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Bachelor of Social Work Students' Experience of Moral Reasoning at an Evangelical Christian University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

David King

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Bachelor of Social Work Students' Experience of Moral Reasoning at an Evangelical Christian University

by

David King

Doctor of Social Work

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

Scholars have documented a lack of effective education and training for integrating faith and social work practice. Also, researchers have identified challenges regarding conflicting philosophical paradigms in social work and cultural changes among emerging adults affecting evangelical Christian universities teaching faith integration. However, little information is available regarding the experiences of students and conflicts between social work values and their religious beliefs. This study was an investigation of the experiences of social work students when considering value conflicts between their religious beliefs and social work practice. The research questions examined the moral reasoning of students at an evangelical university considering self-identified value conflicts. An exploratory generic qualitative research methodology was employed, with a convenience sample of 6 senior-level Bachelor of Social Work students aged 18 to 25 years. Individual semistructured interviews queried 2 main topic areas, including identifying areas of value conflict, and underlying ethical motivations and thoughts. Data were analyzed using descriptive and conceptual coding in the context of moral foundations theory and validated through member checking, peer debriefing, and the use of intentional protocols. Emergent themes included student uncertainty in defining and implementing key social work values and moral reasoning dominated by intuitions of care, concern, and client autonomy and choice. Findings from this research can positively contribute to the field of social work and social change by affecting the education and practice competencies of future social workers and their ability to work ethically and manage value conflicts in individual, organizational, and community settings.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife and children, who endured the process of completing this research project with me. Thank you for allowing me the time and space needed to complete my work amid the many life changes and trials we encountered along the way. I also want to dedicate this work to the glory of God, whose faithfulness, provision, and steadfast love have ever been present and whose undeserved grace and favor undergird my life. May His name be honored through this work and through any means by which I can share its findings.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Dr. Ken Larimore, my committee chair, for his assistance with this project. Dr. Larimore's support, availability, and encouragement have been a blessing to me throughout the process. Thank you also to Dr. Debora Rice for believing in me and my research topic from the start.

Many thanks are also due to the university where I teach and my colleagues in the social work program who supported me through prayer, friendship, and other means to help me reach this milestone. It is my joy and pleasure to serve with all of you.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Social work faculty at evangelical Christian universities face unique challenges in teaching the ethical integration of Christian faith with professional identity to students in a broader social work climate where deontological truth claims, which are at the core of a Christian worldview, are often overlooked or devalued in favor of postmodern, social constructionist, and professional paradigms (Darrell & Rich, 2017; Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Valutis, Rubin, & Bell, 2014; Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018). Under the influence of postmodern thought, the social work profession advocates broad ideas of faith and spirituality that include "all people, all nations, all beings, and the planet itself" that add to teaching challenges faced by social work programs at universities supporting specific religious truth claims (Darrell & Rich, 2017, p. 3). One example of the influence of postmodern and universal views of spirituality on students at evangelical Christian universities in particular can be seen in a recent review of 73 responses of master of social work (MSW) students at an evangelical Christian university to the open-ended question, "Why is it critical for Christian social workers to be strong spiritually to help lift fallen humanity?" (Cutsinger & King, 2019, p. 9). Qualitative analysis of student responses to this question identified primary themes, including the importance of spirituality in helping process emotions, improving self-care, giving hope and inspiration, providing guidance, and increasing motivation through a sense of calling (Cutsinger & King, 2019). However, none of the student responses mentioned the role of truth or morality in helping fallen humanity, their role in ethical decision making, or the potential for value conflicts as an aspect of engaging spirituality and practice (Cutsinger & King,

2019). Student responses in this review raise concerns regarding a lack of awareness in Christian social work students of the role and influence of their faith in ethical and moral decision making in social work practice.

Moffatt and Oxhandler (2018) found more broadly that when social work programs include religion and spirituality in their curriculum (30.4%), the emphasis is on generalist approaches, such as the teaching of spiritual or religious traditions as aspects of diversity or spiritually sensitive practice, avoiding issues of religious truth claims and morality. Therefore, for the field of social work as a whole, students and social workers are largely left to independently determine how to integrate their religious faith and corresponding moral convictions with their professional identity and practice, increasing the risk of ethical issues and value conflicts in the field. Evangelical Christian universities, that hold specific views of truth and morality, must address this concern in light of studies indicating greater risk for value conflicts for social workers with stronger religious beliefs (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Valutis & Rubin, 2016). By conducting a qualitative research study with social work students at an evangelical Christian university, I sought to learn how students' experiences of moral reasoning affect potential value conflicts and their approach to the integration of religious faith and practice. The results of this study may help Christian social work educators improve curriculum and teaching methods for training students in the ethical integration of Christian faith in practice, thereby enhancing outcomes for clients in an increasingly pluralistic society.

In Section 1, I introduce the problem, purpose statement, and research questions for the study. Also, I explain the nature of the doctoral research and the theoretical framework used. In Section 1, I also summarize a review of the professional and academic literature including current themes and important findings regarding religion, faith, and spirituality in social work, social work education and approaches to training that can reduce value conflicts. In Section 2, I explain the research design, methodology, and approach to data analysis used in the study and identify procedures used to address research ethics. In Section 3, I present the findings of the study including data collection techniques, demographics, limitations of the study, unexpected findings and emergent themes. Finally, in Section 4, I describe application of the research to social work ethics and practice including its usefulness, transferability and limitations and conclude with a review of the plan for research dissemination and implications for social work practice and social change.

Problem Statement

Recent literature confirms a lack of training available in social work curricula regarding spirituality and religion as well as a lack of data regarding effective training methods (Chamiec-Case, 2013; Eck, White, & Entwistle, 2016; Hunt, 2014; Husain & Sherr, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Rhea, 2011; Schonfeld, Johnson, Seville, Surratt, & Goedken, 2015; Senreich, 2013; Wolf, 2010). Faculty at evangelical Christian universities face unique challenges in developing curriculum and methods for teaching the ethical integration of Christian faith and practice considering potential value conflicts arising from

differences in religious and professional paradigms. Further, in their review of the literature, Valutis et al. (2014) concluded that little research exists involving direct inquiry of social workers regarding their experience of personal value conflicts in practice and specifically those extending beyond religion as the primary factor resulting in a lack of knowledge in this area. The lack of training for social workers, who are whole person practitioners, in navigating spirituality, worldview, and religion, as well as the shortage of data regarding personal perceptions of causes of value conflicts, raises concerns for ethical practice in the field. Evangelical Christian social work programs need training, tools, and models to help students navigate the integration of their Christian faith and ethical practice that avoids value conflicts.

An overarching goal of Christian higher education typically includes helping students to develop a Christian worldview and to integrate it in the context of their chosen profession (Lindemann, 2016). However, the views of emerging adult students at evangelical Christian universities are changing and may bring unique characteristics that affect their ethics, moral reasoning, and understanding of faith, further complicating the teaching of integration of Christian faith in Christian social work programs (White, Entwistle, & Eck, 2016). Overall, the views of emerging adults reflect both the influences of post-modern thought and their exposure to information, ideas, and cultures via the Internet, creating a situation for Christian universities whereby integration of historical Christian faith must be taught in the context of student's increasing knowledge of competing truth claims and differing assumptions regarding ontology and epistemology (Eck et al., 2016; Lindeman, 2016; White et al., 2016). Understanding how unique factors

may affect moral reasoning for emerging adults is vital for curriculum design and delivery that can effectively engage students' thinking and practice in the areas of religion, faith, and spirituality. Through this study, I sought to gain an understanding of the experiences of emerging adult Christian social work students regarding their moral reasoning in response to potential value conflicts to inform curriculum design and delivery in an evangelical Christian university social work program.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the experiences of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university regarding their approaches to moral reasoning in response to potential value conflicts between their personal religious beliefs and values and those of clients in a practice setting. Moral reasoning reflects student philosophical commitments and worldviews, including personal, professional, and religious beliefs that are integral to ethical decision making in the field (Halvorsen, 2019; Young & Durwin, 2013). Therefore, an increased understanding of students' moral reasoning is vital for developing training approaches to the integration of Christian faith and practice that can reduce value conflicts with diverse populations.

RQ1: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge regarding their moral reasoning in response to identified personal value conflicts between their religious beliefs and practice?

RQ2: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge in moral reasoning regarding the place and priority given to Christian concepts?

Key Terms

Emerging Adulthood: The distinct developmental period that people in their late teens through twenties transition through in industrial and postindustrial societies (Arnett, 2000; Jackson, Entwistle, Larson, & Reierson, 2016).

Integration of Faith and Practice: The process of reconciling the tenets and beliefs of one's religion with core theories, ideas, values, assumptions, and practices related to one's secular profession (Edman, Feenstra, & Jackson, 2016).

Moral Intuition: The automatic, unconscious processes and impulses that prompt moral judgments (Haidt, 2012).

Moral Reasoning: The thought processes and rational justifications that develop in response to moral intuitions (Haidt, 2012).

Postmodernism: A philosophical movement guided by core beliefs including the rejection of grand narratives and universal truths, the belief that truth is culturally constructed and determined, that truth should be viewed skeptically as it is often used to serve those in power, and that language is the means by people claim truth and exercise power (White et al., 2016).

Religion: "[A]n organized or institutionalized system of experiences, beliefs, values, behaviors, symbols, and traditions that are shared by a community and

transmitted over time, which are related to the sacred" or ideas of ultimate truth (Chenot & Kim, 2017, p. 700).

Spirituality: A broad term emphasizing the subjective experiences of people regarding their search for meaning and purpose and their sense of connection to themselves, others, the environment, the universe, the past, a higher power or God (Darrell & Rich, 2017; Groen, Coholic, & Graham, 2013).

Value Conflict: A sense of incongruity that occurs between one's values, beliefs, or moral convictions, and the values and ethics defined by one's profession, employer, funding sources, a governing body, or client (Harris & Yancey, 2017).

Worldview: A person's explanation of reality (where everything came from, the nature of being human, the meaning of life, what is right and wrong and what happens when they die), "the framework by which they make sense of what happens in the world" and their vision for the world (Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017, pp. 91-92).

This research fills a gap in understanding the experiences of social work students regarding personal value conflicts (Osteen, 2013; Valutis et al., 2014). The findings from this study provide insight into the moral reasoning of evangelical Christian social work students and how moral reasoning affects their perceptions of value conflicts and responses. Insights from this study may aid social work faculty at evangelical Christian universities in designing and improving curriculum and training models in the ethical integration of Christian faith in social work practice (see Darrell & Rich, 2017; Eck et al., 2016; Hunt, 2014; Husain & Sherr, 2015; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017). Having an increased understanding of the moral reasoning of emerging adult students

may help faculty to design a curriculum for addressing potential value conflicts for which religious and conservative social workers are at greater risk (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014). Social work is a values-driven profession requiring educators to teach ethical decision making and professional identity development as essential aspects of their programs (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). Because social workers must serve people with diverse belief systems and behaviors, training evangelical Christian students to integrate their Christian faith with professional identity and practice ethically may improve service delivery in the field.

The field of social work as a whole lacks sufficient training and models for teaching ethics and the role of faith, personal values, spirituality, and religion in practice adding to the risk of value conflicts for social workers (Chamiec-Case, 2013; Eck et al., 2016; Hunt, 2014; Husain, & Sherr, 2015; Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Schonfeld et al., 2015; Senreich, 2013). A primary challenge for Christian social work educators is teaching in a context of competing religious and secular worldviews and ethical paradigms evidenced in both culture and in the field of social work adding to confusion about how to teach ethics and spirituality, frame ethical priorities, or even interpret the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics (Eck et al., 2016; Lindeman, 2016; Neagoe, Trancă, Bălăuţă, & Vlaicu, 2018; Pasini, 2016; White et al., 2016). Further, Christian social work students who are emerging adults may embody many of the current cultural conflicts in ethical and moral reasoning influenced by ideas rooted in both orthodox Christianity, postmodernism, and relativism (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Lindemann, 2016). This study was

needed for Christian social work educators to understand better the moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students to improve curriculum and teaching methods that address the ethical integration of Christian faith and practice and reduce the potential for value conflicts with diverse populations. The study makes an original contribution to the field by being the first of its kind to explore the moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university.

Nature of the Doctoral Project

In this study, I used an exploratory generic qualitative inquiry. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding student experiences and beliefs, which was the focus of this study (Jackson et al., 2016; Schonfeld et al., 2015; Spijkerboer, Stel, Widdershoven, & Molewijk, 2016). Also, exploratory qualitative research is useful in research on ethics in human services (Hatiboğlu, Özateş Gelmez, & Öngen, 2019; Hyde, 2012; Schonfeld et al., 2015). Using a qualitative exploratory approach allowed student participants to best tell the story of their experiences, thoughts, and rationale regarding ethical and moral decision making.

I collected data for the study using individual interviews with senior Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) emerging adult students at an evangelical Christian university. Individual interviews are a valuable tool for collecting data in social and health sciences (Flores & James, 2013; Given, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). Individual interviews can elicit data that is individualized, deep, rich, and contextual (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Individual qualitative interviews also allow researchers to gain a fuller understanding of the “range and

variation in people's meaning-making, processes, experiences, and points of view" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 145). The convenience sample size for the study consisted of six students (see Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Students were asked open-ended interview questions to identify areas of personal value conflicts and to explain their moral reasoning regarding decision making in social work practice. Participants were invited to participate through a classroom presentation after identifying current senior status students through coordination with the program director. Interested students were provided an introductory letter explaining the study, including the offer of a follow-up telephone call to address personal questions regarding the study before agreeing to participate and scheduling the interview. Once the participants were selected, their informed consent was obtained to ensure they understood the purpose and parameters of their voluntary involvement, including the study's purpose, methods, timeline, risks, benefits and use and dissemination of data.

Data were collected using a recording device during individual interviews. Detailed transcripts were created based on recordings for further analysis. Data were analyzed using generic qualitative analysis techniques such as open and descriptive coding (see Chowdhury, 2015; Given, 2008; Gläser, & Laudel, 2013; Saldana, 2015). Codes and themes were developed through detailed and recurrent analysis (see Morgan, 2018). Member checking protocols were used to increase the reliability of findings (see Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Given, 2008).

Significance of the Study

Findings from this study increase understanding of the personal experiences and moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university related to potential value conflicts in social work practice (see Osteen, 2013; Valutis et al., 2014). This study specifically addresses a gap in the literature and social work practice regarding the direct inquiry of social workers about their experiences of personal value conflicts from a framework that extends beyond only religion (Valutis et al., 2014). Because the study explored moral reasoning, an increased understanding of student perspectives and experiences was gained regarding their professional and religious views. Further, the results of this study may inform the development of curriculum and training models in the integration of Christian faith and ethics in social work practice at an evangelical Christian university. Effective training models regarding ethical integration of faith in social work practice are currently lacking (Eck et al., 2016; Hunt, 2014; Husain, & Sherr, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Schonfeld et al., 2015). Having an increased understanding of the moral reasoning of emerging adult students may help faculty to design curriculum and assignments to improve training and address potential value conflicts of which religious and conservative social workers are at greater risk (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014). Finally, this research may also contribute to a broader understanding of the effect of recent cultural trends on emerging adult students at Christian universities, which is currently unclear (Jackson et al., 2016). The research also increases understanding of the impact of cultural trends on emerging adult social work student's views at Christian

universities, a population for whom no literature could be found addressing this issue at the time of this study.

CSWE requires social worker educators to teach students competencies that equip them for effective practice with diverse populations, including clients whose beliefs, worldviews, and behaviors may conflict with their own (CSWE, 2015). The NASW code of ethics calls upon social workers to effectively engage with clients of all cultures and faiths, respecting their right to self-determination and recognizing their inherent dignity and worth (NASW, 2017). The findings from this study have the potential to enhance social work practice by informing teaching methods at evangelical Christian social work programs for training students in faith integration and ethical work with diverse populations; thereby, enhancing social change by better equipping students to ethically integrate their Christian faith with their social work identity and practice reducing value conflicts in the field.

Emerging adult BSW students are the future of the profession. How these students learn to understand and engage with increasingly diverse populations and ideologies in culture will affect clients, interventions, and future policy. A key factor affecting one's view of the world and for the world is the idea of worldview, which includes one's religious beliefs (Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017). Students and social workers interpret ethics and practice through the lens of their worldview which can affect value conflicts. Further, worldview and moral reasoning may be shaped significantly by emotionally driven moral intuitions (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2012). By improving understanding through this study of the moral reasoning and

religious worldview of emerging adult Christian social work students and their effects on potential value conflicts, educators can bring about positive social change in individual students as they increase their understanding of the interplay between their religious beliefs and values and social work practice. Results of the study may also enable educators to improve student insight and use of strategies regarding areas of practice that contradict their religious beliefs, improving their ability to engage diverse clients and increase positive social change for individuals, families, and communities as students are empowered to effectively navigate complex issues and value priorities. Social workers help to create positive social change when they can meet individuals and families where they are with empathy and understanding of their beliefs and values while joining with them to envision and create a more positive future. The results of this study may help social work educators at evangelical Christian universities to improve Christian social work students' knowledge and skills toward this end.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was the moral foundations theory (MFT) developed by Haidt (Haidt, 2012; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993). MFT suggests that people make moral decisions intuitively based on core beliefs in areas such as care or harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, liberty, and sanctity, which they then follow with rationalizations that support their gut reactions (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2012). Haidt built his theory on the previous work of Shweder, who also became a colleague (Haidt, 2012; Shweder & Haidt, 1993). Shweder proposed the idea of moderate relativism as a form of moral pluralism, whereby there can be multiple

expressions of moral maturity (Shweder & Haidt, 1993). Shweder was also the first to argue for multiple ways of intuitively knowing moral knowledge beyond harm and fairness (Haidt, 2012) and identified the three initial categories of moral knowing evident in different cultural contexts, including autonomy, community, and divinity (Shweder, 1990).

