

Worldview Pedagogy for Integration of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Education

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Abstract

The study applies worldview diagnostic scale (WDS) as a classroom instrument for enhanced pedagogy for teaching on religion and spirituality in social work education. A sample of 110 Masters of Social Work (MSW) alumni and 154 MSW students was used to investigate: 1) differences in worldviews on human nature and social justice between clinical and community concentration MSW students; and 2) diversity of positions on theological, epistemological, ontological, axiological and deontological issues as related to social work practice. These were compared to MSW alumni to determine spheres of differences between trainees and graduates from the same institution. The results served as a foundation on which the integration of religion and spirituality in social work education was built. They derived the conclusion that a worldview system is a stable structure that does not easily yield to outside influences.

Keywords: worldviews, pedagogical tool, spirituality, religion, social work higher education

1. Introduction

The current state of the social work profession in the USA is experiencing a phenomenal development: The demand and supply for spiritually oriented services have reversed the roles and the functions between service providers and service consumers. For over a century, since the recognition of professional social work (Bisman, 2014; NASW, 1998), the providers of services assumed the leading role of charting new territories through which the profession formed its presence within the society. Even though, traditionally, the development of new theoretical frameworks for practice has been known to strive in catching up with already established practices in the field (Groen, Coholic, & Graham, 2012, p. 36), the last decade was characterized neither by trends in theory nor developments in practice. The determinants of development were set by clients' demands for new kinds of services that took into consideration their religious or spiritual needs. This is a new relationship between providers and consumers of services that has taken a new, reversed trajectory: the clients' demand for spiritually oriented services are now outpacing the availability of professionals who are able to supply them.

The academic literature has identified this gap, steering innovative efforts for training competent social workers on issues of religion and spirituality. This study attempts to contribute to these efforts in a two-fold manner: 1) development of enhanced classroom pedagogy on religion and spirituality in social work education through the application of the Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) instrument for worldview identification; 2) application of WDS for worldview identification and comparison of MSW students and alumni.

The above-stated goals required an answer to four research questions:

1) How do MSW students' worldviews on human nature and social justice differ according to their concentration specialization as clinical and community? 2) What constitutes worldview differences between clinical and community concentration students? 3) Which dimension(s) of students' worldview are more stable and which are more susceptible to change? 4) How do the worldviews of current MSW students differ from those of alumni? These will be explored methodically throughout the study.

Based on the fact that this study is conducted with MSW students and alumni from a religious-based Christian institution – Azusa Pacific University – we hypothesize that their worldviews will align with positions that are theologically conservative and socially liberal. Analysis from the research questions is expected to provide the answers. It is also the foundation on which integration of spirituality and religion into the academic curricula is accomplished.

Immediate integration of the study's results into the academic process is crucial, since the information derived from it is aimed to assist students in identifying their own worldviews. This is an innovative worldview pedagogy designed to bolster students' self-awareness of their own religious beliefs and spiritual practices as a prerequisite for competency-based social work practice with religious and spiritual issues.

2. Worldviews in Social Work

Sire (2004) defines worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world (p. 19). In the field of social work, a modified version of this worldview definition refers to a set of presuppositions, life philosophies, beliefs and practices as applied to the understanding of human nature and social justice from theological, political, economic, ecological and ethical perspectives. Every practicing social work professional exhibits a unique compilation of the above components that form a distinctive worldview. These presuppositions are stable in their structure and do not easily yield to change (Mayhew, Bowman & Rockenbach, 2014).

The applied Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) instrument is designed to examine worldviews on human nature and social justice from theological, ontological, epistemological, axiological and deontological perspectives as exhibited by MSW students and alumni.

