should be looking at us and seeing God and I think that as social workers, you can almost say it the same way. People should see you (as a Christian) and see a social worker. And I think that any kind of missions that you do as a — in a church or anything you really do helping out or whether you're helping with the youth group, whether you're helping with the nursery, whether you're helping with the missions team, I mean anything that you are doing, organizing anything, you're social work. You're doing social work. You're helping your community. Organizing a block party. I mean everything you're doing when you're at church, if you are helping someone else, you're doing social work.

Charlotte's statements were a bit unique in that she emphasized how much Christianity

was comparable to social work whereas other participants tended to place the emphasis

on Christianity and then describe how social work measured against it. Similar to

Charlotte's comparison of church work to social work, Bertha believed both institutions

engaged in similar activity. In addition, though, she clearly articulated her position that it

was truly the church's role to provide help:

> I think that the church — I mean often times the original forms of social work were started by churches and the government has like taken over a lot of them; but when you are looking at like welfare and taking care of people and taking care of their community and loving on people, if the church would just do that themselves, you know, we wouldn't need social work. If the church would just step up and do what God's calling it to do, we wouldn't need social work because people would be taken care of. I wouldn't have a job.

In essence, Bertha viewed social work as the humanistic version of the church's sacred

calling. Each of these participants believed both their profession and religion required

them to provide care to others.

      Cultural humility/competence. The NASW *Code of Ethics* states, "Social

workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society,

recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures" (NASW, 1996/2008, Social workers'

ethical responsibilities to clients, 1.04a). This ethical responsibility is believed to be one

aspect of cultural competence. Although various terminology was used by each, three

participants thought Christianity also emphasized a responsibility to understand

difference. Jenna stated this belief rather simply saying, "— it's all about like loving

others with your Christian faith and it's, you know, loving people that are different from

you and that are struggling…" As discussed earlier, several participants focused on

loving action as a point of fit. Jenna did so as well but specified both Christians and

social workers are called to care for everyone, including those who are different from

themselves. Jennifer also considered cultural competence to be a significant point of fit.

When asked how she saw her faith and social work as aligning, Jennifer commented:

> I'm all about cultural competence. Oh, my gosh. I feel like it's so important like to understand where people come from and not just jumping to the conclusion that all people are going to react to things the same and this is the standard for everybody.

Finally, Roy spoke enthusiastically of cultural humility and its "subcomponent of

transcendence" which he perceived as being an aspect of his religious belief system as

well. Cultural humility as transcendence posits that diversity is so vast that no human can

ever fully know all of the possibilities for difference. A social worker who exhibits

cultural humility recognizes this tenet, brings her/his own expertise to any helping

encounter and looks to the client's expertise as essential in shaping the helping process

(Cousins, 2014). For Roy, the notion that the full diversity of experience is unknowable

connected to his notion of a mysterious, limitless divine power. As with the other two

participants mentioned, Roy believed his profession and his religious belief system

shared a conviction that helping people requires effort to understand difference.

Empowerment perspective. Some participants reported one point of fit between

religion and profession as the concept of equipping people to make change in their lives.

This concept of help was emphasized as radically different from a model which

potentially creates dependency and diminishes dignity through acts of charity alone.

Kendall cited "strengths-based perspective" as being a commonality between social work

and Christianity and then further described the perspective stating, "— you are not like

fixing — you know, the client is the expert and really empowering them to be able to be

successful and what that looks like." Kendall believed as a social worker and Christian it

was not her role to bring people into line but to work with people to assist them in

reaching their own goals. Jennifer also found empowerment to be an important

professional and religious concept:

> …it's more about like equipping a person and making sure that they have these
> skills and that after, you know, they do meet with you and after they do get their
> services, they should be able to basically go out on their own and be productive in
> society on their own and so I liked it because it's not so much about enabling
> people as it is about equipping people.

Jennifer originally discussed empowerment as related to social work principles and what

she had been taught in the classroom. As she elaborated further, though, it became

apparent she connected empowerment to her religious views as well and was concerned

she might work in a non-faith-affiliated organization in which the empowerment

approach might not be used. Jennifer also cited disagreement with her gender studies

professor who suggested Christianity was "limiting" to women. She expressed her own

empowering experience with Christianity declaring "…like I don't feel limited. It's been

the most liberating. Christianity and — not really religion, but having a relationship with

God has been the most liberating thing that I've ever experienced." Jennifer's distinction

between religion and her relationship with God proved interesting. My impression of her

distinction was that she was acknowledging how religious beliefs could be used to

oppress groups of people, yet a personal, sacred experience provided the possibility of

freedom and empowerment.

Human ability to change. Two participants' noted a commonality of social work

and Christianity could be found in the tenet that humans are capable of significant

change, particularly in regard to improving physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and

spiritual functioning. Roy articulated this point of fit well:

> one of the roots of social work in my mind is transformation. Watching a person, and you know, being a part of, being a part of that transformation…(p), you get to participate in a person's journey of becoming new. And, um, I believe in a God that makes all things new and the most broken of broken people. Um, I think social work believes very much in their ability to understand their own value and then change and become something very different and the person that they want to become. And I think that Christ has a very similar idea, in the sense that, um, he is a part of a person's transformation to who they want to become.

Roy's last statement displays his integration of social work and Christian belief by combining the idea that transformational change originates in Christ with the social work premise that each person determines what that change should look like. Interestingly, both Roy and Bertha highlighted this point of fit but also suggested it as a point of conflict (described in later section).

Importance of choice/free will. In social work, the principle of client right to self-determination is highly emphasized. Clients are viewed as being experts in their own lives and, as much as possible, should be given the ability to make decisions for themselves based on that expertise. Jenna regarded Christianity as espousing this principle as well. She stated:

> Choices are — like that's a huge thing about like the Christian faith that I'm thankful for and that I've learned is that like it's never like you have to do — like there's always a choice whether it's the right choice or the wrong choice. But I'm just learning that there's definitely choices in social work that in people's lives and so there definitely are areas where they mesh, absolutely.

Jenna portrayed sensitivity to the perspectives of others several times in her interview. Recognizing that others' ought to have the freedom to make their own choices, despite what she thought of their choice, appeared important to her. Roy was the other participant who noted this commonality, referring to the theological concept of free will saying, "I very much believe in free will. I very much believe in that, uh, because that's what God believes. He wants everybody to make the choice…and if I don't agree with it that's

fine." Roy perceived God's provision of free will as being greater than his own human understanding of other people's choices. As will be described in a later subsection, this point of fit was especially beneficial in decreasing internal conflict related to the moral choices of clients.

Model of Jesus. The last point of fit related to Biblical portrayal of how Jesus lived his life, particularly in relation to others. Although one participant implied this connection between social work and Christianity, Bertha was quite clear in her portrayal of the Jesus-social worker image:

> I think all Christians should embrace social work. Like I think that Jesus was a social worker. I mean when you look at who He hung out with and who He loved on and who He was taking care of and we are called to take care of widows and children and orphans. I mean the people that social workers are working with, often times those are the exact populations that God is calling us to take care of. So I think that it fits SO well.

For Bertha, what could make social work and Christianity more compatible than to envision Jesus as a social worker? She believed if more social workers "really knew who Jesus was, they would dig him."

Participants compared professional ideals with religious ideals and found significant overlap. Shared values, perspectives, and behavior were identified as substantive points of fit. The most frequently cited commonalities were general values, belief in the inherent dignity and worth of every person, and a commitment to loving and caring for others. Often these points of fit were spoken of with excitement and conviction. Such enthusiasm for the fit may have served as a protective factor for areas that did not seem so congruous.

Identity Points of Tension

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, contemporary social work philosophy lines up with a pluralistic and relativistic worldview. Social work literature, primarily focused on values and ethical behavior, has sometimes highlighted potential conflict between the social work worldview and a Christian worldview typically associated with exclusivism and a divine moral authority. Participants in this research study appeared to experience that conflict to varying degrees and in varying contexts. Figure 8 displays a visual representation of common "hot topics" for tension, social context of tension, and internal manifestation of tension.
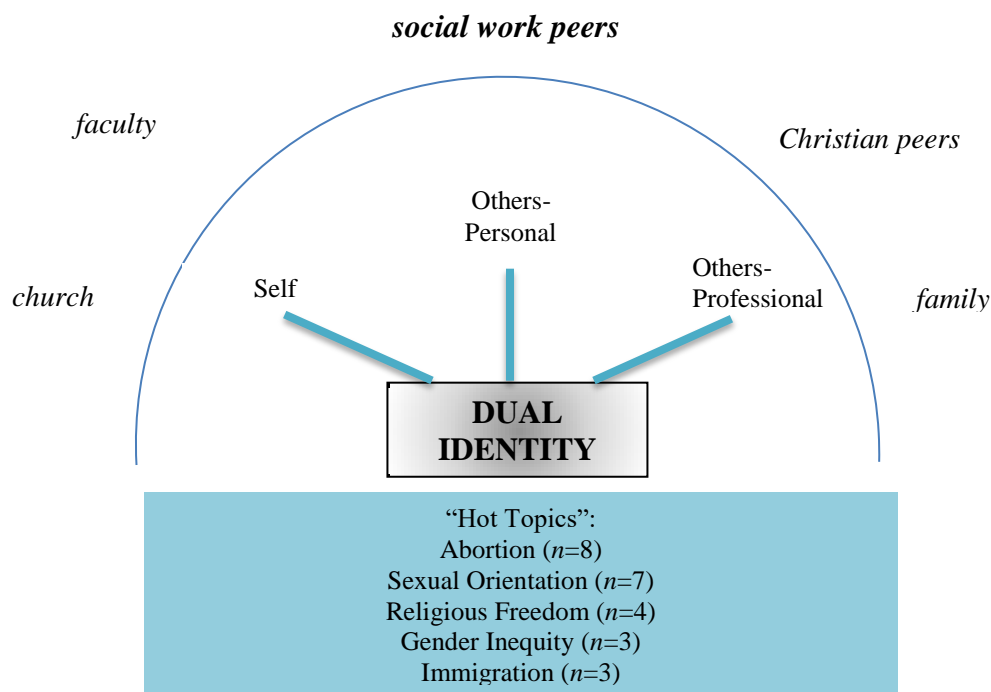
Figure 8. Points of tension between social work and Christianity.

Common "hot topics" for tension. Participants pinpointed five primary topic areas in which they experienced tension between the main social work stance vocalized

in the classroom and their personal religious stance (see lower box in Figure 8). Abortion

rights and marriage rights for same-sex couples were the most frequently reported points

of tension. At the same time study participants tended to be ambivalent regarding their

belief about same-sex marriage, they made strong declarations regarding abortion rights.

John Paul struggled to understand how a profession that values the dignity of life could

also advocate for reproductive rights:

> …one of my biggest struggles is actually with human dignity as well. I consider myself very, very pro-life and the main view of a social worker is very pro-choice… it conflicts me a lot because I don't see how you can say you support the dignity of life but also support the choice… So that one still has been — that one's a constant struggle just trying to balance that and, you know, know where my bias is and where I disagree on everything.

One interesting note regarding John Paul's statement is that he referred to his personal

view as "bias." Even though he clearly identified a particular stance which he believed

was supported by his religious belief system, he also believed he needed to be aware of

how that stance might influence him as a social worker. Charlotte's pro-life declaration

was more pointed than John Paul's as she stated:

> …a lot of my views do kind of match up with like the liberal part of social work, but there's still so many big gaps… like I could just never talk about abortion in class. I could not. I — under no circumstance do I ever think that that's okay.

Because abortion presented a strong tension between religious identity and professional

identity, it was often used by participants to project how they might handle conflicts as

future social workers (described in resolution attempts subsection).