Moral intuitionism is the philosophy upon which MFT is built and began with the works of Hume and Jefferson. Tropman (2014) defined moral intuitionism as "the view that we can know or justifiably believe some moral facts directly, without inferring them from other evidence or proof" (p. 177). Hume (1777/2003) argued that reason is not sufficient to determine what is moral. Indeed, Hume stated his hypothesis directly when he said, "morality is determined by sentiment" (p. 87). Hume contended that to make moral judgments by reason alone, one would need to know everything about a particular situation, action, or event, which is not possible and, therefore, that emotion must be a key driver of moral determinations whether positive or negative. Hume also noted that people act morally or immorally even when having adequate knowledge of events and time to use their reason to determine right from wrong, demonstrating the driving force of emotion in moral decision making. Finally, Hume argued for moral intuitionism from the example of beauty, that people have internal impulses that seem inherently to acknowledge good from bad. Overall, Hume believed that the passions ruled over reason in moral decision making (Haidt, 2012).

Jefferson also argued for the importance of the heart in moral decision making. Jefferson argued that reason has its primary role in matters more scientific in nature but

not in areas regarding human relationships (Haidt, 2012). Jefferson stated that for other areas such as "feelings of sympathy, of benevolence, of gratitude, of justice, of love, and friendship," nature has rooted them in the heart (as cited in Haidt, 2012, p. 35). Jefferson's conclusion, however, differs from Hume's in that he argued that reason and emotion are equal and coreigning over different domains (Haidt, 2012). Building on these ideas that passions are the drivers of moral impulses, a variety of theories emerged regarding how this process works and what the primary internal intuitive trigger may be, including ideas of self-evident truth, felt emotional responses, and how things may appear (Tropman, 2014). However, Tropman (2014) noted that identifying various theories or forms of intuitionism such as these does not mean they are inconsistent or at odds with one another as people may process information in multiple ways simultaneously.

MFT acknowledges the reality of internal and automatic moral impulses, classifies them, and describes how moral reasoning follows (Haidt, 2012). Using MFT allowed me to explore and identify the intuitive moral launching points of reasoning in students' experience and how these interact with their Christian faith and beliefs. Using MFT helped increase my understanding of how social work students with strong religious beliefs use moral reasoning in response to value conflicts in social work practice and the conclusions they reach regarding ethical decision making and integration with their faith. In the context of interviewing students of Christian faith, MFT helped me gain insight into how students frame, prioritize, and justify moral intuitions considering their faith and understanding of the Bible and historical Christian concepts. The MFT framework also

helped frame themes emerging from qualitative analysis of the data and guided the implications of this study for social work education.

Values and Ethics

Two primary values and principles from the NASW code of ethics were relevant to the study of this research problem. First, the value of the dignity and worth of the individual was of importance. The code of ethics (NASW, 2017) states, “Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients' socially responsible self-determination” (Ethical Principles Section). The principle that social workers should respect the dignity and worth of all whom they serve regardless of differences is essential to effective social work practice. Because all social workers come with personal worldviews, values, and bias, the code of ethics calls them to use reflection and supervision to gain insight into areas of potential value conflicts that can affect their practice. Worldview assumptions, moral intuitions, and moral reasoning are important underlying factors upon which social workers should reflect when engaging, assessing, and intervening with clients recognizing the effect these may have on clients’ experiences of being treated with dignity and respect as well as their outcomes.

The second value of significance for this study was the importance of human relationships (NASW, 2017). Social work is a person to person profession where a social worker’s use of self and the relationship he or she develops with a client is of primary importance in the process of change (NASW, 2017). To effectively engage clients, the code of ethics calls social workers to meet clients where they are and seek understanding

of their experiences and basic worldviews to work together as partners in the change process (NASW, 2017). Social workers need awareness and understanding of their values, biases, and theories of change to effectively navigate, negotiate, or manage these to best engage clients. By increasing knowledge of student's moral reasoning and areas of potential value conflicts, this study may help educators at Christian universities develop curricula and opportunities for students to increase their awareness and relationship skills to work effectively with clients.

Social work programs at evangelical Christian universities that are CSWE accredited are committed to uphold and teach the NASW code of ethics. These programs recognize that as a part of evangelical Christian universities; they have a responsibility to teach and promote both the Christian faith and the code of ethics which consist of compatible values but require equal integration into student's professional identities. The purpose of this project was to better understand the moral reasoning of students and how they approach ethical decision making considering both their Christian faith and knowledge of social work practice values and ethics. Findings from this project may help evangelical Christian universities improve curriculum design and delivery to better equip students to uphold the dignity and worth of clients and engage in effective relationships with diverse individuals as they partner with them toward positive change.

This project supports the values and principles of the NASW code of ethics by seeking to understand the experiences of students to improve their social work education and practice. By increasing understanding of student worldviews and moral reasoning, the findings of this study can be used to improve teaching practices that maximize student

abilities to treat clients with dignity and respect, effectively engage clients in meaningful relationships, and increase their professional expertise (NASW, 2017).

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A thorough review of the recent academic and professional literature was completed to inform this study. The search for journal articles was limited to peer-reviewed scholarly works. I located material relevant to social work, ethics, and higher education, which are intertwined in the study, by searching the databases of Academic Search Complete, SocIndex, and Social Work Abstracts to identify relevant literature from 2015 to 2019. The search generated titles of more than 700 articles and books using the search terms *social work education, or social work curriculum and keywords, including faith integration, religion, spirituality, evangelical, Christian, worldview, ethics, conflict, dilemma, postmodern,* and *moral*. I further narrowed the focus of my search by identifying articles with themes specific to social work education and issues relevant to areas of faith, value conflict, and moral reasoning. Also, additional searches were completed using the above-identified databases and the search terms of social work and social work education with the keyword of *truth*, which is an essential concept in the Christian university, yielding results of more than 200 additional articles. Notably, a search of the databases using search terms of social work or higher education and keywords of *sin* and *Bible* produced no results indicating a possible lack of research focused on these topics and their relevance to social work or avoidance of the terms. Finally, additional older and important literature articles and dissertations were identified through a review of references in articles gathered in the original literature search.

Issues of faith, religion, and spirituality are complex and challenging to address in social work and social work education. Overall, a review of the literature demonstrated the importance of religion, faith, and spirituality (RFS) for both clients and practitioners while identifying a lack of training and consistency regarding approaches to faith integration in social work education and curriculum (see Chamiec-Case, 2013; Eck et al.,2016; Elliott, 2017, Hunt, 2014; Husain, & Sherr, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Schonfeld et al., 2015; Senreich, 2013). Scholars also noted the potential for value conflicts and ethical dilemmas in social work, especially for those of strong religious faith and conservative beliefs, along with the effect of managing moral distress on social worker's themselves (see Begun, Kattari, McKay, Winter & O'Neill, 2017; Fantus, Greenberg, Muskat & Katz, 2017; Hatiboğlu et al., 2019; Lynch & Forde, 2016; Pfeilstetter, 2017; Valutis & Rubin, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014). Specifically, relevant to the population of this study, scholars identified that emerging adults bring specific perspectives on religion, ethics, justice and spirituality that may affect their moral reasoning and may require more targeted educational strategies (see Arnett, 2000; Chenot & Kim, 2017; Eck et al., 2016; Erdvig, 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Lindemann, 2016).

Similarly, there was broad discussion among scholars in the literature regarding the importance of philosophical frameworks and worldview in teaching on issues of faith and ethical decision making including the distinct differences between the impact of modernism and moral realism as compared to postmodern and social constructionist frameworks and their implications (see Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Halvorsen, 2019;

Harris & Yancey, 2017; Hendriks & van Ewijk, 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Pasini, 2016; Rai & Holyoak, 2013; White et al., 2016; Yilmaz & Bahcekapili, 2015; Young, & Durwin, 2013). Finally, scholars acknowledged differences in moral reasoning comparing rationale, intuitive, and emotion-driven models and their importance in ethical decision making and education, highlighting the challenge in separating one's personal and emotionally based values in making ethical decisions (see Graham et al, 2013; Hodgson & Watts, 2017; Pasini, 2016; Patterson, Rothstein, & Barbey, 2012; Pugh, 2017; Tropman, 2014; Young & Durwin, 2013). Overall, my review of the recent literature demonstrated a robust scholarly exploration of issues of faith, philosophy, spirituality, and worldview and their inevitable outworking in social work practice as well as difficulties in teaching these concepts in the university setting.

Importance of Faith, Spirituality, and Religion in Social Work

RFS has always been a part of social work. In the late 1800s, charity movements, as early forerunners for the social work profession, became widespread, focusing on improving conditions for the poor in the wake of the industrial revolution (Leighninger, 2012; Scales & Kelly, 2016). Leaders of these social service organizations were known to view their work as a "new benevolent gospel" and themselves "as missionaries of a holy cause" exposing the religious motivations of their work (Leighninger, 2012, p. 9). Indeed, the history of social work is religiously inspired and began as a blend of religious and social interventions (Darrell & Rich, 2017; Garland & Yancey 2014; Groen et al., 2013; Harris, Yancey, Myers, Deimler, & Walden, 2017; Oxhandler & Pargament 2014; Scales & Kelly, 2016). Based on their religious assumptions regarding inherent truth and a grand

design, early charity movements also supported the importance of scientific inquiry and a positivist view that natural laws and truths existed and were discoverable and as such that scientific inquiry could help improve the lives of others, leading to decades of increased secularization and professionalization in social work (Darrell & Rich, 2017; Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2016).

In the 1980s and 1990s, social work experienced a renewed interest in spirituality, including the development of the Society for Spirituality in Social Work and conferences related to the topic, eventually leading to the mention of religion and spirituality in CSWE accreditation documents (Darrell & Rich, 2017). Although the profession of social work shifted from a more religiously oriented charity-driven movement in the 19th century to one with substantial emphasis on science and secular thought during the 20th century to a more broadly oriented view of spirituality today, many of its religiously motivated ethical values and underlying philosophical assumptions remain (Elliott, 2017; Groen et al., 2013; Harris et al., 2017; Hodge, 2006; Leighninger, 2012; Royse et al., 2016; Scales & Kelly, 2016; Stewart, 2009). Indeed, even ethical tensions that have historically driven differing political and practice leanings within the social work community such as those between individual case-based approaches (social treatment view) and those addressing societal ills through broader means and public policy (social justice view) have origins in a religious Judeo-Chrisitan worldview (Lowe & Singer, 2012). Friedman (2002) argued that both the social treatment view and the social justice view are rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition with Judaism emphasizing charity as the idea of "tzedakah" meaning justice or righteousness and Christianity focusing on charity

as “Caritas,” connoting a more individual expression (p. 6). Therefore, although social work as a profession has moved in a secular direction since the mid-20th century, its philosophical assumptions are still rooted in Judeo-Christian values as reflected in the code of ethics (NASW, 2017), where even the strategic differences that often shape debate regarding ethical interpretations and imperatives have religious roots.

Knowledge of RFS today is vital for social work in light of the current prominence of faith and religious belief in the world and its role in framing client’s needs, cultures, and diversity (Cutsinger & King, 2019; Dinham, 2018; Hodge, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neagoe et al., 2018; Oxhandler, 2017; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017). Indeed, it is unethical for social workers to ignore the importance of clients’ faith, religion, or spirituality as an essential component of holistic practice (Harris et al., 2017; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). Data from the Pew Research Center (2015) confirms the overall importance of RFS in people’s lives with 84% of the world’s population acknowledging a religious affiliation, 77% of adults in the United States reporting religion to be somewhat important in their lives and 53% calling it very important. Pew (2015) also reported that 36% of adults attend weekly religious or spiritual services, and 55% pray daily. Finally, Hodge (2015) added that 71% of individuals believe God personally cares about their lives. The potential breadth and importance of RFS in the lives of clients as indicated here requires social workers to pursue competence in engaging clients RFS in practice.

Faith and spirituality are also important in the lives of clients who frequently prefer that social workers include these in their care; a factor which can also lead to more

positive outcomes (Harris, Randolph, & Gordon, 2016; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neagoe et al., 2018; Oxhandler, 2017; Oxhandler, Ellor, & Stanford, 2018; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014; Oxhandler, Wolfer, & Chamiec-Case, 2019). Client's personal and religious beliefs also shape their perspectives and choices, leading many clients to express a desire for practitioners to initiate spiritual conversations (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). Incorporating faith and spirituality into practice can also help clients engage and provide a starting point for developing change strategies (Darrell & Rich, 2017). Further, CSWE's educational policy accreditation standards require social work programs to address issues of diversity, including religious and spiritual diversity, and how it may shape client's identities or experiences (CSWE, 2015). Indeed, a greater understanding of the role and importance of religion, faith, and spirituality in society and in the lives of clients is vital for social workers and educators to improve training and curriculum to better prepare students for practice (Dinham, 2018; Hodge, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Oxhandler, 2017; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017).

RFS is also important in the lives of social workers who frequently identify as religious or spiritual and bring their beliefs and values to their practice (Chamiec-Case, 2016; Groen et al., 2012; Rinkel, Larsen, Harrington, & Chun, 2018). For example, in a survey study of 225 members of the NASW, Larsen (2011) found that 81.8% of respondents believed in "God" or some other "higher power," 58.9% considered themselves religious, and 93.7% identified as spiritual. Also, 57.8% of social workers acknowledged affiliation with a Christian organization, and 17.3% affiliation with other religious organizations with nearly half attending religious services at least weekly

(Larsen, 2011). In a follow-up survey of 2,100 members of NASW, Larsen and Rinkel (2016) further discovered that over 70% believe in God or a higher power and that social workers report their religion or spirituality as providing a framework for their beliefs and direction for their behavior. Faith also draws many into the field of social work itself and motivates them to practice including a large majority of social workers who support including the teaching of religion as an aspect of diversity in social work curriculum (Chamiec-Case, 2016; Elliott, 2017; Harris et al., 2017; Scales & Kelly, 2016). Moreover, many social workers and students desire or seek more training in the areas of religion, faith, spirituality, and faith integration (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017). In a national survey of licensed social workers from across the United States, 46% sought continuing education in this area (Oxhandler, Parrish, Torres, & Achenbaum, 2015). Indeed, RFS appears to be as important for social workers as as it is for their clients.

Social workers report that the practice of social work also impacts their personal spiritual lives. In a 2018 mixed-methods survey study of 527 NASW members, Rinkel et al. (2018) found that over 40% of social work practitioners acknowledged that their practice affects their spiritual/religious development. Oxhandler et al. (2019) further argued that,

> In the same way, social workers recognize RSF is a core part of clients' identities (NASW, 2017), the same is true for many social workers' identities and is not something that can simply be ignored when they practice social work. As a result, attempting to bracket their faith at work may feel forced, inauthentic, and/or lead

> to an unsatisfying and unproductive disconnect between their personal and professional selves. (p. 58)

In light of this, it is unrealistic to expect social workers to divorce their spirituality and beliefs from their practice (Chamiec-Case, 2016). Indeed, RFS is active and essential in the lives and decision making of clients and social work practitioners and should be addressed as such in social work education.

Value Conflicts and Moral Distress

Because social work is a values-driven profession and a significant percentage of its workers identify as religious or spiritual as described in the previous section, value conflicts and ethical dilemmas where social workers are caught between competing values or ethical standards have important implications for social work education. Indeed, some scholars argue that because of the complex nature of social work and working with humans, ethical issues are constantly at play and that all issues have a moral dimension (Sherwood, 2016). In particular, scholars acknowledge that due to the personal nature of religion and spirituality, social worker's deeply held values may create conflict with their commitment to upholding professional and client-centered values (Braganza, 2018; Chamiec-Case, 2016; Harris & Yancey, 2017). In a random survey of 197 licensed professional social workers in Pennsylvania, Valutis et al. (2014) found that more than 34% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they experience conflict between religious and professional values and that 88.8% of social workers disagreed that religious values should take precedence over professional values. Valutis et al. (2014) also found a significant positive relationship between conflict items and increased

religiosity and more conservative political beliefs in respondents. Males were also more likely to experience value conflicts than females in the study (Valutis et al. 2014). In a follow-up study, Valutis and Rubin (2016) used quantitative survey research to examine more closely social worker conflicts between professional and personal values, and religious beliefs and political views. In this survey of 169 NASW members from across the United States, 54% of respondents reported at least occasionally experiencing conflict between personal and professional values and over 27% conflict between religious and professional values (Valutis & Rubin, 2016). Valutis and Rubin (2016) further concluded in their analysis of the data that social workers who placed a higher priority on religion, attended services more frequently, and identified as using religion in daily decisions experienced higher rates of value conflict between religious, professional, and political views. Duckham and Schreiber (2016) added that religious people might be more likely to exhibit religious ethnocentrism and convey an in-group out-group mentality to others. The above research reinforces the need for additional studies regarding the impact of religion on value conflicts for social workers trained in explicitly religious settings.