2.1 Worldviews on Human Nature as Measured through the WDS Instrument

Defining human nature is not an easy task. Existing philosophies offer definitions projected through the lenses of their own worldviews tenets. For example, the Christian view of human nature is quite distinguishable from the Blank Slate theory or the Darwinian theory of human nature. The task is further complicated by the fact that the diversity of opinions is fairly strong and not yielding to compromise. To challenge these difficulties, Stenmark (2012) offers a comprehensive approach for describing human nature by defining ten building blocks of its composition, referring to them as "views" (p. 544). Dissimilarly, Byron (2014) simplifies the process, suggesting a broader philosophical definition of human nature "as an attribute of the human species that is *uniquely/distinctly* human" (p. 241). The difficult task of describing the existing views is attributed to Stevenson, Haberman & Wright (2013) who compile a comprehensive description of 12 theories (worldviews) on human nature as held by Confucius, Upanishadic Hinduism, Buddhism, Plato, Aristotle, the Bible, Islam, Kant, Marx, Freud, Sartre and Darwin.

Existing rival theories could be summarized to cross arguments on a two-axes debate: nature vs. nurture and reason vs. emotions. The first discourse takes place between biologists and social scientists arguing that human nature is either a product of nature (genetically determined), a product of culture (socially constructed) or a combination of both. Karl Marx goes further to introduce economic systems as the change factor in shaping human traits.

The second discourse goes back to ancient classicists Plato and Aristotle, with Thomas Aquinas, Descartes and Kant representing the Middle Ages and Ian Hacking and Martin Heidegger representing contemporary philosophers. Counter argumentation of the role of emotions, as opposed to cognition, as primary to human nature is held by Augustinian philosophy and Kierkegaard's existentialism.

The discourse on human nature in the social work field follows the same pattern of reasoning. Diversity of theories on human nature has penetrated the mental health field in the form of psychotherapeutic approaches for direct practice. There is no uniform comprehensive theory that gives practitioners one-way guidance in assessing what went wrong with the human condition and consequently prescribes a treatment plan for alleviating it. Freud's genetic (sexual and aggressive drives) and Adler's environmental (community feelings) determinism is juxtaposed to Albert Ellis' and Aaron Beck's positions on cognition as a foundational factor of human existence and function, and they all compete with the existential philosophy of Sartre who, negating all attempts to address the human condition, argues that "there is no human nature Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (Rose, 2003, p.1)

The above views, as applied in social work, could be classified based on two sets of criteria. The first set distinguishes between views of the human nature on monochotomy (mind and body relationship), dichotomy (body/mind and soul relationship) and trichotomy (body/mind, soul and spirit) principles. It is important to note that this classification differs from the biblical discourse on soul and spirit as dichotomy/trichotomy binary. This approach mirrors the EPAS educational standards for conducting bio-psych-social-spiritual assessment for competency-based practice (Hunt, 2014).

The second set of criteria takes into consideration the emphasis on the component of the human structure through which healing is achieved. By its definition, the monochotomist approach looks only at a one-dimensional mind/body human structure; the mind being viewed as a higher evolutionary neurological development (a view congruent with

Material Naturalism). These structures are considered as targets for cognitive and behavioral interventions through which therapeutic change (healing) is achieved. The dichotomist approach to human nature regards the body/mind and the soul component of human nature as equally important in the process of therapeutic healing. This practice is a return of the profession's century-long disavowal of religion that resulted in a much narrower defining of *psyche*, "first as mind and then as behavior or even neural activity" (Miller & Delaney, 2004, p. 11). Dichotomous therapeutic interventions target change of personality traits and identity development. This approach recognizes the return of the profession to its primary subject study – the psyche. The trichotomist approach adds an additional dimension – that of the spirit – to the structure of the human nature. Spiritual matters, along with human behavior, emotions and cognition are equally addressed. Personality, mental and relational pathologies are examined through the condition of the human spirit and its relation to the Divine Spirit.

The WDS instrument captures differences in professional opinions on issues of human nature and life origination (Q18, Q22, Q27), perceived reality (existence of spiritual realm) (Q17, Q24, Q27, 28Q), gender (Q30) and process of healing (Q8, Q16, Q23, Q26, Q29,) and positions are scored as Material Naturalism, Secular Humanism, Pantheism and Monotheism, accordingly.

