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Why We Do What We Do: A Psychosocial Development Perspective on Factors That Influence Decision to Pursue a Career in Social Work

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Why We Do What We Do: A Psychosocial Development Perspective on

Factors That Influence Decision to Pursue a Career in Social Work

by

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicy present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Table of Contents

What factors influence an individual's decision to pursue social work as a career? This question has been looked at from varying points of view. Past and contemporary literature has attempted to answer this question in some capacity, ranging from identifying the motives, incentives, and concerns of being a social worker to identifying what type of characteristics a potential social worker may possess. Previous research has yielded information considered beneficial to the profession but there is limited information that reviews what influences pursuit of a career in a helping profession such as social work during specific stages of the lifespan.

"The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW, 2012). Historically, the majority of those involved in the profession who contributed significantly to the advancement of advocacy from its early beginning were women. Pioneers such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond helped shape and define the profession through their diligence and steadfastness in advocacy for others. The background of aforementioned prominent figures had both similarities and differences with regards to their upbringing and relationships with significant primary caregivers during their lifespan.

The framework of social work has undergone many changes throughout history ranging from the feminist movement during the mid-1800's to Mary Richmond's contribution of "social diagnosis" which brought a different perspective on addressing societal ills through focus on the inner process of individuals (Andrews & Brenden, 1993). As the profession of social work has evolved, so has the diversity of those

entering this unique field.   From 1974 through 2000, there was an increase of almost

30% in social work graduates who were people of color in Bachelor of Social Work

programs (Liu, Morrish, & Schilling, 2008). With the increase in diversity came an

increase in the number of BSW and joint BSW-MSW programs which grew from 150 to

404 between 1974 and 2000. Reasons behind the increase in social work among

individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders have

been variable and perhaps enigmatic as the data collected regarding this increase did not

identify specific motivating factors that influenced the decision to become students of

social work.

Universities seeking ideal candidates for a degree in social work have created

specific criteria to ensure applicants are not only academically competent, but to make

certain they also share the values and beliefs that coincide with that of the educational

institution. One such method of determining "good candidates" consist of requiring

potential students to write personal statements in an attempt to determine what factors

may have influenced their decisions to pursue social work, along with understanding their

personal values and beliefs (University of North Dakota, 2012).

Fields such as vocational psychology have helped with targeting driving forces

behind individual employment aspirations, while taking into consideration personal and

environmental influences. Gottfredson (2001) discussed the importance of identifying

the antecedents of work productivity through childhood influences, educational

experiences, and attainments. How personality structure can influence vocational

behavior is also an important aspect of this area of study. As vocational psychology has

helped with career guidance, there have also been some identified areas of weakness within this particular field.

Becker & Gottfredson (1981) noted in their article, the "widespread assumption in vocational psychology is that aspirations for particular types of work play a significant role in determining the kinds of jobs people eventually obtain" (p. 125). The authors described a more accurate reason for career choice was more determined by environmental contingencies or availability of particular jobs and training program instead of vocational aspirations.

More directly, previous research of social work students identified idealism, altruism, and perhaps personal life experiences as possible influences of career choice (Moriarty & Murray, 2007). A different perspective is provided by Pearson (1973) who studied individual motives of students pursuing careers in social work. Pearson's article described how individuals who chose a career in social work were individuals who were either exhibiting some form of primitive political rebellion or were projecting their own internal unresolved issues from childhood onto that of some unsuspecting client. In contrast to Pearson's perspective of factors that influenced social workers to pursue their chosen field, Krauss (2008) discussed how her own personal interest in social work happened later in life and was due in part to some of the core ideoligies of social work, such as social justice and advocacy. After accepting a temporary position with a non-profit organization, Krauss began writing editorials for a local social work journal, and quickly familiarized herself with the profession and discovered that social work matched her own personal beliefs and ideas.

In regards to early life experiences, the term *attachment theory* has been defined as a concept that suggests an infant has an inborn biological need for close contact with its mother or caregiver. This concept describes a normal bond as developing within the first 6 months of life through the caregiver's responsiveness to those needs. Maternal deprivation during this period can have adverse effects on the psychological development of the child (A Dictionary of Psychology, 3ed, 2012).

A significant contributor to the concept of attachment theory was John Bowlby, a prominent British child psychologist. Bowlby's contribution to attachment theory was to use the concept as a tool for clinicians to have a better understanding of psychopathology, emotional stress and development (Strauss, 2000).

A major theme of Bowlby's work regarding attachment theory revolved around the relationship between mother and infant and significant caregivers and how the patterns established early on predicted the developmental outcomes of the child (Van der Host, 2008). It was concluded from Bowlby's research that external relationships, such as the way a parent treated a child, could provide insight into a child's behavior. Bowlby also concluded from his research that repeated separation experiences during childhood could cause psychological harm in childhood that could carry on through adulthood. Bowlby proposed that interaction with significant others throughout the lifespan, predominantly between early childhood and adolescence created styles of relating to others in close relationships (Wilson, 2007).

Peluso, Peluso, Bucker, Kern & Curlette, (2009) noted in their article how attachment theory attempted to explain an individual's methods of relating to others, viewing the world and governing behavior. Thus attachment theory provides a

theoretical perspective about closeness and relational style that may be related to vocational choices, particularly in the area of human services.

The intent of this qualitative study is to examine life experiences that may influence an individual to pursue a career in social work. This research article is significant to the profession of social work as it emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and may provide insight into which populations are most inclined to pursue such an endeavor.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

The literature review will begin with an overview regarding prominent historical figures in the practice of social work to provide some insight into their upbringing and identify important influences throughout their lifespan that helped them to become remarkable advocates for the disenfranchised. Characteristics of social workers will also be discussed in an attempt to identify what qualities are required to be an effective and productive social worker. The remaining sections of the literature review will consist of discussion of concepts from vocational psychology and different theories regarding lifespan development in attempt to identify what factors may influence an individual to pursue a career in a helping profession such as social work.

Historical Background of Early Pioneers

Perhaps one of the most prominent figures in the history of social work is Jane Addams, a staunch reformer who dedicated her life to improving the living conditions of the disadvantaged. An important source detailing Jane's upbringing is her autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (Addams,1912). This work contains her early writings, newspaper clippings, records from Hull House, and influences that shaped

her into the person she became. Within the text, Jane described how she viewed her father, John Addams, a businessman and state senator, as an important influence in her life, an individual respected in the community as a prominent figure.