In general, some areas of practice are also more likely to trigger value conflicts for social workers than others, especially those more directly challenging religious or political beliefs. Harris and Yancey (2017) identified three ways that value dissonance can occur for social workers, including:

- when the social worker experiences conflicting personal values which she must prioritize;

- when the social worker's values conflict with the values of the profession and/or society; and
- when a social worker's values are significantly different from the values of the client. (p. 124)

One example of value dissonance for religious social workers is their views on abortion and permissiveness in sexual activity where increased religiosity tends to decrease one's support for these behaviors (Begun et al., 2017). In a survey of 504 BSW and MSW social work students from public and private schools across the United States, Begun et al. (2017) found that 22.8% of respondents did not support abortion under all circumstances and that higher religiosity was significantly associated with anti-abortion beliefs. Similarly, increased religiosity was associated with lower support for birth control and permissiveness in sexual activity (Begun et al., 2017). Further, in a survey of 443 social work students using distributive snowball sampling, results demonstrated that students who personally disagreed with abortion reported higher degrees of inability to help clients in this area and that students with more conservative political views were less likely to support abortion (Winter & McKay, 2016). Overall, this data may indicate that social workers with high levels of religiosity and conservative belief may be at greater risk of value conflicts in practice specifically in area of reproduction.

Other issues frequently creating value dissonance in religious Christian social workers include capital punishment, diversity in sexual and gender expression, care for the dying, the definition of marriage, and sex outside of marriage (de Jong, 2017; Harris & Yancey, 2017). When social workers are confronted with specific issues such as these

that conflict with their religious beliefs relating to the nature of God and the authority of sacred texts, they may feel their personal values are being suppressed or feel compelled to expand professional values to support them (Hatiboğlu et al., 2019). Either approach can negatively impact social workers' faith or professional practice. Additionally, social workers can experience value dissonance as a result of conflicting values within the social work code of ethics itself and the struggle they may have in reconciling personal and professional beliefs in light of its standards (Čepulionytė & Dunajevas, 2016). For example, in a study of 92 social workers in European countries, researchers found that 72% of survey respondents agreed with supporting both values of life and abortion rights simultaneously, indicating inherent conflicting values in the social workers themselves (Čepulionytė & Dunajevas, 2016). Social workers must learn to ethically integrate their faith with their view of social work ethics and practice to reduce such conflicts.

Moral distress is yet another category of value dissonance experienced by social workers. Moral distress refers to situations where a social worker knows what actions are right, but are restricted in carrying them out due to organizational or policy constraints (Lynch & Forde, 2016). Moral distress, somewhat different from ethical dilemmas, occurs primarily as a response to political or structural issues (Lynch & Forde, 2016; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2016). Examples of situations that may create moral distress for social workers include having the time to serve clients well in the face of productivity demands or having to limit contacts with needy clients due to funding source restrictions resulting in frustration or concern for negative outcomes. Although moral distress has been studied mostly in nursing with little attention in the social work literature, it can

result in burnout, exhaustion, lower morale, and high turn-over in staff as social workers strive to meet ethical standards while fighting organizational barriers (Lynch & Forde, 2016; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2016). In a Finnish survey of 817 social workers in public social services, 11% reported experiencing active moral distress and felt compelled to violate the code of ethics in their jobs (Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2016). Moral distress, value conflicts, and ethical dilemmas all impact the well-being of social workers when they are frequent, prolonged, or unresolved, which can, in turn, affect the quality of services they provide.

Finally, in the university setting, emerging adults may also bring specific views of RFS that affect their perceptions or experiences of value conflicts and have unique implications for faith integration at Christian universities. Emerging adults are the population group spanning the ages of 18 to 29 who are navigating a time of transition, identity development, and exploration between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erdvig, 2016; Jackson et al., 2016). Overall, the current generation of emerging adults have been noted to be less religious, prefer individual beliefs over institutions, have lower views of the authority of the Bible, reject the idea of objective moral truth, have more negative views of Christianity, and more easily combine their beliefs with those of other faiths or cultures (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Lindemann, 2016). Morales (2016) argued that currently emerging adults are deeply affected by culture, possibly due to constant engagement with technology and find it difficult to sustain a worldview contrary to the culture, especially one that claims exclusivity. Current emerging adults are experiencing an unprecedented amount of information and exposure to pluralism at a

time in their development “when major questions about life and reality are asked, and basic beliefs about life and the world are processed and decided upon” (Erdvig, 2016, p. 47). Being flooded with multiple worldviews and perspectives may lead to moral confusion adding challenges for ethical decision making for emerging adult social work students.

The impact of cultural shifts on evangelical Christian emerging adults, as a whole, is unclear, and a review of the social work literature reveals the particular effect on evangelical Christian emerging adult social work students is unknown (Jackson et al., 2016). However, the term, moral therapeutic deism, has been used to summarize the faith views of many emerging adults whereby they see God primarily as a helper, wanting people to be good, happy, and get to heaven regardless of their religion (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017). Eck et al. (2016) argued that course content regarding religion should be revised to address the unique needs, starting points, and learning styles of emerging adults. Lindemann (2016) added that by the time emerging adults reach college, students have already adopted ideas from multiple worldviews to compete with professional and religious paradigms important to the institution. As a result, Christian social work educators must consider not only issues of what and how to teach the integration of Christian faith and social work but the ages and developmental stage of whom they are teaching (Lindemann, 2016).

The Roots of Value Dissonance

Beyond the dissonance that can result from specific client or organizational behaviors, value conflicts for social workers are ultimately rooted in the differences

between their ethical framework and the philosophical assumptions of their core beliefs and faith in contrast to those of other ideologies being communicated by clients, the social work field, politics, communities or culture (see Chamiec-Case, 2016; Harris & Yancey, 2017; Hatiboğlu et al., 2019; Valutis et al., 2014; White et al., 2016). Indeed, underlying value conflict triggers stem from one's understanding and approach to truth and its implications for ethical decision making (see Sherwood, 2016; Yilmaz & Bahcekapili, 2015). Growing out of the Enlightenment era, positivism was the driving philosophy behind scientific inquiry and thought that significantly shaped the field of social work in the 20th century and into the next, including the current emphasis on evidence-based practice approaches (Eck et al., 2016; Groen et al., 2012; Sherwood, 2016; White et al., 2016). Modernism emphasizes naturalism, objectivism, reason, empiricism, and individualism (White et al., 2016). Modern philosophy argues for the existence of universal truth and natural laws that can be discovered and applied across culture and circumstances, which affect approaches to moral reasoning and ethical decision making (see Sherwood, 2016). Moral realism is the ethical approach aligning with modernism, referring to the idea that moral facts exist and can be objectively known and, as such, define that which is good or right (Young & Durwin, 2013). Deontological approaches to ethics accept modernism's underlying premise regarding the existence of universal truth and argue that ethical reasoning must take these truths and their natural consequences into consideration (Rae, 2018; van der Kooij, de Ruyter, & Miedema, 2015). Modernism along with its assumptions regarding deontological and universal

truths permeated the fields of science and social work for much of the 20th century and have played an important role in development of the social work profession.

In contrast, post-modern philosophy embraces ideas that deny the existence or relevance of objective truth. Instead, post-modernism promotes ideas such as the rejection of a grand narrative of truth in support of multiple narratives, the belief that truth is created through cultures and as such cannot be judged against objective standards, the idea that "truth" is a construct that reinforces power for some individuals over others, and that "truth" is reinforced through language (Caputo, Epstein, Stoesz, & Thyer, 2015; Myers & Noebel, 2016; Sherwood, 2016; White et al., 2016). Post-modern thought identifies truth only as a social construct leading to an axiological ethical framework of relativism or utilitarianism that denies ethical authority except that which is pragmatic or defined by the needs of individuals in a specific situational context (Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Rae, 2018; Sherwood, 2016). Critical theory is a further outworking of post-modern thought that asks its followers to question the truth and grand narratives, teaching also "that the notion of ever-increasing knowledge as evidence of moral advancement is foolish and even arrogant" (Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018, p. 58). Indeed, the assumptions of Postmodernism and critical theory directly challenge and conflict with those of modernism.

In opposition to post-modern and critical theory, religions generally support beliefs in objective and universal truth based on assumptions regarding the existence of God or a creative, organized, consistent, and sustaining force upholding the world and life. Because religions promote structured ideas and frameworks, they tend to reinforce

moral behavior (Yilmaz & Bahcekapili, 2015). People who believe in moral facts or moral realism have also been shown to demonstrate greater motivation to care about the needs of society and others and to act morally compared to those who do not (Chenot & Kim, 2017; Young & Durwin, 2012). Indeed, philosophical assumptions inform moral reasoning and affect ethical decision making for social workers, whether they are religious or not, and are becoming an increasingly important area of study in social work (Halvorsen, 2019; Sherwood, 2016).

Conflicting Ethical Paradigms

Some recent authors have contended that as a profession, social work philosophically attempts to operate using both modern and post-modern ideas, resulting in inherent tensions and potential conflicts in moral reasoning for social workers (Chamiec-Case, 2016; Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Halvorsen, 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). For example, although social work now largely supports the importance of religion and faith in practice where belief systems typically support Positivistic assumptions or are deontological in nature and encourages their integration when working with clients, it does so largely from a Universalist spiritual perspective, which reflects a postmodern paradigm (see Darrell & Rich, 2017; Valutis et al., 2014). Indeed, faith, in the social work profession, is often touted as a personal value and not a reflection of the truth (see Warkentin & Sawatsky, 2018). It is in this context that some scholars have argued that social workers should be objective practitioners and avoid influencing others with their beliefs (Harris & Yancey, 2017; Pugh, 2017). Simultaneously, however, other scholars have argued that value neutrality is a myth and that clinicians and

educators must simply own their views and can only seek to manage boundaries professionally (Lindemann, 2016; Peteet, 2014). Indeed, mixed messages regarding the role of personal and professional beliefs and values continue to exist in social work.

Because of such conflicting messages that students may experience between their educational or agency settings, especially those in a religious context, confusion in interpreting or applying the code of ethics in practice may arise (Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Stewart, 2009). The NASW was founded in 1955 as the umbrella organization for the social work profession and within a few years began developing a model of core values (Lowe & Singer, 2012). Today, the NASW code of ethics formally articulates the values of the profession that include individual, organizational, scholarly, and political responsibilities of social workers (NASW, 2017), while continuing to reflect many core Judeo-Christian beliefs rooted in the profession's past (see Elliott, 2017; Groen et al.,2013; Harris et al., 2017; Hodge, 2006; Leighninger, 2012; Royse et al., 2016; Stewart, 2009). However, social workers may lack understanding of the Judeo-Christian roots of the code of ethics and may tend to interpret it from a humanist and secular perspective with little awareness of the moral framework and assumptions that support it. Understanding the religious roots of the code can be essential, especially for Christian social workers for effectively developing and integrating their professional and faith identity, which can reduce value conflicts (Elliott, 2017; Sherwood, 2016).

Indeed, more broadly, some scholars contend that a Judeo-Christian and theistic worldview may be necessary as a foundation to uphold ethical mandates in the code such as the dignity and worth of persons and self determination, which require the idea of a

transcendent moral lawgiver and a positivist belief in natural laws embedded in human nature and relationships to sustain them (Murray, 2018; Sherwood, 2016; Stewart, 2009; Zacharias & Vitale, 2017). For evangelical Christian and other social workers of Judeo-Christian belief, the tension in the field between the existence or non-existence of objective moral truth and its implications for interpreting and applying the code of ethics are at the root of potential value conflicts that need to be resolved. Stewart (2009) argued that social work cannot adopt a single philosophical framework and that reconciling beliefs in objective truth with postmodern and humanist ethical paradigms breaks down given that claims of truth are, by definition, exclusive. Instead of ignoring this tension, Sayre (2016) argued that educators must consider embracing the idea that it is not possible to teach students to resolve ethical dilemmas without acknowledging the reality of the effect of personal beliefs and constraints. Further, Oxhandler et al. (2019) concluded that educators must acknowledge that the interaction of a social worker's RFS is inevitable and grappling with concepts of truth is unavoidable (Oxhandler et al., 2019). Therefore, the real question for social workers is not whether their faith and social work will interact, but only "how thoughtfully, competently, and ethically" they handle interactions regarding RFS and beliefs with others in practice (Oxhandler et al., 2019, p. 59). For religious social workers who believe in a transcendent moral first cause, understanding the implications of their beliefs is vital to their approach to ethical decision making.

Strengths and Weaknesses in the Current Literature

Overall, scholars have established well the importance of religion, spirituality, and faith in the culture and for clients (Cutsinger & King, 2019; Dinham, 2018; Hodge, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neagoe et al., 2018; Oxhandler, 2017; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017). Also, client's interest in spirituality, desire for its integration in their care, and importance to their outcomes is well documented in the literature (Harris et al., 2016; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neagoe et al., 2018; Oxhandler, 2017; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017; Oxhandler et al., 2018; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014; Oxhandler et al., 2019). Third, a strength of recent scholarship has been in highlighting the importance of RFS to social workers indicating the significant numbers who regularly engage with RFS, desire training in this area, and who see its importance in practice for themselves and their clients (Elliott, 2017; Groen et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2017; Larsen, 2011; Larsen & Rinkel, 2016; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Oxhandler & Giardina, 2017; Oxhandler et al., 2015; Rinkel et al., 2018). Fourth, recent literature examined well the role of personal values as well as religious and political views on potential value conflicts or ethical dilemmas both more broadly and in regard to specific issues (Begun et al., 2017; Braganza, 2018; de Jong, 2017; Harris & Yancey, 2017; Valutis et al., 2014; Valutis & Rubin, 2016; Winter & McKay, 2016). Of note was research that indicated overall low levels of conflict between personal and professional values, with the exception of social workers who are more religious and conservative who are at higher risk (Valutis et al., 2014; Valutis & Rubin, 2016). The recent literature demonstrates the importance of RFS to clients, social workers and practice.

A final strength evident in the recent literature was the robust debate regarding the role of philosophy, including ontological and epistemological assumptions, regarding religion and spirituality and ethical responses to value conflicts in the field (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Eck et al., 2016; Groen et al., 2012; Halvorsen, 2019; Harris & Yancey, 2017; Hatiboğlu et al., 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014; White et al., 2016; Yilmaz & Bahcekapili, 2015). Scholars engaged substantially in discussion regarding modernism and postmodernism and its effect on both social work and ethics in the field (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Eck et al., 2016; Groen et al., 2012; White et al., 2016). Also, scholars highlighted the tensions within the field of social work regarding its ethical reasoning that attempts to balance conflicting philosophies (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Halvorsen, 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). Specific to RFS scholars pointed out the tension between the Judeo-Christian religious history and now more universalist approaches to spirituality in practice (Darrell & Rich, 2017; Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Sherwood, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014; Warkentin & Sawatsky. 2018). The literature confirmed the tensions that many social workers and students may experience in practice as they engage in ethical decision making.

Overall, the recent literature demonstrated continued debate between those that argue for practice approaches that assume the ability of social workers to be objective in their practice and those who believe that social workers cannot practice outside of their worldview assumptions (see Harris & Yancey, 2017; Lindemann, 2016; Peteet, 2014; Pugh, 2017). Although some scholars provided thoughts on responding to philosophical tensions, the literature was lacking in offering solutions to bridge the philosophical

divide. Other areas of weakness in the literature included that, to date, no research had examined personal or religious value conflicts for social workers using a qualitative approach (Valutis et al., 2014; Valutis & Rubin, 2016). Also, research regarding social workers' experiences of moral distress was lacking, where only a couple of studies had been completed. Finally, no research regarding the effects of post-modern thinking and other qualities of millennial students on evangelical Christian emerging adult social work students had been completed (Jackson et al., 2016; Lynch & Forde, 2016; Mänttäri-van der Kuip, 2016). However, in spite of these gaps, scholars suggested several strategies for social work training and education to address RFS and its potential value conflicts in the university setting and field.

Suggested Approaches to Curriculum and Training for RFS

Worldview and instruments. One effort to help social workers identify underlying philosophical assumptions and tensions and increase their knowledge and skills for recognizing their limits while increasing spiritual competency and reducing value conflicts in practice is worldview theory. Scholars have described a worldview as a set of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits that help people make sense of God, the world, and relationships (Erdvig, 2016; Lindemann, 2016; Myers & Noebel, 2016; Schultz, 2013; Sherwood, 2016). In the literature, worldviews are defined as organized patterns of thought represented through religions or other developed ideologies, but that can also be eclectic and personal as people adopt different aspects of multiple views (van der Kooij et al., 2015). Scholars have also described worldviews as orientations mainly of the heart, indicating conscious or unconscious philosophical assumptions and

explanations about the nature of life, reality, relationships, and truth (Lindemann, 2016; Morales, 2013). Finally, scholars have emphasized that a person's worldview represents answers to questions of origin, identity, the meaning and purpose of life, the basis of morality and where the future is headed that become the source of his or her motivations and the lens through which he or she see the world (Erdvig, 2016; Groen et al., 2012; Sherwood, 2016; Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017).