2.2 Worldviews on Social Justice as Measured through WDS Instrument

Social justice is the primary motivational factor for individuals committing to the social work profession (Cree & Davis, 2007). Social justice is central in the mission statement of the International Federation of Social Workers, which envisions itself as a "global organization striving for social justice, human rights and social development" (IFSW, 2015). Social justice is a core value listed in NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008). Despite its prevalence in notion in social work field, however, defining the concept and practice of social justice remains a subject of continuous academic discourse (Okimoto, 2014). Differences proceed from the philosophical framework applied to study the phenomena of social and economic development (Gaba, 2014). The polarity of views forms a binary scale defined by *Human Development* (Lerner, 2015; Naqvi, 2015; Gaynor & Schachter, 2014; Sachs, 2006; Rawls, 1971) at one end and *Economic Development (Neoliberalism)* (Moyo, 2010; Unwin, 2007; Sharma, 2007; Easterly, 2006) at the other end. The first considers Keynes' macroeconomic insights and prescriptions as foundational; the second adapts to contemporary conditions the principles of the classical economics of Adam Smith (1776).

Both approaches voice concerns to the causes of social justice as 1) equal right to basic liberty and 2) reduction of social and economic inequalities. Both approaches, however, differ in the means to achieve them. While the first approach holds as primary the establishment of distributive practices (Gaba, 2014), the second calls for the establishment of the right societal conditions (known as structural adjustments) for administering the social justice agenda. These differences may be seen in the alternative approaches applied to poverty alleviation: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aligns with the *Human Development* approach for social justice, while The World Bank embraces the *Neoliberal* approach to development.

The above-described binary position on social development in academia spills into the field of social work as well with predominant positions aligned with the *Human Development* approach to social justice. Chhachhi (2006) identified this as a biaxial discursive conflict in international social development between Liberalism and Neoliberalism and asserted that it is the "broader notions of development as freedom which place the multidimensionality of a person's capabilities and the pursuit of human flourishing as central, and the (re-)emergence of normative frameworks for distributive justice" (Chhachhi, 2006, p. 1329).

The WDS instrument captures differences in professional opinions on issues of social welfare (Q3, Q7), private property (Q6), economic development (Q11, Q9) and poverty alleviation (Q5, Q8) and positions are scored as Material Naturalism, Secular Humanism, Pantheism and Monotheism, accordingly.

2.3 Theological, Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological and Deontological Worldviews as Measured through the WDS Instrument

The instrument clusters 24 questions into five categorical dimensions: *Theological, Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological and Deontological Dimensions*. Questions are purposefully chosen to account for the diversity of positions on theological, social, cultural, political, economic and ecological issues as they apply to the social work field (Table 1).

The first three dimensions deal with theological doctrines on human creation, existence and the capacity of human knowledge. The questions from WDS instrument make these theological doctrines relevant to social work through inquiring answers to their situational applications. The *Theological Dimension* covers the existence of God question. It consists of four statements: Q14 (God is distant and not involved in human life and history), Q18 (God created humans

in His own image), Q22 (Life begins at conception), and Q27 (Death is not the end of human existence) (Table 2). Views vary from denial of God's existence (Atheistic worldview), existence of many gods (Polytheistic worldview), existence of one God who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient (Monotheistic worldview).

The *Ontological Dimension* addresses questions about human nature. Four questions inquire on: (Q16) Recognition of wrongdoing (repentance) is the first step towards healing, (Q19) Existential fear of death is a lack of peace (uncertainty in one's eternal destiny), (Q28) The human spirit, like the mind and the body, is prone to illness and (Q 29) Attaining God's holiness brings mental, physical and spiritual healing (Possible answers take positions of *Secular Humanism* and *Material Naturalism* with the understanding that human beings are the product of material evolution; Polytheism believes that human beings are themselves divine and Monotheism holds the beliefs that God created human beings in His own image).

The *Epistemological Dimension* identifies the source of knowledge and is composed from five variables: Q17 (Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit is crucial for successful counseling/therapy), Q23 (Prayer should be part of the therapeutic process for healing), Q24 (Biblical curses and blessings are in effect today), Q26 (Demonic possession should be considered in diagnostic assessment), Q30 (Gender roles are divinely assigned). Divine revelation through Scripture is a shared Monotheistic tenet. *Secular Humanism* and *Material Naturalism* emphasize human reason and intelligence as the source of knowledge. Polytheism puts weight on the human discipline of mind and will in achieving knowledge.