Addams also described how she held her father in such high esteem, she was hesitant to interact with her father in public in fear of embarrassing him. She described herself as "the ugly, pigeon toed little girl whose crooked back obliged her to walk with her head held very much upon one side, who would never be pointed out to these visitors as the daughter of this fine man" (Addams, 1912, p. 5). Addams described a poignant moment with her father around the age of seven, when she was exposed to the "first sight of the poverty" and began to question her father about why individuals lived in such conditions of squalor. Addams did not elaborate as to what her father told her in response to her question, but made clear that it influenced her to take residence within the broken and crowded homes to which she was exposed in order to help those in need.

By all accounts, it does not appear as if Addams was adversely affected by the passing of her mother when she was two years of age. The assumption can be made that a normal bond did develop between Jane and her mother during the first 6 months of her life. However, this perceived bond does not appear to have been greatly influential in Jane's evolution as an individual. Addams describes how as a little girl, she may have been more heavily influenced by her mother had she not died when Jane was an infant. From Jane Addams' account, the relationship with her father seemed to be more important in instilling her a sense of responsibility and altruism. Jane's description of how she emulated her father's ways and habits, in absence of her mother, supports the

idea that interaction with a "significant" presence during childhood influenced how Jane viewed the world and governed her behavior as an adult.

Aside from the influences of her father, Addams (1912) also described how her exposure to poverty significantly impacted her. In her autobiography, Addams had an overwhelming sense of responsibility to repair societal wrongs, so much so that her sense of obligation triggered a dream in which she was assigned the task of making a wagon wheel, which metaphorically represented her attempt at rebuilding humanity and ending suffering (Addams, 1912). Jane was also fortunate in that her life experiences took her overseas where she was exposed to different philosophies and societal influences. Addams' idea for the famous settlement house, Hull House, was greatly influenced by the first settlement house in Europe, Toynbee Hall.

Other accounts of Jane Addams' life support her statement that her father was an important figure in her life, but there are weaknesses in the assumption that the relationship between the author and her father solely impacted her development. Victoria Bissel Brown (2004) in her text, describes the amount of support Jane received from her eldest sister, Mary, who was 18 years of age when Jane's mother passed away. Mary's role was that of surrogate parent to the remaining children in the household, including Jane, as her father was absent from the children the year after the death of Jane's mother. "Motherless though she was, the toddler Jennie Addams was embedded in a safe and attentive circle of responsible, caring adults" (Brown, 2004, p. 24). The assumptions by Brown are limited, as the author's statements rely on written sources other than Jane Addams herself. Further limitations to the use of Jane Addams' autobiography include

the level of accuracy, as it was suspected Jane may have exaggerated her past and present life to create an idealized version of herself for the public (Brown, 2007).

There is also some literature to indicate that Mary Richmond, another important icon of social work, was significantly influenced by one primary caregiver during her upbringing. Richmond, an equally significant influence in the profession of social work, made it her mission to improve the level of appreciation and understanding of social work in the community (Murdach, 2011). Similar to Jane Addams, Richmond's mother, Lavinia Harris Richmond, passed away from tuberculosis when Mary was very young. Mary's only memory of her mother was that of climbing into her bed towards the time of her mother's death, around the age of four (Ledderman, 1994). Mary's father worked as a blacksmith in a munitions factory in Illinois and was not a consistent figure in Mary's upbringing. Neither parent played a significant role in Mary's childhood development.

After the death of Mary's mother in 1865, Mary's grandmother, Mehitable Harris assumed the role of surrogate caretaker for Mary.   Mehitable may have helped to influence Mary's pursuit in social advocacy as her personal causes consisted of women's rights and spiritualism. Further, Mary was exposed to different elements because her grandmother helped to improve her vocabulary and understanding of society from an adult perspective. Mary would often accompany her grandmother to social events where the majority of those in attendance were adults whose areas of interest included advocacy for women. Richmond was noted as inheriting one significant quality from her grandmother, "that fulfillment comes from fighting for a cause" (Ledderman, 1994, p. 24).   Similar to Jane Addams, it was noted that Richmond had the propensity to dramatize the level of poverty she experienced in order to project the image of someone

who truly understood poverty because she experienced it firsthand. Interestingly, both Addams and Richmond experienced the early loss of a parent during their early years in life. Despite the loss of a parental figure, both Addams and Richmond had individuals who served to be tremendous role models, helping to influence their decisions to become advocates for the disenfranchised.

Influence of NASW

The National Association of Social Workers is an organization that was "developed to maintain the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies" (NASW, 2012, n.p). Educational institutions that are participants in this organization have utilized the NASW Code of Ethics as a guide for current and future social workers to maintain appropriate professionalism and to adhere to values and beliefs that are congruent with the concepts of social work. The social work profession, as indicated by the NASW, is rooted in core values that have been agreed upon throughout the professions history, consisting of six standards, (1) Service, (2) Social Justice, (3) Dignity and Worth of the Person, (4) Importance of Human Relationships, (5) Integrity and (6) Competence.

Pertaining to the *Value of Service*, the goal of the social worker is essentially to help people in need and address social problems. The objective of the *Social Justice* value is to challenge social injustice and pursue social change when encountered on behalf of the disenfranchised and oppressed. The value of *Dignity and Worth of Person* refers to social workers applying basic respect and sense of value to the individuals to whom they provide services. Recognizing the importance of relationships between and

among individuals as a vital tool for social change which is a goal of the value centered

on the *Importance of Human Relationships*. The intention of the value *Integrity* is that

social workers behave and act in a trustworthy manner within the organizations with

which they are affiliated. The final value regarding *Competence* requires that social

workers practice within their areas of competence and maintain and develop their

professional skills to provide adequate and appropriate services to those in need.

Characteristics of Social Workers

Pearson's (1973) perception of those who pursued a career in social work differed

significantly from the expectation set forth by the NASW. Pearson presents in his

summary an alternative description of social workers as being essentially political deviant

and that the core of pursing a career in social work was "born out of a complex of moral

and political impulses" (p. 225). Pearson also goes on to state that the motivational

accounts by individuals pursuing social work may be based on the individual's feelings

of guilt about societal wrongs or to make up for emotional damage incurred perhaps in

early childhood. Further, Pearson believed social workers imagine themselves as "super

parents", finding some level of enjoyment in having clients dependent on them (p. 212).