Because the concept of worldview captures a broader spectrum of beliefs and assumptions, some scholars have recommended the use of the worldview model and terminology as a replacement for the narrower focus on faith, religion, and spirituality in social work (Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). Scholars have argued that shifting to a worldview model broadens one's view to include atheism and social and political ideologies when engaging with and assessing clients as these also represent ways of seeing and acting in the world (Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). This approach is consistent with other scholars who have argued that every worldview accepts some things by faith that must be identified in the helping process (Kim, McCalman, & Fisher, 2012; Sherwood, 2016). Morales (2013) affirmed this idea stating, "whether people place their faith in the God of the Bible, themselves, or some aspect of the universe, they maintain convictions consistent with the object of their faith" (p. 89). Indeed, every client, organization, and culture have foundational assumptions and beliefs affecting their views and decisions.

Emerging adults, have been noted in the literature to face unique challenges in developing their worldview (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Morales, 2013).

Through media and the Internet, college students are being exposed constantly to multiple worldviews, including secular humanism, postmodernism, relativism, naturalism, materialism, and political and sexual ideologies (Morales, 2013). Therefore, as relevant to this current study, students at evangelical Christian universities must learn to discern and navigate the different assumptions and influences these worldviews bring, including those of their Christian tradition, and the effect they may have on their moral reasoning and ethical decision making (see Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Morales, 2013). Understanding one's worldview, while also managing multiple worldviews, assumptions, and perspectives is a growing challenge in social work and the academy as communities increase in cultural diversity and pluralism through population changes and exposure through media (Hendriks & van Ewijk, 2019).

In proposing the concept of worldview as a solution for assisting students in navigating RFS and their potential value conflicts, some scholars have suggested using worldview assessment tools in the curriculum. One such tool examined by Morales (2013) for the validity of use in higher education is the Three-Dimensional Worldview Survey-Form C (3DWS-Form C). The 3DWS-Form C is a 76-item scale developed to assess Biblical worldview in post-secondary age students and is the only current instrument that includes all three identified components (propositions, behaviors, and heart-orientation) of a worldview (Morales, 2013). A sample of 427 students enrolled in a Biblical worldview course from a leading Christian university was used to test the instrument in a study which found it to have overall construct validity but recommended additional changes to the tool in the heart dimension and further research to improve

results (Morales, 2013). The study focused on emerging adult students, specifically undergraduate freshmen, and suggested that using the tool could be helpful for classroom instruction and curriculum development at Christian universities (Morales, 2013).

Alternatively, Neshama-Bannister (2016) proposed a broader worldview assessment tool, specifically for use in social work. The Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) contains five subscales addressing five worldview dimensions, including theological, ontological, epistemological, axiological, and deontological (Neshama-Bannister, 2016). The instrument consists of 24 questions randomly assigned to each dimension and classifies results into four worldview categories that include Biblical theism, moderate Christian, secular humanism, or material naturalism (Neshama-Bannister, 2016). Neshama-Bannister (2016) conducted a study to validate the WDS using a response sample of 110 participants who were MSW alumni of a Christian university. The 24-question version of the tool was found to have internal consistency and reliability (Neshama-Bannister, 2016). Neshama-Bannister (2016) recommended the use of the WDS in social work education to increase student's awareness of the components of their worldviews, including those who do not identify as religious. Using the WDS may improve overall knowledge of existing worldviews and their ideas, and provide students and educators a tool that levels the playing field and reduces the potential for value conflicts and misuse of power when working with others (Neshama-Bannister, 2016).

Integration profiles. Similar to worldview assessments, scholars have suggested using faith integration profiles with social workers to increase their understanding and

awareness when navigating issues of religion, faith, and spirituality in engaging clients. Oxhandler et al. (2019) proposed the use of the Social Worker's Integration of their Faith – Christian (SWIF-C) scale to help identify varying aspects of the interplay between a social worker's faith and practice. The 43-item scale seeks to measure four main interacting effects of faith and practice including impact on a) motivation and character formation, b) understanding of faith and social work, c) practice of faith and social work, and d) the degree to which tension emerges during such integration (Oxhandler et al., 2019, p. 61). The study examined 376 valid responses to the instrument resulting in findings supporting the reliability and validity of this first of its kind tool (Oxhandler et al., 2019). A significant finding from the survey indicated a large number of respondents integrating faith and practice without sufficient training and raised concerns regarding how social work education can improve training in faith integration that reduces the possibilities of imposing beliefs on clients (Oxhandler et al., 2019). The study also validated prior research regarding the connection between intrinsic religiosity and integration of faith and practice and the reality that social workers cannot merely separate from or operate outside of their worldview (Oxhandler et al., 2019). The SWIF-C can be used in social work education to increase student awareness of the interplay between their faith and practice and to explore value conflicts and ethical issues that may arise as a result.

Courses. Although CSWE (2015) and the NASW code of ethics currently support the inclusion of RFS as elements of diversity in their standards, MSW programs vary widely in the inclusion of religion, faith, and spirituality in their curriculum and course

offerings. In their review of the 262 MSW accredited programs or programs in candidacy in 2016, Moffatt and Oxhandler (2018) found that 30.4% offered one course or more in religion or spirituality related to social work with 30.8% of those programs being faith-based. This data indicates that even in the faith-based community, two-thirds of MSW programs are not addressing the issue of faith integration directly through courses. Further, of the 95 total number of courses on religion and spirituality available across all MSW programs, the vast majority (83 of 95) are offered as electives (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). This data suggests that in the majority of MSW programs, if RFS is being included in the curriculum at all, it is incorporated into other classes or addressed ad-hoc.

Further, a review of the 76 course descriptions available for the MSW programs offering courses on religion or spirituality indicated courses using a wide variety of textbooks and topics emphasizing items from history, assessment, practice approaches, and theology with the top three topics being religious and spiritual traditions or diversity, ethics or ethical practice, and spiritually sensitive social work practice (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). A notable exception to the data collected by Moffatt and Oxhandler (2018) was a post-graduate program called; Values Focused Social Work Practice (Neagoe et al., 2018). This program, aimed "to train professionals who can provide social and spiritual assistance in an integrative way" by providing a curriculum that teaches students to assess, analyze and integrate client's faith and spirituality while examining ethical issues in practice (Neagoe et al., 2018, p. 29). The program, although not an MSW program, included courses related to clinical practice, families, policy, and history and

sociology of religion (Neagoe et al., 2018). The spiritual integration program was unique in offering this specialty and a thorough examination of spirituality in social work education. Overall, however, the literature indicated that there appears to be no consensus in social work education regarding best practices for teaching on topics of faith regarding either the client or the practitioner (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018).

Methods. Despite the lack of consensus in social work education regarding either courses or priority topics, scholars continue to explore other methods for addressing RFS in the classroom. One method described by Elliott (2017) is the use of a specific 3-hour lecture that makes a case for the inclusion of faith and spirituality in social work to legitimize and pave the way for further discussion and integration over time. The lecture includes defining religion and spirituality and explaining its prevalence, relevance, importance, and complexity in the lives of clients and communities while also exploring the connection between religion in social work's history and values from multiple faith perspectives and their current implications (Elliott, 2017). The content of the lecture further leads students through intentional exercises highlighting tensions between religious and secular social work ethics, including areas such as sexuality, gender roles, and abortion, and encourages students to consider the effect of their spirituality on their roles as social workers (Elliott, 2017). By engaging students with the material regarding religion, faith, and spirituality early on, the goal of the lecture is to help students to think more broadly and be more open to honest discussions of ethics, boundaries, and practice in the context of difficult topics and areas of tension.

Field education is another area of social work curriculum where ethical integration of faith, religion, and spirituality has been explored by scholars in the literature. In one large university, a 10th CSWE competency was added to the curriculum, including three practice behaviors requiring students to:

1. Understand and work effectively with the religious, faith, and spiritual dimensions of persons and communities
2. Examine one's own religious, faith, and spiritual frameworks and knowhow these aspects self-inform and conflict with one's social work practice
3. Understand and work effectively within the context of the practice setting in regard to religion, faith, and spirituality. (Harris et al., 2017, p. 4)

The practice behaviors were incorporated into the field learning contract and included in the final field evaluation, which also required students to explain their learning in each area upon completion (Harris et al., 2017). More than 600 field evaluations completed over five years were reviewed in the study, including 73.4% of which were MSW students (Harris et al., 2017). Important themes that emerged from student's discussions regarding their ability to demonstrate these competencies in practice included the importance of relying on the code of ethics, supervision, self-awareness, research regarding other faiths, self-determination, and agency context as vital to effectively integrating RFS in the field (Harris et al., 2017). Withholding of their faith and keeping a focus on the client's beliefs were also significant themes identified by students (Harris et al., 2017). Finally, the authors noted that few students expressed concern regarding the

integration of faith in practice in the context of the practice behaviors and that ethical integration of faith and practice is largely possible in field education (Harris et al., 2017).

Models. On a broader conceptual level, scholars have proposed a variety of models for approaching the integration of faith and spirituality to help social workers manage value conflicts. For example, based on a review of the literature on Christian hospitality and Biblical principles regarding welcoming others, Braganza (2018) proposed a hospitality framework. Using qualitative analysis, Braganza (2018) identified themes for social work practice that can reduce the potential for value conflicts when encountering others with differing beliefs including acting as a host who truly seeks to welcome the other, authentic attempts to know the other and not diminish them, seeking areas of unity and agreement with others even while acknowledging differences, and respecting lines of difference while allowing freedom for exchange. Also, Sherwood (2016) offered a hermeneutical spiral model for teaching faith integration whereby students are taught that their faith position informs both their view and interpretation of ideas and the world and where reality and experiences also challenge and modify their faith assumptions. Sherwood (2016) proposed that Christians, in particular, should consider their assumptions regarding revelation, scripture, and the nature of God that underlie their views of morality as they approach practice.

Other classroom-based faith integration models proposed by scholars included exploring views of faith integration itself as well as approaches to implementing it in practice. For example, Chamiec-Case (2016) conceptualized three categories of faith integration including the effect of faith integration on the Christian social worker's

motivation, character, and identity formation, the effect of faith integration on one's understanding of faith and social work, and the effect of integration on the practice of faith and social work. The categories of faith integration model can help to expand student's views of the dimensions of faith integration in practice. The three-legged stool model is also a model presented by scholars to help students integrate faith with practice (Harris & Yancey, 2017; Harris, Yancey, & Myers, 2016; Harris et al., 2017). The three-legged stool model proposes that the faith, religion, and worldview of the client matters; that the faith, religion, and worldview of the social worker matters; and that the organizational context matters when integrating faith in practice (Harris et al., 2016; Harris & Yancey, 2017). The three-legged stool model helps students to assess and seek to balance these three areas in a realistic and holistic fashion when considering the integration of faith and practice.

Scholars have recommended using models such as those described above to improve training regarding the integration of faith and practice in the classroom. For example, Braganza (2018) recommended practicing hospitality skills in the classroom by providing students opportunities to encounter areas of difference and conflict with others. Using role-plays and interactions, students can practice seeing other perspectives as valuable while not feeling pressured to challenge them or assimilate them into their worldview (Braganza, 2018). Sherwood (2016) argued for teaching a principle-based approach to ethics and that the key to integrating Christian values in social work, "is making complex judgments based on wisdom growing out of the mind and character of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ" (p. 132). Sherwood (2016) emphasized the importance

of teaching students to think critically, increase their awareness of their assumptions and reflect on their approach to scripture, ethics, and integration of faith and practice as a whole. Models such as the three views of faith integration and three-legged stool are argued to be useful in the classroom as frameworks for reflection and critical thinking in considering practice decisions (Chamiec-Case, 2016; Harris et al., 2016; Harris & Yancey, 2017). All of the above models are useful for students to conceptualize faith and practice and can be built into the curriculum, class discussion and case reflection throughout their training.

Finally, some scholars have recommended methods for teaching the integration of faith and clinical practice specific to the needs of emerging adults in Christian universities. Given the current context where millennial students tend to doubt universal truth and embrace pluralism, scholars have questioned the validity of current educational approaches (see Eck et al., 2016). For example, using a mixed-methods 32-item survey, Eck et al. (2016) completed a study of psychology faculty at Christian universities from approximately 34 programs regarding their experiences of teaching faith integration courses to millennial emerging adult students in undergraduate psychology programs. Findings significant to teaching the integration of Christian faith in the classroom with young adults included a perception that students were most interested in learning faith integration in the context of application to moral living, sex, and gender, and application to real-life clinical contexts followed by the connection of faith and science (Eck et al., 2016). Faculty perception of what was of least interest to students included learning about worldviews, topics related to the Bible and theology, and understanding the role of

culture (Eck et al., 2016). Overall, findings from the study emphasized that faculty perceptions of emerging adult students in Christian universities were that they prefer learning that focuses on real-world issues and their own lives over theoretical and abstract ideas (Eck et al., 2016). Jackson et al. (2016) also argued that students learn faith integration primarily through mentoring and professors who serve as role models. Regarding teaching faith integration to emerging adults, scholars have recommended changing pedagogy of course content to increase engagement and experiential learning while not abandoning the teaching of theoretical concepts essential to teaching a Christian worldview (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016).

Strengths and Weaknesses of Suggested Approaches to RFS Training

In response to a lack of training in RFS in social work, scholars have offered a range of approaches to address the need. The strongest option currently offered is training in worldview theory to shift the discussion from RFS to underlying beliefs and assumptions regardless of one's professed faith (see Erdvig, 2016; Groen et al., 2012; Lindemann, 2016; Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; van der Kooij et al., 2015). The worldview model allows social workers to identify and explore both their own and their client's philosophical frameworks to find areas of compatibility or difference and to identify ways that each may impact choices, behaviors, and options. Worldview assessment tools that can be used in the classroom or in agency training that can help social workers more clearly identify their philosophical underpinnings and implications are also being tested by scholars (Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). Because the worldview approach does not focus on specific religions or approaches to spirituality and

also allows for assessment of other personal paradigms, it can be helpful as a mental model and practice approach in a variety of ways while increasing social workers ability to understand others (see Erdvig, 2016; Lindemann, 2016; Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Sherwood, 2016; van der Kooij et al., 2015).

More specific to religion and spirituality, some scholars have also developed a faith integration profile to help increase social workers' awareness of their approach to faith integration and its effects on their practice (Oxhandler et al., 2019). The faith integration tool can increase awareness and can be used in training to discuss different aspects of faith and practice (Oxhandler et al., 2019). The tool corresponds with the three categories of faith integration model offered by Chamiec-Case (2016) that can be used in social work curriculum to help students explore various ways of integrating faith and practice and their implications. This broad approach to learning and evaluating one's views on faith integration is useful for inclusion in curriculum and assessment

Similarly, a final area of strength in the current literature regarding approaches to training in RFS are models that seek to increase student's critical thinking and explore the ethical application of RFS. Such approaches include a lecture designed to improve dialogue and openness to RFS throughout the curriculum and a framework such as the hospitality model that seeks to shape students' overall approach to practice (Braganza, 2018; Elliott, 2017). Further, Sherwood's (2016) model of a hermeneutical spiral, and Harris and Yancey's (2016) three-legged stool are also useful approaches for helping students learn concepts for managing faith and practice. These models may prove

beneficial for inclusion in the curriculum to help students think critically and open them to dialogue about the role and approach to RFS in social work practice.

A significant area of weakness noted in the literature is a lack of consistency and consensus in courses and pedagogy related to RFS in the curriculum of social work programs. Overall, researchers found a lack of training on RFS in the social work curriculum, including in programs housed in faith-based institutions (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). Also, there was a broad variation in RFS courses being offered, with many being electives or outside of the social work program itself (Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018). One social work program integrated RFS into the curriculum by adding a spiritual competency and including it in field education for final evaluation (Harris et al., 2017). Although this approach was successful and ensured that students practiced and were evaluated on specific behaviors, the behaviors were defined broadly and did not address areas of potential value conflicts or provide specific guidance about ways to address ethical dilemmas (see Harris et al., 2017). Finally, some scholars identified the need to improve pedagogy specific to millennial students in psychology to better engage them in areas of RFS (Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016). However, recommendations were lacking in specific methodology for this population, and the research was not specific to emerging adult social work students in this area. Also, the literature as a whole lacked discussion about the exploration or implications in university RFS courses or training regarding key Judeo-Christian ideas such as the reality of sin, the authority of scripture, or the importance of spiritual battles in issues of value conflicts, application of faith integration, or ethical decision making for Christian social workers.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to increase clarity regarding the moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university to improve curriculum design in the area of faith integration and managing value conflicts. A review of the recent literature indicated significant gaps in the kind, amount, and approach to educating social work students in RFS in social work programs in spite of its importance in the lives of social workers and clients. For example, one recent study indicated that only 13% of social workers have completed a course on RFS while another survey revealed that nearly half of clinical social workers in the United States do not feel adequately trained to address RFS in practice (Oxhandler, 2018**;** Oxhandler et al., 2015). Recent surveys found that 43.4% of social workers report religious or spiritual content in their education as rare even while 83% support the inclusion of RFS in the social work curriculum (Bullis, 2013; Harris et al., 2017). Evangelical Christian universities, in particular, should intentionally prepare students to address RFS in practice ethically.