Axiological and *Deontological Dimensions* inquire of moral value positions. Major tenets of the *Axiological Dimension* ethics uphold the postmodern understanding that moral codes are expected to change as society changes (Danto, 2008). It represents ethics that are conditioned upon the greater good for society and individuals. The section of the WDS that explore these attitudes contains eight variables that identify positions on the ultimate value of life. Questions explore opinions on welfare practices (Q3) The biblical mandate to help the poor should be replaced by government welfare), (Q 5) The welfare state is the answer to poverty), (Q9) The government is responsible for the general well-being of all citizens); property rights (Q6) A strong private property rights policy creates an unjust society); social justice: (Q7) Governmental redistribution of wealth is a just practice); poverty alleviation: (Q8) The global society [UN] can completely eradicate world poverty), (Q10) The World Bank should unconditionally forgive the debt of poor nations); and economics: (Q11) When one person becomes rich, another person automatically becomes poor). On different worldviews the point of centrality is taken either by matter (Material Naturalism), human beings (Secular Humanism) or God as the most important in life (Monotheism).

The *Deontological Dimension* determines ethical perspectives through moral standards that are firmly set. These represent Kantian and biblical ethics, which in WDS instrument consists of three questions: Q1 (Moral values should change as society becomes more progressive), Q4 (People can build a just society without Judeo-Christian values), Q12 (The Ten Commandments are outdated norms of living). Different positions view God as the source of absolute moral standards (Monotheism); Human beings set moral values (Secular Humanism); and acknowledgment that moral values are relative and subjective to change (Postmodernism).

3. Worldview Pedagogy for Achieving CSWE – EPAS Criteria

The application of WDS instrument in classroom settings accomplishes multiple pedagogical goals targeting CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS. The WDS instrument facilitates a two-fold learning process: 1) assists students in identifying the tenets of their own religious beliefs and spiritual practices; 2) gives students the necessary tool to assess their clients' religious beliefs and practices, associating them with an existing religion and/or practices.

The instrument allows for the expression of diversity of religious and spiritual worldviews of MSW students without the judgmental notion of "right" and "wrong" of personal beliefs and practices. The instrument scores these as conservative or liberal – determinations that are equally found in contemporary society as applied to social policy, economic issues and theological concepts. Diversity of opinions, beliefs and practices constitute the pedagogical tools through which classroom learning builds students' self awareness. This process lends itself to a deeper understanding of societal trends through discovery and appraisal of social changes and the relevant services aimed at the affected population (Competency #2 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS).

The WDS instrument is suited for implementation in the mental health field assessment process. It informs the clinician about clients' spiritual orientation, capturing a wealth of information that could be used in clients' treatment process. The tool's non-discriminatory approach recognizes that each person, regardless of their position in society, has basic human rights. (Competency #3 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS).

The diversity of religious beliefs and spiritual practices in the classroom logically mirrors the beliefs and practices encountered in contemporary society. Academic curricula, however, don't equally address the state of the former compared to the attention given to the latter. Since the focus of academic training is client-centred, teachings on clients' spirituality and religion take priority in the academic curricula. Issues of primary concerns are related to ethical approaches in dealing with spiritual issues as part of diversity training (Competency #1 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS). This approach gives little attention to the religious beliefs and spiritual practices of the future social work practitioners themselves. Selcuk & Valk (2012) apply a different strategy: a worldview model for religious education built on knowing of self to know others.

Known methodologies for integrating spirituality and religion in the classroom may be classified into three categories: 1) the *cognizant approach* aimed at building students' expertise on religious/spiritual matters, 2) the *generative approach* applied for the understanding of the phenomena of spirituality and religion from a psychoanalytic perspective; and 3) the *transformative approach* calling for students' own spiritual development and maturity through internalization of specific religious beliefs and spiritual practices.