Hilarski and Wodarski (2001) described the fundamental role of a social worker

as being a "change agent" (p. 29). In their article, the qualities a practitioner should have

in order to be an effective social worker are discussed in detail. The authors indicated

that workers who exhibit warmth, accurate empathetic understanding, and genuine

understanding, are more likely to have a more effective therapeutic outcome. Johnson,

1989; Goldstein,1986; Rothmeier & Dixon, 1980, as noted in Hilarski and Wodarski

(2001), suggested that all practitioners should possess acceptable levels of warmth and

empathy in order to increase the likelihood of a positive relationship between worker and client.

The ability to effectively communicate clearly and consistently is also an important characteristic in being a social worker. Hilarski and Wodarski (2001) suggested that practitioners should possess culturally germane nonverbal skills, such as appropriate facial expressions and the ability to pace their interactions with clients. The authors describe this interaction as an "empathetic dance wherein the therapist uses his or her voice, body, or gestures in harmony with the client" (p. 22). The ability to communicate non-verbally is described as equally important as it can help to strengthen the social worker and client relationship by building unity and emotional identification. This type of interaction is designed to increase the level of trust which is important in social work interventions.

Cohen (1966) attempted to identify specific characteristics between two groups of social workers, those that practiced private practice and those that did not, in an attempt to determine if the differences between the two groups were shaped by influences, contingencies met, and personal choices. The results of Cohen's study determined that depending on the settings in which social workers were currently employed, social workers were either introduced to or alienated from influences that could sway their decision to pursue private practice. For example, social workers that worked with other social workers who either had experience with private practice or were supportive of pursuing private practice were more likely to follow private practice for themselves. This study did take into account various influences in the participants' lifespan, but indicated that career decisions among social workers could be influenced later in life.

Vocational Psychology

In an overview from the Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology (2004) vocational psychology is described as a discipline from applied psychology that focuses on how individuals experience their work and careers. Vocational psychology focuses on vocational behavior, looking at the responses a person goes through when choosing or adapting within a profession. Clinicians in this area of psychology examine the development of vocational behavior over the lifespan, "from the growth of occupational aspirations during childhood to the disengagement from the world of work during old age" (Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology, 2004, para. 1).

Vocational psychology describes how human beings are not all alike, in that we exhibit through heredity, through early training, through accident, social pressure, and personal preference a great diversity of talents and defects (Hollingworth, 1929). The idea that through early training, we develop either adaptive or maladaptive qualities in how we interact with others coincides with literature pertaining to attachment theory. Vocational psychology has focused on the importance of understanding how the experiences throughout the lifespan influence career choice, but has also been described as not meeting its potential. It has been suggested that the concept of vocational psychology has not reached its full potential as a developmental science in the ever increasing world of occupations (Vondracek, 2001).

The concept of "vocational behavior" began at the beginning of the 20th century when individuals began migrating from farm work to employment in large factories. These industrial organizations created tasks that were divided and required very little skill, matching these positions with individuals they believed had the set criteria to

complete the job. Early philanthropic organizations such as the YMCA utilized guidance

workers to help connect individuals with jobs that matched their skill set and also helped

them acclimate to their new settings. Organizations like the YMCA and settlement

houses offering vocational support to these individuals utilized the person-environment

model which was in part influenced by sociological theorist, Talcott Parsons (1964)

focused on analyzing the relationship between individuals and features of their

environment, both social and natural which gave meaning to their actions (Penguin

Dictionary of Sociology, 2006).

 The person environment model has been determined to be a very important factor in

obtaining a comprehensive understanding of an individual (Neufeld, 2006) and a major

component of the practice of vocational psychology. Not surprisingly, this concept has

expanded throughout the years. John R. French (1963) was another significant

contributor to the concept of person in environment. French highlighted the importance

of measuring the person and environment, while addressing how individual

characteristics of both the person and environment may influence many responses such as

mood, physiological reactions and basic behavior (Caplan & Harrison, 1993). More

contemporary thoughts of person in environment would include Holland's theory

regarding vocational personalities and work environments (Leong, Altmaier, & Johnson,

2008).

Holland's Theory

Reardon & Lenz (1999) discussed the influence of American psychologist, John Lewis Holland, and his theory on how congruence, identity, and commonality can all be used to increase understanding of an individual's decision to pursue a specific career. Holland hypothesized that most individuals have a "personal career theory" (PCT) that is a compilation of beliefs, ideas, assumptions and knowledge that may sway an individual to choose an occupation or particular field of study.

Holland also identified how problems in obtaining a rewarding and fulfilling career could stem from flaws in occupational knowledge, poor decision making skills, and personal characteristics. PCT was described by Holland as essentially being a lifelong matching system beginning in childhood. Influence from significant figures such as parents or school teachers during childhood could make an impact on what type of employment an individual pursued. Examples of such influence by caregivers may include comments such as, "you would make a good lawyer" or "you are so kind to people, you should be a social worker". Holland also noted how the adverse effects of this system failing or stalling could result in uncertainty or unhappiness in career decisions (Holland, 1997, as cited in Reardon & Lenz, 1999).

From Holland's theory, six types of vocational personalities emerged, consisting of realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Individuals that matched *Realistic* personalities expressed interests in outdoor and mechanical related activities. These types also found enjoyment in working with machinery or animals, and were described as having a take charge mentality. Individuals with *Investigative* personalities are more inclined to have interest in science and assume the role of a

thinker. Leisure activities of these individuals may include reading or researching areas

of interest. *Artistic* personalities have preferences in the areas of music, art, and

literature. These individuals assume the role of creator, and have recreational interests

that may include activities that involve self-expression or an appreciation of attending

venues such as concerts, theatres, or museums. *Enterprising* personalities are those who

show curiosity in sales or managerial tasks. These types prefer to assume the role of

leader, enjoying the idea of travel or political pursuits. An ideal role for the enterprising

type may consist of public official or corporation president. *Conventional* personalities

are described as finding enjoyment in data or record collection, roles they may pursue

consist of historians or organizers. *Social* personalities have areas of interests that may

include working with people or assuming the role of helper. Leisure pursuits for these

types involve social interactions and conversations. Individuals who fit this personality

type may be inclined to assume to role of teacher or social worker.