In addition to the need for increasing and improving curriculum, a review of the literature found little discussion of the RFS of social workers or students in general and especially regarding personal experiences or perceptions of value conflicts (Oxhandler et al., 2015, Valutis et al., 2014). There was also a gap in qualitative studies examining the experiences of social workers or students with RFS in social work programs, either their experiences in the classroom or their concerns regarding value conflicts or faith integration (Oxhandler et al., 2019). Specific to emerging adult students, no recent qualitative studies existed regarding the experiences of undergraduate social work

students with value conflicts or faith integration either in general or specific to any conceptual models (see Oxhandler et al., 2019). One study regarding Christian undergraduate student views of faith integration was completed but was with psychology students and not social workers (see Hall, Ripley, Garzon, & Mangis, 2009). Harris et al. (2017) called specifically for conducting qualitative research with students regarding their faith and integration perspectives to help improve the training that honors social workers' RFS without imposing beliefs on clients.

In Section 1, I identified and described the problem of insufficient and inadequate training for social workers in religion, faith, and spirituality in social work programs. Specifically, a lack of clarity and consistency exists in evangelical Christian university programs regarding best practices and content for teaching faith integration to undergraduate students in ways that can reduce potential value conflicts in the field while addressing the needs of emerging adults. Further, in Section 1, I identified how social work programs at evangelical Christian universities need a better understanding of the moral reasoning of young adults to inform curriculum and instructional design specific to the emerging adult population who are more significantly influenced by postmodern ideas that often contradict historic Christian views. In this section, I reviewed the nature of this qualitative study using individual interviews to explore the perspectives of senior BSW students to identify their experiences regarding faith and value conflicts. I further described moral foundations theory (Haidt, 2012) and its implications for identifying themes in student motivations and rationale regarding ethical decision making. Data from

the study will be used to identify implications for improving curriculum and instruction in evangelical Christian social work programs.

Section 1 also included a thorough review of recent literature regarding the importance of RFS in social work for both social workers and clients and its relationship to value conflicts, moral distress, and how values of emerging adults may interact with these ideas. Next, the literature reviewed highlighted the roots of value conflicts in social work, including clashes between modern and postmodern philosophies, differing interpretations of the code of ethics from Judeo-Christian and secular perspectives and conflicts stemming from views of truth and spirituality. The literature review also explored the current state of social work program courses, theories, methods, and models suggested in the literature for improving RFS training. Areas from the literature reviewed in this section included use of worldview theory and instruments, faith integration profiles, and inclusion of an additional spiritual competency in social work curriculum and field evaluations. Additional models reviewed included introductory lectures on RFS and use of conceptual frameworks such as hospitality, hermeneutical spirals, the three-layered faith integration perspective, and the three-legged stool approach to faith integration balancing the faith perspectives of social workers, clients, and organizations.

Consistency in training and curriculum for social workers in ethical approaches to RFS and faith integration is currently lacking. Social work educators in evangelical Christian universities face additional challenges teaching faith integration that upholds their faith traditions while reducing the potential for value conflicts in the field. It is important to understand the experiences of emerging adult social work students to help

faculty improve training in RFS for the next generation of social workers. By conducting a qualitative research study using individual interviews with emerging adult social work students that allowed them an opportunity to discuss their experiences of potential value conflicts and Christian faith, additional knowledge was gained to inform RFS training at evangelical Christian universities. I explain the research design and data collection methods used in the study in Section 2.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

Social workers lack effective training for integrating faith and practice, which may increase value conflicts. Social work programs at evangelical Christian universities face unique challenges in teaching faith integration considering their strong religious beliefs and the changing views of emerging adult social work students. In this study, I used a qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of emerging adult students in a social work program at an evangelical Christian university regarding their religious beliefs and areas of potential value conflicts in practice. Research findings may assist faculty at evangelical Christian universities to develop training models and approaches to teaching faith integration that can decrease potential value conflicts in the field and improve student's understanding of personal and professional identity. In Section 2, I discuss the research design, methodology, approach to data analysis, and ethical procedures I used to complete this study.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand emerging adult social work students' experience of moral reasoning at an evangelical Christian university considering potential value conflicts. The research questions focused on how students use moral reasoning when considering areas of value conflict between their religious beliefs and areas of social work practice.

RQ1: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge regarding their moral reasoning in response to identified personal value conflicts between their religious beliefs and practice?

RQ2: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge in moral reasoning regarding the place and priority given to Christian concepts?

This research addressed the problem of a lack of understanding of social work students' experiences regarding the integration of faith and practice and potential value conflicts that may arise. In this study, I sought to understand the moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university to inform curriculum design and pedagogy. To complete this qualitative study, I used individual interviews to collect data from senior BSW students. Generic qualitative inquiry and the use of individual narrative interviews are useful in understanding human experiences and perceptions (see Flores & James, 2013; Given, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin, 2012; Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). Qualitative research is also useful for studying ethical issues in social work with some scholars calling for additional use of qualitative research to explore issues of faith integration and value conflicts in practice (see Hatiboğlu et al., 2019; Hyde, 2012; Schonfeld et al., 2019; Seville et al., 2015; Valutis et al., 2014).

Key operational definitions for this study included:

Emerging Adults: People in their late teens through twenties in industrial and postindustrial societies (Arnett, 2000; Jackson et al., 2016).

Faith Integration: How one reconciles the tenants and beliefs of one's religion with core theories, ideas, values, assumptions, and practices related to one's secular profession (Edman et al., 2016).

Moral Reasoning: The thought processes and rational justifications that develop in response to moral intuitions (Haidt, 2012).

Value Conflict: A sense of incongruity that occurs between one's values, beliefs, or moral convictions, and the values and ethics defined by one's profession, employer, funding sources, a governing body, or client (Harris & Yancey, 2017).

Methodology

Data for this study was collected from senior BSW students at an evangelical Christian university who were emerging adults. Six students were purposefully selected to participate in the study as a representative sample of senior-level BSW students in the social work program. A semistructured interview schedule was used to gather data, including open-ended questions, to explore participant's views of perceived value conflicts and their corresponding moral reasoning. Interviews were conducted in person at a neutral location on the university campus.

Participants in the study were senior BSW students in an on-campus program. I identified students for the study through contact with the university social work program director and review of course registration data. Students who met the criteria for the study (emerging adult age group, senior status in the BSW program) were invited to participate in an individual interview through a short in-class presentation about the study. Students received an introductory letter and a consent form explaining the research, including the offer of an individual phone call to answer any questions before scheduling the interview. Students who requested additional information were offered contact by telephone to respond to additional questions.

A purposeful sampling strategy was appropriate to this research, given the target age of the population for study. Focusing on senior-level BSW students was also important to this study as senior-level students are more likely to have had an opportunity through their learning or practicum experiences to consider areas of potential value conflicts between social work and their religious beliefs. Therefore, senior-level BSW students were best suited to explain their experiences of moral reasoning in response to potential value conflicts as emerging adults. Students who agreed to participate were asked to complete a written informed consent form indicating their voluntary participation and understanding of the purpose, methods, timeline, benefits, risks, and use of data in the study.

I collected data for this study using an audio recording of individual interview sessions conducted in a private setting on the college campus. I also completed analytic memos regarding my observations and meetings with students. Participants were assigned numbers to anonymously associate them with the interview data. Finally, the recorded audio of each interview was converted into verbatim transcripts using a research transcription service for detailed qualitative analysis.

Because ideas regarding thresholds for saturation in coding and meaning vary and are unpredictable in qualitative research and the literature, Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) have argued for the use of information power to support study sample size. The information power model provides researchers a framework for assessing and supporting the appropriateness of the sample size to the qualitative research (Malterud et al., 2016). The information power model supports using smaller sample sizes when the

study aim is narrow, the specificity of the study is dense, an established theory is used for analysis, dialogue quality is high, and research case analysis is intended to be in-depth (Malterud et al., 2016). The information power model was used in this study to obtain deep and rich data from individual interviews with the proposed sample size. I will further explain the application of this model regarding and its relevance to the dependability of the study in the data analysis section.

Instrumentation

To support the process of completing individual interviews, I used an interview protocol for all interviews. Interview protocols are an important tool for ensuring consistency and quality in conducting qualitative research (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview protocol included an opening script describing the study and its motivation, what the participant could expect from the interview including length, the interview process including a request for openness and honesty and a reminder for participants to review the research consent form regarding information about the researcher, contact information, a review of member checking protocols and confidentiality and anonymity (see Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ravitch and Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview protocol also included the open-ended questions to be asked during the interview as well as prompts for follow-up questions followed by a closing script with final reminders regarding member checking and follow up opportunities (see Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Ravitch and Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Questions for the protocol were developed based on previous research highlighted in the literature review regarding emerging adult students, value

conflicts and MFT as a theoretical framework. Because this was an exploratory study, questions were few and broad to allow participants to take the lead in describing their views and experiences of value conflicts and moral reasoning.

Data Analysis

To interpret the data, transcripts and records from individual interview sessions were analyzed using descriptive coding techniques and directed content analysis to capture themes specific to the guiding theoretical framework of moral foundations theory (see Chowdhury, 2015; Given, 2008; Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Saldana, 2015; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). I developed codes and themes through detailed and recurrent analysis including identifying those related to the research questions and guided by the theoretical framework of the study (see Morgan, 2018; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Steps included data preparation, data immersion, identifying units of analysis, identifying categories, and coding schemes based on an inductive analysis of the data and deductive categories from the theoretical framework, verifying the coding scheme, assessing consistency, and drawing conclusions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Several methods were used to establish the trustworthiness of this research. First, the credibility of the study was enhanced by my familiarity as a researcher to the university setting, its social work programs, and experience with engaging students in discussions regarding ethics and moral reasoning through my work in field education at Christian universities over the last 10 years (see Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth,

2009). Also, as a current faculty member of the university in the MSW program, I brought a valuable insider view of the organization's religious beliefs and perspectives of students that allowed me to approach the data with a deeper understanding of the question and phenomenon as a whole (see Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). However, because I teach in a different program and location, I did not have a relationship with any of the BSW students in this study. Second, I enhanced the credibility of the study by creating conditions to improve honesty during data collection such as establishing ground rules to promote honesty, respect, and safety and reminding participants of their right to refuse to participate or end their engagement in the process at any time (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Also, I instructed participants that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions and I encouraged them to be honest and candid at all times (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Finally, the credibility of the study was improved through member checking (see Carter et al., 2014; Given, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they wished to clarify any of their responses or provide any final insights. Participants also received a copy of the transcript of their interview session with a request to respond with any corrections or clarifications. Review and analysis of data by participants through means such as these can add value and increase trustworthiness in qualitative research (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004).

Transferability and Dependability

The findings of this study and its implications are specific to a large evangelical Christian university BSW program. Because the focus of this study was a population that will continue to age, grow, and develop and who represent a specific generation, there are also limits to the applicability of the data over time. Students in this age group may also have religious beliefs that may be unique to the context of the University and region in which it exists. Other evangelical Christian universities may benefit from the findings of the study but should consider the similarities and differences of their context compared to the factors described in this research before determining the importance of the findings to similar populations (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Also, because this study is the first of its kind to explore the experiences of value conflicts and moral reasoning in BSW students in an evangelical Christian university, additional research will be needed to establish further dependability of the findings. However, the dependability of this study was enhanced by the use of a detailed audit trail and demonstrating adherence to protocol that future researchers can duplicate in similar settings (see Shenton, 2004). The dependability of this research was further improved through the use of interview protocols and questions that were duplicated in each session, increasing the consistency of the research process.

Finally, to improve the dependability of the data, I used the information power model to assess the sample size and its implications before and during the study (see Malterud et al., 2016). Using individual interviews with a smaller sample size of 6 students is supported by the information power model in the following ways:

- The aim of the study is narrow, focusing on a very specific population and topic.
- The participants represent a sample whose characteristics are very specific to the aim of the study.
- An established theory, MFT, will be applied and used to conceptualize the data.
- The strength of the dialogue is anticipated to be strong, given the experiences of the researcher, topic, and individual interview method.
- The analysis strategy focuses on an in-depth analysis of narratives from selected participants (Malterud et al., 2016).

A small sample size was justified for this study based on an assessment of the above dimensions of the information power model supporting its dependability (see Malterud et al., 2016). However, to further assess the dependability of the sample size, I reviewed the dimensions and implications to the study at the half-way point of the interview process, documenting my assessment in a reflection memo and recommending any changes in approach.

Confirmability

In executing this research, efforts were taken to ensure that findings reflected the perceptions and experiences of the students participating in the study and not those of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). First, in this study, I acknowledged my bias as a researcher including my role as a faculty member at the University, my experience with teaching ethics, and my personal religious beliefs that may affect my

perceptions of truth and moral reasoning (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Second, to reduce the impact of my bias, I engaged in reflective activities during the research process, including the completion of analytic memos, observations, and records of peer feedback sessions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Also, as previously mentioned, the internal consistency of the data and findings were confirmed using member checking protocols. Finally, peer debriefing to assist in a review of data coherence, findings, interpretations, and recommendations was used to help confirm the study process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical protection of participants is vital in qualitative research where participants disclose personal information and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The study was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in December of 2019, approval number 11-26-19-0516021. Participants in this qualitative research project signed an informed consent form describing the purpose of the research, procedures, timeframes, sample questions, the voluntary nature of their participation, risks and benefits, privacy information, and who to contact regarding questions or concerns. The informed consent document included participants' right of refusal to participate or withdraw from the study and information specifying that individual or identifying information would not be shared with the university, faculty, or any entity. Data collected were used for data analysis only. Number codes were ascribed to participants to allow for the anonymity of the data during transcription and reporting (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Informed consent forms were hand-delivered to students before the individual interview session to allow students an opportunity to review the information and reach out with questions in advance. The researcher also reviewed the informed consent document with each participant before the start of the interview, including a review of procedures regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and guidelines during the interview. Original data collected for the study was kept in a secure location, including paper and electronic data, to which only the researcher has access and will remain in this location for five years, after which it will be destroyed. The summary of data and findings were disseminated through this published capstone document and made available publicly, and to university faculty and administration.

Summary

In Section 2, I described the methodology of this study and rationale. Data for this study were collected via in-person individual interviews with six students in a neutral setting at the university using a semistructured interview process. A professional transcription agency transcribed the data, which was analyzed by the researcher for themes using inductive and deductive methods that reflect the theoretical framework of moral foundations theory. The study's credibility was increased by the expertise and background of the researcher, methods used to enhance honestly and candor of participants, and by employing member-checking protocols. Dependability of the study was addressed through the creation of a detailed audit trail, review of information power dimensions, and use of standardized questions and documentation for each interview. Confirmability was enhanced through the use of analytic memos, and peer debriefing

sessions. Detailed informed consent forms were used to ensure disclosure of all relevant research information and voluntary participation of students. Issues of anonymity, confidentiality, and risk were addressed both in writing and verbally before beginning data collection, and data was kept in safe and secure locations throughout the study and beyond. Data analysis and findings are discussed in Section 3.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the experiences of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university regarding their approaches to moral reasoning in response to potential value conflicts between their personal religious beliefs and values and those of clients in a practice setting. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge regarding their moral reasoning in response to identified personal value conflicts between their religious beliefs and practice?

RQ2: For emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university, what themes emerge in moral reasoning regarding the place and priority given to Christian concepts?

Semistructured individual interviews were used to collect data from six senior status BSW student participants identified using convenience sampling at an evangelical Christian university. Convenience sampling allows researchers to use participants based on availability and self-selection (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Generic qualitative and recurrent analysis techniques were used to identify patterns and themes across the data set (see Morgan, 2018; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), content analysis is an inductive process whereby the researcher analyses and interprets the data, assigning categories, or themes. Components of content analysis include data preparation and immersion and identifying units of analysis, categories, and coding schemes leading to the development of themes and conclusions (Zhang &

Wildemuth, 2009). Audio data were professionally transcribed verbatim for analysis and coding. I used the transcripts to review and highlight important data, using the comments section to identify initial in-vivo and descriptive coding ideas along with notes and impressions. Coding from the individual transcripts was translated into an Excel document for a comparison of responses from each participant along with further side by side analysis identifying concepts and categories leading to emerging themes. In Section 3, I describe in more detail the data collection and analysis process and techniques that were used for this study. I also describe the findings of the research, along with themes that emerged from the data and a summary.

Data Analysis Techniques

The Walden University Institutional Review Board approved this study in December of 2019 (11-26-19-0516021). I used convenience sampling to identify participants for the study. In January 2020**,** I presented information about the study to the senior BSW class at the university, distributing a letter of introduction regarding the research and a copy of the consent to participate form to 28 students. Six BSW students meeting the criteria for the study contacted me via email within the following week to arrange an interview time and location. I met with each student in a neutral and semiprivate location in the campus library, which allowed for sufficient privacy as well as safety for the participants. Participants were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Participant interviews took place over 2 weeks in January 2020. The semistructured interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. Each participant was

assigned a number to ensure anonymity in the analysis and presentation of the data. The volunteer participants were senior BSW students aged 18-25 years. I reviewed the informed consent document individually with each participant before beginning the interview obtaining their signature and providing them with a $25 gift card of their choice to either Amazon or Starbucks for their participation. Participants were also given the option to receive and review their transcripts after the interview, as well as a draft version of the study findings for review and feedback before its completion. All participants agreed to receive and review these documents.