The proposed worldview approach appears congruent with the cognizant pedagogical approach but its classroom application could also constitute a class by itself. Accumulation of knowledge as a cognizant experience builds a "stationary" bank of knowledge from which students can draw information applicable to the specific cases encountered in social work practice. Worldview knowledge is a large contributor to this bank. When, however, this worldview knowledge is first applied to practitioners themselves it results in higher levels of self-awareness. Consequently, this higher level of cognitive functioning lends itself to exponential growth of comprehension capacity because an internalized self results in expansion of critical thinking skills (Competency #9 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS).

4. Methods

4.1 Design and Instrumentation

The literature review for this study conducted searches of PsycINFO, SocINDEX, ERIC, MEDLINE, and CINAHL, Christian Periodical Index, and the ALTA Religion Database, using keywords related to "worldviews", "spirituality", "religion", and social work education. Search parameters were defined linguistically to "English language" and academically to "peer reviewed".

The data was collected through an online Worldview Diagnostic Scale survey disseminated via Google Forms between September and December of year 2014 to APU MSW students and alumni. The obtained responses from 110 MSW alumni and 154 MSW students from clinical (84 subjects) and community (70 subjects) concentrations formed a large data bank utilized to examine the diversity of worldviews among MSW students and alumni and answer the study's research questions.

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, Version 22.0. and JMP[®], Version <12.1.0> programs. Exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction method, using a VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser normalization was applied for the study of the instrument's factor model. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine whether the WDS instrument produces reliable data in terms of internal consistency. The exploratory factor analysis aimed to identify the dimensionality of the instrument and the computation of Cronbach's Alpha showed its internal reliability. The value of Cronbach's Alpha was judged according to the scale of George and Mallery (2003) scale " > .9 – Excellent, > .8 – Good, > .7 – Acceptable, > .6 – Questionable, > .5 – Poor, and < .5 – Unacceptable" (p. 231).

The WDS instrument is a 24-item questionnaire developed in a two-tier structure. *Tier I* delineates the items in two categories: human nature (13 items) and social justice (11 items). *Tier II* arranges all 24 items in five dimensions: Theological, Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological and Deontological (Table 1). Please note that the original survey consisted of 30 items. Upon computation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and exploratory factor loading analysis, the items were reduced to 24 to reflect improvement of the instrument's internal consistency. Six items were identified as outliers and were removed from the instrument.

The design does not separate specific items into separate parts of the instrument for the five dimensions of the instrument. Surveyed participants were not able to identify which items were attempting to measure specific factors. The items 14 to 30 needed score reversal. The scores were calculated on a numerical scale for each factor and were equally scaled within the five dimensions. On the scale from 0 to 7 lower scores correspond to conservative values, reflecting biblical theism, and higher scores identified liberal values, reflecting atheistic and socialistic worldviews (Table 2).

Table 1. WDS instrument – two-tier structure: *Tier I* - Two categories of worldview structure – social justice and human nature and *Tier II* - Five dimensional worldview structure

Tier I	Tier II	WORLDVIEW DIMENSIONS	
Human Nature	Theological Dimension	14. God is distant and not involved in human life and history	
		18. God created humans in His own image	
		22. Life begins at conception	
		27. Death is not the end of human existence	
	Ontological Dimension	16. Recognition of wrongdoing (repentance) is the first step towards mental, emotional and physical healing	
		19. Existential fear of death is lack of peace (uncertainty in one’s eternal destiny)	
		28. The human spirit, like the mind and the body, is prone to illness	
	Epistemological Dimension	29. Attaining God’s holiness brings mental, physical, and spiritual healing	
		17. Seeking the guidance of the holy spirit is crucial for successful counseling/therapy	
		23. Prayer should be part of the therapeutic process for healing	
		24. Biblical curses and blessings are in effect today	
		26. Demonic possession should be considered in mental health diagnostic assessment	
	Social Justice	Axiological Dimension	30. Gender roles are divinely assigned
			3. The biblical mandate to help the poor should be replaced by government welfare
			5. The welfare state is the answer to poverty
6. Strong private property rights policy creates an unjust society			
7. Governmental redistribution of wealth is a just practice			
8. The global society can completely eradicate world poverty			
9. The government is responsible for the general wellbeing of all citizens			
Deontological Dimension		10. World bank should unconditionally forgive the debts of poor nations	
		11. When one person becomes rich another person automatically becomes poor	
		1. Moral values must change as society becomes more progressive	
		4. People can build a just society without Judaeo-Christian values	
		12. The ten commandments are outdated norms of living	