Class discussion regarding issues related to diverse sexual orientation and gender

identity also proved challenging for many participants. All but one person in the study

specifically cited this topic area as a point of tension. As stated earlier, though,

participants seemed to be uncertain of what they actually believed in regard to sexual

orientation and gender identity. Roy appeared visibly uncomfortable as he described his

own confusion:

> …one of the things that I butt heads with the most, uh, would probably be, um, (pause) [looking down, moving head and body around as if uncomfortable) the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning) community and myself. Er, you know I, …that's something that I still have questions of and I need the answers on and that's a personal journey for me that I have not completed, whereas a majority of social workers that I've come into contact with, um, have finished their journey in understanding where they are and where they stand.

Roy's explanation of his stance displays a sense of separateness from other social

workers. The others have "finished" while he is still trying to clarify his beliefs. Jenna

also showed uncertainty as she wavered back and forth between social work and religious

ideas:

> …like there's all these like social issues that we talk about in social work classes or like the rights of different kinds of people and like there obviously are like issues in the world that kind of come up as questions for Christianity and how to deal with them. Like we've gone through like, you know, like the whole thing with like gay marriage and… with like the reactions from my friends, my Christian friends and like but then talking about all the doors that open and for our clients as social workers and…it's hard because my initial reaction is to say like, "yes, that's a right." Like it's a — like that is a step in the right direction for a non-Christian country. You know, like non-Christian world. Whether I agree with it or not, you know, like Christian value wise.

The statements of Jenna and Roy exemplify participants' struggle to reconcile what they

understood from their church community with what they understood from the social work

community regarding marriage rights for same-sex couples.

In addition to abortion and LGBTQ issues, several participants cited religious

freedom legislation (described earlier) and immigration policy as having been an

uncomfortable source of debate in classes, although they did not specifically state where

they stood on these issues. Three participants, who attended the same university and had

been enrolled in a gender studies course outside of the social work program, identified

negative portrayals of how Christianity views women as having provoked internal

conflict for them as well.

Overall, study participants accepted the fact that others had viewpoints different

than their own at times. The dominant challenge regarding professional identity was that

they perceived their personal viewpoints as setting them apart from professional peers

and mentors. The arguments of others also compelled them to think more critically about

their own stance. This critical analysis or "wrestling," as three participants called it,

proved particularly difficult when the personal viewpoint was associated with religious

identity.

Social contexts of tension. The outside edge of the arc in Figure 8 represents

various social contexts for the provocation of tension. Using narrative language,

participants identified five antagonists in their story of tension between professional

identity and Christian religious identity: (1) church, (2) faculty, (3) social work peers,

(4) Christian peers, and (5) family. These social contexts provided opportunity for

external and internal conflict regarding differing beliefs. Externally, participants

sometimes engaged in defense of either their social work perspectives or their Christian

perspectives. Internally, they were challenged to reconcile what seemed like competing

beliefs and to fend off negative characterizations heard about Christians or social

workers. Further description of the five social contexts is warranted to understand

participant experience.

The social context of church refers to participants' experience with members from

an organized faith community at home or college. Relatively little conflict was reported

in regard to the church community. Only Bertha identified a particularly negative

encounter with fellow church members in a small group setting that pitted her social work

perspective against the perspective of other Christians. She described the incident as

"terrifying" and decided against further engagement with that small group. Other

participants who discussed conflict with other Christians specifically identified friends as

the source of conflict, not pastors or adult lay people within the church.

Participants acknowledged more conflictual experiences with faculty than they

did with the church community. However, they generally portrayed social work faculty as

supportive of or, at least, sensitive to their perspective. John Paul viewed his faculty as

being valuable resources in managing the identity tension:

> So my professors, like (named university) social work professors are the best.
> They are so helpful in any situation. Even if they don't have that faith
> background, I still talk to a few and I have — man, they're just awesome and
> they're so helpful. So I'd say my professors have just been THE go-to people and
> they've just helped me become more clear as like what the mission as a social
> worker is. And where it's going to get tough and like just being real about it too
> like yeah you're going to struggle.

Despite seeing social work professors as sensitive to faith perspectives, participants from

each of the three universities reported perceiving one social work faculty member as

fanning the flames of contention. Kendall commented:

> — usually professors are pretty good about like letting — you know, keeping —
> not keeping the peace but keeping things at a point where it's still respectful for
> both sides and it was just my one professor last year that he kind of added to that
> negative energy to lead the conversation more towards saying negative things.

Kendall's description highlights an important distinction. "Saying negative things" was

not a reference to others expressing a different point of view from her own. Rather, she

was referencing negative comments being made about Christians. Participants reported

feeling the most intense tension when they perceived other students or faculty as painting

Christians in an unfavorable light. Faculty outside of the social work program were most

often cited as expressing negative views about Christianity. However, when social work

faculty did express such negative views about Christians, they were viewed as

hypocritical as Kendall's next statement implied:

> I think just how Christians are talked about within social work and then — well, within the classroom setting. And then it's kind of like tongue and cheek because my professors will say how — like open and understanding and welcoming we need to be of ALL populations *(mimicked professor voices)* and I believe that but then at the same time they will be bashing and saying "well I don't know how those Christians can think like homosexuality is wrong or whatever" —

One other important note about participants' conflict with faculty was the recognition that

a power differential existed between student and professor. Roy highlighted this power

difference as he described disagreements with one particular social work faculty:

> A lot of times people have their views and they're just gonna be stuck in them. You know, uh, you know, *I'm* that way. But, uh, I think that whereas *I* had to, I was force fed the way that *she* (professor) thought, um, and then when I would try to speak in the way that I thought, um, I thought that, uh, then my words would be twisted and say "Well, that's, that's incorrect."

Roy was suggesting he was not engaged in a fair exchange of ideas because the professor

controlled the conversation. He seemed secured enough in himself to vocalize a

perspective that differed from that of a professor. He stopped speaking up though when

he perceived his ideas as not being heard. Other participants did not feel so emboldened

to speak up, particularly when they believed they would not receive support from their

student peers.

In Figure 8, "social work peers" is bolded and at the top of the arc to denote this

social context as having been the most antagonistic. When discussing challenges to fit

between social work and Christianity, seven participants highlighted contentious

discourse with classmates focused on the aforementioned topic areas. This discourse was

reported to have taken place in the classroom within guided discussion. Even though the

conflict was prompted by discussion of the topic areas, participants consistently identified

the manner in which classmates argued as the cause of felt tension. Anne stated:

> I've seen the discussions take a heated turn and a lot of social work students sort of hate on religion and I'm like, oh, boy. Well, this makes me feel very comfortable and very safe to say what I believe in… (sarcastic tone).

Bertha's portrayal of non-Christian classmates was very similar:

> …students will get really worked up and then they'll feel like they have like a platform to just kind of give the spiel on how Christians are hateful and stupid and bigoted and it just escalates into this big old like hatefest.

Kendall attended a different university from Anne and Bertha yet reported similar

experiences with her classmates. These experiences led Kendall to identify herself as "a

minority voice" in the classroom that likely would be criticized. The descriptions

provided by Anne, Bertha, and Kendall clearly articulated participants' perceived conflict

with their social work peers.

In addition to conflict with social work peers, three participants experienced

conflict with their Christian peers because social work education had influenced their

way of thinking. Jenna believed her Christian friends had the right to their own beliefs

but she also found herself frustrated with them when social topics were discussed:

> I think since being in the social work major AND just other things that have gone on where I've been more interested in just what's going on in the world and being more aware of that; being aware of real life outside of college, outside of a Christian bubble in college… I've just realized that it is a lot — it's not as like clear cut on like some of the controversial like topics that Christians — a lot of Christians are like "I believe this" …I've just started to be like do you guys really understand what's going on? Like, it's not as easy to just say this is how it should be because there's truth behind it… I think that like I've seen more of outside the bubble than they are sometimes and so that is a little frustrating to me and I just tell myself I'm like eventually they'll figure it out but I don't — it's hard to be around like conversations about that when I feel like I'm the only one like thinking straight like.

Jenna sometimes felt like "the only one" with both her non-Christian classmates and her Christian friends. Charlotte also perceived herself as not quite belonging with either group. Bertha summed up this lack of belonging very well stating, "I would say that I'm a very liberal conservative and a very conservative liberal. I kind of don't really fit anywhere." Christian peers were reported less often as antagonists than were social work peers or isolated faculty members, although both Bertha and Jenna reported feeling more comfortable discussing the "hot topics" within the social work program than at home or with Christian friends.

Finally, family was cited least frequently as a context for tension between social work identity and Christian identity. Anne and Bertha disclosed some conflict with their fathers about social work perspectives. Because neither of their fathers were highly religious though, they interpreted their fathers' diverse viewpoints as strictly political in nature. Rose vaguely referenced some differences she had experienced with her mother. She portrayed the differences, however, as fairly benign and not generating much felt tension. Overall, then, participants did not perceive the family as providing fodder for conflict between professional and religious identity.

Internal manifestation of tension. Tension between professional identity and religious identity impacted participants in differing ways and to differing extents. As participants discussed thoughts and emotions associated with identity tension, the theme of relationship conflict and preservation emerged. Essentially, participants seemed to be asking three primary questions as they experienced the tension:

1. In the midst of this tension, how do I stay true to self (relationship with self)?

2. In the midst of this tension, how do I stay in good relationship with people I value personally (relationship with others-personal)?

3. In the midst of this tension, how will I establish and maintain good professional relationships (relationship with others-professional)?

Figure 8 displays these primary questions or relationship spheres as situated between the internal processing of beliefs related to identity and the external social contexts in which participants experienced both support and tension. Although the first question appears most directly related to identity (how do I stay true to self), the other questions are significant as they framed the identity development process. In other words, as social work students experienced conflict between professional and religious identity, they were not only evaluating who they believed themselves to be but they were also evaluating how others perceived them. Students then managed both identities according to these evaluations and importance of social relationship. Descriptions and examples of each relationship sphere are presented separately in this section. It should be noted, however, that the spheres were not compartmentalized in participants' descriptions of the tension. Instead, they were interconnected parts of a functioning identity development process.

Relationship to self. A significant component of the tension between identities revolved around who participants believed themselves to be and wanted to be. For everyone but Roy, both professional and religious identities appeared important to self-perception. Because Roy had used social work as a means to developing ministry skills, he freely admitted he did not view himself as a social worker. Other participants did seem to have investment in seeing the self as both Christian and social worker. As the identities conflicted then, participants were left to decide which identity was primary. Some participants clearly referenced religious identity as principal in their lives. John Paul commented:

> I think it's EVERYTHING how I view myself. If I'm going to like describe myself, the first thing I would say is I'm a Catholic. Like — like I love social work and that would be the next thing I would say is I'm a Catholic social worker…

John Paul's statement was a direct assertion of his religious identity being primary. In a similar vein, Bertha described herself as a Christian saying, "Christianity will never just be my religion. It's never just going to be something that I check on a piece of paper or make a Facebook status about. It's an encompassing everything that I am now…" In Bertha's words, we hear a description of self that extends beyond the label of "Christian" to denote identity that has master status. Jennifer closely echoed Bertha's sentiment suggesting being Christian is "not just a name tag…not just something that you check off on a piece of paper. It's actually a lifestyle."

Other participants conveyed the importance of Christianity in their lives but in a manner that did not necessarily place it above other parts of the identity such as social worker. As Anne discussed the points at which her profession and her religion conflicted, she often described herself as "Christian" and "social worker" without differentiating one as being dominant over the other. Both Charlotte and Jenna spoke of religion and profession in ways that suggested each carried comparable weight in self-identity. Charlotte remarked, "I'm very in tune with — like with God. I'm like — I rely on Him for like a lot of stuff." This remark sounds much less declarative and all-inclusive than the statements made by Bertha, Jennifer, and John Paul. Although all students in the study identified as Christian and indicated religion was "a central part of their life" (study questionnaire), variations could be seen in strength of religious identity.