Life Career Rainbow

The concept of Life Career Rainbow was discussed by Super (1980), to better

describe the variable aspects of a career throughout the life span. The Life Career

Rainbow essentially had two purposes: to teach the concept of life career, specifically,

the idea of life stages, life space, life-style and to help individuals to recognize the

interactive nature of the many roles constituting a career. Emphasizing the importance of

how *self actualization*, which can be defined as an individual's ability to actualize their

personal capabilities in the world (Goldstein, 1939) can be obtained in different

combinations of life roles is discussed by the author. The Life Career Rainbow was also

designed to be used as a counseling aid with older adolescents and adults to help analyze

their own careers to date and with potential changes in the future. Super (1980) identifies

several important components used within the Rainbow such as Life Space, Roles,

Theaters, Emotional Involvement and Determinants.

Super (1980) discusses the idea of life space within the rainbow, essentially the

idea that individuals play different roles throughout their different stages of life. The

roles individuals play are not static, and can begin as early as childhood or in later stages

in life. Within the life space, the author identifies nine roles most people adopt during the

course of their lives. In chronological order, the role of child, student, leisurite, citizen,

worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner are listed. Super (1980) notes that not

everyone assumes all the roles identified and points out that role identification does not

always occur in chronological order. The settings or "theaters" are likely to take place in

four venues, (1) The Home, (2) The Community, (3) The School, and (4) The Workplace.

Similar to the idea of roles, not all individuals enter all of the listed theaters. For

example, throughout their lifetime some individuals never find employment, attend

institutions of education, or become caretakers within the home setting.

Super (1980) also identifies how emotional involvement in a role can vary

throughout the lifespan for individuals. An example provided described how an

individual could be uninterested in a particular activity or task until a stimulus is

activated, such as encouraging words from a significant figure, that arouse some level of

enthusiasm or desire to further pursue the activity or task. An individual's role may

become more important the more emotionally involved they become. Or individuals may

lose interest over time if the activity is no longer challenging or if there is indication that

the potential for further growth has plateaued. From the Life Career Rainbow, the term

determinant is listed as two types, personal and situational. Personal determinants consist of the genetic constitution of the individual modified by his or her experiences in the womb, the home, and the community. Situational refers to the geographic, historic, social and economic conditions "in which the individual functions from infancy through adulthood and old age" (Super, 1980, p. 295).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory concepts began with Sigmund Freud's idea of physiological dependence and satisfaction in an infant's relation to her or his mother as a source of drive reduction (Fitton, 2012). Fitton described Freud's view of infant behavior as being clingy and dependent. Freud explained the mother and infant bond process through feeding, describing it as the secondary drive theory. When infants were fed, acknowledged and generally satisfied by the interactions with their mothers, they experienced pleasure (p. 121).

Bowlby (1969, as cited in Peluso et al., 2009) proposed that attachments were close, intense, emotional relationships that formed between infants and one or two caretaking individuals. These attachments can be either secure or non-secure, depending on the relationship between the child and caretaker(s) involved. The perceptions of the child during this period in time dictate how the child develops future relationships in adulthood. Adler (1964) suggested that individuals "create their lifestyles to develop of sense of belonging which helps them cope with the natural inferiority and helplessness of the human condition" (p. 395).

The quality of relationships with significant caretakers during one's childhood determines how comfortable and secure the child feels with exploring their environments. This relationship also lays the framework as to how the child will develop future relationships during adulthood. Howe's (1995) research, regarding attachment theory, notes that how we treat those who have significant roles in our lives, experience other people, and who we are now currently, is influenced by how we were treated by others during our childhood. Attachment theorist, Sroufe (1988) supports this idea, suggesting that children form internal models of self through their interactions with caregivers during early in life and carry these models into adulthood.

Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson's (1975) contributions to the study of human behavior helped to shape fields of study such as social work and psychology. One of Erikson's most important theories explained psychosocial development spanning the entire lifespan. In relation to career choice, Munley (1975) investigated the connection between Erikson's psychosocial development and vocational choice behavior and development. Erikson concluded that individuals go through eight stages of development, and at each stage the individual must experience and cope with a core psychosocial dilemma. The eight stages consisted of basic trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair. As the individual resolves the crisis encountered with each stage of development, the attitude or reaction that emerges from each contributes to the development of an individual's personality.

In Munley's (1975) research article, he attempted to assess the relationship between Erikson's psychosocial development and vocational behavior and development during the first six stages of development. The participants of this study consisted of 123 male college students ages 18-21. These individuals were selected from introductory psychology classes and were given extra research credit for their participation. It was Munley's assumption that the six stages of development were key influencers in deciding vocational choice and maturity. The hypothesis of the study suggested three potential outcomes: (1) There would be a significant difference in the level of psychosocial development across Erikson's first six stages for individuals classified in different vocational choice adjustment groups with the adjustment choice group demonstrating a significantly higher level of psychosocial development in comparison to individuals exhibiting within the problem vocational choice groups, (2) that individuals that had made successful completion during the first six stages of development would demonstrate a significantly "more successful resolution of the identity crisis" as compared to participants with problematic vocational choices, (3) Participants high in vocational maturity would demonstrate a significantly higher level of psychosocial development across the six stages as compared to participants that were low in vocational maturity.

Results from the study indicated that psychosocial development stage scale differences and patterns within a vocational choice category could not be accurately interpreted. However, the study did determine that individuals who demonstrated adjusted vocational choices exhibited a higher level of psychosocial development across the first six stages of Erikson's psychosocial development as compared to individuals with problem vocational choices. The findings of the study supported Erikson's theory,

as the adjusted group was the most successful in choosing a vocation and was the most successful in resolving the six stages of crisis. A weakness to this particular study was the fact that all of the participants were male and did not represent an expansive age range as it was limited to ages 18 to 21.

Conceptual Framework

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development provides a conceptual guide for this study. The concept of Erikson's theory has provided significant contributions to the field of professional career development and to the study of vocational behavior (Munley, 1975). This particular framework helps to identify at what stage of development individuals are exposed to elements that may influence their decision to pursue a career in a helping profession such as social work. The framework also highlights how the concept of stage theory can be considered fluid and a continuation of lifelong development.   As there has been an increasing exploration of the concepts of vocational interests and developmental influences, so has the emergence of other developmental concepts such as self-concept and career maturity.

