QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (MSW) STUDENT SCRIPTURE: REFLECTIONS/ETHICS INTEGRATION

By: Randy J. Baxter & Dorothea Epple

Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2017
November, 2017
Charlotte, NC

Qualitative Study of Master of Social Work (MSW) Student Scripture Reflections/Ethics Integration

Randy J. Baxter, Ph.D., MSW, LMSW

Dorothea Epple, Ph.D., LMSW

Department of Social Work

School of Human Services

Spring Arbor University

October 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine MSW student's perceptions of the integration of the values in the social work code of ethics with reflections on Matthew 25. Biblical Parables, Beatitudes, Isaiah 43 and the Twenty Third Psalm. An MSW cohort class process using a sample of students within four separate clinical courses is the foundation for this research. The methodology used to conduct the research will be descriptive content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002).

The potential of integrating scripture reflections in a faith based MSW program with the social work professions code of ethics will be studied in a manner to gain real-life results. These results can be used as foundation data for deeper study of the impact of the level of integration and its influence on graduate education and the students themselves both academically and professionally.

Key Words

MSW Students, Code of Ethics, Ethical Values, Student Reflections, Integration of Faith and Learning, Content Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine Master of Social Work (MSW) student's perceptions and experiences of their integration of the values in the social work code of ethics with reflections on Matthew 25, Biblical parables, the Beatitudes, Isaiah 43, and the Twenty Third Psalm. An MSW cohort class process on scripture reflection, the Spiritual Reflection assignment process, using a sample of students in four consecutive clinical courses will be featured.

The students' reflections on the meaning of the scripture, how the scripture applies to social work, and the values of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2013) reflected in living the scripture were the requirements of the assignment. The overall narrative of the student's narrative stories will be analyzed, identifying the individual spiritual reflections and how they could be classified and denoted under the six (6) core values and related ethical principles of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2013). These six (6) core values are: Service, Social Justice, Dignity and Worth of a Person, Importance of Human Relationships, Integrity, and Competence.

Through an analysis of these results, these researchers are attempting to answer this research question: What perceptions and experiences do MSW students have on the integration of scriptural reflections and the core values and ethical principles of professional social work practice?

Barker (2013) noted that "despite the proliferation of research related to spirituality, religion and social work practice in recent decades, relatively little attention has been given to the role of spirituality and religion in the life of the social worker, and the subsequent impact that

has on the practice context" (2013, p. 5). This could also be applied to how students are being trained regarding these factors at both the BSW and MSW levels.

Sherr, Huff, and Curran (2006) have also discussed the integration of faith and learning (IFL). They expressed a concern regarding the efforts of Christian social work professors to provide IFL experiences. Perhaps their students' perceptions of IFL result in them not sensing these efforts are occurring. Their research question sought answers to the question of what are these BSW students' perceptions of the IFL indicators that faculty is providing. In this paper we hope to further this knowledge by how it applies to Master of Social Work (MSW) students. We will especially seek to find out how the reflections/perceptions of a sample of MSW students may be linked and integrated with the broad ethical principles based on the 6 core values of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 2013)

As a component of this research study, we realize that there is a problem of very limited research attention devoted to understanding the impact of this integration of faith/spirituality and learning in two ways: while a Student is completing their MSW education, and the ongoing role it plays when they enter or continue in the practice or career arena. We are especially concerned to find the links/integration to social work's core values and the effects on their ongoing education, practice and career.

Sanders and Hoffman (2010) report in their book on how social work program administrators try to infuse ethics in their social work curricula, yet they find little research evaluating the effectiveness of teaching ethics within the curricula (p.7).

Seitz (2014) states that social work educators should promote professional competence and as a result have an ethical responsibility to assist social work students to work toward competence in faith and spirituality issue areas.

Our means of exploring this topic is to discover how this may happen in a particular set of courses using a series of assignments in a consistent process to discern and promote this integration. Analysis of student's answers to this assignment via their reflections will assist us to discern some of the themes and factors that arise from this integration process. We will study the effect on students themselves, and in tandem on their integration with the core values and ethical principles of the social work profession.

This research study demonstrates its most favorable significance in that the exploration of the impact of the integration of faith and learning (IFL) relating together has, as its foundation, the input provided by the students' themselves. It will likely yield results of perceptions and experiences that help to define the specific indicators of IFL used now and in the future. It could expand integration knowledge with an increased impact for students, also unleash a potential to impact implementation of this knowledge relating to the core values and ethical principles used in the social work profession.