Despite the variations in religious identity strength, most participants noted the potential danger of betraying themselves in the midst of religious and professional

tension. Typically, the danger was stated in terms of jeopardizing the religious self.

Jennifer and Kendall both referenced not wanting to "compromise" their religion. Anne

also used this term when discussing her approach to working with someone whose moral

code is different than her own. In envisioning the possibility of sharing her own

convictions without being offensive, she asked, "…how can I say this in a way that I feel

like I haven't compromised myself as a person but also I don't want anyone to feel like

I'm judging them." Anne's comment nicely demonstrates the tenuous balance of being in

right relationship with self while also maintaining right relationship with others. In

talking through how he might work with a client who is seeking an abortion, Roy was

able to reconcile his theology with the social work concept of self-determination.

However, his follow-up thought hinted at a potential "compromise" of self. He stated,

"So, um, and being able to sleep at night will be, you know, what I'll have to figure out."

Although his religious beliefs allowed him to rationalize supporting a woman's choice to

obtain an abortion, Roy defined the rationalization as violating his own personal moral

code and believed the violation would be a burden. A final example of students' desire to

be in right relationship with themselves came from John Paul who said:

> …everybody has like different morals and values and knowing your values and
> being firm in them as a social worker and as a Christian or a non-Christian or
> whatever, just always kind of being true to you and not trying to fake it to make it
> because that's not going to make you effective at all.

John Paul saw a compromise of self as not just being problematic for him but potentially

problematic for those with whom he would work. Language regarding these potential

compromises moved back and forth between comprising "self" and compromising

"religion." The use of language seemed to indicate religious belief served as a strong

identifying factor. To betray one's religion was to betray the self.

Relationship to others: personal. Along with highlighting the need to maintain self-identity, participants also discussed identity tension in terms of personal relationship with others. Sometimes the tension prompted concern about approval or sense of belonging because students viewed themselves as being unorthodox both as social workers and Christians. Jenna feared if she verbalized her thoughts about homosexuality to her Christian friends, they would question her Christianity. Likewise, she refrained from telling many social work peers how religion influenced her view of homosexuality believing they would question her as a social worker Along with risking disapproval, Jenna worried relationships might be "ruined" if her Christian friends responded negatively to her unorthodox Christian beliefs. Kendall also believed her views on homosexuality would cause other Christians to question her religious authenticity saying they might see her as "completely in the wrong." On the other hand, she worried she might not be accepted into her university's MSW program if the admissions committee knew she was a Christian. Although she reasoned with herself that the committee could see her religious views as a form of diversity, she still possessed a bit of concern as to how her religious identity might impact her chances for admission. For Jenna and Kendall, being true to their own versions of social worker and Christian was perceived as a threat to relationship.

For other study participants, risk to relationships did not prevent them from sharing either their religious or professional views. Charlotte attributed her unorthodox religious views to social work education by stating, "being a social worker HAS caused me to become this more unconventional Christian." Like Jenna and Kendall, she perceived that her blending of social work principles and religious beliefs left her not

quite belonging in either group. A primary difference between Charlotte and the other two students, though, was that Charlotte verbalized her beliefs more often. Jenna and Kendall feared they would not fit in with either Christian friends or social work peers/faculty, while Charlotte actually perceived herself as not fitting in based on others' reactions to her verbalizations.

John Paul also shared his religious views in the classroom and said another student had negatively remarked he was "THAT Catholic kid in class." From his perspective, revealing his religious identity in the classroom had resulted in both negative and positive reactions from peers. No matter the reaction, John Paul's need to be true to his religious beliefs by vocalizing them was more important to him than maintaining approval. He stated, "I don't mind defending my faith even if it does kind of set me apart from everybody." John Paul's willingness to risk approval from or relationship with other social work students in order to express faith was connected to his image of an ideal Catholic. He believed Catholics should have "a heart to evangelize" and "not be ashamed of our faith."

Although most participants referenced relationship with peers, two participants verbalized anxiety about risking the disapproval of professors, specifically noting the risk of lowered grades or not getting good recommendation letters in the future. Several others mentioned concern about being called out in the classroom by faculty who knew they were Christian. Regardless of where the concern was focused (peers or faculty) or what choice was made in regards to speaking out, the majority of participants believed identity as a Christian or as a social worker placed personal relationships at risk.

Relationship to others: professional. The last relationship sphere addressed by participants was that of relationship to future clients, employers, and licensing agents. In thinking through areas of tension between profession and religion, these students wanted to believe they would be helpful to clients, would be able to fulfill commitments to employers, and would operate in good standing with licensing boards. This sphere highlighted relationship to the profession and commitment to social work ideals.

Several study participants voiced concern regarding how to be both a social worker and a Christian in social work practice. They appeared to hold the client's right to self-determination balanced against their own personal moral code. Anne admitted she felt discomfort when moral issues were discussed in the classroom. She knew she didn't want to "preach" to clients about making wise choices but she also had difficulty picturing how she would stay neutral. Along with her fear of risking the social worker-client relationship by offending clients, she also feared for her standing in the profession:

> …it feels to me like check your beliefs at the door and your beliefs are now the social work code of ethics… I don't know if that's how they (faculty) mean for it to come across; but as a student who had — where I have strong faith beliefs that sometimes feel like they don't mesh well with being a social worker, it's sort of intimidating. Like, oh man. Oh, boy. I'm gonna really mess this one up. I worry a lot about will I say something wrong? Will I get myself in trouble and will I have to go in front of the board — the code of ethics committee and they'll tell me that I'm not fit to be a social worker because I can't check my values at the door and I can't stay in the code of ethics.

Anne was appropriately sensitive to and respectful of the profession's code of ethics. She was also frightened, though, that her religious beliefs might lead her to act in an unprofessional manner. In addition, she feared that others would question her capability as a social worker.

Jenna also vocalized worries about her religious identity negatively impacting her work with clients. Unlike Anne's concern of placing a personal value on a client, however, Jenna's apprehension focused on non-Christian clients' ability to place trust in her.

> You always just hear like things about like "oh you're just trying to like convert me or you're not going to change me"…and that's not my goal. I just want to improve their life… It's like a sensitive thing… but if they've had a bad experience with someone who is a Christian or a bad experience at church or it's — it's just they view it negatively… I don't — it makes me nervous that I don't want that to like affect our professional relationship when it doesn't have to, like it shouldn't.

Jenna actually perceived herself as quite capable of setting her biases aside. At the same time though, she wasn't convinced clients would be able to set anti-Christianity bias aside. Jenna's concern came from a perception of Christianity generally being rejected by U.S. culture. Her social work education had instilled the understanding that establishment of trust with the client is essential for effective service. She feared that, if clients knew she was a Christian, building that trusting relationship would be challenging.

When Jennifer considered the tension she experienced between social work and Christianity, she projected concern about being in good relationship with her employers. Although most participants discussed working for a faith-based agency as a way to decrease the tension (or possibly be true to self), only Jennifer verbalized risk to relationship with employer if personal and professional values were not in accord. She conjectured what might happen if an agency policy stood in opposition to personal values or beliefs:

> You'll either kind of comply with those (agency policies) and do what, you know, what you're supposed to do in the business or you'll be like in a job where you are kind of — I'm sure there are people who don't comply with the policies as much as they **should** because they don't go — because they're not with their

specific beliefs but I mean of course that can get you fired very easily and that's just not a smart choice…

Jennifer prefaced these statements with emphasis on the need to be true to self and she followed with the notion that finding an agency with like values was the best course of action. Her statement above, however, with its emphasis on the word "should" seems to acknowledge a social worker's responsibility to practice in accordance with an employing agency. In other words, working in a social service agency places the social worker in relationship and, therefore, careful consideration must be given to choice of agencies. As with other participants, Jennifer perceived her religious identity as posing a potential threat to future professional relationships.

The missing relationship. One interesting finding is seen in what participants did not say. In describing identity as a Christian, the majority of participants used the notion of being in personal relationship with God as a critical component in spiritual development. One might expect a tension then between religious and professional identity to provoke fear of displeasing God. Only one student, however, hinted at this possibility as she talked about her thoughts on the issue of homosexuality. Overall, even though participants spoke about the importance of being in relationship with God, they did not appear to be worried that "compromising" their religion would jeopardize that sacred relationship.

Identity Management Methods

As with challenges to professional identity formation, participants utilized a mixture of methods to manage identity tension. All methods worked to preserve or restore relationship to self, relationship with personal others, relationship with professional others, or a combination of the three. Also similar to methods used in

maintaining professional identity, these methods manifested in intentional action, conscious coping mechanisms, and unconscious coping mechanisms (see Figure 9).
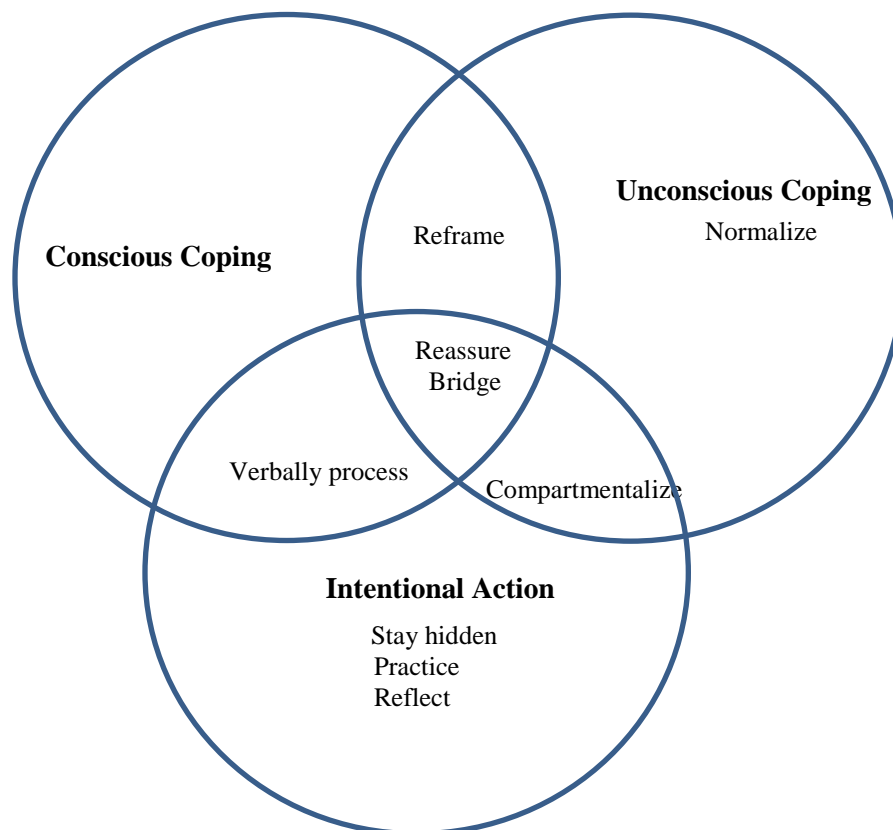
Figure 9. Professional-religious identity management methods.

Each of the methods utilized in response to professional identity challenge was also observed in the management of religious and professional identity. Two additional methods then emerged in professional-religious identity management: reflect and bridge. Bridge was broken down into two subcategories: (1) bridge ideas, and (2) bridge people. Description and supportive examples of these methods are included below. As shown in Table 9, most participants utilized a wide variety of methods. Seven participants displayed use of seven or more methods to manage tension between professional and

religious identity. Rose used significantly fewer identity management methods than her peers. This finding fits with her heavy use of compartmentalization in maintaining professional identity. Her vision of separating out personal and professional suggested a concrete thinking style that would likely decrease tension.