Upon completion of the paperwork and answering any final questions for the participant, the interview began. As indicated in the interview protocol (see Appendix A), the interview began with a review of the purpose of the research, the projected time frame of the interview, the participant's option to stop the interview at any time, and the recording of the interview for transcription purposes. The participants were also reminded to answer questions with honesty and candor and to describe their experience without worrying about right or wrong answers or what I, as the researcher, might wish them to say. Student participants were asked before the interview began, as well as at the end of the interview, if they had any additional questions.

The interview consisted of open-ended questions presented in a semistructured format. Open-ended questions allow participants to respond freely and the researcher to "uncover as much about the participants and their situation as possible" (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 3). The initial questions in the interview focused on creating a connection and establishing the context of the participant, including a description of their

background, how they came to study social work, and a description of the meaning and importance of their religious beliefs. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) recommend asking easier questions first to build trust and confidence. The remaining questions in the interview protocol focused on the experiences of the participants regarding the main research questions followed by additional prompts intended to elicit further description and meaning from participants (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

During the interviews, participants spoke freely as they expressed their thoughts, feelings, and reasoning regarding their experiences of value conflict. When responding to participants, I was careful to listen intently, reflect their responses, and summarize content where possible to ensure my understanding of their meaning. Participants did not appear anxious or uncomfortable and engaged openly in processing their ideas and insights out loud. I recorded each interview using a digital recorder and immediately backed-up the recording to my laptop to ensure the data were secure. After the interview was over, I thanked the student for participating and reminded them that I would be sending the transcript for review; I also reminded them of my contact information on the informed consent should they wish to contact me with any questions, concerns, or changes. Also, after each set of interviews occurring on a given day, I completed an analytic memo reflecting on the interviews, their content, and my reactions. By using techniques such as member checking, including clarifying responses during the interviews, transcript review, and final review of study results by participants in conjunction with using a structured and consistent format for each interview, the

trustworthiness of the research was enhanced (see Carlson, 2010; Carter et al., 2014; Given, 2008; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

After completing the participant interviews, the audio recordings were uploaded to a secure transcription service where they were transcribed verbatim and returned in six individual Word documents. Each interview transcript was, then, individually sent to the student participants for review and feedback. Two students responded, indicating that they had no feedback or corrections, and four did not respond at all. I stored all study data in a password protected and secure encrypted laptop. Hard copies of materials such as consent forms were stored in a secure locked cabinet.

Generic qualitative analysis techniques such as descriptive coding and content analysis were used to identify emerging themes in the research (see Morgan, 2018; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) identified key steps in content analysis that include data preparation, data immersion, identifying units of analysis, identifying categories and coding schemes based on an inductive analysis of the data and deductive categories from the theoretical framework and assessing consistency, and drawing conclusions. Using this approach, I began by preparing the data, adding line numbers to the dialogue, and saving each Word transcript as previously indicated, storing each audio recording and individual transcript in a secure location by student number. Next, I immersed myself in the data by reading each interview several times and checking them against the audio recordings. Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated that qualitative researchers serve as interpreters of the experiences and words of others and emphasize that insight that informs theories grow as they immerse themselves in the

qualitative data. As a final step in the immersion process, I also read through my analytic memos to familiarize myself further with my thoughts and reactions at the time of the interviews, adding to my insights about the data set.

After this period of immersion and reflection on the data, I began the step of precoding and identifying initial units of analysis. While reading each transcript, I highlighted, bolded, and underlined keywords and phrases for initial descriptive and in vivo coding, making notes using the comments feature of Word to capture key terminology, personal notes, and impressions of the data (see Saldana, 2015). During this process, I also captured the descriptive codes in a codebook, organizing them according to the main research questions. DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) stressed the importance of using a codebook to serve as a guide for analyzing interview data as they capture key definitions and ideas. The codebook allowed me to further analyze the data for common concepts. The initial dataset identified 159 codes.

For further inductive analysis and coding, I created an Excel spreadsheet with key quotes and phrases from the data as well as descriptive codes to compare each interview side by side. This process allowed me to further identify keywords and similar coding concepts across all interviews, creating a larger roadmap with which to analyze the combined data and codes. Next, through second and third level coding, I used a process to further consolidate the identified codes by developing a thematic map of common concepts and categories focusing on the key interview questions. Saldana (2015) described the cyclical and heuristic nature of the coding process that builds on itself with each level of coding and interaction with the data. By comparatively layering my process

of coding, I was able to identify concepts and categories that allowed for the emergence of themes.

Through the process of comparative analysis of codes and concepts, I also used a deductive approach to filter findings through the theoretical framework of MFT (Haidt, 2012). Haidt's (2012) model of moral reasoning assumes that felt moral intuitions drive moral thoughts and reactions followed by the rationale to justify them. The coding process revealed multiple words and phrases where students were processing value conflicts through the lens of internal emotional reactions. Haidt's categories of moral intuitions such as care/harm, loyalty/betrayal, and sanctity/degradation allowed me to assess the codes from this framework and identify commonalities in the value conflicts presented.

My final step of analysis involved reviewing potential themes and assessing their consistency with the data set and drawing conclusions (see Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). To ensure consistency with the questions of the study and the data set, I reviewed the themes in relation to the codes and categories several times. Corbin and Strauss (2015) described the coding process in qualitative research as moving from information directly arising from the data toward higher abstractions to capture the ideas, intent, and experiences of the participants, without which the final results lack depth, meaning, and relevance to the questions at hand. The process I used for identifying and constructing themes was informed by the data, research questions, theoretical framework, and my intuitions and understanding of social work values and evangelical Christian concepts (see Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Braun and Clarke (2012) stated that, when articulating themes, it is important that each one has a unique focus, relates to the others without overlapping, answers the research question, and helps tell the story of the data. To accomplish this task, I used phrases capturing the common elements of responses, selected descriptive coding words from the data set to include in the statement, and sought to connect the flow of ideas as derived from the data. Four themes were identified relating to research question one and one theme from research question two. For RQ1, themes included (a) predominant internal student struggle to reconcile social work values and religious convictions, (b) use of common values in moral reasoning but uncertainty regarding definitions and application, (c) emphasis on not imposing personal values on others, and (d) prioritizing of care and authenticity in client relationships. For RQ2, one main theme emerged: (a) importance of the Bible or Biblical teaching as a foundation to moral reasoning.

Corbin and Strauss (2015) argued that validating data includes checking with participants and against the data when interpreting findings and subsequently discarding contradictory ideas. Validating data is "a system of checks and balances built into the analytic process" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 65). Member checking was a key component used to confirm the data in the study. Member checking is a way of confirming the data and its results and challenging the bias the author may impose on the research (Birt et al., 2016). The first layer of member checking in the study occurred during each interview, where I frequently asked participants if I was understanding their words and positions correctly, paraphrasing ideas back, and making sure they agreed it was correct. The second layer of member checking involved participants receiving a copy

of the interview transcript for review and having the opportunity to respond with any comments, changes, or feedback desired. Participants did not request any changes to the transcripts. Finally, a draft copy of the study's findings was sent to participants for review and feedback. Each participant was given 7 days to respond, after which I contacted any remaining participants again to ensure them the opportunity for feedback. Using frequent member checking at different stages of the research process helps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The trustworthiness of the data and research process was also enhanced by structured consistency in the interview process, analytic memos, and peer debriefing. First, by using a semistructured interview process and questions, each participant responded to the same set of questions, increasing the integrity of data collection. Carlson (2010) confirmed that using the same research procedures during qualitative interviewing improves the trustworthiness of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data. I also kept a written audit trail to capture the step by step process of the research for future duplication and to assess strengths, weaknesses, and dependability of the process. Additional components of documentation from this study include audio recordings of the interviews, transcripts, analytic memos, and coding documentation (Carlson, 2010).

As a second tool for increasing trustworthiness in the research, I completed analytic memos at the end of each interview day to capture additional thoughts, impressions, and insights related to the data. Corbin and Strauss (2015) emphasized that writing and reviewing analytic memos helps researchers identify and assess ideas and concepts for further development. One helpful reflection tool I used in writing the memos

included responding to the questions, what surprised me, what intrigued me, and what disturbed me to assess my assumptions, positionality, and values (see Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2011, p. 88). Using these specific questions allowed me to challenge my biases during the interview and the data review process. Third, I used peer debriefing as a means of checking and challenging my research approach, process, and findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the interview process, I contacted my committee chair for debriefing regarding my interviewing style and approach to ensure the integrity and consistency of the process. I also completed an analytic memo following the meeting to reflect on my research further. Finally, I arranged a peer debriefing session with a colleague to review my data collection, coding process, and initial findings to obtain additional guidance and feedback, followed by another analytic memo capturing ideas and insights. By using techniques of intentional structure in research design, active reflection, and peer debriefing, the validity and trustworthiness of the data were enhanced.

Limitations

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) argued that the goal of qualitative research is "to expose the human part of a story" (p. 1). However, as with all stories, research only tells a part and has limits to its lessons. This study has several limitations. First, the results of the study are limited to one evangelical Christian university in the mid-West United States. The participants may represent a set of beliefs and perspectives specific to the context of the university, its location, and the denomination with which it is affiliated. The results may provide helpful insights to similar universities, but caution should be used when extrapolating the findings. A second limitation of the study is its small sample

size of six participants. Although the sample size still represents a substantial portion of the current senior BSW class at the university (28) and meets criteria substantiating its information power as described by Malterud et al. (2016), the findings may not be representative of the university's BSW population as a whole. Also, all the participants were female, limiting the study's implications for male social work students. Third, a limitation of the study is the age and developmental stage of the participants whose perspectives and struggles with value conflicts are rapidly changing as they complete the program. The study represents a moment in time perspective on the issue. Fourth, this study is limited as the first of its kind to examine the experiences of value conflicts and moral reasoning in BSW students in an evangelical Christian university. As a result, the findings are preliminary, and further study is needed to support them. Finally, although substantial efforts were taken to minimize the bias of the researcher, a limitation of the study may be reflected in my commitment to the University and passion for the ideas of integrating Christian faith and social work practice. Despite the identified limitations, this study can offer useful information and insights to social work educators as an initial exploratory study of the moral reasoning of BSW students.

Findings

The social work profession is driven by the ethics and values of social workers. Emerging adult BSW students are becoming social workers in the context of a world that is increasingly diverse in belief, behavior, and culture creating additional challenges for students and the faculty who seek to train them in ethical decision making (Eck et al., 2016; Lindeman, 2016; White et al., 2016). Through this study, I sought to understand

the experiences, perceptions, and moral reasoning of senior BSW students at an evangelical Christian university in the face of value conflicts in practice between their social work values and religious beliefs. I also sought to understand student experiences of the role of Christian beliefs and ideas on their ethical views and decision making. Based on participant responses, students affirmed common core values yet wrestled with their definitions and application in practice, emphasized private and individual views of the place of morality in relationships, prioritized care and authenticity in client relationships, and expressed a sense of ongoing internal conflict between social work values and particular religious convictions. Also, specific to Christian belief, students identified the importance of the Bible or Biblical teaching in their moral thinking and of specific Judeo-Christian beliefs regarding the inherent value of others as God's creation.

Demographics

This study included six research participants. All were given numbers to protect their identity. Per the criteria identified for the study, each participant was a senior-level BSW student, aged 18 to 25 years, attending an evangelical Christian university. All of the students who volunteered for the study were female.

Regarding background information, all participants were from the Midwestern United States. Five out of the six participants reported being raised by a Christian parent or parents and attended church regularly. All but one participant professed a strong commitment to the Christian faith while also describing a broadening of their views from those of their parents. Also, five out of the six participants reported gaining an interest in the social work profession as a result of previous experiences with family or personal

relationships involving difficulties where they became exposed to both specific kinds of problems and human services providers.

Themes

This study sought to answer two research questions. Data collection and analysis from the individual semistructured interviews generated four themes pertaining to the first research question and one theme related to the second. The aim of the first research question was to identify general themes when considering potential value conflicts between the student's religious beliefs and social work practice. The second research question was more specific to the priority given by students to specifically Christian concepts in their moral reasoning. Themes that emerged regarding the first research question include (a) predominantly internal student struggle to reconcile social work values and religious convictions, (b) use of common values in moral reasoning but uncertainty regarding definitions and application, (c) emphasis on not imposing values on others, and (d) prioritizing of care and authenticity in client relationships. For research question two, one main theme emerged: (a) importance of the Bible or Biblical teaching as a foundation to moral reasoning.

As a whole, the data collected resulted in a richer understanding of the views and personal struggles students face in addressing areas of value conflict between social work values and their religious convictions. The identified themes for both research questions one and two are described in further detail below. Selected participant responses and quotes are used to support each theme. However, some responses were edited to enhance clarity and readability while maintaining the participant's words and intent.

RQ1 Theme 1: A Predominantly Internal Student Struggle to Reconcile Social Work Values and Religious Convictions

When considering specific value conflicts between religious beliefs and practice, all students expressed a sense of internal struggle in their moral reasoning between their views of social work ethics and their religious convictions. The areas of value conflict identified by students included working with LGBT clients, clients considering an abortion, individuals who murder or repeatedly lie, needy and abused children, and the tension between social work and service delivery expectations in Christian agencies. All students expressed a sense of responsibility to both their personal convictions and the social work profession and openly described the struggle to reconcile these two sets of values or worldviews in their area of identified conflict. However, students also repeatedly expressed concern over mixing their faith convictions and real-life social work practice. All students explained their efforts to integrate their views and their approaches to relieving tension between their faith and social work values, including attempts to better understand concepts such as love, truth, sin, and accountability and their role and priorities in ethical decision making as Christian social workers. Adding to their sense of internal conflict, students expressed emotional struggle with feelings of personal guilt over going against their religious convictions, tensions between cultural and religious views on issues, the impact of past experiences and uncertainty about precisely what to do in practice.

Student 1 reported regarding working with an LGBT client,

> “I don’t know what to do or how to approach it” and expressed not knowing how to reconcile her Christian beliefs with her role as a social worker in this area when she is “not supposed to mix the two.”

Student 1 further stated that she knows someone who is transgender and sensitive to being mis-gendered and wondered,

> how do I interact with them and empathize with them in a way that's sensitive to them and their situation, but also having the thoughts in my head that are like, this isn't right? It kind of gets confusing because it's usually like faith versus social work.

Student 2 expressed her emotional struggle in managing value conflicts in social work as,

> I think (my faith) it's definitely there, prevalent I would say, but not winning the battle. I'm thinking of ethics and beliefs fighting over each other. There's always that tug of the personnel emotional, spiritual kind of thing.

Student 3 verbalized concerning the issue of abortion in social work,

> Christian and social work views feel very opposite to each other, and I feel like I am constantly trying to teeter in the middle of being a social worker but also being a Christian social worker, and that feels very difficult.

Student 3 also reflected on the impact of past experiences affecting her struggle,

> I had a close friend who had an abortion and I just really wrestled and empathized with her with what she had gone through and hadn't told anyone before. And so, it's like the most two conflicting things I feel like is where I ended up being. It's like, how do I sit with people and journey with people who've made choices that I

> don't agree with, but I love for who they are? And how do I still believe what I believe and take my stance?

Student 4 expressed when working with abused children,

> I guess the first thing that comes to my mind is working with children, and just how the Bible calls us to care for children, and even just the respect between a parent and a child, and how often as social workers we're working with really broken families, so it's just kind of hard to see that and not want to fix that relationship. And then bigger, hot social topics such as abortion. There's a conflict inside of you to want to be more involved with responding with certain approaches or beliefs that you think could help them, but you are not supposed to do that. It's really hard for me not to want to get personally involved, but I know that I can't. That's probably one of the biggest conflicts that I have.

Student 5 described her struggle with value conflicts between her view of faith and social work in religious settings, stating,

> It's those little things to me. It's like, why should a child have to sit through a religious program just so they can eat for the night…feels like manipulation in a way. Yeah. And I don't like that, I feel like it's unethical. Because I feel like then it pushes people into a religion that they're probably not going to have fidelity with, they're not going to use in the right way and then they have this false sense of what it actually is and so, I don't know. I think that bothers me.

Student 5, further explained her thoughts on her value conflict and as related to her past, stating,

> I think with the whole doing the right thing and doing it the right way comes from the way I was brought up because with my mom. It's been drilled in my head that there's a right way to do stuff at the right time that makes it important to me

Student 6 explained in response to working with a client pursuing an abortion,

> So, having to really struggle with the differential in that of having to basically support and help someone do something that is against something that I believe in and feeling the guilt of it. I definitely see myself wrestling back and forth and struggling. I think what my responsibility is in that moment is the commitment that I've made to my employer and what I've agreed to. Also, I think more importantly, I've made a commitment to Christ, and so what crosses that line and which is more important to me?

Student 6 further reflected on the impact of a personal experience on her struggle,

> My uncle committed suicide a couple of years ago and so ever since then I think I've come to understand and have a respect and appreciation for life in a new way because I think that wasn't his right. Sounds wrong, but I don't think that that's a choice that he should have made. The gift of life has come to be something that I value a lot more recently. When I think of abortion of taking that away from someone that hasn't had the chance to live, that's one that really hits home.

The sense of internal conflict to reconcile their social work values and religious convictions was real for each student. Although the issues identified were different, all students expressed a desire to honor their religious convictions, while acknowledging that they sought to keep their faith separate from their social work practice. Although, as will

be discussed further in theme 3, students deferred to the idea of following social work values to not impose beliefs on others, the students expressed internal struggle just the same. Overall the sense of internal battle in their moral reasoning appeared driven by a sense of incompatibility between their religious convictions, previous personal experiences and social work priorities.