Literature Review

Rothman (2009) views the inclusion of spirituality as accepted as an integral part of social work practice. He also sees the necessity for this concept to be an essential part of social work education. Material on spirituality should be an integral part and infused into the social work curriculum, especially the core practice courses, at both the BSW and MSW levels.

Relating to these findings, integration of faith reflected and values/ethics assignments within specific courses appears to be a worthy idea to implement to promote infusion. A research study by Hirsbrunner, Loeffler and Rompf (2012) explores…

> "…the role spirituality plays in selecting social work as a profession among 70 undergraduate students at a small private Christian college and a large state

> university. Findings from this exploratory study indicate that more than 80% of students considered their spirituality to be influential in their career choice, and significant relationships were found between students' perception of their career as a 'calling,' the degree of spiritual influence on career choice and their additional motivations for choosing social work as a career." (pg. 1)

These findings contribute ideas regarding what is important to be reviewed and using their BSW process as a guide, strive to apply these factors to MSW students as well.

Barker (2013) discusses how many Christian students desiring to live out religious mandates gravitate to the social work profession to serve others and promote social justice (one of the 6 core values). Later she goes on to assert that "despite the proliferation of research related to spirituality, religion and social work practice….relatively little attention has been given to the role of spirituality and religion in the life of the social worker and the subsequent impact that has on the practice context." (2013, pg. 5). Integration of faith reflections and research and/or values/ethics assignments within specific courses according to these factors remain commendable for our analysis of subsequent effects.

Kaplan (2006) talks more specifically in her study about the influence of social work education on specifically MSW social workers, as it relates to moral reasoning. She concludes: "Integral to defining ethical practice is the understanding of social work as a profession dealing in moral issues: the literature reinforces this and the connections between moral reasoning and ethical conduct" (p.519). These findings are especially important as they relate to the spiritual reflections as moral reasoning of the MSW student sample we are studying.

Rockenbach and Mayhew (2013) discuss how college students' spirituality helps to translate research into practice and identify that spirituality is a multi-faceted quality and has five

measures used to assess it. One of these measures is an active quest for answers to life's big questions (p. 13). This quest could yield answers to one of life's big questions like how the importance of values/ethics research tied in with spirituality (faith reflections) could be analyzed and integrated by students and their professors to determine the quantity and quality of its impact.

The study by Sheer, Huff, and Curran (2006), first discussed in our introduction also identifies concerns about the integration of faith and learning (IFL) experiences. These concerns warrant serious consideration as it relates to the components of this research study and the use of the class assignments document being investigated. These findings establish the important supportive connections, foundational factors and important concerns relating to the research question established for this study.

Their concerns noted in greater detail are:

1) What good are our efforts as Christian social work professors to provide IFL experiences if students do not sense the efforts; and
2) If our efforts to provide IFL experiences are congruent with expectations of IFL experiences of students, how can we identify those differences and adapt to provide Christ centered social work education. Thus, this question is addressed: What are BSW student's perceptions of salient IFL indicators of Christian social work faculty (Sheer, Huff, & Curran; pp. 59-60)

These same factors/concerns need to be an integral part in any review of the perceptions and experiences of MSW students as they were for BSW students.

Seitz submits that the NASW Code of Ethics as a guidebook for all social workers in how they behave regarding diversity and spirituality, and discusses the importance for students

"to understand their own personal values and beliefs and how to resolve any potential conflicts between their own beliefs and the Code of Ethics in a responsible manner" (2014, p. 336). Again the focused review of the perceptions and experiences in this study relates well to this importance that is needed for students to behave ethically.

All of the previous literature identifies and is supportive of factors that demonstrates a credibility and capability to implement our research question reiterated from above, which is: What perceptions and experiences do MSW students have on the integration of scriptural reflections and the values and ethical principles of professional social work practice?

Methodology

Content (Document) Analysis- Qualitative Approach

Engel and Schutt (2017) describe the important components of a qualitative research approach, in that it focuses on text rather than numbers and the goal of the analysis of text as a way to understand what participants really thought or did in some situation or at some point in time. Content (document) analysis is a type of qualitative approach.

Guest, Namey & Mitchell (2013) detail the advantages of how content (document) analysis as a qualitative research approach. One unique advantage is: the nature of this type of inquiry is being inductive and flexible. Another advantage is this type allows for more detailed descriptions and explaining of experiences, behaviors and beliefs, and deeper probing into responses and observations (p. 21).

Guest, et. al (2013) goes on to address the significance of the exploratory approach (more qualitative in nature) interconnecting with content (document) analysis, and allowing more content-driven and not hypothesis driven activities. To be content driven (exploratory), some specific characteristics must be present. Each of these characteristics described by these authors

follows what was a component of this study of MSW student impressions: 1) observable attributes in the sample; 2) inductive orientation; 3) specific code/analytic categories do NOT have to be predetermined as coding is open-minded and derived from the data; 4) can use either non-probability or probability sampling (p. 254). Content (document) analysis, with these many characteristics present is pragmatic for fulfilling this study.