Table 9

Participant Use of Identity Management Methods

Participant Method	Anne	Bertha	Charlotte	Jenna	Jennifer	John Paul	Kendall	Rose	Roy
Reframe (*n*=9)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Bridge: ideas (*n*=7)	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
people (*n*=5)	√		√	√		√			√
Reassure (*n*=7)	√	√		√	√	√	√		√
Verbally process (*n*=7)	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	
Reflect (*n*=7)	√	√	√	√		√	√		√
Compartmentalize (*n*=6)	√	√			√	√	√		√
Practice (*n*=6)	√	√		√	√	√			√
Normalize (*n*=3)		√					√		√
Stay hidden (*n*=3)		√		√			√		

Identity management methods will be discussed in order of highest frequency use to lowest frequency use.

Reframe. As described previously, reframing involved altering thoughts to reflect a more positive view of something perceived as negative. In this instance, participants generally gave positive meaning to the tension experienced between identities. For example, when Kendall discussed her developing thoughts about homosexuality, she

stated, "I think it's just been a wrestling and not necessarily a doubting or a questioning."

The book of Genesis contains the story of Jacob who "wrestled" an angel and overcame

his struggle (Genesis 32: 22-31, New Revised Standard Version). This story carries

strong positive connotations for those in the Christian faith. Consider then the well-

known accounting in the New Testament of Thomas' need to touch nail wounds in order

to believe the man who stood before him was Jesus (John 20:27, New Revised Standard

Version). Even for those not within the church, the label of "doubting Thomas" is not

welcomed. By changing the language of her experience to "wrestling," Jenna created a

positive self-portrait.

Several other participants reframed internal and external conflict experience as

tools for personal growth. In recounting the tension he experienced in one particular

class, John Paul stated:

> This women in gender's studies class I had a lot of — I loved like — one of my
> favorite classes; but I loved it for the fact that it pushed me to understand my faith
> more and grow my faith because I had to defend myself more.

In essence, this reframe posited external conflict as an opportunity to refine his beliefs

and religious argument. Jennifer similarly reframed conflicting ideas as an avenue to

sharpen herself intellectually and spiritually:

> — if I do feel challenged it's in a way that makes me want to go home and like
> think about it more and explore it more; but it's never in a way that makes me feel
> bad about who I am or like what I'm doing.

Jennifer did not deny feeling some level of tension when conflicting perspectives were

discussed in class. She did, however, manage to depersonalize the conflict by labeling it

as a learning opportunity.

Charlotte's reframes integrated her religious beliefs by seeing conflict as a part of God's plan for her. She had originally planned to attend a faith-based university but came to believe God desired her to be educated in a secular setting. She sometimes felt uneasy about conflicts she had with classmates. Charlotte reported:

> And every time I get into a really heated argument in class, I'm like was that appropriate? And then I'm like, I'm supposed to be here so probably. That's what I think about every time.

As described previously, Charlotte expressed a sense of not fitting in with social work peers. Reframing the arguments she had as part of God's larger plan gave the conflict purpose. Charlotte viewed herself as divinely sanctioned to present a different perspective to her peers.

As with professional identity challenges, reframing potentially negative events in a positive perspective imbued the events with meaning and gave participants hope.

Bridge. One manner in which participants managed identity tension was to connect conflicting ideas or people. Basically, they attempted to bring Christianity and social work together by moving back and forth between the ideas and the people associated with each. Bridging ideas is described first in this section because it was used more frequently than was bridging people.

Bridge ideas. As participants recounted their challenges of bringing religion and profession together, they often used language or constructs that blended the two spheres of life together. Sometimes the bridge was built from religion to profession, such as Roy suggesting client self-determination was a form of free will. A common form of bridging from religion to profession was seen in participants' vision of ethical social work practice motivated by religious beliefs. Bertha used this method saying:

> I'm not going to bring my personal religious beliefs into it. I'm just going to kind of like be an overarching extension of like — I'm going to LOVE that person and try to take care of them the best that I can.

Bertha's picture of love came from her religious ideals. She recognized that openly discussing her religious views in practice could potentially pose an ethical violation. By viewing the work she would be doing with clients as love, she connected her dearly held religious beliefs to the social work profession. John Paul expressed a similar sentiment:

> There's a quote that I live by. It's "preach the Gospel and only use words when necessary." So even though I can't directly say, hey, you know, this right to them, my actions should still be speaking to me as a Christian. So — and it's just finding that balance and how to do that without becoming preachy or pushing my faith upon someone.

This concept of modeling Christian ideals to clients and colleagues was mentioned by several participants as the primary manner in which they would integrate their faith with their social work practice. It offered a seemingly safe way for them to envision being true to themselves while also respecting professional ethics.

Participants also constructed a bridge from social work to religion at times. Bertha became frustrated with negative stereotypes she heard about Christians in the classroom. To decrease her frustration, she utilized empathy skills to imagine the other person's perspective. In addition, Bertha used social work language to remind classmates of the need to appreciate diverse perspectives:

> It's really just kind of an approach of "well let's open our minds a little bit and remember that *all* people, even the people that we don't necessarily like or we really strongly disagree with, as social workers it is — it's in our Code of Ethics to, you know, to respect their dignity." And normally people kind of like simmer down after that.

Bertha utilized social work ideals to move her "anti-religious" peers toward respecting people who are religious. Although she did not identify as Christian in the classroom, the

bridging strategy provided a means for decreasing classroom conflict and defending her

religious identity with values of the profession.

   Bridge people. Another bridging strategy observed was that of breaking down

stereotypes connected to either identity. Participants commonly referenced the negative

perception of Christians that existed both in social work and non-social work classrooms.

Four participants reported intentional efforts to discredit stereotypes of Christians. Anne

was concerned she would be viewed as a "Westboro Baptist-type of person" so she

attempted to portray herself as loving and nonjudgmental to peers. Roy believed he had

built trust with non-Christian classmates by showing his willingness to consider diverse

viewpoints:

> I think a lot of times, um, social workers and, you know, people in general can
> have this stereotype of Christians where they're very close-minded people. And
> when they knew that I cared about people the way that I do, no matter who they
> are, even though I don't necessarily agree with what they're *doing*, they, they
> respected me for that.

Roy's strategy of negating stereotypes allowed him to form relationship with his peers

while also giving his peers opportunity to know and better understand someone with a

strong religious identity. John Paul built bridges by good naturedly correcting classmates'

misperceptions about Catholicism and Charlotte built bridges by educating her Christian

peers about LGBTQ issues. Perhaps Jenna vocalized building bridges between people

most powerfully when she said:

> But I think I — it's weird because I'm more of like — I'll be like the ambassador
> for like the social workers that when I'm with my Christian friends but then when
> I'm with social workers, I'm like, yeah, but like Christianity — like — so it's
> weird. I change roles a little…

For Jenna, being an ambassador to each group meant she would represent each identity

positively in the face of negative perception. The role of ambassador may have provided

a more pleasant portrait of Christians to social workers and vice versa. This role may have also supported integration of Jenna's religious and professional identities.

Reassure. Participants frequently used self-talk to affirm the possibility of being both a social worker and a Christian. Kendall reported having been told "you can't be a good social worker if you are a Christian." Throughout her interview, she cited several ways in which her religion would actually increase her effectiveness such as giving her more tools for self-care and self-reflection. Kendall also affirmed her place as a Christian in the profession by suggesting the population of social workers needs to be just as diverse as the people they serve. In a similar fashion, John Paul believed his religious beliefs and practices improved his potential as a future social worker because they taught him to not judge others. Another example of self-reassurance was observed when Jennifer wrapped up her study interview with an impassioned speech about being a social worker and a Christian:

> I would say the important thing to understand is that you don't have to choose between your career and your religion. I think that in order to have a fulfilled life, you have to be able to balance both and you have to be able to figure out "how do I apply Christianity to social work and how do I apply social work to Christianity." Like I feel like the two need to be able to be used interchangeably and I don't feel like you should ever have to leave your faith at home and then go to work and be a different person. I feel like it's all just one big thing that just works together and so I would just say never compromise. Never allow people to make you feel like your beliefs are not important at the workplace.

Verbally process. Seven participants found talking to others about professional-religious identity tension to be a helpful tool for decreasing anxiety. Sources for verbal processing included family ($n = 3$), clergy ($n = 2$), spiritual mentors ($n = 2$), social work faculty ($n = 2$), other Christian social work students ($n = 2$), and practicing social workers ($n = 2$). Participants who relied on people outside of social work to be their sounding

boards reported this method as less effective than did those who processed with social work students, faculty, or professionals. Anne's following statements propose those outside of social work may not fully understand her dilemma:

> I talk a lot about it with my "discipler" trying to figure out, you know, like what do I do in this situation because — I mean, she is a theater major so she sort of — you know, it's a very liberal (major) and, you know, free… do whatever you want kind of thing and so we kind of had some similar experiences on what do you do as a Christian in certain situations. So that was helpful but, I mean, it's one thing when I'm one-on-one talking with a good friend, you know, my "discipler." It's another to be *in* this situation…

Anne recognized she might benefit more by verbally processing with someone in the social work program yet she reported being intimidated to do so because she did not know who could be trusted. An important related note is that all participants expressed a desire to be able to safely contribute to difficult conversations in the classroom, both to provide a different perspective than the one typically shared but also as a means of working through their own questions related to religion and profession. In short, they seemed to believe talking through conflicting ideas or values was an effective method for identity integration.

Reflect. Self-reflection was noted as a method for understanding oneself and responding effectively in the midst of classroom tension. Jenna did not often share her thoughts in class discussion and presented this tendency as part of her need for reflection:

> In the classes where I don't speak up all the time where I'm just like — part of it is because I don't want to like say everything that I'm thinking sometimes but also there's a lot to like process between thinking about my Christianity and what I believe like real world. And so I think I'm thinking about that a lot is why I kind of sit back and don't contribute as much as other people… because I'm really like thinking about things.

In comments prior to these, Jenna had implied she ought to speak up more in class to defend Christianity. As she reflected in the interview process, she realized allowing time for reflection improved her understanding of self.

Other students reported using self-reflection as a preparation tool for speaking in class particularly when discussion was heated. Kendall typically did not speak in such conversations but recounts a time she did so:

> There was one time last semester where I finally like had to say something in class just because — I usually — in those situations too I think you have to be prayerful because there's only going to be certain times where I think it's worth saying something as far — you know, so I've always tried to be really prayerful in class when I feel like I need to speak up or making sure that my emotions are on track, that I'm not speaking out of anger.

In this example, we see a blending of social work reflection ("making sure that my emotions are on track") and religious reflection ("be really prayerful in class") that enabled Kendall to proceed with verbalizing her thoughts in an intimidating situation. In like fashion, John Paul reflected on his emotions during contentious classroom discussion but chose a different response:

> I was getting really angry with like the comments people were making. And so to — my like thought process I had actually said a quick prayer. I just asked for the Holy Spirit to come within me and let Thy will be done. And the more I sat there in silence, the more I realized I shouldn't be speaking because it's all anger that would be coming out and there would be no love.

Self-awareness is emphasized to social work students as an essential practice for working effectively and ethically. Students in this sample were able to combine social work and Christian reflective practices in order to manage intense emotion.