The nominal scale scores ranged from a maximum of 7 to a minimum of 0. For all items the following scoring scale was used: agree without reservations = 0, agree with reservations = 1, not completely agree = 2, more agree than disagree = 3, more disagree than agree = 4, not completely disagree = 5, disagree with some objections = 6, completely disagree = 7. The WDS instrument does not contain demographic and experience questions. The instrument was administered as described in Neshama-Bannister (2015).

Table 2. Worldview index scale

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Biblical Theism	Moderate Christian		Secular Humanism		Atheism/ Socialism		
0 – 1	1 – 3		3 – 5		5 – 7		

5. Results and Analysis

The sample was subjected to examination of the psychometric properties of the worldview instrument. An exploratory factor analysis, using a VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser normalization yielded satisfactory levels of Cronbach’s Alpha of .873 (M=2.6, SD=1.52), indicating that the instrument produces reliable data in terms of internal consistency.

Further exploration of the instrument’s reliability was computed on worldview dimensional subscale levels. Each of the five worldview dimensions underwent separate examination. An exploratory factor analysis aimed to identify the dimensionality of the instrument and the computation of Cronbach’s Alpha showed its internal reliability.

The composite variable ranged from 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (Agreed without reservation) with a Cronbach’s alpha for Theological Dimension of .792 (M=1.63, SD=1.52), Ontological Dimension of .810 (M=2.53, SD=1.42), Epistemological Dimension of .841 (M=3.34, SD=1.64), Axiological Dimension of .860 (M=2.67, SD=1.31), and Deontological Dimension of .802 (M=2.61, SD=1.86). The Cronbach’s alpha results from the WDS instrument were compatible with earlier findings (Neshama-Bannister, 2015).

5.1 MSW Students’ Worldviews According to Concentration Specialization

Investigation of this research question explored the differences in concept development on human nature and social justice between clinical and community concentration MSW students. This step of the study investigated *Tier I* relationship of conceptual differences on social justice and human nature between clinical and community concentration students. Two statistical approaches were applied to two different samples. Sample one consisted of 50 second year students with representation of 28 students from clinical and 22 students from community concentrations. The second sample set included 104 first and second year students: 56 students represented the clinical concentration and 48 students represented the community concentration. The investigation targeted their concept development along the concentration divide. The O’Brien test of equal variances was employed to investigate the first sample’s relationships and one-way MANOVA was applied to investigate the dynamic within the second sample.

The results for concentration (second) year students are displayed on Figure 1, showing the summaries of the distributions by boxplots. The distributions are fairly normal and there are no outliers. The O’Brien test of equal variances fails to reject the null hypothesis, meaning that the two variances are identical ($F(50)=2.845, p=0.097$). The t-test indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups on social justice ($t(50)=1.473, p=.147$).

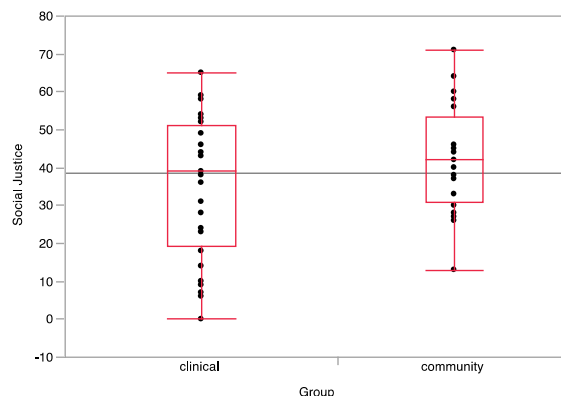


Figure 1. Boxplots distributions for social justice

Figure 2 shows that the distributions of opinions on human nature are skew and there are no outliers. The O'Brien test of equal variances fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning that there is no significant difference between the two variances ($F(50)=2.3, p=0.135$). The t-test shows that there is no significant difference between the two groups on human nature ($t(50)=-0.757, p=.452$).