Erikson's concept regarding the lifespan of an individual describes eight stages in ego growth, consisting of *basic trust versus mistrust*, *autonomy versus shame and doubt*, *initiative versus guilt*, *industry versus inferiority*, *identity versus identity confusion*, *intimacy versus isolation*, *generativity versus stagnation*, *and ego integrity versus despair*. These stages occur and match with a series of "crises" that an individual encounters as he or she transitions from infancy, through childhood, into to adulthood and maturity. Erikson's concept of crisis can be described as a point during an individual's development at which he or she is faced with critical dilemma.

Depending on how the individual responds to this critical moment, in each stage, determines whether or not the individual matures successfully or remains stagnant in their development. As an individual matures, the people within the environment also change. At some point in time, the person comes into contact with other individuals and institutions that can significantly influence his or her development. Within this growing process, an individual's perception of the people he or she interacts with also changes. Munley (1977) describes the process as a "mutual interaction between individual development and the society in which a person lives" (p. 262). This interaction ultimately results in a progression of crises and stages children must encounter, along with adults throughout their lifespan.

The manner in which an individual resolves a crisis can influence the development of both the individual's attitude and their perception of how they view the world and interactions within. If a developmental stage has been successfully mastered, the experience can empower an individual to successfully complete the next stage of development. Munley (1975) describes a possible result of someone being unable to make personal or vocational commitments during adolescence as the individual being unable to obtain a sense of ego identity. This in turn may result in that person having difficulty in maintaining interpersonal commitments and create a type of isolation from others. From the perspective of Erikson's theory, this research study will focus on two of the developmental stages; identity versus identity confusion and intimacy versus isolation to explore resolution of the developmental crisis in each phase.

Current Study

The current study will explore factors that may influence an individual's decision to pursue a career in the helping profession. The aforementioned literature, in regards to developmental and vocational theories, provides some insight into the reasons an individual pursues a specific career focus. The current study will contribute to the literature by giving social workers some awareness of what factors may have influenced their decision to pursue a career in the helping profession.

Information for this study was obtained from individuals currently employed as social workers to learn more about their personal experiences and how their experiences guided their decision to become advocates for the disenfranchised. The findings of this study will include current social workers' perceptions of what most influenced their decision to pursue a career in social work during Erikson's identity versus identity confusion stage of development (age range 12-18) and intimacy versus isolation stage of development or young adulthood (age range 19-40).

Methods

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for the purposes of this study to aid in determining what factors may influence an individual to pursue a career in social work. The intent of this design is to employ strategies that can trigger memories during specific stages of life development and to attach meaning or interpretation into how these past events may have either directly or indirectly impacted an indidivudal's decision become advocates for the disenfranchised. The interview schedule contained 16 open-ended questions (See Appendix B).

Sample

A nonprobability convenience sample was used. A list of different agencies that

employed licensed social workers was obtained. These social workers were contacted

through both email and telephone to identify if they would be interested in taking part in

this research project. Social workers within this sample varied in regards to gender,

ethnicity, the types of services they offered, and the type of populations to whom they

provided services.   The social workers from these agencies were also sent a consent form

(Appendix A) outlining the purpose of the study, an explanation of the procedural

process, and the researcher's contact information should they have questions regarding

the study. The rationale behind selecting this specific demographic was based on the fact

that they all met the requirements to be classified as "social workers" as they were all

licensed by the state of Minnesota to practice social work within their respective

licensure guidelines. Out of the 10 social workers who were contacted it was anticipated

that perhaps 8-10 social workers would volunteer their time to take part in this study.

Protection of Human Rights

This study was reviewed by a research committee and by the Institutional Review

Board (IRB) at St. Thomas University prior to collecting data for the study to ensure

Protection of Human Subjects. The participants of this study were employed by various

social service agencies, offering an array of services such as mental health counseling

services and case management services. The researcher reviewed the consent form with

the participants, explaining all aspects of the document and offered the participants the

opportunity to ask additional questions regarding the study. The consent form provided

information about the survey and purpose for data collection and explained in detail what

procedures would be followed during the interview. It was explained to the participants that if they did not wish to participate in the interview at any time, they had the option to ask the researcher to stop the interview. Risks and benefits of participation in the study were discussed, reporting that there were no known risks or benefits identified that could affect the participants.

The consent document was modified to include information about the current study and was approved by the researcher's committee chair, Dr Karen Carlson and the University of St. Thomas (IRB). To maintain confidentiality, the participants' names have been omitted from the transcript developed from the interview, notes taken by the researcher for the study, and from the report herein. The audiotape from interviews has been scheduled for destruction May 25, 2013.

Data Collection

The research questions asked by the researcher were reviewed and approved by course instructor, Dr Karen Carlson. In addition, the questions met the University of St Thomas IRB requirement regarding the Protection of Human Subjects guidelines. The questions were open ended and pertained to the concepts identified within the literature review for this study. The research design for this study was qualitative, utilizing qualitative questions during the interview process. The questions asked in this study were designed to ascertain significant past events that may have influenced the participants' decision to pursue a career in social work.

The questionnaire tool was developed by the researcher utilizing recurrent themes throughout the literature review in addition to the concepts from the conceptual framework. Question #4 "Can you tell me about individuals or situations that may have

influenced your decision to pursue a career in social work?" was influenced by John

Lewis Holland and his theory on how congruence, identity, and commonness can all be

used to increase understanding of an individual's decision to pursue a specific career.

Question #5, "Around what period in your life did you decide to become social worker?"

was created to ascertain if the participants determined their set careers during Erikson's

psychosocial development stage, *identity versus identity confusion*. Questions #6 & #7,

"What did you hope to accomplish by going into the field of social work?", "By entering

the field of social work, what did you hope to steer clear of in your professional life?",

was influenced by Geoffery Pearson's (1973) study identifying motivating factors to

pursue a career in social work.

The chair, committee members and classmates for the researcher reviewed the

questions to ensure the questions are easy to understand and will generate information

pertinent to the particular study.