Compartmentalize. As described previously, compartmentalization decreased anxiety about identity conflict by separating out competing concerns. The most frequent form of compartmentalization was for participants to plan to work in a faith-based

agency. Most reported being open to working in either a secular or faith-based agency. However, seven participants suggested either a preference for working in a faith-based agency or a recognition that doing so would assist in their ability to integrate their profession and religion. None of these participants acknowledged a possibility of values conflict with policies of a faith-based agency. Instead, they seemed to presume their ideology and values would coincide due to identifying with the same religion. They also viewed themselves as being "free" to integrate their religious identity by discussing beliefs with colleagues and clients. In some respects, compartmentalizing faith-based agencies as "good" gave participants the ability to avoid identity conflict.

Although most participants who used compartmentalizing did not do so at a conscious level, Bertha directly identified her use of this method. When asked how she might handle a situation in the future in which she perceived her religious beliefs as conflicting with professional responsibilities, she responded:

> Yeah, I hope that I'm not in one of those situations. I — like I said I do a pretty good job of like compartmentalizing like my personal life and then my like politically correct like way that I interact with the world life.

Bertha spoke often during the interview of her diplomacy skills. She perceived herself as being adept at challenging others' viewpoints in a "tactful" manner. Although this skill could be viewed as a bridging strategy, she viewed it as a way of separating out who she was from who she presented to others.

Practice. When asked how they envisioned themselves in the future as both social worker and Christian, six participants offered practices they currently used or planned to use that they believed would assure effective services to clients and maintain the

participant's dual identity. Anne reported purposefully placing herself in situations that

would allow her to explore what integration might look like:

> I'm just working on experiences that will get me out of my safe little bubble. I
> don't want to be complacent as a Christian or as a social worker. Because I feel
> like if you become complacent you start letting things slide and start losing
> yourself a little bit and I don't — I don't want to be that way. I want to grow in all
> aspects of my life and I want those to mesh together and not to grow apart.

Several participants talked about the practice of "setting bias aside" in order to effectively

serve clients but admittedly were not sure how they might do so. Jenna pictured herself

discussing values conflicts with clients as a healthy practice for addressing possible bias:

> But what I think I SHOULD do is definitely like I said before like address it and
> say like can I like — what I would want to know like what their hesitations are
> like towards me and towards me helping them… given my faith…

Unlike Bertha's plan to be "politically correct," Jenna's plan for handling values conflicts

offered a way to maintain self-integrity.

Some participants planned to pray for clients outside of meeting with them as a

way to integrate faith in an ethical manner. As Roy thought about a future dilemma

between his religious identity and social work ideals, he imagined himself meeting with a

woman who was experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. Roy vocalized a commitment to

providing her with all of the options including abortion and added, "…but that doesn't

mean I don't, you know…you know when they leave the office start praying my butt off

for that person. Um, and asking God to do what He does best…just show up and show

off." Prayer on behalf of clients allowed the possibility of engaging in a religious practice

without evangelizing or being intrusive.

The final way participants projected managing future dilemmas between

professional self and religious self was to refer the client to someone who could

effectively work with that person. Generally, this practice was presented as a

responsibility to the client as opposed to a release from the dilemma for the social

worker. Jennifer also anticipated what her practice would be if providing services to

someone with an unplanned pregnancy. She stated:

> I would try to offer all of their — offer all the options for them and make sure even though our beliefs are different, just make sure you understand like, "okay, let's weigh the pros and cons of this decision. Let's look at all your other options." And I feel like I would do that for any client. Not just a client that is, you know, similar to me or different from me. Just making sure that they are getting — making the best choice for themselves and you know of course remembering that it's not my place to judge you or condemn you or pick for you but it is my place to offer all these resources and make sure that you know what the benefits and the costs of each thing is and then working with them individually to pick what would be best for them And so — and then if it got to a point to where it was just like it was so far-fetched and so out of the loop for me that I couldn't deal with it, I definitely will not mind referring them to somebody else who would be better and not as judge — not as biased in the situation.

Jennifer's vision for practice exemplified the overall attitude of participants when

considering values conflict with clients. In Kendall's words, "…I always have to think

about the client because it's not ever about the practitioner…"

   Normalize. Viewing conflict as a normal part of life served to minimize anxiety

related to professional-religious identity conflict, although it was not a widely used

method. For Kendall and Bertha, religious beliefs played into their ability to normalize as

they viewed conflict as a result of sin in the world and in themselves. Roy extended the

normalization method by positing Christians in other professions also experience threat to

religious identity. He stated:

> I think that you can definitely be…you can definitely be a very strong Christian and definitely be in social work and use both very easily. But at the same time, you're also going to get a lot of push back because I think we're getting into a culture that is pushing away (from religion). And um, yeah, so that's what I see as, uh, is a challenge. Um and that's for any student, not just social workers for sure. Whether that's a nurse or an engineer or whatever.

Normalizing assisted participants in managing tension by reminding them they are not alone in their struggle.

Stay hidden. Although none of the study participants reported having denied they were Christians, three did make comments that suggested they also weren't open about their religious beliefs. Two participants, Anne and Kendall, acknowledged concern other students would view them unfavorable and inaccurately. Kendall commented she sometimes wanted to defend Christians but didn't believe it would be "worth it" based on the likelihood of other students being receptive to her opinions. Bertha also did not identify as Christian in the classroom but thought other students knew she was a Christian from comments she made. Like the others, she did not hide completely but she thought carefully about how to portray herself. Further, Bertha had risked sharing her social justice ideology with a group of adult Christians from her church when she perceived them as making "racist statements." Because she was confident in her diplomacy skills, she was unprepared for their response. She described the experience as follows:

> But I was like, calmed myself down and I thought through what I was going to say and then I started to share like "yeah, but there is such a thing as like systematic oppression…"and all these things that I've like learned in social work and very excited about and hadn't really challenged because I've been learning them from my professors who I like trust authority on things and *they shot me down* (slow and emphasized) and were like, "well, you just go to that school and you're just — you know, it's this liberal agenda" and just — I mean, it like they all came down on me SO hard.

This experience prompted Bertha to initially question what she had learned in social work classes and to question her skill of "eloquently" arguing a point. She stated the incident did not cause her to question becoming a social worker. She did, however, question whether to continue attending the group or to opt out. Eventually, she did decide to remove herself from the group, saying "It just — mental health perspective-wise, it was

just a better decision." Bertha admitted the incident had also caused her to be more

inhibited in the classroom, particularly in non-social work classes. In spite of Bertha's

professed self-confidence, she perceived a need to protect herself both in the classroom

and in her own faith community.

Bertha and her student peers experienced obstacles to integrating professional and

religious identity. The influence of competing worldviews appeared to create some

identity dissonance and a perception of being different from both the religious group and

the professional group. Some methods described above seemed to assist in lessening

anxiety related to identity dissonance (e.g., normalize, reassure) while other methods

were used more actively as identity integration tools (e.g., bridge, reflect). All

participants conveyed the belief they could be both a devoted Christian and a social

worker. At the same time, carrying both identities prompted discomfort both in present

circumstances (e.g., classroom) and in projection of a professional future.

Findings Summary

This qualitative study used narrative interviewing to explore professional identity

formation as well as integration of professional and religious identity in Christian BSW

students. Findings revealed a common storyline among participants in both professional

and religious identity formation. Although identity formation processes contained a linear

aspect, the process became more fluid as participants questioned what it meant to be a

social worker or a Christian. Further, identity formation was not static but evolving as

new ideas and experiences were introduced into the story. Participants reported

challenges to professional identity formation as well as to the integration of the two

identities. Intentional action, along with conscious and unconscious coping mechanisms,

were employed to establish and/or maintain identity in the face of challenges. The majority of participants in the study voiced commitment to both identities as well as a desire to become adept at "balancing" the identities together.

Although the word "balance" was used by several participants, it denotes separateness, which did not seem to be what participants hoped for or experienced. The metaphor of weaving identities provides a closer portrayal of the integration experience but still implies threads can be easily distinguished from one another or even pulled out. The metaphor of braided rivers proves to be more helpful in considering students' integration of their professional and religious identities. Braided rivers are characterized by a recurring separation and joining of channels that results from the dynamic interaction between riverbed and sediment deposit (Dey, 2014). The braided river is not a merging of many rivers, but rather one river, the flow of which is disrupted by sediment overload associated with various environmental conditions such as steep grades. Although disrupted, channels in the river eventually do come back together only to separate again giving the river its braided appearance from an aerial view (Dey, 2014). This metaphor is well suited to participants' experience of identity formation and integration. The process appeared dynamic, being influenced by both internal and external factors. Participants found themselves at a "steep grade" in life as they left home (family and church) for college and found themselves disrupted and overloaded by differing perspectives and emotionally challenging experiences. Despite these disruptions, participants managed to bring the channels of identity back together at points to form a unified picture of self. They also recognized, however, that the process was ongoing with more disruptions awaiting downstream.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Exploration of professional identity in Christian undergraduate social work students reveals a rich and complex identity formation process. Study findings both complement and expand upon the limited research on social work professional identity formation. In addition, focus on integration of two potentially congruous and competing identities (professional and religious) points to the need for further examination of how students can be supported in managing multiple identities as they work to become an effective practitioner. This chapter will examine the current study's findings in light of prior research, connect findings to relevant theory, consider strengths and limitations of the study, and propose implications for future research as well as social work undergraduate education.

Significant Findings

The social work profession can be seen as unique among helping professions in its emphasis of a moral worldview as a key component in professional identity (Stewart, 2009). This moral worldview, primarily based on the construct of social justice, promotes advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged people groups in society (Stewart, 2013). Social work literature of the past twenty years has highlighted potential values conflicts between the moral worldview of social work and a Christian worldview. Such a conflict raises questions of Christian social workers' commitment to the *Code of Ethics* as it competes with deeply held religious beliefs. The current study, however, found Christian BSW

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students to be committed to a professional identity, sensitive to their own biases, and able to critically analyze conflicts in worldview.

The current study identifies a significant relational aspect in professional identity formation and integration. Participants' depictions of how they viewed themselves as social worker and Christian highlights social contexts that both support and challenge these identities. One important relational aspect is students' need to perceive the profession as a good fit for their personal identity. Consistent with previous research, participants viewed fit in terms of specific character traits (Hackett et al., 2003: Loeske & Cahill, 1986; Wiles, 2013) and values (Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011). The current study highlights two additional points of fit to be: (1) the participant's alignment with social work principles and theories related to change (e.g., ecosystems theory and empowerment perspective), and (2) positive emotional experiences associated with learning social work knowledge and skills. In regard to positive emotional experience, many participants referenced feeling "passion" for certain social work topics or "loving" when specific skills were practiced in the classroom. These emotional experiences are important in signaling to students they have chosen the right profession.

Although perception of oneself as fitting within the social work profession may appear to be an internal process, social factors play an important role in constructing professional fit. Social work students' picture of self as a social worker shift as they interact with people and ideas both from within and outside of the profession. These social interactions and their resulting internal responses provoke both affirmation and challenge to professional identity. The professional identity is typically threatened when one of the points of fit described above comes into question. For example, study

participants who perceived themselves as not naturally possessing a necessary character trait, such as compassion, reported insecurity about their ability to be an effective social worker. This finding supports previous research on a character trait model for social work identity (Hackett et al., 2003; Wiles, 2013). It should be noted that some participants also reported insecurities about specific social work competencies. Interestingly, a participant's confidence in their own fit with the profession often served to decrease anxiety regarding competency. In essence, competency could be built while fit was a naturally occurring phenomena. If challenged in one point of fit, participants were generally able to affirm overall professional identity by focusing on aspects that were a strong fit. As was expected, the values point of fit proves to be troublesome at times. Consistent with other research findings, participants perceived a strong fit between core values of the profession and of their religion yet cited some experience of value incongruity within their social work education. (Osteen, 2011; Thaller, 2011). Specific points of value congruence between religion and profession, such as the mandate to care for others, allows students to maintain a sense of fit in spite of values conflict.