Neuendorf (2002) in her book identifies many different approaches/types of content (document) analysis. One approach/type she introduces is the technique of descriptive content analysis. This type permits a description of a particular message pool used in an archival manner. She describes it best in this way: "Researchers working in this vein are careful to limit their conclusions to the content being studied, although they may be clearly motivated by a desire to infer characteristics to the sources or to anticipate outcomes of the message. These analyses are attractive for clarity and parsimony". (p.53)

All of the literature outlined above concerning this technique demonstrates the expediency and utility of implementing for this study the methodology foundation of content (document) analysis.

Sampling/Instrumentation/Data Collection

Purposive/Judgment Sampling

For purposive sampling, each sample element is elected for a purpose because these elements have a unique position, and you can study an entire population or limited group/subset of this population. Other researchers identify this type of sampling as judgment sampling, in that intuitively you, as the researcher, choose study participants based on their study involvement purpose (Engel & Schutt, 2017; Guest, et. al, 2013; Neuenedorf, 2002).

The sample frame for this study: An MSW cohort class process on scripture reflections, using a sample of 5 students in four consecutive clinical courses will be featured. Their spiritual reflections occur at the opening of every individual class session within a particular course. The PowerPoints used as compilations of each individual students' reflections by the class professor/instructor contain a narrative of the compiled reflections made during each individual class. These documents were the final content used to collect the data that is detailed later in this study. The purposive/judgment sample described here is one where they were elected for a purpose and a subset of an entire population of MSW students can be studied as chosen by the researchers.

Instrumentation/Data Collection

The instrumentation/data collection for this study is outlined here through the Spiritual Reflection Assignment process developed by the class professor who was the same instructor for all four classes:

Spiritual Reflection Assignment Process

Data collection for this study was obtained from MSW Advanced Standing Students in a cohort model program, in four consecutive courses. The courses and the scripture reflections included (1) Psychopathology I reflecting on Matthew 25; (2) Psychopathology II reflecting on Parables of Mercy; (3) Practice & Theory I reflecting on the Beatitudes; and (4) Practice & Theory with Families reflecting on Psalm 23 and Isaiah 43.

A group power point was developed with each student adding their 3 to 5 minute reflection (talking points) on their chosen aspect of the scripture and allowing for class discussion. This scripture reflection allowed the class to begin each week with a prayerful reflective process of integrating faith and social work values. The group power point allowed for

each student to participate in a collective process of developing a concrete document of shared personal expressions of faith, with many creative expressions of heart felt reflection. The instructor modeled the class process at the first session of each course.

Consistent requirements for the process during each individual class and scripture reflection assignment process included: 1) selecting one aspect of the larger scripture for focus; 2) personal reflection on the passage and its application to social work; 3) reflecting on congruence with the scripture and social work values; 4) reflection on integration of faith and social work. The core values of social work were defined from the social work code of ethics (NASW, 2013) including service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence.

Many of the insights students brought to this exercise were powerful reflections of their own empathy, compassion, insight and wisdom as they talked of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in practice; or identified the parables in real life situations that identified the heart of the client and the social worker. Student's sensitivity also brought forth the metaphor and paradox of the Beatitudes and Psalm 23 as well as Isaiah 43. No explanation or data analysis can speak fully to the power of grace in the classroom after each reflection and its impact on how the group worked together in their learning and study to become Christian Social Workers. This study's major focus is to identify MSW student perspectives on faith through spiritual reflections and ethics integration. But to fully understand the power in this work one would need to have been in the classroom hearing the heartfelt wisdom from our next generation of social workers. In providing the MSW students' real-life reflections for this study, we have tried to capture this power as best as we can, allowing for us to gain valuable insights to be used further.

Ethics/Cultural Competency

Spring Arbor University, where these assignments were completed by students, is a Christian university that can be described well through its mission statement:

> *"Spring Arbor University is a community of learners distinguished by our lifelong involvement in the study and application of the liberal arts, total commitment to Jesus Christ as the perspective for learning, and critical participation in the contemporary world."* ("About Spring Arbor University", n.d., para. 3)

Each part of this statement, known as "The Concept," indicates an important aspect of the culture of Spring Arbor University (SAU). First, "The Concept" identifies that SAU is dedicated to developing students who will pursue a lifelong involvement in learning. The second part of "The Concept" states that utilizing a Christian perspective for the purpose of learning is an important value of the university, and, thus, is integrated heavily into the classroom. Other programs at SAU require students to take a class dedicated solely to the integration of faith and their field. The final statement made in "The Concept" identifies that participation in the modern world is another value the university holds. Each of these values relates directly to themes that were discovered in the data provided by students.