Data Analysis Plan

The research methodology applied to this research study consisted of grounded

theory (Monette, 2009). The data collected from the interviews was reviewed and

analyzed by the researcher to identify codes and themes in the transcription of the

interview. As codes and themes evolved from the data reviewed, this information was

labeled onto a coded transcript. Content analysis was used for open ended questions (1-

16) to analyze the data reviewed. Open coding was utilized by the researcher to identify

themes. Berg (2009) describes open coding as having four guidelines, consisting of

asking a data specific and consistent set of questions, analyzing the data minutely,

frequently interrupting the coding to write a theoretical note, and to never assume the

analytic relevance of traditional variables until the data indicates it to be relevant (p. 354).

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

An analysis of the data collected from interviews produced four major themes that

connected directly to the focus of the study which was to identify factors that influenced

decisions to pursue a career social work. These four major themes consisted of: strong

connection to significant caregivers, major life events, role of caregiver, and the ability to

socialize with others.

Strong Connection to Caregivers

"Strong connection to significant caregivers" was a theme identified from

interviews collected. The theme was identified from answers provided from interviewees

for question (3), "Can you describe what your relationship was like with parents or

caregivers during your childhood and adolescence?", question (4) "Can you think of an

individual who you believe to be the most significant caregiver in your life", and question

(8) "Can you tell me about individuals or situations that may have influenced your

decision to pursue a career in social work?" All of the participants within the study

identified having a strong connection to one or two individuals they described as

significant caregivers. The following are quotes from participants' opinion regarding

having a strong connection to caregivers.

"Yes, I had a grandmother and she was, I'm sure we'll come to this point later, probably

the reason I looked at social work"

"I would probably say my mom, I think because I saw all that she had to manage in the

household with my dad, you know she really managed to do it all"

"Probably my dad, because I was a tom boy so I loved being outside and being with him and he was the way, the caregiver I wanted to be"

"Um, my upbringing, I guess was quote on quote, normal, stable, my parents are still married, they were nurturing and loving, so yeah, pretty normal"

"Probably my grandmother, on my mom's side, I was very close to my grandmother and grandfather."

Significant Life Events

Of the eight participants, five participants reported experiencing a significant life event during their life that may have influenced their decision to pursue a career in social work. A participant was asked if there were individuals or situations that may have influenced her decision to pursue a career in social work; the participant replied:

"Okay, well, because I pursued it late in life, I teasingly say it was a midlife crisis. I sold my minivan and went to night school. But I spent twenty years in the business world and kind of got to the point, is this really what I want to do?"

Another participant described sexual and emotional abuse experienced at the hands of her father. The participant then describe how she assumed the role of caregiver during this period of abuse in her family in an attempt to "keep the peace" with her father.

"My adolescence was a little bit different, my dad was mentally ill I believe and losing the bakery maybe triggered something, so he was very, he was abusive to when I was younger to my brother."

"But it was difficult, and then when I was older about 14 or 15, my dad tried to rape me, and so that was not a pleasant time, so I really, after that I didn't have a relationship with him and my mom was busy trying to keep the family together, working long hours, and she didn't know what was going on."

"I'm going to say a caretaker and a peacekeeper, definitely tried to keep the peace. Just trying to keep my dad less volatile."

The following quote from a participant demonstrates how having a family member with mental illness was a significant event that impacted her.

"I think being a family member of someone who has a mental health issues, had traumatic brain injury, resides in a care setting, I think I can understand families perspectives, I think that's a big influence for me."

"My father is a Vietnam Veteran, he had post traumatic stress disorder, he also had underlying Schizophrenia diagnosis, so I think we kind of went through his cycle of highs and lows, being on medication, not being on medication, how that affected our family, I think that throughout my formative years, kind of shaped my wanting to help other people, so that was probably a significant influence."

Role of Caregiver

There was a noticeable theme of caregiver from four of the participants within the study. When asked the question, *"What role did you play in the family in which you were raised, for example did you think of yourself as a caretaker or mediator, what role would you say you played?"* One participant responded by saying:

"I was kind of the caretaker of my younger brother and, my earliest memory was of my mom crying, on the stairs and me holding her hand and crying with her and I had no idea what was going on, but she was sad so I was sad."

This participant then went on to describe how she viewed herself as caretaker in some of her current interactions with others. The following is a quote from the participant describing her interaction with her soon to be husband.

"I'm the caretaker too?, so I tend to, it goes out into a lot of my relationships, I'm getting married soon, I've been with my finance for eight years but, you know I'm, very motherly like, I have his scheduled so I'm constantly reminding him to do things, it's just kinda how I am. So very organized."

An additional participant also described her role in her family as caregiver, as she would model the actions of her father who she considered to be a significant influence.

"I was a tom boy so I loved being outside and being with him and he was the way, the caregiver I wanted to be if I ever became a parent."

The same participant went on to describe how her role as caretaker influenced her decision to become a social worker.

"I think I took on a lot, you know, besides being a caregiver for her for a awhile, I took on the family feelings that never got dealt with. And so, I think I absolutely was a caretaker, that just set me up for becoming a social worker."

"Well, um, definitely, looking back now I definitely know that my mother's death and being a caretaker for her, did influence me greatly. I didn't realize it at the time, at the time I was very much angry that I was being put into a situation of being a caretaker and of course angry that she was dying."

One participant described her experience during childhood when she was requested to take what she described as a "personality test". The participant goes on to describe the results of this test to the interviewer in the following quote.

"I remember in middle school, we took some type of personality test or aptitude test, something, and I don't remember specifically what it was, but I think it told me I would be a good caregiver, like a nurse or medical professional."

Another participant responded by describing herself as a caregiver when asked what talents or interests she had during her childhood and adolesence in which she stated:

"I wanted to take care of other things, animals in particular. But then I realized, there's something about animals and children that they're so innocent, and they really trust you, and you know I just felt like I just couldn't do that work very well without having some emotional problems with that, um, sometimes putting animals down or what have you. I guess I just always had that caregiver piece in me."

Ability to Socialize with Others

The theme of socializing with others was recurrent throughout portions of the interviews conducted. When asked what talents or interests participants had during their childhoods and adolescents, four participants highlighted their ability to socialize with others as individual talents they had during their childhood and adolescence. The following quotes are from the two aforementioned participants.