At points where professional and religious values do conflict, students express fear they may have to compromise their personal values and, thus, not "be true to myself." Osteen's (2011) research of conflicting personal-professional values reported students chose personal values over that of the profession in the face of intense values conflict. Much more complexity is observed among students in the current study. Although participants did speak of their religious beliefs and values as truth, many of them also framed their beliefs as "bias" which implied an appreciation for the beliefs of others. In doing so, they honor the social work profession's admonition to "understand

the nature of social diversity" and display compliance with the profession's strong emphasis on self-reflection to prevent imposing personal values on clients (NASW, 1996/2008, 1.05).

Consistent with previous research, participants looked to the social work principle of client right to self-determination as one means for resolving values conflict (Thaller, 2011). Honoring a client's right to make their own choices, despite a religious values conflict for the social worker, provided the ability for participants to see themselves as being true to both identities. Also supporting Thaller's earlier findings, many study participants suggested they would refer a client to another social worker in the future if they were unable to resolve a values conflict in practice. They did view referral, however, as a sort of last ditch effort only to be used if critical self-reflection and consultation with colleagues did not provide resolution. Again, students' speculative description of values resolution implies a vigorous commitment to professional values. Some participants reported that the only practice situation in which they would likely choose referral was if a client was seeking an abortion. One unexpected finding, though, was the willingness of several participants to provide information on abortion services to clients despite their personal pro-life stance. These strategies for addressing values conflict emphasized professional values while maintaining religious identity.

Another relational aspect to professional identity formation and integration with religious identity was seen in a desire to belong to the professional group and to the religious group. Participants wanted to be viewed by others, particularly faculty and social work peers, as fitting the model of a social worker. They also desired to be in good standing with fellow Christians. Their social work knowledge and values set them apart

from most others in their faith community, yet their religious beliefs and values set them

apart in the classroom. These findings are consistent with previous research showing

Christian social work students sometimes experience internal and external conflict with

practices and beliefs of their faith community (Thaller, 2011).

Also supporting earlier research findings, most participants report hearing

negative stereotypes of Christians in the classroom particularly as social issues, such as

same-sex marriage, are debated (Hodge, 2007). Social work faculty were largely

described as sensitive to Christian students' perspectives, albeit not proactive enough in

providing a level playing field for contentious debates. Participants in the current study

primarily viewed other students as the primary source of hostility toward Christian views.

Both Thaller (2011) and Osteen (2011) reported some students as openly defying what

they perceived to be the social work status quo as portrayed in classroom debate.

Participants of the current study were more reluctant to do so. Those that did speak up

were very intentional about presenting their religious views in a way that might be

palatable to non-Christians in the classroom. A decreased willingness to openly resist

anti-religious views verbalized by students or faculty may have been related to age of

participants in the current study. Whereas Thaller (2011) and Osteen's (2011) study

samples were comprised of MSW students and practitioners new to the field, participants

in the current study were traditional-aged college students whose overall personal identity

may have been more fragile. Participants did not want to be "labeled" or stigmatized as

the "hateful Christian." Openly defying their peers or faculty likely was too threatening

because acceptance from peer group and authority remained important to identity.

Goffman's (1963) model of stigma management is relevant to Christian BSW students' social interactions within their educational programs. The word *stigma* figuratively means "mark of disgrace" and typically refers to a characteristic of a person that has negative meaning associated with it ("Stigma," n.d.). Social psychologists contend that dominant social institutions influence the connection between a characteristic and a stereotype (O'Brien, 2011). Students view each other in the classroom according to the stereotyped categories and characteristics they see in one another (*virtual social identity*). Their *actual social identity*, the categories and characteristics that do exist, is not visible. Goffman maintained that when a "deeply discrediting" invisible difference, such as diverse sexual orientation, exists between the virtual social identity and the actual social identity, a person feels stigmatized and then acts to manage the stigma in social interactions (Goffman, 1963, p. 3).

One might question how Christian social work students could feel stigmatized considering religious demographics that seem to be in their favor. One factor lies in a general belief within the Christian community that their worldview is not welcomed. Roy exhibited this belief, saying:

> I think our culture's moving toward a society that does not want Christ. So, as we talk about different cultures and we talk about different people and we talk about, you know, those sorts of things, I think that's a very strong thing that a lot of Christians are going to have to think about. Is that they're going into…sometimes, they're going into a place where their faith is not wanted. Um, and it's REALLY not wanted.

Roy did not see negative messaging about Christianity as simply an issue within the social work profession. Along with the larger cultural factor, though, Christian BSW students in this study did hear negative stereotypes about Christians in the classroom. Todd and Coholic (2007) contend social work classrooms can be unsafe for both students

with fundamentalist beliefs *and* students who perceive themselves as being oppressed by those beliefs (e.g., LGBT). The social work profession's focus on removing oppressive policies and practices from social institutions has had the unintended consequence of creating stigma for its Christian students and practitioners.

Goffman (1963) further suggests people who are stigmatized interact with others in a manner intended to reduce impact of the stigma. These behaviors were displayed by participants in the current study as they looked for cues in both faculty and other students as to whether they were Christian, open to hearing a Christian perspective, or hostile to hearing a Christian perspective. Participants then made decisions about revealing religious identity based on interpretation of those cues. Several participants actively attempted to discredit negative stereotypes of Christians through modeling behavior that did not fit with the stereotype and reported having been told they were "not like other Christians." Efforts to portray oneself differently from the stereotypical Christian or attempts to downplay or hide identity as a Christian can be viewed as a type of "covering" (Goffman, 1963, p. 102). These efforts serve to minimize conflict while also allowing the student to maintain a stable, if somewhat superficial, relationship with others in the social work program.

Some participants also used the stigma management strategy of remaining distant from non-Christian students and forming an alliance with other Christians in the program. Anne used this strategy, although she expressed desire to have more intimate connection with other social work students. She discussed how difficult it could be to overcome negative stereotypes in a classroom setting due to inability to effectively communicate complex beliefs in a limited time frame:

> …so it's hard to develop a personal relationship with a lot of my peers because there's just not a lot of time. And I — in my personal time I hang out with people whose beliefs line up very similar to mine and so there's not a lot of overlap there. I wish I could figure out a way to make it overlap…

Being stigmatized prevented participants from fully processing values conflicts with either faculty or other social work students. This consequence is troubling since they viewed both social work and Christianity as important components of identity.

Identity Development Perspectives

Using a narrative approach to explore professional and religious identity formation uncovered interesting findings. Commonalities in storylines suggest a developmental component in the process of traditional-aged BSW students coming to view themselves as social workers and as Christians. Most participants "played" with professional and religious roles in childhood that were often reinforced by family. These roles, along with their accompanying identities of helper and Christian, were carried into adolescence. As these participants experienced challenging life situations and transitioned from family to peers for support, they began to question who they were as a helper and as a spiritual being. Such questioning eventually allowed for a professional and religious image that could be personally "owned." This portrayal connects to Marcia's (1966) theory of identity development and is consistent with empirical studies showing progression from lower levels of identity status in adolescence to higher levels in young adulthood (Kroger et al., 2010).

Marcia's (1966) theory, however, rests on the idea that identity is achieved and fails to address evolving nature of identity which was evident in results of this study. Most participants had grown into a more mature sense of identity and two or three might

even be seen as having reached identity achievement. Yet most participants also perceived themselves as ever-changing and anticipated further challenging situations that would compel them to continue to question and refine their image of self as social worker and Christian. In addition, Marcia's work which is based on Eriksonian developmental theory utilizes a psychological framework that fails to fully account for social and cultural contexts (Moulin, 2013).

The experience of forming professional identity as described by participants in the current study supports a professional socialization framework rooted in symbolic interactionism. Such a framework considers influencing factors in professional identity development before a student sets foot on a college campus (Cohen-Scali, 2003), factors such as the seeming invisibility of the social work profession in adolescents' occupational choices. This framework also recognizes influencing factors beyond the primary socializing institution (social work educational program) such as family and faith community (Barretti, 2004b). Significantly, a symbolic interactionist approach to professional socialization posits professional identity not solely as an acquisition of values, skills, and knowledge but as an evolving process in which students are active players able to challenge socializing messages (Miller, 2010). This last point is particularly salient when contemplating integration of social work and Christian religious identity. When viewing religious identity development as a socialization process as well, the Christian social work student's dilemma extends beyond values conflict or cognitive dissonance to that of identity dissonance in context of relationship. Imbuing this dilemma with even more significance is the fact that both identities relate to students' beliefs about their very meaning and purpose in life. Challenging the socializing messages of one's

intended profession and/or one's religion at twenty years old would seem a daunting task, yet a potentially necessary one for identity integration.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Several limitations of the current study need to be considered. One limitation was that specific cultural contexts of individual social work programs were not addressed. Each social work program exists within a unique climate (e.g., university, geographic region, etc.) and creates its own unique climate within which students learn. Such differences were not examined as a factor in this research study. In a similar vein, using the microsociological framework of symbolic interactionism did not take into account larger sociopolitical and socioreligious factors impacting social work students. Additionally, the study sample was comprised of students who had managed to continue in the social work program despite conflict between professional and religious identity. Although this characteristic of participants allowed for indepth exploration of identity management methods, it also meant perspectives of students who opted out of social work due to professional-religious identity conflict were not included. Finally, only one participant in the study sample had experienced a practicum. Social work professional identity literature shows field education, specifically relationship with the field instructor, to be a significant influence on professional identity development (Miller, 2013).

Conversely, several strengths can also be found in the study. Examining the lived experience of professional identity formation from a developmental perspective is unique in social work literature. Most social work professional identity research has focused primarily on the acquisition of identity without developing a storyline of identity development from childhood through higher education. Utilizing this approach helped

uncover additional factors in social work professional identity development that warrant further attention. In addition, prior research in social work has focused on narrow definitions of professional identity (e.g., values acquisition, knowledge base, connection to professional community) without considering interplay between various aspects. This study's focus on integration between two identities unexpectedly highlighted the interplay between professional identity components. Another strength relates to the relationship between researcher and participant. The integration of professional and religious identity proved to be a sensitive topic which hampered recruitment. Utilizing an in-house faculty member to connect me (an unknown) to students allowed for a transference of trust and decreased the likelihood of social desirability bias in participant responses. Although my own background as Christian and social worker could be perceived as a potential limitation, I perceived it as a strength both in recruitment and in the interview process. I did not identify myself as Christian but in sharing with them where I taught social work (faith-based university), participants likely viewed me as a safe person. As a result, interviews yielded rich and thoughtful explorations of the study topic.

Implications and Recommendations

Personal-professional identity integration has been labeled as complex and multi-faceted within social work literature yet little research has been conducted on this integration. Although this study added to the knowledge and understanding of professional and religious identity integration, much remains unknown. Because participants in this study had not yet practiced social work, their ideas about how they would practice as a Christian social worker were largely speculative. Additional research

might include follow-up interviews after the social work practicum has been completed to aid in understanding how field education may impact the identity integration process. To construct a clearer picture of professional-religious identity integration, future research should also include BSW students at faith-based universities and in different regions of the country. Further, improved understanding of professional identity development and values conflict resolution would be gained by exploring these issues in nonreligious social work students as well. Another significant research area includes social work faculty attitudes toward religious students, as well as faculty methods for negotiating contentious classroom discussions, is needed to better determine appropriate intervention. Finally, because traditional-aged students are highly supported and influenced by peers, examination of peer mentoring interventions is warranted.