Additionally, the Spring Arbor University (SAU) Social Work Program uses the 9 core competencies proscribed by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) toward assuring both BSW and MSW students receive a fully accredited education. Our social work administration and faculty consensually agreed in 2016 to add a tenth competency to implement and measure the application of an ethical integration and faith within social work practice. The three practice behaviors identified for this competency area are:

- Understand the strengths of a client's faith in the healing process
- Allow the client to integrate their faith in the treatment plan and clinical practice
- Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations (SAU, 2017)

Specific assignments as appropriate directly related to this competency are integrated within courses to reflect the SAU ethics and culture and that of the Social Work program as well. The third behavior identified above is the most relevant and advantageous regarding the data/collection analysis of the specific assignments reflected in this study.

Seitz (2014) reinforces importance of all the core competencies, and in this case, including the 10th competency created by our social work program, in augmenting the ethical and professional practice of social workers/students. Seitz calls for the idea that social work students, with ethical decision-making as a process, should have continuing opportunities to explore how faith/personal beliefs impact practice and promote skill development addressing these issues in an ethical manner (p. 337). These measures, particularly the 10th (tenth) competency as an additional measure, allow for the MSW students in this study to have such an opportunity/experience.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

Researchers already had a strong grasp of the culture of Spring Arbor University (SAU) due to the extensive time they each spent there, but cultural competency is only one aspect of ethical and excellent research. To conduct research at our University in an ethical and legal manner, it was necessary to submit and receive approval by our Institutional Review Board before it could be considered officially conducted and be able to present the results outside of our institution. No data from this study could be related to any specific student, even by researchers

so an exemption to the standard IRB process was submitted and approved. This approval is attached (Appendix A) and shows a final approval date of 10/23/2017.

Data Analysis/ Results

Content (Document) Data Analysis

Content (document) analysis is the recognized data analysis approach/procedure for this study. We need to iterate the many specific phases necessary for document (content) analysis.

Identified steps in Document (Content) analysis include: what documents, images , or artifacts have been produced by my study population that are conceptually related to my research question (s); how accessible are these sources of data; and choose sampling units, coding units and code attributes for your analysis (adapted from Guest, Namey & Mitchell. 2013, pp. 252-253). Each of these steps were an essential part of the current study.

Engel and Schutt (2017) identifies with additional detail specific stages necessary for this type of analysis, which are:

- Identify a population of documents or other textual sources for study
- Determine the units of analysis
- Select a sample of units from the population
- Design coding procedures for the variables to be measured
- Test and refine the coding procedures
- Base statistical analyses on counting occurrences of particular words, themes, or phrases, and test relations between different variables

These stages were all present in the analysis conducted in this study as well.

In her book, Neuendorf (2002) provides a helpful flowchart (see Appendix B) that was often consulted by the researchers to guide their implementation of the process of content analysis process. The work in this study was concentrated mostly in items 1-5 of the chart.

A very significant action by the researchers in their use of the above steps and stages for the data analysis process implemented, was the strategy developed to completely review of all the compiled class Power Points identifying each students' input and contribution to the Spiritual Assignment Reflection process for these 4 classes. Each specific class had these themes (SWK 618- Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, SWK 628- Parables of Mercy, SWK 629- Beatitudes and SWK 625- Isaiah 43, 23rd Psalm). Researchers took further action through extensive study of each of these documents to find specific student reflection/excerpts and subjectively best assigning the best fit for each of them under any of the 6 (six) NASW Code of Ethics Core Values/Ethical Principles. Chart 1 establishes the Conceptual and Operational definitions necessary for applicable valid data collection/measurement/ analysis techniques used in this study to complete these actions (See Chart 1 to follow).

Barker (2013) identifies a challenge relating to the scientific study of spirituality and religion, or in this study the integration of student reflections and spirituality/ethics illustrated in Chart 1, which is the lack of standard conceptual definitions for both terms. The researchers felt it necessary to detail the proper definitions seeking to reduce this challenge. These definitions aid in interpreting any results for this study. For measures we need to determine a suitable frequency of occurrences, and Chart 1 helps to detail these measures.