"That's interesting, um, I was quite a reader. Had a pretty good social circle, so I don't know if it's a talent, socialization, understanding people, understanding relationships"

"I was involved in a lot of different things, I did 4H, so I was involved in the community, I did a lot of volunteer work"

"I think social activities, I really like to be with people, played a little bit of sports, those types of things, but really again, more working with people, I worked as a nursing assistant in high school and college. I think just being social."

"um I did a lot of mentoring programs in school especially with my dad being the middle school counselor where I went to school, um, you know elementary mentoring and then peer mentoring, um so, I was involved in that too."

Discussion

Interpretation of findings

Overall, the results of this study indicated the many factors that could influence an individual to pursue a career in social work. The participants of this study contributed significantly by their willingness to share life experiences that they believe influenced their decisions to become social workers. In this section, the four themes identified consisting of: strong connection to significant caregivers, major life events, role of caregiver, and the ability to socialize with others will be discussed more in depth.

The two most frequent themes consisted of strong connection to significant caregiver and role of caretaker. Several participants during intervals of the interview process described how the connections with individuals they considered to be influential caregivers greatly swayed their decision to pursue a helping profession such as social work. From the interviews collected, significant caregivers varied slightly, most of the participants identified their mothers or other female caregivers as being the most influential.

One participant identified both her mother and father as being significant caregivers that they had a strong connection to, while another participant identified her father soley as being her significant caregiver that she was positively connected to. Two participants reported having a strong connection to their grandmothers. This aligns with the concept collected within the literature review pertaining to Attachment theory. As mentioned earlier, the quality of relationships with significant caretakers during one's childhood determines how comfortable and secure the child feels with exploring their environments. This relationship shapes how the child will develop future relationships during adulthood. The theme of strong connection to caregivers also connects to the characteristics of prominent social workers throughout history.

The second most pronounced theme regarding role of caregiver was identified from four of the participants. One participant described how her role in her family as a caregiver, was modeled by the actions of her father who she considered to be a significant influence during her life. An additional participant stated that she assumed the role of caretaker to help support her mother during a family separation. This participant also described how this role carried into her adult life as she stated that currently demonstrates similar caretaker qualities toward her significant other. The same participant went on to describe how her role as caretaker during childhood also influenced her decision to become a social worker. One participant described her experience during childhood when she was requested to take what she described as a "personality test", and how the results of this test indicated that she should pursue a career such as nursing as she exhibited caretaker qualities. Another participant described her caretaking of others as an actual talent or interest she had during her childhood and adolesence.

From the literature review, Reardon & Lenz (1999) discussed Holland's theory in their text on how congruence, identity, and commonality can all be used to increase understanding of an individual's decision to pursue a specific career. Of Holland's six types of vocational personalities discussed, the personality type of *Social* was apparent in many of the participants that took part in this study. *Social* personalities as described by Holland have areas of interests that may include working with people or assuming the role of helper. Leisure pursuits for these types involve social interactions and conversations. Individuals that fit this personality type may be inclined to assume to role of teacher or social worker. Further, the theme of role of caretaker also had similarities to the concept of "Life Career Rainbow" by Super (1980).

Regarding the conceptual framework pertaining to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, none of the participants in the study identified concretely their desires to become "social workers" during the identity versus identity confusion stage of development. Despite the fact that Erikson's theory has provided significant contributions to the field of professional career development and to the study of vocational behavior, the researcher was unable to determine if the participants decision to pursue social work as a career occurred during the identity versus identity confusion stage. Many of the participants reported that their decision to become social workers occurred later in life and was triggered by events, ranging from the influence of those they considered significant caregivers to major life events such as a death in the family or personal trauma.

The data collected from the research yielded fascinating insight into what exactly influenced the research participants to pursue a career in social work. As stated earlier within the study, participants identified several variables that they considered influential for their career process choice. In particular, the role of caregiver and significant connection to a caregiver were two prominent themes from the study.   Of the participants that identified themselves as "caregivers" during their childhood, the same participants also reported that their role of caregiver was placed upon due to either abusive or traumatic events occuring during their childhood.

Implications For Social Work Practice

Implications for social work practice would include the emphasis on the concept of countertransference and self awareness aforementionally discussed. As social workers, the concept of countertransference is important to be aware of due to the stressful nature of the profession. The ability to remain objective and refrain from placing personal feelings in a relationship with a client can be difficult. As stated earlier, Pearson (1973) suggested that the motivational accounts by individuals pursuing social work may be based on the individual's feelings of guilt about societal wrongs or to make up for emotional damage incurred perhaps in early childhood. Pearson also suggested that social workers may imagine themselves as "super parents", finding some level of enjoyment in having clients dependent on them.

All of the participants within the study reported experiencing countertransference with clients in some point in time with clients. However, none of the participants reported negative outcomes within the client/social worker relationship as a result of the countertransference experienced. While the potential for countertransference is not

uncommon in helping professions such as social work, the emphasis on educating future

social workers about countertransferance and the importance of self awareness should be

an element within the curriculum in Universities accredited by the (CSWE) Council of

Social Work Education.

Self awareness, as defined as the recognition of the self as a distinct entity,

separate from others, with its own thoughts, feelings and characteristics (Kagan, 1981),

is an equally important concept in regards to implications to social work practice.

Gardner (2001) discussed how both social work students and workers should be aware as

to how their attitudes, values, and personal issues may affect interaction with clients. The

author also emphasized the importance of social work educational systems offering

courses that teach and increase the concept of self awareness in hopes that students will

develop the capacity to be significantly reflective of their values, ideologies, and models

of practice.

Implications for Policy and Research

A policy implication identified by all of the participants within the study was the

lack of understanding or awareness of the social work profession during their childhoods.

Many of the participants reported that their decisions to become social workers occurred

later in life, either during college or after completing their degree in another field. One

participant reported making the decision to become a social worker in her mid 40's after

experiencing what she jokingly described as a "midlife crisis". In order to recruit

individuals who have an interest in pursuing a career in social work, organizations such

as the Council of Social Work Education and National Association of Social Workers

should contemplate the option of partnering with local elementary and high schools to

educate children about the profession of social work asmany of the participants stated that they did not have a clear understanding of what social work was until after high school.