RQ1 Theme 2: Use of Common Values in Moral Reasoning but Uncertainty Regarding Definitions and Application

When explaining their approaches to moral reasoning in value conflict situations, students repeatedly referred to common sets of values between social work and Christian ethics, including self-determination, the dignity and worth of individuals, and loving others first. These common values primarily reflect the category of care/harm in MFT, describing an intuitive moral sense that drives people to prioritize care and avoid causing pain for others (Haidt, 2012). Students also referred frequently to the idea of not imposing beliefs on clients or mixing religious beliefs and practice, implying that doing so would cause harm. Although students quickly explained that their moral reasoning in response to clients focused on offering choice, showing love and honoring the inherent value and dignity of others, they also expressed uncertainty over the precise definitions of these terms and how to implement them in practice. During the interviews, students raised questions out loud regarding how and when it might be appropriate to challenge clients' preferences or choices, when and how social workers should use their influence with others, what the process of change looks like when it comes to client and social worker values working together, and what God's role and sovereignty looks like in the

process. Overall, students verbalized the struggle to fully understand and implement concepts such as love, self-determination, and client-centered practice, especially when working with clients whose values or morals were significantly different from their own. Although students referred to moral intuitions of care and avoiding harm as driving their moral reasoning, the concept became more complicated when responding to the needs, risks, and consequences faced by real people, creating tension between the emotional aspect of their moral intuition and a more rational decision making process.

Student 2 stated, “For me it's just making sure I'm being sensitive to our clients because I can't just assume that's what they believe and I wouldn't want to put my beliefs on them.”

Student 3 asked,

> How much influence can I or should I exert? How do I consistently make sure I'm not pushing that line of challenging to a certain degree of what my clients are capable of. But also having that realization that they have to make their own choices and I can't choose for them or make them choose the way I would choose.

Student 4 explained,

> We are called to love everyone equally, but I am not called to tell parents that they need to love their child better. I mean, self-determination a lot. People can make some really bad decisions, but it's not my place to put my religious or personal beliefs on them. I just need to help them work towards what's best for them whether or not that aligns with my beliefs.

Student 6 stated,

> I love social work the most because it feels like a chance to literally do what I'm called to do as a Christian in regards to being called to love people, love others and specifically the least of these. Yeah. I think that that drives me more than any other things. But, I'm thinking about like, okay, what does it look like to love, what does it look like to empower and bring up?

Student 6 further expressed,

> I think also the simple call of loving others and what does that look like in that situation? Is that supporting them in the decision that they're making or is that helping them and pushing them in the direction of making a decision that is more morally sound? Yeah, that seems that's a really big one. I think for me, I preach that I want to love others, but what does that practically look like in a lot of situations? Because I think it's different in every situation and that's really hard.

As seen above, students sought to respect individuals and honor client choices but were unclear regarding how to balance these in the context of ethical decision making. Student's desires to maintain boundaries and avoid imposing values created uncertainty regarding how best to work with clients in the context of difficult choices.

RQ1 Theme 3: Emphasis on Not Imposing Personal Values on Others

A third theme articulated by students regarding their approach to moral reasoning was a focus on being careful not to impose values or religious beliefs on others. Morals were less something external to be applied in the helping process, and more something internal and specific to the clients, their beliefs, and contexts. This reflects a postmodern view of truth noted by other authors as common among emerging adults (Eck et al., 2016;

Lindeman, 2016; White et al., 2016). In addition to expressing fears of being insensitive and imposing beliefs on others, students articulated concerns about coercion or manipulation of clients and reported a duty to keep their beliefs private. Overall, student responses reflected social work practice values of neutrality, taking a nonjudgmental stance and focusing s on the client's agenda. Student's approach to moral reasoning reflected a tendency to minimize the importance of morality in working directly with clients. Students expressed discomfort in having open conversations with clients when it came to ideas of what is good, right, wrong, healthy, or unhealthy, and expressed concern and caution about challenging client's views. The approach to moral reasoning explained by students seemed to minimize the MFT category of sanctity/degradation, which emphasizes the good of a more noble and higher way to live while elevating the category of liberty/oppression that promotes freedom and minimizing power or authority over others (Haidt, 2012).

Student 1 explained,

> So, I believe that when it comes to marriage, it should be man and wife. But I also believe that I'm not the ultimate judge of people's lives and their decisions. My role is never to implement my own beliefs but just to listen and empathize.

Student 2 reported,

> I think it's very important to be respectful of our clients and just make sure that nothing that we're doing is trying to push our beliefs on them. If I had an issue and I went to the Lord with it, and I spent time trying to figure that out, I would hope that that would change me to be more gracious toward them, more

> compassionate, those kinds of things. But other than that, I don't think that putting any kind of my beliefs on any of my clients would be appropriate.

Student 3 stated, “Personally, I would never tell them that what I think they did was wrong because that's their moral standard, not mine.” Student 4 explained, “It helps me to remember that these are religious principles that I need to follow, but that doesn't mean that everyone needs to follow them”.

Student 6 responded,

> I can't put all of my personal convictions on others, but I keep thinking through that and what that looks like. I think wrestling with that idea too of God doesn't call us to do that, I don't know. I keep thinking of the scripture of looking for the splinter in your own eye when there is a plank in your own.

As mentioned previously, an underlying drive to avoid messages that might imply authority, critique, or judgement seemed to drive student responses. A, “who am I to judge”? perspective seemed to dominate student thinking, including a heightened view of the importance of social work values such as client freedom of choice and autonomy that lead them to minimize or separate moral issues from conversations and to keep their own views private.

RQ1 Theme 4: Prioritizing of Care and Authenticity in Client Relationships

Consistent with the categories of care/harm and liberty/oppression previously described as important concepts supported by students, the fourth theme in the moral reasoning of students regarding value conflicts was that of prioritizing care and authenticity in relationships with clients. Students frequently expressed a desire to care

for others, be sensitive to vulnerable people, and walk alongside them. Students also expressed frustration with the limits of their role as social workers that prevented them from spending more time with clients, and being more personal, honest, open, or caring in their interactions. Students reported tension between the need for professional boundaries and the desire to show care and authenticity that was difficult to reconcile at times. Professional stances were seen as more impersonal and distant. Overall, students expressed a moral reasoning driven by a desire for authentic interaction and personal support for clients once again emphasizing a moral foundation of care/harm. However, students also emphasized a need to remind themselves to remain professional and be mindful of appropriate boundaries more indicative of the MFT category of authority/subversion stressing deference to authority and hierarchy above their feelings (Haidt, 2012). The intuitive default mode for students was care and sensitivity to clients with a conscious reflection on boundaries or professional responsibilities or standards coming in second.

Student 1 explained,

> I know that in scripture we're supposed to care for the oppressed and we're supposed to care for the people in society who are looked down upon. And so that's where my empathy comes from out of kind of a moral obligation, if you will, to be that person in her life.

Student 3 stated,

> I think it's a lot of walking and being in relationship with people that are not like me or have any sort of same beliefs as I have and being able to reconcile our differences for the sake of being in a relationship with them.

Student 4 expressed.

> You're not supposed to get really super involved personally with social work. You can't step into that person's life and show up and be there for them constantly. It's just when you're working with them. But in religion, I guess you're told to love unconditionally, and reach out, and be there for the orphan and widow and the poor, and sometimes I feel like it can be a limiting to just be one resource.

Student 5 emphasized,

> That's something that I have a hard time with because, like in the Bible, Jesus isn't a professional, he's a person, and so I think that that's an ethical principle that I understand and value. Sometimes I'd love to just work in a program and not have the professional side of it because I've seen how you can impact people through a relationship.

When considering working with others and encountering value conflicts between personal religious beliefs and social work practice, students articulated relying on common core social work values, including self-determination, the dignity and worth of persons, and loving one's neighbor as directives for their reasoning while recognizing that these principles do not provide clean-cut or clear remedies to value conflicts in practice. Also, the moral reasoning described by students in response to value conflicts emphasized the subjective, personal, and cultural nature of truth, including moral truth as

they explained their responses to working with clients. Students expressed hesitancy to declare the existence of objective moral truths when considering social work practice or the need to explore it with clients as a part of the helping process. Student's approach to value conflicts was permeated with concern for not imposing beliefs on others. The tendency to approach morality individually corresponds with students' responses stressing relationship, care, and authenticity in their work as having greater importance than specific moral issues clients may present.

With this backdrop of student approaches to moral reasoning in response to value conflicts in mind, I now shift to the theme specific to the place and priority of Christian concepts that emerged from the data. The evangelical Christian faith is grounded in beliefs such as the existence of moral truth rooted in the nature of God, the authority of the Bible as the word of God, sin that requires redemption, the importance of repentance, holy living, prayer, and the existence of forces of good and evil battling in the spiritual realm. Indeed, these beliefs are essential to the evangelical view of orthodox Christianity. Evangelical universities are committed to helping students explore the implications of these beliefs in their lives and professions and to helping students develop an integrated Christian worldview and identity (see Lindeman, 2016). Further, moral reasoning reflects fundamental beliefs and assumptions of one's worldview and moral intuitions (see Halvorsen, 2019; Young & Durwin, 2013). The purpose of the second research question in this study was to identify themes regarding the importance of specifically Christian concepts in moral reasoning for students when considering value conflicts between social work and religious beliefs. Of the many Christian concepts mentioned above, only one

emerged as a theme from the data. Although other Christian concepts were mentioned by some students such as the use of prayer, personal study, or reflection on the importance of people being made in God's image, for most students these were not central to their reasoning or were not explained as playing a significant role in their thinking or ideas about practice when confronted with a value conflict. Instead, the students largely stressed social work values such as the dignity and worth of persons and self-determination as guiding principles that they believed were consistent with their religious beliefs and should be dominant. Indeed, noticeably absent in the data were references to the importance of truth, sin, holiness, redemption, or other important ideas related to change in the evangelical Christian tradition.

RQ2 Theme: Importance of the Bible or Biblical Teaching as a Foundation to Moral Reasoning

The Christian concept mentioned most often by students in explaining their moral reasoning regarding value conflicts was the role and importance of the Bible or previous Biblical teaching. All students referenced either the Bible, specific Bible verses or concepts, or past Biblical teaching as they expressed their thoughts related to their identified value conflict. In referencing the Bible, however, some students expressed an understanding of the moral standard but not an understanding of the Bible's reason for it or why it was important. When students did express conviction regarding the moral stance of the Bible as authoritative on an issue, they were also quick to mention the importance of other Biblical or social work ideas such as loving others, not judging, awareness of one's sin and need for self-examination, self-determination, etc., to

counterbalance their claim. Students also expressed that following the code of ethics took precedence over making a stand or trying to influence a client on a particular moral issue regardless of the Bible's moral position.

Student 1 stated, "So, I believe that when it comes to marriage, it should be man and wife. But I also believe that as a Christian, I'm called to love everybody regardless." Student 2 explained,

> I think when it comes to trying to define what the truth in the situation is for me since I am relatively young in my faith, I seek that help out in finding that in the word. So, it's like what does the word say about this? However, I would just like to think that it wouldn't change the way that I would practice.
>
> For me, I totally believe that God's word is the truth, and then I think that there's a whole human process of getting there with yourself as a Christian to believing and doing as the truth says. So yeah, I think it is a process.

Student 3 reported,

> I would say my belief side is more on the parent family side of growing up and from religious institutions. I think I teeter-totter between the fact that it's ingrained in me from time, but I don't think that is the absolute right choice or the only choice to have a baby if you're pregnant. Is that a conflicting statement?

Student 5 stated,

> I was like, "No, do you not read the Bible?" I don't feel like that's how Jesus would take it at all. So, when people say that it's very contradictory and so I guess that's where it rubs with me because I want someone if they're going to live a life

> of Christianity to live that life. Your religion is supposed to be serious, and yes, there's human error and stuff like that, yes. But it goes with the whole picking and choosing. I just don't like that. I want fidelity if that makes sense. But I'm becoming more understanding of how it doesn't always have to be this way.

Student 6 explained,

> I think for me the idea of abortion rubs me the wrong way because I think that God created and gave life in that who are we to be able to step in and put that into our own hands. I think that's what abortion does. That's something that I personally don't believe in, but I recognize that in my role as a social worker, my role is to come alongside the client and help them to self-determine and figure out what's best for them.

Once again, the primary theme identified for research question 2, reflected a tension for students between different MFT categories of moral intuition (Haidt, 2012). By referencing the Bible or past Biblical teaching, students described their impulse toward the idea of authority/subversion, indicating a desire to submit to a hierarchical authority based in God or respect for the traditions of their church or family (Haidt, 2012). Students expressed this as a strong impulse but one in which they struggled to embrace fully. Instead, students quickly described what seemed to be their more powerful intuitions stemming from the moral foundations category of liberty/oppression reflected in their preferences to avoid imposing ideas or expressing anything that would imply criticism or challenge of the client's beliefs as well as the close intuitive counterpart of care/harm to ensure their focus is on love, concern and compassion (Haidt, 2012).

Regarding their specific religious beliefs, student responses also supported Haidt's premise that once the moral impulse arises, people look for a rationale to support it. In this case, students looked to support their overriding primary felt moral impulses of liberty/oppression and care/harm with Biblical ideas that counteracted the authoritative moral claim of their belief system.

Unexpected Findings

Scholars have noted that the current generation of emerging adults bring views on religion, ethics, justice, and spirituality that influences their moral reasoning (Arnett, 2000; Chenot & Kim, 2017; Eck et al., 2016; Erdvig, 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Lindemann, 2016). Although I was aware of this while undertaking this study, there were elements of difference I did not expect to emerge given the strongly evangelical beliefs of the University and substantial past church involvement described by the majority of the students. For example, I did not expect students to express their moral reasoning in ways that leaned so heavily on social work terminology alone. Given the strong religious context and backgrounds of most of the participants, I expected more references to or intermingling of Christian or theological terminology when exploring ideas of moral reasoning or responses in practice. Students most frequently referenced terms and concepts such as self-determination, dignity and worth, and not imposing values as the most common phrases reflecting their moral thinking. Using such terminology may reflect the strong emphasis on the code of ethics (NASW, 2017) taught in the program and students' development of their professional identity.

Second, an unexpected finding was the degree to which students expressed the influence of past experiences and personal relationships on their moral reasoning and decision making process. Many students explained their moral reasoning and responses to a potential value conflict while referencing experiences or relationships, evaluating their reasoning in light of these and emphasizing the personal nature of the value conflict for them as individuals. This finding raises issues of boundaries, bias, and projection which results when a clinician responds emotionally based on previous events and developmental experiences (Arundale & Bellman, 2018). Although many students referenced the importance of boundaries and professional behavior, it was not clear that they were aware of the degree to which their experiences could be affecting their moral reasoning and strategies. Although one student expressed her awareness of "personalizing" in her explanation of her response to the value conflict, other students did not use this term, and no one identified the possibility of projection. Understanding and resolving boundary issues in social work is vital to creating effective therapeutic relationships and outcomes (Davidson, 2005).

Summary

Moral intuitions and worldview assumptions shape moral reasoning and responses to value conflicts (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2013; Haidt, 2012; Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of emerging adult social work students at an evangelical Christian university regarding their moral reasoning in view of value conflicts in the field. Participants in the study freely identified areas of value conflict and explained their moral reasoning and struggle with

reconciling their religious beliefs with social work practice. Data from the six semistructured student interviews resulted in the emergence of themes answering the two research questions posed in the study and provided insight into social work student's experiences of moral reasoning in the context of value conflicts. Student answers identified themes including predominantly internal efforts to reconcile social work values and religious beliefs; the use of common core values in moral reasoning but uncertainty regarding how to best implement those values; a dominant belief in not imposing values on others; that relationships, respect, and care for others is paramount; and that the Bible is still foundational to their moral perspective. In section 4, I explore the application of the study and its findings to social work ethics and practice. Also, I discuss the usefulness, transferability, additional research implications, dissemination, and implications for social change of my research findings.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of social work students regarding moral reasoning in view of value conflicts between their religious beliefs and social work practice, including the priority given to Christian concepts. For this qualitative study, I used convenience sampling to identify senior-level BSW student participants from a large evangelical Christian university in the mid-West United States. I collected data from six volunteer students who met the criteria using semistructured interviews lasting 35-60 minutes. This qualitative research focused on understanding student's internal experiences and perceptions. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the data in response to two research questions. For RQ1, four themes were identified: (a) predominantly internal student struggle to reconcile social work values and religious convictions, (b) use of common values in moral reasoning but uncertainty regarding definitions and application, (c) emphasis on not imposing personal values on others, and (d) prioritizing of care and authenticity in client relationships. For RQ2, one main theme emerged: (a) importance of the Bible or Biblical teaching as a foundation to moral reasoning.