Chart 1 Conceptual/Operational Definitions- Student Reflections/NASW Code of Ethics

NASW Core Values Ethical Principles	Conceptual/Operational Definitions	Potential Measures
Service Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and address problems	Social workers (SW) elevate service to others above self-interest. SW draw on their knowledge, values and skills to help people in need and to address problems. SW are encouraged to volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no exception of significant financial return (pro bono service)	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes
Social Justice Social workers challenge social Injustice	SW pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. SW's social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. SW strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes
Dignity and Worth of a Person Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person	SW treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. SW promote clients' socially responsible self-determination. SW seek to enhance clients' capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. SW are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients' interests and the broader society's interest in a social responsible manner consistent with the values/ethical principles, and ethical	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes

	standards of the profession.	
Importance of Human Relationships Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships	SW understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. SW engage people as partners in the helping process. SW seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes
Integrity Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner	SW are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards and practice in a manner consistent with them. SW act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practices on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes
Competence Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise	Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and apply them in practice. SW should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession	Frequency of Occurrences highlighting this core value/ethical principle detailed in specific MSW Student Scripture Reflections selected from all 4 classes

Source: Chart created/completed by researchers (2017).
Adapted from National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2013)

In line with the Institutional Review Board approval for this study, the Researchers created a workbook/codebook which has the specific individual comments/excerpts of each student and where it was placed according to the process described above. Due to the fact these excerpts were aggregated in order to preserve confidentiality and other appropriate research principles, the results below will be recorded by occurrence, with a compiled aggregated

synopsis of the important insights from the students identified by the researchers among specific classes and core values, and also becoming a part of the workbook/codebook. The results below will be reported in Table 1 by occurrences and highlights of important synopses illustrating the reflections and how they are integrated with the NASW Code of Ethics core values and ethical principles.

Results/Discussion

Table 1 Student Reflections/Core Values/Ethical Principles Integration Compilation of Results

Column1	Column2	Column3	Column4	Column5	Column6
CORE VALUES- NASW CODE OF ETHICS	MSW 618	MSW 628	MSW 629	MSW 625	TOTAL- EACH CORE VALUE
Core Value 1-Serv	5	5	3	5	18
Core Value 2-SJ	3	5	2	3	13
Core Value 3-DWP	4	5	2	4	15
Core Value 4-IHR	4	5	3	4	16
Core Value 5-Integ	3	5	3	4	15
Core Value 6-Comp	6	5	2	4	17
TOTAL- BY CLASS	25	30	15	24	**94**
	MSW 618	**MSW 628**	**MSW 629**	**MSW625**	**ALL 4 CLASSES**

Core Value Glossary

1. Serv=Service
2. SJ=Social Justice
3. DWP=Dignity and Worth of a Person
4. IHR=Importance of Human Relationships
5. Integ=Integrity
6. Comp=Competence

Source: Table created/completed by researchers (2017)

Highlights of Students' Reflection Synopses by Code of Ethics- Core Values

Services- CV 1

- Personal actions of social workers to carry others' burdens through "search and rescue" for their well-being in an ethical manner. These actions are accomplished by showing dignity and respect, not judging others through mercy and humility.
- A highly needed feature for social workers is to show a positive attitude through gentleness and humility without personal gain.

Social Justice- CV 2

- Professionalism and advocacy hallmarks of service by social workers, gained through the knowledge values and skills of the profession. This service must also be related more closely toward combatting system injustice.

Dignity and Worth of a Person- CV 3

- Human interactions are paramount with the use of appropriate social responsibility by social workers through loving, caring and comforting to promote dignity and worth.

Importance of Human Relationships- CV 4

- No replacing of human interaction when helping, need to harbor the homeless. Inform about resources available as much as possible , and comfort the afflicted and those in need

Integrity- CV 5

- Personal actions of social workers to carry others' burdens for their well-being in an ethical manner, not judging others through mercy and humility, showing dignity and respect in help to promote the worthiness of people. We can also advocate and educate and promote personal and social knowledge to enhance this worthiness in a professional and skillful manner, always with a high degree of integrity.

Competence- CV 6

- Personal actions of social workers to carry others' burdens for the well-being of others and themselves in an ethical manner. Carry out these actions by not judging others through mercy and humility, showing dignity and respect with help us to promote the worthiness of people. We can also advocate and educate and promote personal and social knowledge to enhance this worthiness in a professional and skillful manner. It is very important to practice within our competency limits while always trying to enhance our competency and expertise.

Discussion of Results

Each Core Value in the chart is represented with a significant number of student comments/insights under each core value category. The subsequent synopses highlights advance and illuminate these core values and ethical principles as how they appear to impact these MSW students. It appears they see now in their academic training and subsequently in their practice of social work how these reflection can illustrate the values and ethical principles that are so vital to the social work profession.