The findings of this study are important in light of a professional code of ethics that calls for personal values to be recognized and held in check when working for the best interest of clients. Christian social work students who express commitment to the values and ethical principles of their profession do not feel adequately supported in critically processing points of conflict. Previous research indicates social work faculty largely approve of including religious and spiritual content in social work curricula for the purpose of increasing student sensitivity to varied religious traditions, yet are reluctant to bridge these discussions in the classroom for reasons related to student protection and self-preservation (Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994). Social work educators are responsible for engaging students in thoughtful debate around relevant professional topics, yet are also responsible to effectively address classroom statements and behaviors that are harmful to students. Todd and Coholic (2007) maintain classroom

discussions that illicit strong emotional reactions related to presentation of religious or spiritual beliefs require social work educators be highly skilled facilitators. They further argue that a sense of intellectual, emotional, and social safety in the classroom can sometimes suffer irreparable harm causing some students to simply disengage. Social work educators must carefully consider how their own practices within the classroom may serve to discount the experience or voice of some students.

Todd and Coholic (2007) contend the classroom is likely not the most effective context for assisting students who are struggling with conflict between the religious self and the professional self. They instead promote private, individual conversations between faculty and students. The current study suggests students are unlikely to initiate such conversations, however, fearing disapproval from faculty who may not be sympathetic to their perspectives or struggle. The onus rests on faculty then to create avenues for all students to actively and safely engage in critical analysis of their personal values and ideology in relation to those of the profession.

The Council on Social Work Education's 2015 Educational and Policy Accreditation Standards delineate explicit curriculum (instructional program and courses) from implicit curriculum (learning environment) and state, "The implicit curriculum is as important as the explicit curriculum in shaping the professional character and competence of the program's graduates" (p. 14). Demonstration of "value and respect for diversity" is specifically cited as an accreditation standard within the implicit curriculum (CSWE, 2015b, Educational Policy, 3.0, p. 14). An implicit curriculum points back to professional socialization and the assumption that effective socialization happens in the interactions

between students and faculty. Social work educators must model respect for diversity by recognizing the diverse belief systems students bring to an educational program.

Along with modeling respect for diversity, social work faculty need to provide opportunities within the explicit curriculum for students to explore identity integration as related to their learning and eventual practice (Seitz, 2014). Many potential avenues for such exploration exist within social work curriculum and can be tied directly to CSWE (2015b) core competencies. Table 10 highlights three possibilities for engaging undergraduate social work students in exploration of professional/religious identity integration.

Table 10

Curriculum Ideas for Identity Integration Exploration

Course	Content	Assignment/Activity	Core Competency
Introduction to Social Work	Values and ethics of the profession	• Self-reflection paper on personal and professional values with follow-up group discussion • Case studies for conversation and analysis	Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
Human Behavior in the Social Environment	Spiritual development/ Moral development	• Guest panel representing religious/ spiritual diversity with follow-up self-reflection writing • Case studies for conversation and analysis	Engage diversity and difference in practice
Social Welfare Policy	Anti-discrimination policy	Conduct policy analysis that incorporates reflection on related professional and personal values	Engage in policy practice

Several considerations should be taken into account when making exploration of professional/religious identity integration one component of a social work course. First, faculty must remember students come to the classroom with diverse spiritual/religious perspectives even when identifying themselves in the same manner (e.g., "Christian"). Activities and assignments, therefore, need to be constructed in such a way as to avoid assumptions and acknowledge differences. Second, self-reflection is required of the instructor in creating and executing these identity integration components of learning. Examining our own perspectives and emotional reactions to students' religious perspectives is essential to fostering a learning environment in which students do not fear punishment for acknowledging ideological differences (Hyde & Ruth, 2002). Third, self-reflection alone is insufficient for healthy exploration of identity management. Social work faculty ought to assess the need for follow up with individual students who display difficulty in ethical integration of professional and religious identity. In addition, educating students regarding integration strategies, both functional and dysfunctional, is required to enhance student capability for healthy integration in practice.

Serious thought must also be given to the potential role of peer mentoring in assisting the professional-religious identity integrative process. Cascio and Gasker's (2002) research shows peer mentoring as a promising tool for professional identity development. The current study reveals Christian BSW students as wanting to have like-minded others with whom they can discuss both the points of fit and points of tension. Thoughtfully constructed peer mentoring programs, that utilize religion as one criterion for matching students together would provide opportunity for Christian BSW students to verbally process their concerns and could serve as part of the implicit curriculum.

Because field education is the primary socializing agent of social work and because field instructors have been shown to be key figures in development of professional identity (Miller, 2013), careful consideration should be given to field placements for students who are integrating religious identity with a professional identity. This consideration does not mean simply relegating Christian students to faith-based agencies. Instead, the specific needs of students should be evaluated, along with the resources of field instructors and social service agencies, to provide an experience that will prompt students to practice professional-religious identity integration within the safety of practicum.

Finally, debating whether or not Christians can practice social work within the confines of professional values, which has been done in social work literature, may not be a wise use of energy for the profession. All people entering social work education and the profession bring values and beliefs with them that potentially do not reflect the professional ethos. Emphasis must be placed on how we assist students and practitioners in being true to themselves and the profession, much as we strive in nonjudgment to help clients confront their identity struggles. Anne's message to her parents, who continued to challenge her social work identity, may very well prove a fitting message for those of us who educate future social workers:

> Yep, like I've already questioned and doubted the social work thing and I've already come full circle in realizing that it is still what I want to do… so at the end of the day I've already been through these questions with myself and I really just need you to support me in that and that's what I just try and convey… It's like you don't have to agree with it. You don't have to like it. I just need you to be there and say, "I understand and I'll help you however I can." That's all I want.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Western Michigan University
Interview Protocol

Introduction:
- Introduce self and professional background
- Discuss purpose of study
- Provide informed consent
- Explain structure of interview
- Allow for questions
- Allow for selection of pseudonym
- Ask if ready to proceed

Guiding Questions

Professional Identity Questions:
- How long have you been a social work major?
- What led you to consider social work as a profession?
- Have you ever had challenges to your decision to be a social worker? If so, what were those challenges?
- How do you picture yourself as future social worker?
- What do you picture as an effective social worker?

Religious Identity Questions:
- Tell me about your faith background:
- You have identified as being Christian. In what ways do you see yourself as Christian?
- What do you picture as an effective or good Christian?
- Have you ever had any challenges to your religious beliefs? If so, what were those challenges?

Identity Integration Questions:
- Tell me about your experience of being a social work student and a Christian:
- How does being a social work student and a Christian fit well together?
- If there are times being a social work student and a Christian don't fit well together, how do you handle the lack of fit?
- How do you see yourself as a practicing social worker and a Christian ten years from now?

Concluding Question and Wrap-up:
- "Is there anything else you would like to share with me about being a social work student and a Christian?"
- Thank for participation and offer $10 gift card as thanks
- Ask about interest in seeing results
- Provide my contact information for participant follow-up and for recruitment purposes
- Ask if participant is open to follow up contact from me

Appendix B

Program Director Email Script

Western Michigan University
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Program Director Email Script

Dear _____,

Greetings. Per our earlier email discussions regarding my dissertation project focused on the integration of professional identity and Christian religious identity in undergraduate social work students, I am requesting your assistance in recruitment. I have attached the following recruitment materials: study announcement email, Facebook page announcement, and recruitment flyer. Please send the email announcement to students in your BSW program. I also request that you post the Facebook page announcement on your program Facebook page and display the attached flyer in a social work student commons area.

This study has been approved by Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board and is being conducted under the supervision of Mary Lagerwey, PhD. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, please contact Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler (765-641-4514; lkboyler@anderson.edu) or Mary Lagerwey (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu) the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or WMU vice president for research (269-387-8298).

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,
Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler
PhD student Western Michigan University
Associate Professor and Social Work Program Director Anderson University

Appendix C

Student Email Recruitment Script

Western Michigan University
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Student Email Recruitment Script

Hi! My name is Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler and I am a PhD student at Western Michigan University (WMU) as well as the BSW program director at Anderson University. You are receiving this email because you are enrolled as a social work major at _____. I am inviting you to participate in my dissertation project which is called **"*The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian Religious Identity in Undergraduate Social Work Students*."**

You are eligible for the study if you fit the following criteria:
- Sophomore, junior or senior in the BSW program
- Age 19-24 years
- Identify as Christian
- Speak English

You can use the following link to learn more about the study and, if still interested after reading about the study, complete a brief questionnaire (http://socialwork-faith.questionpro.com). The questionnaire takes about 5-10 minutes to complete.

After completion of the questionnaire, you will be invited to provide contact information if you are interested in participating in a 60-90 minute interview with the researcher. The interview focuses on your experience of being a social work student and a Christian.

This study has been approved by WMU's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about participation in the study, please contact me at 765-641-4514 or lkboyler@anderson.edu. If you have any concerns about the study, please contact Mary Lagerwey, PhD (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu), the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or WMU vice president for research (269-387-8298).

Thank you for your interest!

Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler, MSW, ACSW
PhD student Western Michigan University
Associate Professor and Social Work Program Director Anderson University

Appendix D

Facebook Announcement

Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Western Michigan University
Facebook Announcement

Hi. My name is Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler. I am the BSW program director at Anderson University and a PhD student at Western Michigan University. I am conducting a research study for my dissertation which explores the integration of professional identity and Christian religious identity in BSW students.

If you are a sophomore, junior or senior in your social work program, are between the ages of 19-24, identify as Christian, and are an English speaker, I would love to hear your story of being Christian and a future social worker.

The study is approved by Western Michigan University's Institutional Review Board. It involves a brief questionnaire and a 60-90 minute interview at a time and location that are convenient for you.

If you are interested or just have questions, give me a call at 765-641-4514 or email me at lkboyler@anderson.edu.

Thanks and I hope to hear from you!

Appendix E

Recruitment Flyer

Western Michigan University
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Recruitment Flyer

ARE YOU A SOCIAL WORK MAJOR IN YOUR SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR OR SENIOR YEAR?

ARE YOU BETWEEN THE AGES OF 19-24?

DO YOU IDENTIFY AS CHRISTIAN?

INTERESTED IN TALKING ABOUT BEING BOTH A SOCIAL WORKER AND A CHRISTIAN?

If you answered yes to all of the above questions, you are invited to participate in a research study examining the ***integration* of *professional identity* and *Christian religious identity*** among social work students!

If interested in learning more about the study and possible participation, you can access that information at http://socialwork-faith.questionpro.com or scan the QR code below.

You may also complete a brief questionnaire at the above website. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be invited to provide contact information if you are interested in learning more about participating in a 60-90 minute interview with the researcher.

Questions about your participation? Please contact me (Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler, MSW, ACSW) at 765-641-4514 or lkboyler@anderson.edu. Concerns about the study? Please contact Mary Lagerwey, PhD (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu), the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or WMU vice president for research (269-387-8298).

Appendix F

Electronic/Paper Questionnaire with Consent

Western Michigan University
Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Electronic/Paper Questionnaire with Consent

Principal Investigator: Mary Lagerwey, PhD
Student Investigator: Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler
Title of Study: The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian
          Religious Identity of Undergraduate Social Work Students

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian Religious Identity of Undergraduate Social Work Students." This project will serve as Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler's dissertation project for the requirements of the PhD in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely before providing consent. *For those accessing online*: Clicking the "Submit Responses" button at the end of the survey indicates consent for your responses to be included in the research.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
Professional identity development is deemed to be of importance for social work students particularly as it relates to an ability to provide effective, ethical services and to uphold the value base of the profession. For some students, their identity as a Christian is of great personal importance as well. Therefore, this research project explores the *experiences of Christian undergraduate social work students as they bring together religious identity and professional identity*.