Strengths & Limitations

Strengths of this particular study include the fact that the questions generated were inspired by previous research in regards to lifespan development, motives to pursue social work as a career, and vocational psychology. As indicated within the conceptual framework, the concept of Erik Erikson's theory on lifespan development has provided significant contributions to the field of professional career development, the study of vocational behavior, and to the profession of social work. An additional strength to the study was the fact that all of the participants were licensed Social Workers from various backgrounds and areas of focus, giving variety to what influenced them to pursue a career in social work.

A limitation to the study is that the sample was limited to 8 licensed social workers residing within the Metro Area of Minnesota. A larger sample of social workers which included those outside of the Metro Area may have helped with identifying stronger themes. An additional limitation to the study would include the small number of minorities that took part in the study. One participant who took part in the study was Indonesian, while the remaining participants were Caucasians. There were no available males to take part in this study. A larger sample of individuals from varying ethnicities and genders may have provided a more diverse explanation as to what factors influence career choice. An additional limitation was how the researcher was unable to accurately determine if participants met their "crises" during the identity vs identity confusion or

intimacy vs isolation stage of development. Lastly, including additional input from social workers of different ethnicities or gender regarding the format of this study may have added a different perspective as to how to questions should be asked or developed for the study.

Future Directions

Future research on factors that influence individuals to pursue a career in social work should focus on the successive stages of development, as the participants all reported having a more thorough understanding of social work later in life. Determining if there is a relation between job contentment in social work and successful completion of either the identity versus identity confusion stage and the intimacy versus isolation stage of development (age range 19-40) would be benficial to the profession of social work as this could help to identity social workers that may be at risk for job dissatisfaction during their careers.

Researchers would obtain valuable information in learning more about individuals who both reported having a clear understanding of the social work profession and made their decision to become social workers during the identity versus identity confusion stage of development. Would these individuals be more likely to report having higher levels of job satisfaction in the field of social work later on in life? In order to achieve both reliable and convincing results, future studies would require a much larger and diverse sample to identify more concretely, patterns and significant themes.

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<u>**Appendix A**</u>

Why we do what we do: A Psychosocial development perspective on factors that

influence decision to pursue a career in social work. Research information and

consent form Saint Catherine University/ University of Saint Thomas

General information about the study:
The purpose of this study is to identify factors that may influence an individual's decision
to pursue social work as a career. Past and contemporary literature has attempted to
answer this question in some capacity, ranging from identifying the motives, incentives,
and concerns of being a social worker to identifying what type of characteristics a
potential social worker may possess. Previous research has yielded information
considered beneficial to the profession but there is limited information that reviews
influences to pursue a career in a helping profession such as social work during specific
stages of the lifespan.

You are invited to participate in this research:
You were selected as a possible participant as you are currently employed as a Licensed
Social Worker. All participants in the study are licensed by the Minnesota Board of
Social Work and allowed to practice social work within their level of licensure. The
findings of this study will include current social workers perceptions of what most
influenced their decision to pursue social work during Erikson's identity versus identity
confusion stage of development (age range 12-18) and intimacy versus isolation stage of
development or young adulthood (age range 19-40).

Background information:
The purpose of this study focuses on individuals who have decided on a career in social
work and their rationale behind said profession. The intent of this qualitative study is to
examine life experiences that may influence an individual to pursue a career in social
work. This research article is significant to the profession of social work as it emphasizes
the importance of self-awareness and may provide insight into what populations are most
inclined to pursue such endeavor. Self-awarenes is an important tool for social workers in
that it encourages individuals to be aware of internal reactions to situations encountered
with clients. Further, it can help with minimizing incidents of countertransference
between client and social worker.
Procedures:
The participant in the study will review the consent form with the researcher, which will
include background information of the project, researcher's procedures to complete
questionnaire, risk and benefits of the study, confidentiality of the study, voluntary nature
of the study, contact information of researcher, course instructor, and the information to
the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research will be
completed through interviews with participants that agree to take part in the study. Those
that decide to take part in the study will be asked by the researcher to set up a time to

complete the interviews in a location that is convenient to the participant. The interview will consist of 16 questions pertaining to the research study. The interview will be digitally recorded and will range from 30 to 45 minutes.

Risks and benefits of being in the study:
The study has no known risks.

Confidentiality:
The interviews for this study will be recorded for transcription by the researcher. The transcripts from the recordings will be completed in an unidentified manner as not to reveal the names of the participants or any other identifying information. The transcripts for this study will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's home. Prior to the study, consent forms will be reviewed and signed by all participants.

Voluntary nature of the study:
Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships and no further data will be collected.

Contacts and questions:
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.
Researcher name: Hugh Armstrong
Researcher email: arms2373@stthomas.edu
Researcher phone: ***-***-****
Research advisor name: Dr Karen Carlson
Research advisor email: carl1307@stthomas.edu
Research advisor phone: 651-962-5867
UST IRB Office: 651-962-5341

Statement of consent:
I have read the above information. My questions have been asked to my satisfaction and I am at least 18 years old. I consent to participate in the study. By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent to participate in the study.

Signature of study participant   _____ Date: _____
☐ Electronic signature

Signature of researcher   _____ Date: _____
☐ Electronic signature

<u>Appendix B</u>

Interview Questions

1. Could you start by describing what your upbringing was like? Where you lived, number of siblings and so on?

2. Briefly describe what your parents did for a living?

3. Can you describe what your relationship was like with your parents or caregivers during your childhood and adolescence?

4. Can you think of an individual who you believe to be the most significant caregiver in their life?

5. What role did you play in the family in which you were raised? For example, did you think of yourself as a "caretaker" or "family mediator"?

6. Can you recall specific situations during your life when you were told by significant influences that you should pursue a specific career based on your talents, interests, or events occurring within your life? Please elaborate as to when this occurred and what was suggested.

7. What talents or interests did you have during your childhood and adolescence?

8. Can you tell me about individuals or situations that may have influenced your decision to pursue a career in social work?

9. Around what period in your life did you decide to become social worker?

10. What did you hope to accomplish by going into the field of social work?

11. Was there anything that you intended to avoid by entering the field of social work? Please elaborate.

12. What words come to mind when you hear the term "social worker"?

13. What population are you currently working with now in your role as social worker?

14. What influenced your decision to work with this particular population?

15. How would you say your life experiences have impacted how you interact with clients overall? Please elaborate.

16. As a social worker, have you experienced episodes of countertransference or transference with clients? Can you connect those situations to past events during your life? Please elaborate on those experiences.