The overall focus across all elements of this student insights/synopses detailed in this chart and augmented with the frequent occurrences of all of the value as detailed in Table 1 demonstrates a strong emphasis on the personal interactions of the worker and client. While this initial emphasis is occurring, there remains a strong potential identified by them for the worker, along with their clients, to look at system injustice as a "parallel" activity. How this plays out in real life will depend greatly on the mutual agreement of the worker and clients to consider the appropriateness within the individual, family, group and community systems around them toward the promotion of the well-being of all among these arenas to the best interest of any clients, workers, professionals, and the community and help promote the ethical value components of any personal or social actions taking place within the very important human interaction/relationship occurring in the clinical/community treatment process. The findings here of the integration of spiritual reflections and ethical core values/principles of service, social justice, dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence can contribute to further education, practice and research now and later to heighten the ethical knowledge, skills and professionalism of social work students, educators, professionals, and community to strengthen social work best practice and education.

Reliability and Validity

This study has internal validity in that there is a match-up in this study of the conceptual and operational definitions. Content validity is also present, allowing for the extent to which the measure reflects the full domain of the concept being measured. The various occurrences of student comments/insights which appear throughout define this fullness of domain constructively (Neuendorf, 2002).

Reliability is present but limited, first as it relates to generalizability, which appears to be limited only to this purposive sample, but with using the Spiritual Assignment Assessment process again with other samples and trials and if the same general results, a stronger reliability may be possible. A measure is not valuable if it can only be conducted once or by one person in. particular. Neuendorf denotes that with repeated trials, the measures from this study would have ongoing utility for evaluating validity and reliability (2002, p. 112)

A positive factor that contributes to strengthen the reliability and validity of this study is the consistency across cohorts/classes. Each cohort/class had gone through the same program (with very similar, if not identical classes thus far), at the same location, and with the same professor. Each assignment was conducted in the same manner using the Spiritual Reflection Assignment process as the foundation.

Limitations

There are some limitations that need to be reported for this study. Using Barker (2013), as a guide, one limitation present is that the study data is based on self-report; the student's perceptions are based on educational experiences, which may or may not turn out to be "REALITY". Another limitation is that the generalizability of the findings is narrow, such as the

sample was very small, not diverse and the factors of ethnicity and gender play a role, in that the sample was all females. It is therefore very difficult to generalize beyond this specific sample.

Another limitation/challenge for this study guided by the Seitz (2014) study regards the process of integrating of faith/competency development. A concern identified is that this type of competency development is difficult to connect with competent and ethical practice. Faith development is personal and has different meanings within the faith community. These factors can affect the reliability and validity assessment of any our data and findings. One factor to limit the influence of these limitations discussed already was consistency across cohorts/classes in the Spiritual Reflection assignment process.

Significance/Implications for Future Research

This research is significant in that it begins to explore themes and factors relating to how student spiritual reflections can begin to be integrated with the professional core values and ethical principles of the social work profession. This preliminary data and findings can be studied further to measure the impact of this integration and outline more specific indicators of this integration. One asset that is present is the input of students' themselves as the place to start. This study has yielded some results/ideas to conduct and gain future research/ knowledge, especially related to the ethical enrichment of students, educators, professionals and the community.

There are several possible, ongoing benefits to consider in further discovering themes and perspectives denoted by students and the impact on spiritual reflection/ethics integration. A beneficial impact is how students benefit more in the professional development and academic knowledge continuum, especially as it relates to best ethical practice. During their future careers, when they face ethical dilemmas during their professional work, they will already have practice

integrating their faith into these ethical decisions as well as their daily tasks, and done so with evidence through their MSW Advance Study work as provided by this particular assignment process and other assignments in their studies.

These findings also lend an initial beneficial impact for educators regarding teaching pedagogy/strategies. An example of this would be to use these concepts as components of other class assignments or project within any of their classes, particular as it relates to ethical practice improvement. They can also share these results with other academics and other members of the social work profession as necessary to further any best social work practices that occur each day.

References

About Spring Arbor University. (n.d.). Retrieved October 27, 2016, from https://www.arbor.edu/about-spring-arbor-university/

Barker, S.L. (2013). A Qualitative examination of the experiences of Christian students in social work education programs. Social Work and Christianity, 40 (1), 3-22

Engel, R.J. & Schutt, R.K (2017). The Practice of Research in Social Work (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guest, G., Namey, E.E. & Mitchell, M.L. (2013). Collecting qualitative data: a field manual for applied research. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Hart, Addison (2012). Taking Jesus at his word: what Jesus really said in the Sermon on the Mount. Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Hirsbrunner, L.E., Loffler, D.N. & Rompf, E.L. (2012). Spirituality and religiosity: their effects on undergraduate social work career choice. Journal of Social Service Research, 38.2 (Mar 2012), 199-211

Kaplan, L. E. (2006). Moral reasoning of MSW social workers and the influence of education. Journal of Social Work Education, 42 (3) (Fall 2006), 507-522

Kushner, H. S. (2004). The Lord is my Shepard: Healing wisdom of the twenty third Psalm. New York: Random House Inc.