Who can participate in this study?
Some time periods in life are significant for identity development. Therefore, we are looking for students that fall between the ages of 19-24 years. Because we want participants who are likely to have a good understanding of the social work profession, you must be a sophomore, junior or senior in your social work program to participate. Due to the nature of the study, you must also identify as Christian and view your faith/religion as central to your life. Lastly, because the second phase of the study consists of an interview, you must speak English.

Part of the electronic questionnaire is Francis' (2007) New Indices of Religious Orientation Short Form scale which will be used to help us understand in what ways a participant may be religious. If more students than are needed for the study fit the inclusion criteria, investigators will use NIRO (Francis, 2007) scores to select a study sample that includes a variety of religious orientations among participants.

Where will this study take place?
The study involves two potential phases of participation: 1) electronic or paper questionnaire and 2) follow-up interview at a time and place convenient to you. *For those*

accessing the consent and questionnaire online: The electronic questionnaire is accessed by checking the consent terms box below. *For those being provided consent and questionnaire in person*: If you would like to take the paper version of the questionnaire, I will provide it to you today. If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in a follow up interview, you will be invited at the end of the questionnaire to provide contact information so that we may contact you to arrange a date and location (on or off-campus) to meet in order to learn more about the study and the potential interview.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You are currently being invited to participate in the questionnaire phase of the study which contains 24 questions and will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. If you provide contact information at the end of the questionnaire, the investigator will contact you for a brief phone conversation (5-10 minutes) to answer any questions you may have and ask if you are interested in meeting to review informed consent and potentially interview. If you agree to such a meeting and sign consent, just one interview will be conducted and will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
For those accessing the consent and questionnaire online: If you choose to participate in the electronic questionnaire phase of the study, you will be asked to check consent below, complete the electronic questionnaire, and click "Submit Responses" to consent to responses being part of the study. *For those being provided consent and questionnaire in person:* If you choose to participate by completing the paper questionnaire, you will be asked to sign this consent form, complete the questionnaire, and place it in the envelope I have provided. You are asked to provide contact information if interested in learning more about the interview phase of the study. If you then choose to meet with us to learn more about the study, you will be provided detailed information about the study and given opportunity to ask questions. If you consent to participate in an interview, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions related to your religious experiences and to your experiences as a social work student.

What information is being measured during the study?
The electronic questionnaire uses questions meant to assure participants meet the eligibility criteria. In addition, the questionnaire contains the NIRO (Francis, 2007) scale which measures religious orientation or the way in which someone experiences and acts out his/her religion. The interview portion of the study will use a series of questions intended to gather information regarding how participants view themselves as Christian, how they view themselves as a potential social worker, and how they view the integration of those two identities.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
At this point, you are only being asked to consider completing the electronic or paper questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire poses no anticipated risks for you.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Participation in this study offers no personal benefit to you.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
No costs are associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
No compensation is provided for participation in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Only the primary and secondary investigators will have access to data collected through the questionnaire. Several measures are taken to provide confidentiality of your responses. The electronic questionnaire is hosted by Question Pro Online and is protected with both password and SSL security which means only the investigators have access to responses and any identifying information. Responses from this questionnaire will only be reported in aggregate form. All print questionnaire data will be securely stored at WMU in the primary investigator's office for at least three years after the close of the study.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can exit the questionnaire at any point. You are free to not provide contact information if uninterested in the interview portion of the study. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator (Mary Lagerwey, PhD (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu) or the secondary investigator (Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler at 765-641-4514; lkboyler@anderson.edu). You may also contact the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or the WMU Vice President for Research (269-387-8298) if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for (date one year after approval on electronic questionnaire) one year after the date stamped above (wording for paper questionnaire). You should not participate in this project after that date.

Thank you very much for your time. *For those accessing consent and questionnaire online:* If you would like to continue, please note your consent by checking the box and clicking the **Continue** button below.(Individual is presented with Acceptance Text box which must be checked in order to continue. Box states "I have read this informed consent document. By checking this box I agree to participate in the study.")

For those who are given paper copy of consent in person: If you would like to participate in this study, please sign below.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Please Print Your Name

_____   _____

Introductory Questions (* denotes required inclusion criteria question):

*Your current class status in the social work program:
Freshman (<mark>online:</mark> checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)
Sophomore
Junior
Senior

Gender:
Female
Male

*Age:
under 19 years (<mark>online:</mark>checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)
19-21 years
22-24 years
25 years or older (<mark>online:</mark>checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)

*Are you an English speaker?
No (<mark>online:</mark>checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)
Yes

*Do you identify as Christian?
No (<mark>online:</mark>checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)
Yes

*Do you consider your religion or faith to be a central part of your life?
No (<mark>online:</mark>checking this response will direct student to Termination/Thank You page)
Yes

NIRO (Francis, 2007) Questions:
You will now be provided with a set of statements that relate to religious life. Please mark the response that best describes your reaction to each statement:

Responses include: Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Certain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

I allow almost nothing to prevent me from going to church on Sundays.
As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change as well.
While I am a religious person, I do not let religion influence my daily life.
I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.
Occasionally, I compromise my religious beliefs to protect my social and economic well-being.
The church is most important to me as a place to share fellowship with other Christians.
One reason for me going to church is that it helps to establish me in the community.
I pray at home because it helps me to be aware of God's presence.
I was driven to ask religious questions by a growing awareness of the tensions in my world.
My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious beliefs.
I go to church because it helps me to feel at home in my neighborhood.
I pray chiefly because it deepens my relationship with God.
One reason for me praying is that it helps me to gain relief and protection.
My religious beliefs really shape my whole approach to life.
I value my religious doubts and uncertainties.
I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.
For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.
I pray chiefly because it makes me feel better.

You have now completed the questionnaire. ==*For those accessing questionnaire online*==: Clicking the "Submit Responses" button below indicates willingness for your responses to be used in the study. If you are interested in learning more about the study and the follow-up 60-90 minute interview, please provide your contact information below so that I may reach you to schedule a date, time, and location that is convenient for you.

First Name:_____
Last Name (not required): _____
Phone: _____
Email Address:_____

==*For those accessing questionnaire online:*== "Submit Responses" button

If participant clicks "Submit Responses" button, s/he is taken to the following page:

Thank you for completing the questionnaire! If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler (765-641-4514; lkboyler@anderson.edu) or Mary Lagerwey, PhD (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu).

Appendix G

Classroom/Student Organization In-person Recruitment Script

Western Michigan University
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Classroom/Student Organization In-person Recruitment Script

Hi! My name is Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler and I am a PhD student at Western Michigan University (WMU) as well as the BSW program director at Anderson University. I am here to invite you to participate in my dissertation project which is called **"*The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian Religious Identity in Undergraduate Social Work Students*."**

You are eligible for the study if you fit the following criteria:
- Sophomore, junior or senior in the BSW program
- Age 19-24 years
- Identify as Christian
- Speak English

If you are interested in learning more about the study and potential participation, I would ask you to read over the information and consent form I am passing out to you. If you would like to participate after having read the form, please sign your consent and complete the questionnaire which should take about 10 minutes. I have placed an envelope by the classroom door in which you may place your completed or incomplete form and questionnaire.

Do you have any questions for me in regard to the study?

I want to thank (name of instructor or organizational leader) for giving me a few minutes of your time today. Thank you for your interest!

Appendix H

Interview Invite Phone/Email Script

Western Michigan University
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Interview Invite Phone/Email Script

Hello. This is Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler. I am the PhD student from Western Michigan University conducting research on integration of social work and faith. I am calling because you completed the initial electronic questionnaire and indicated you were interested in learning more about possible participation in the interview part of the study.

Do you have any questions about the study or potential participation in the interview?

Are you still interested in learning more about participating in a 60-90 minute interview focused on your experience as a social work student and a Christian?

If student answers "no"…That's fine. Thank you for participating in the first part of the study and, if you change your mind, you are welcome to contact me at 765-641-4514 or lkboyler@anderson.edu. Have a good day.

If student answers "yes"… I would like to set up a time for me to give you more information, review the consent form, and conduct the interview if you have signed the consent form. It would be best for us to meet in a location in which we aren't likely to be interrupted and I can audiotape the interview. What would be a good date and time for you? Where might you suggest we meet for the interview?

Great. I have us as meeting at _____ on _____. Is it okay if I text or call you the day before just to make sure that time and location is still okay for you?

If you are unable to keep our meeting or if you have questions or concerns before we meet, feel free to contact me at 765-641-4514 or lkboyler@anderson.edu.

Appendix I

Interview Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Interview Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Mary Lagerwey, PhD
Student Investigator: Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler
Title of Study: The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian
Religious Identity of Undergraduate Social Work Students

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "The Integration of Professional Identity and Christian Religious Identity of Undergraduate Social Work Students." This project will serve as Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler's dissertation project for the requirements of the PhD in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely before providing consent.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
Professional identity development is deemed to be of importance for social work students particularly as it relates to an ability to provide effective, ethical services and to uphold the value base of the profession. For some students, their identity as a Christian is of great personal importance as well. Therefore, this research project explores the *experiences of Christian undergraduate social work students as they bring together religious identity and professional identity*.

Who can participate in this study?
Some time periods in life are significant for identity development. Therefore, we are interviewing students that fall between the ages of 19-24 years. Because we want participants who are likely to have a good understanding of the social work profession, you must be a sophomore, junior or senior in your social work program to participate. Due to the nature of the study, you must also identify as Christian and view your faith/religion as central to your life. Lastly, because the interview calls for indepth responses as to your experiences, you must speak English fluently.

Where will this study take place?
The meeting to learn more about the study, review informed consent, and potentially interview is arranged to take place at a location convenient to you either on or off-campus.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
You are currently being invited to participate in the interview phase of the study. If you sign consent to participate in the interview, just one interview will be conducted at that same meeting and will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
If you consent to participate in an interview, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions related to your religious experiences and to your experiences as a social work student.

What information is being measured during the study?
The interview portion of the study will use a series of questions intended to gather information regarding how participants view themselves as Christian, how they view themselves as a potential social worker, and how they view the integration of those two identities. The interviews will be audiotaped and later transcribed in order to look for themes in participants' responses.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
Participating in the interview poses no anticipated risks for you. However, the researcher will be sensitive to possible emotional reactions in discussing topics which could be sensitive. If you experience emotional distress at any point in the interview, please tell me so that I may pause the interview process and consult with you as to what you may need (e.g. brief break, cup of water, discontinue the interview). In addition, referral information to campus counseling services and chaplaincy services will be provided so that you may follow up on any issues raised during the interview process.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Participation in this study offers no personal benefit to you.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
No costs are associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
No compensation is provided for participation in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Only the primary and secondary investigators will have access to audiotapes and transcribed interviews. You will be instructed to construct a fake name for yourself and any others you mention, which will be used on transcript data and interview notes in order to protect confidentiality. While direct quotes of your responses may be used in the written dissertation as well as other publications or professional presentations, all identifying information of you, others, and the university will be eliminated. Audio-recordings of interviews will be destroyed after transcription is completed. All interview data will be securely stored at WMU in the primary investigator's office for at least three years after the close of the study.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. If you feel uncomfortable answering any interview questions, you can refrain from answering. You

will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator (Mary Lagerwey, PhD (269-387-8167; mary.lagerwey@wmich.edu) or the secondary investigator (Lolly Bargerstock-Oyler at 765-641-4514; lkboyler@anderson.edu). You may also contact the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or the WMU Vice President for Research (269-387-8298) if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Please Print Your Name

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

Appendix J

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Letter of Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: April 29, 2015

To: Mary Lagerwey, Principal Investigator
Lolene Bargerstock-Oyler, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair *AmyNaugle*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 15-04-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Integration of Professional and Christian Religious Identity among Undergraduate Social Work Students" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study*)." Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: **April 28, 2016**