In the discussion of my research findings, I summarized student perspectives on value conflicts and moral reasoning in social work considering their religious beliefs. I also discussed connections between findings in the data and categories of moral intuition as defined by MFT (see Haidt, 2012). Further, I highlighted the difficulties students expressed in defining and implementing commonly stated values such as self-determination and the dignity and worth of clients in areas of value conflict. I also

explained findings from the data regarding the influence of experiences and relationships on student moral reasoning and their implications regarding issues of projection in responding to value conflict. Data from this study may help to improve curriculum development and teaching methods for faculty at evangelical Christian universities and assist students in better understanding and applying core social work values in practice. Also, findings from the data may assist social work program faculty at evangelical Christian universities to identify and provide greater opportunities for reflection, supervision, and mentoring to address areas of projection that can increase risk in practice. Finally, findings from the data may assist social work faculty at evangelical Christian universities to improve practices that can help students better understand the role of the Bible in informing their social work practice and improve their ability to integrate their Christian faith with their professional identity.

In Section 4, I will describe the application of this research to professional ethics in social work practice, make recommendations for social work practice, and discuss implications for social change based on the findings. I will conclude with a summary of the research.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The NASW code of ethics serves as the foundation for social work practice and education. Overall, this study promotes the integrity of the profession by engaging research to promote high practice standards and improve competence in the classroom and field regarding value conflicts in social work (see NASW, 2017, Ethical Standards 5). Also, specific core principles and standards of the code are directly related to the

social work practice problem of this study including respecting the inherent dignity and worth of persons, the importance of human relationships in the process of change, and avoidance of conflicts of interest and discrimination (see NASW, 2017). Social workers engage with vulnerable, diverse, and frequently marginalized clients, seeking to influence change at multiple levels (NASW, 2017). Understanding the moral reasoning of social work students helps guide social work educators in improving awareness, reflection, and practice skills that can reduce potential conflicts of interest and discrimination and increase competence for future social workers. A proper understanding of social work values and their implementation in practice, such as the inherent dignity and worth of persons and the importance of human relationships, is essential for navigating value conflicts in the field.

The NASW code of ethics guides clinical social work practice in the area of value conflicts, as is the focus of this study, in two primary ways. First, the principle that social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of persons calls social workers to support the client's self-determination in the context of social responsibilities (NASW, 2017). The code of ethics describes this as a dual responsibility that social workers must always manage (NASW, 2017). Value conflicts require social workers to engage in moral reasoning that considers such a dual focus while also examining personal beliefs and convictions adding to the complexity of ethical decision making (Sherwood, 2016). Second, the principle of recognizing the importance of human relationships requires that social workers seek to effectively engage and support clients while also managing tensions between client needs and desires, personal convictions, and community or

societal interests (NASW, 2017). Findings from this study may help to clarify the challenges faced by social work students in implementing these values and assist social work educators in improving student's understanding and application of these ethical principles in practice.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Based on the findings of this study, four action steps are recommended. The recommendations correlate to the issues and difficulties experienced by BSW students when considering areas of value conflict between religious beliefs and social work practice.

The roots of value conflicts are deep and, in some ways, hidden. When explaining their experiences of value conflict, students repeatedly reflected on the meaning and practice implications of ideas such as self-determination and the dignity and worth of persons and the role or place of their personal and religious convictions when considering these values. Students questioned the meaning of values in their responses, including social work terms, what love looks like, and how and when social workers should use their influence. Also, students were quick to use the terminology of social work values such as not imposing beliefs on others but expressed a lack of clarity in understanding or implementation of these ideas in more complex practice situations. As a result, a recommended first action step is the development of assignments in the social work curriculum at evangelical Christian universities that address the core values of the code of ethics individually. Assignments could clarify terminology and meaning for each primary value, and allow for discussion of specific case examples where students can apply the

ideas in morally complex situations. Also, social work educators should consider intentionally offering students opportunities to clarify the application of specific social work values and terms at other times in the curriculum without assuming this will happen naturally in field settings or discussions as all students in this study were in their final semester of the program and continued to struggle in this area. Values discussions should also include the potential conflicts between the dual responsibilities mentioned in the code to individual clients and society as well as personal or religious convictions held by students and how to use the code of ethics to navigate these tensions (NASW, 2017). Christian social work educators should use specific questions that help students to clarify the meaning of terms, their limits, and application such as:

- What does self-determination mean?
- What are its limits and why?
- How is self-determination the same or different from the Christian view of free will?
- What does this mean for you as a Christian social worker?
- Based on your own moral convictions, what issues trigger your impulse to prefer limiting someone's self-determination or choice, and why?

By asking penetrating questions such as these in the context of specific social work values and case examples, students will engage in higher levels of critical thinking and the self-reflection needed to prepare for future value conflicts. Helping students to more extensively clarify the foundation of their understanding and application of social work values differs from current models identified in the literature regarding faith integration,

which largely emphasize gaining knowledge, comparing belief systems or using integration profiles (Harris et al., 2017; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Oxhandler et al., 2019).

Similarly, student responses in the research interviews also indicated that they were still wrestling through and thinking aloud regarding their worldviews, philosophical assumptions, and moral intuitions. Students often articulated being unclear about key aspects of what they believed and why or what a specific moral conviction meant for them in relationships personally or professionally. Students questioned their worldview without clear paradigms for evaluating what they were questioning, or its foundations, aside from prescribed social work values, past experiences, relationships, or references to moral teachings from the Bible. In short, they lacked an understanding of meta constructs, narratives, or perspectives for thinking about what they were thinking about. Findings suggest that students have imbibed social work values while lacking a deeper understanding of their moral underpinnings or philosophical foundations like how some students described their understanding of their religious, moral beliefs. Also, as previously described, social work currently operates from differing philosophical paradigms that may be irreconcilable (Chamiec-Case, 2016; Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Halvorsen, 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Stewart, 2009). Therefore, students must understand the different worldviews and assumptions at work that may be adding to their internal value conflicts (Sherwood, 2016).

The second recommended action step, therefore, is the use of tools in the social work curriculum at evangelical Christian universities that will allow students to evaluate

their worldview assumptions and moral intuitions more closely. Worldview assessments such as those created by Neshama-Bannister (2016) and the Moral Foundations Quiz (www.yourmorals.org) associated with MFT (Haidt, 2012) are helpful tools educators can use to assist students in identifying, evaluating, and reflecting on how their assumptions and intuitions affect their moral responses and interpretation of the code of ethics and from where they come. Using such tools helps students to be more conscious of their bias and evaluate the validity and consistency of their assumptions and ethical stances, including those based on their faith or and other ideological assumptions. Evangelical Christian universities should encourage students to understand the differences between the assumptions of a Christian worldview and ethical approach as compared to others (Sherwood, 2016). Such understanding is also useful for social workers engaging with diverse populations and seeking to understand a variety of worldviews.

Finally, a finding that emerged in the research is the impact of student relationships and past experiences on their sense of internal value conflict. When describing value conflicts between their religious beliefs and social work, students described personal experiences or relationships that affected their emotions and challenged their ethical beliefs and moral convictions. The power of these experiences contributed to their sense of moral conflict between what they experienced and felt and their belief of right or wrong. Although such emotionally driven reactions are associated with the MFT model of moral intuitions (Haidt, 2012), the source of these intuitions were

specific experiences or relationships which may better reflect the concept of projection (Arundale & Bellman, 2018).).

To address this issue, the third recommended action step is that social work educators at evangelical Christian universities implement opportunities for students to reflect on issues of projection, including how these can impact their work, value conflicts, and ethical reasoning. Given the personal nature of value conflicts, programs should provide specific training regarding the issue of projection and how it may affect value conflicts and relationships with clients. Programs should also implement specific assignments where students can identify and reflect on issues of projection to assess how they may be affecting their attitudes or social work practice. Opportunities for individual mentoring could also be offered to help students address issues that may represent risk or conflicts of interest in the future. Lastly, as the issues of projection was not identified in the literature review as related to faith integration or value conflicts, it is recommended that additional research be done to explore the presence and effect of projection on moral reasoning in social workers.

Usefulness of the Findings

Currently, I am a social work educator teaching at the MSW level and serving as the director of field education for an evangelical Christian university. The findings of this study directly affect my work by providing greater insight and understanding into the experiences and perspectives of emerging adult social workers, many of whom will continue into an MSW program. Some findings are also pertinent to emerging adult students currently attending the MSW program. For example, during field discussions,

emerging adult students often express similar concerns regarding integrating faith and practice emphasizing fears of imposing beliefs on others or the belief in their ability to be neutral in their roles. The conclusions and recommendations of this study may be used to inform curriculum design that can improve student's ethical decision making abilities and management of value conflicts in the field. The findings of this study will also assist me in training adjunct faculty to improve their skills for teaching ethics and guiding students in integrating their faith and social work. Overall, the findings of my research have expanded my knowledge and understanding of struggles students face in reconciling personal convictions and religious beliefs and social work values in practice. Beyond the intellectual understanding and knowledge needed for social work practice, the findings of this study will allow me to speak in greater detail about the difficulties and challenges young adult social work students face in navigating value conflicts and the integration of their faith and social work values and identities in evangelical Christian universities.

Transferability of the Findings

The research completed for this study is specific to emerging adult BSW students at one evangelical Christian university in the Midwestern United States and is not generalizable. However, the findings of this study can be shared with similar evangelical Christian universities with BSW programs and their faculty who may benefit from the data. Similar universities should consider their individual context and compare them to the criteria and purpose of the study when evaluating the importance of the findings to their population (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The main focus of this research was to increase understanding of the moral reasoning of

students in response to value conflicts and their views regarding integrating their faith and Christian beliefs with social work practice to inform teaching methods and curriculum. As a result, the data and findings will be useful to the social work department and faculty for program planning and improvement. The qualitative research performed in this study was designed with its own purpose, structure, and intent for maximizing its benefit to the University and social work program in which it was completed.

Limitations of the Findings

This research study sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of emerging adult social work students regarding value conflicts at an evangelical Christian university in the Midwestern United States. The study was limited due to its small sample size ($N = 6$), the single-gender of the participants, and their specific backgrounds. The religious beliefs and perspectives of the student participants may also represent unique aspects of the University or region. Also, the target age of participants in this study represented the current young adult population whose influences and development are changing, limiting the applicability of the data over time. The research design may be replicated, but the validity of the study beyond the University at which it was conducted is limited, and the results are not generalizable to all emerging adult students in other BSW programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

Social work education currently lacks consistent and reliable training for social workers pertaining to the integration of faith and practice (Chamiec-Case, 2013; Eck et al., 2016; Elliott, 2017; Hunt, 2014; Husain & Sherr, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018;

Morales, 2013; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Schonfeld et al., 2015; Senreich, 2013). Further, social workers practice in a professional context where different value priorities and philosophical paradigms are often at play, increasing the need for social work programs to prepare students for value conflicts in the field (see Chamiec-Case, 2016; Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Halvorsen, 2019; Neshama-Bannister, 2016). For this research study, six senior-level BSW students at an evangelical Christian university were recruited through convenience sampling to participate in semistructured qualitative interviews to gain knowledge regarding their experiences of moral reasoning in areas of value conflict between their religious beliefs and social work practice to increase understanding and improve training. An unexpected finding of the study was the influence of personal experiences and relationships that may impact moral reasoning and ethical decision making.

Further study regarding this phenomenon in social work students is recommended to clarify the place and effect of projection. Also, because this study was the first of its kind to explore moral reasoning in BSW students, additional research is needed to enhance the dependability of the findings and increase knowledge in this area. Additional research in the area of moral reasoning in social workers, especially as it relates to integration of faith and practice is needed to continue to inform effective training for social workers engaging diverse populations.

Dissemination of the Research

Research findings from the study will first be distributed to the participants via email. Findings will also be distributed via email to on-campus BSW faculty at the

University, followed by an invitation to an informal meeting to discuss the data and its implications. Third, the findings of the study will be presented at the University faculty symposium in the Fall of 2020 to present the data to a wider University audience. Finally, I will seek publication of study findings in academic or social work journals to inform social work education and practice and advance knowledge more broadly. Engaging in social work research, evaluation, and dissemination of findings are key aspects of ethical social work practice (NASW, 2017, Ethical Standard 5.02).

Implications for Social Change

This research study provides important preliminary insights into the moral reasoning of emerging adult social work students in a Christian context. Qualitative research in social work is especially helpful when researchers employ sufficient rigor to relevant professional problems to understand complex phenomenon and multilayered experiences (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011). Findings from this research can positively contribute to the field of social work by affecting the education and practice competencies of future social workers and their ability to work ethically and manage value conflicts in individual, organizational, and community settings. Ethics work, as described by Banks (2016), is "the effort people put into seeing ethically salient aspects of situations, developing themselves as good practitioners, working out the right course of action and justifying who they are and what they have done" (p. 2). Moral reasoning and responses to value conflicts, as examined in this study are key to ethics work and vital to effective social work practice.

Because social workers are called to engage in ethics work daily in their roles and professional identity, enhancing knowledge and training in the work of ethics, especially in areas of value conflict such as identified in this research may result in positive social change on multiple levels. On a micro level, the results of this study may lead to improved student abilities to identify and manage value conflicts between personal religious beliefs and social work values. Students may also increase their knowledge and understanding of social work values, reflexivity, and the ability to use critical thinking skills for ethical decision making. At the mezzo level, dissemination of this research to faculty may result in increased understanding by faculty of the importance of helping students to reconcile ethical difficulties as well as improvement in the social work curriculum and teaching methods in the social work program. At the macro level, dissemination of research findings through scholarly journals and presentations may benefit other Christian universities as they consider changes to their curriculum and approach to teaching ethics and integration of faith and social work that can improve student competencies and practice. It is hoped that the findings and data from this study will improve both social work education and curriculum in faith integration training at Christian universities, resulting in more effective social work practice.

Summary

Effective education and training for integrating faith and social work practice are currently lacking (Eck et al., 2016; Hunt, 2014; Husain, & Sherr, 2015; Moffatt & Oxhandler, 2018; Neshama-Bannister, 2016; Paine, 2017; Schonfeld et al., 2015). Faculty in social work programs at evangelical Christian universities face unique challenges in

teaching integration of faith and practice given the increased risk of value conflicts experienced among more religious and conservative social workers (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Valutis et al., 2014). Also, as emerging adult BSW students are the future of the profession, it is vital to understand the impact of cultural trends on these students' views and approach to moral reasoning in view of potential value conflicts in practice to inform training models for faith integration (see Eck et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2016; Lindemann, 2016). Social work faculty are called to equip students to work effectively with diverse populations, including those of differing faiths, ideologies, and behaviors (CSWE, 2015). Social work education should equip students for effective ethical decision making in contexts of diverse behaviors, lifestyles, cultures and thought.

The student participants in this research study readily and sincerely shared perceived areas of value conflict between their religious beliefs and social work practice and the difficulties they experienced in reconciling their views. Students expressed commitment to professionalism and upholding the code of ethics amid their challenges. Data were analyzed using generic qualitative coding techniques as well as a theoretical framework of MFT (Haidt, 2012). Five themes that reflected answers to the two research questions were identified from the data including (a) predominantly internal student struggle to reconcile social work values and religious convictions, (b) use of common values in moral reasoning but uncertainty regarding definitions and application, (c) emphasis on not imposing personal values on others, (d) prioritizing of care and authenticity in client relationships, and (e) importance of the Bible or Biblical teaching as a foundation to moral reasoning. Findings from this study will be used to increase the

social work profession's knowledge of the moral reasoning of emerging adult students and their experiences with value conflicts to enhance curriculum and training methods for integrating faith and social work practice.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date
Time
Interviewee Code
Location of Interview

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions	Notes / Comments
Introduction	• Welcome. Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this research study. As you know, the purpose of the study is to understand better how a student like yourself experience and think about value conflicts and ethical decision making as you prepare for social work practice. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. • After the interview, I will be examining your answers, along with the answers of other students to complete data analysis as part of my doctoral project. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. • Before we begin, do you have any final questions about any items on the informed consent or regarding any other aspect of the research study or process? • Finally, before we begin, let me explain my hopes for our time	

	together today. First, I am hoping for your complete honesty and candor today. Your honesty and openness will help the results of this study to make a difference for future students. Also, during the interview, I will be asking you several questions. Please feel free to stop and ask me to repeat or clarify any questions I ask. I will also be doing my best to make sure I understand your answers correctly. If you don't think I have something right, please let me know. Finally, I hope you will remember that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I am hoping for your honest answers and responses and not what you think you the right answer might be. • Are you ready to begin?	
Question 1	• Tell me a little about your background.	
Question 2	• Tell me about how you got interested in social work.	
Question 3	• How would you describe your current religious beliefs and their importance?	
Question 4	• Describe an area of social work practice where you are concerned about encountering a conflict between your personal religious beliefs and values and your role as a social worker. • Prompt: Explain what causes you	

	concern in this area and why.	
Question 5	• Imagine you have to work with a client or situation where this area of concern comes up. What might this look like? • Prompt: Tell me about your thoughts and the ethical or moral issues you think are most important when you consider the situation. • Prompt: Describe what you think guides or influences you most as you evaluate the ethical or moral issues in the situation. What is most important to you personally in the decision making process of how to respond? • Prompt: Tell me about any other personal religious beliefs, values, or concepts that you think of first when considering the issue or situation. Why do you think these are important to you and come up most automatically?	
Closing	• Thank you for your answers and for taking the time to meet with me today. Do you have anything else you would like to add or that you feel you should clarify before we finish today? • Do you have any final questions for me? • Thank you so much for your time. I will be in touch to provide you the opportunity to review the transcript and provide any	

	comments or corrections. Please remember that my contact information is on the consent form if you wish to contact me.	