NASW (2013). Social Work Code of Ethics. Washington; DC: National Association of Social Workers

Neuendorf, K. (2002). The Content Analysis Guidebook. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization (2015). The parables of mercy. Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division.

Rockenbach, A.B. & Mayhew, M.J. (Eds.) (2013). Spirituality in college students' lives: translating research into practice. New York: Routledge

Rothman, J. (2009). What we can teach and how we can teach it. Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work, 28 (1) (Jan 2009), 161-184

Sanders, S. & Hoffman, K. (2010). Ethics education in social work: comparing outcomes of graduate social work students. Journal of Social Work Education, 46.1 (Winter 2010), 7-22

Seitz, C.R. Jr. (2014). Utilizing a spiritual disciplines framework for faith integration and social work. Social Work and Christianity, 41 (1), (Winter 2014), 334-354

Sheer, M.E, Huff, G.E. & Curran, M.A. (2006). BSW Student perceptions of salient integration of faith and learning indicators. Social Work and Christianity, 33 (1), 58-76

Spring Arbor University (SAU) Social Work Program. (n.d.). 10th Core Competency. Retrieved October 18, 2017, from https://www.arbor.edu/social work program

The Dynamic Catholic Institute (2015). Beautiful mercy: Experiencing God's unconditional love so we can share it with others. Beacon Press.

Appendix A

Spring Arbor University Institutional Review Board Decision Sheet

Project Category:

_X___ New Assigned IRB#: Baxter_Epple_293871_10.23.17

____ Renewal Funding Agency, (if applicable):

Project Timeline: Start Date: October 24, 2017

End Date:

Committee Decision:

_X__ Approved as an exempt review, no further review needed unless protocol changes.

___ Approved as an expedited review, no further review needed unless protocol changes.

___ Approved as a full review, no further review needed unless protocol changes.

___ Denied due to:

Recommendations and Comments:

This study has been approved as an exempt review, category # 4, as requested.

As a reminder, every effort must be made to maintain confidentiality of all participants, such as no data or information collected can be identified to an individual. All data should be coded for confidentiality, whether stored by paper or digital file. At the end of the study all data and identifying information on the study's participants held or stored by the researcher need to be destroyed.

This approval is for a period of one year from the date of approval and will need renewed, if not completed by that time. Should the study's protocol change in any way, a resubmission for a new approval is required.

Please contact the SAU IRB, when the study is completed, so the study of record can be closed.

Date of Decision: 10.23.17

Signature of IRB Designate: Dr. Inna Molitoris Spring Arbor University

Appendix B

As stated in the Methodology section of this paper; Neuendorf (2002) presents ideas from her book which identifies many different approaches/types of content (document) analysis. One approach/type she introduces is the technique of descriptive content analysis. This type permits a description of a particular message pool used in an archival manner. On the next 2 pages of Appendix B there is a flow chart from her book that represents this well documented type of content analysis. We noted before we used items 1-5 more frequently to guide our analysis.

Box 3.1 A Flowchart for the Typical Process of Content Analysis Research

1. *Theory and rationale: What* content will be examined, and *why*? Are there certain *theories* or perspectives that indicate that this particular message content is important to study? Library work is needed here to conduct a good literature review. Will you be using an integrative model, linking content analysis with other data to show relationships with source or receiver characteristics? Do you have *research questions? Hypotheses?*

↓

2. *Conceptualizations:* What *variables* will be used in the study, and how do you define them *conceptually* (i.e., with dictionary-type definitions)? Remember, you are the boss! There are many ways to define a given construct, and there is no one right way. You may want to screen some examples of the content you're going to analyze, to make sure you've covered everything you want.

↓

3. *Operationalizations (measures):* Your measures should match your conceptualizations (this is called *internal validity*). What *unit of data collection* will you use? You may have more than one unit (e.g., a by-utterance coding scheme and a by-speaker coding scheme). Are the variables measured well (i.e., at a high *level of measurement,* with categories that are *exhaustive and mutually exclusive*)? An *a priori* coding scheme describing all measures must be created. Both face validity and content validity may also be assessed at this point.

↙ Human Coding ↘ Computer Coding

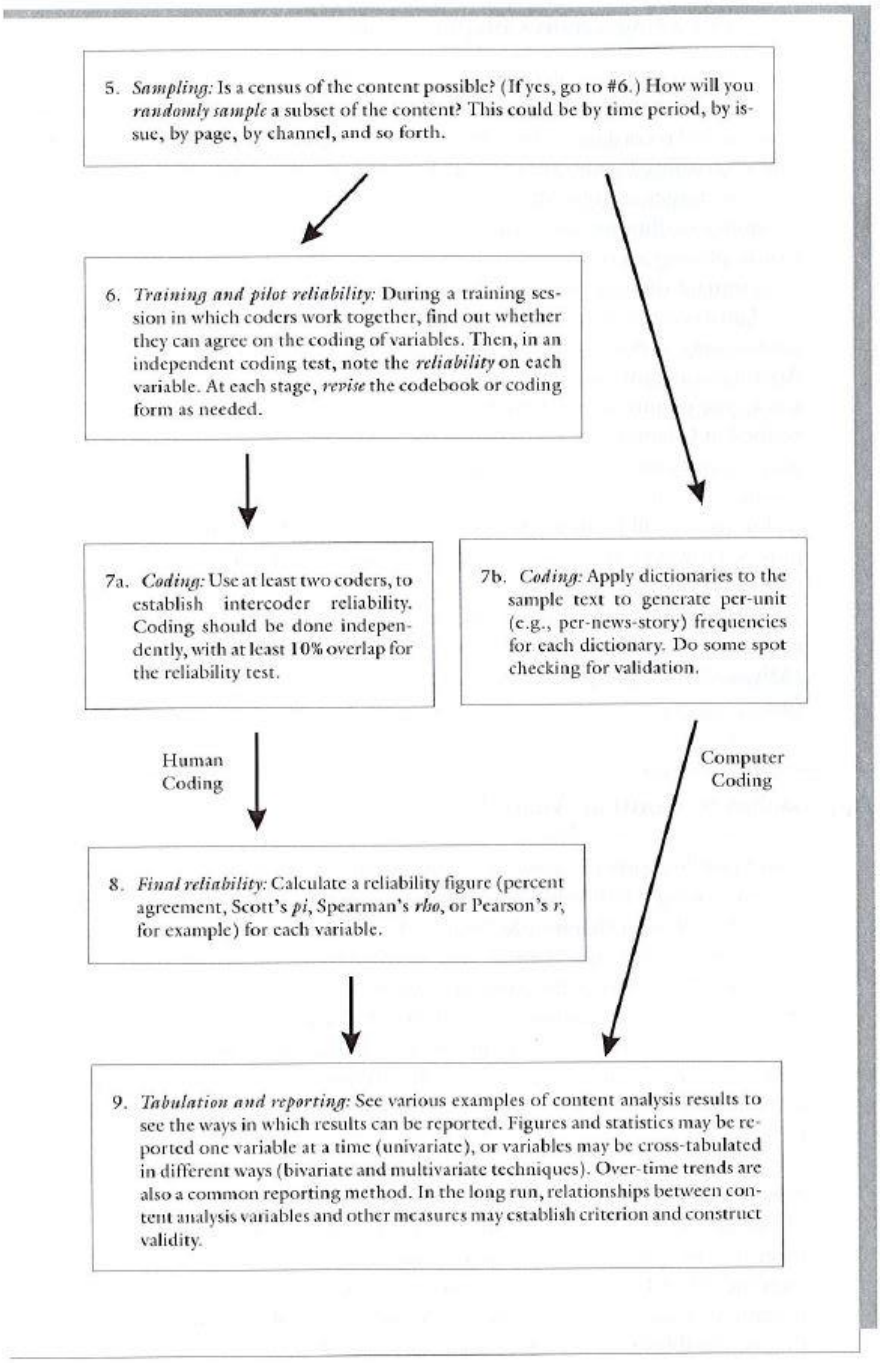
4a. *Coding schemes:* You need to create the following materials:

a. *Codebook* (with all variable measures *fully* explained)

b. *Coding form*

4b. *Coding schemes:* With computer text content analysis, you still need a codebook of sorts—a full explanation of your *dictionaries* and method of applying them. You may use standard dictionaries (e.g., those in Hart's program, *Diction*) or originally created dictionaries. When creating custom dictionaries, be sure to first generate a frequencies list from your text sample and examine for key words and phrases.

↙ Human ↘ Computer



Neuendorf, K. (2002). The Content Analysis Guidebook (pp. 50-51). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.