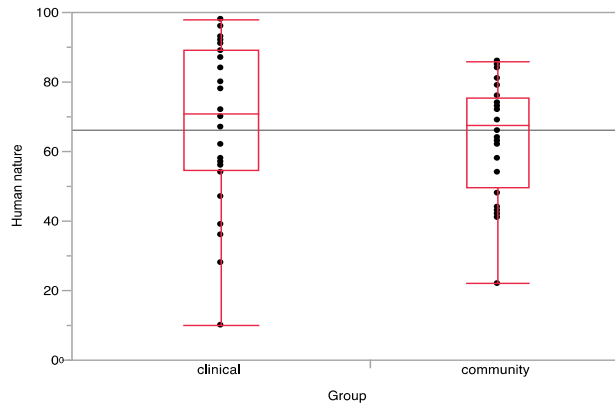


Figure 2. Boxplots distributions for human nature

One-way MANOVA was applied to the second sample. The results found no statistically significant differences on the development of the social justice concept for the clinical concentration ($M=2.66, SD=1.34$) and for the community concentration ($M=2.39, SD=1.22$) with $t(102)=1.06, p=.29$. Similarly, no statistically significant differences were found for the development of human nature concept for the clinical concentration ($M=2.72, SD=1.54$) and for the community concentration ($M=2.64, SD=1.35$) with $t(102)=2.71, p=.78$.

5.2 Five-Dimensional Worldview Differences between Clinical and Community Concentration Students

One-way MANOVA was applied to investigate Tier II worldview components between clinical and community MSW students. The test determined the effect of the concentration on worldview formation of MSW students. MANOVA results indicated no group differences for Theological, Ontological, Epistemological and Deontological dimensions of the worldview instrument. The test between-subject effects identified the Axiological Dimension to have statistically significant differences between clinical and community concentration students [Wilks' $\Lambda = .882, F(2,49) = 3.26, p < .047, \eta^2 = .11$]. 11% of variances account for group differences (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for five-dimensional worldview scale

TESTS OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS					
Between Clinical and Community Concentration MSW Students					
Worldview Dimension	Social Work Concentration	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Theological	Clinical	1.85	1.61	1.03	.31
	Community	1.39	1.60		
Ontological	Clinical	2.71	1.66	.78	.44
	Community	2.38	1.32		
Epistemological	Clinical	3.29	1.93	.17	.86
	Community	3.20	1.63		
Axiological	Clinical	3.07	1.32	1.95	.05
	Community	2.38	1.21		
Deontological	Clinical	2.71	1.91	.14	.88
	Community	2.63	1.75		
MULTIVARIATE TESTS					
	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Sig.	
Wilks's Lambda Λ	.882	3.26	5	.047	

To further investigate whether or not course material impacted students' worldviews along the five-dimensional scale, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare MSW students' worldviews according to their clinical and community concentration specialization (Table 3). The t-test compared all five worldview dimensions for both cohorts and found no differences between *Theological Dimension* scores for clinical students ($M= 1.85$, $SD=1.61$) and community students ($M=1.39$, $SD=1.60$) with $t(50)=1.03$, $p=.31$; *Ontological Dimension* for clinical students ($M=2.71$, $SD=1.66$) and community students ($M=2.38$, $SD=1.32$) with $t(50)=-.78$, $p=.43$; *Epistemological Dimension* for clinical students ($M=3.29$, $SD=1.93$) and community students ($M=3.20$, $SD=1.63$) with $t(50)=.17$, $p=.86$; and *Deontological Dimension* for clinical students ($M=2.71$, $SD=1.91$) and community students ($M=2.63$, $SD=1.75$) with $t(50)=.14$, $p=.88$. The only statistically significant marginal differences were found for *Axiological Dimension* between clinical ($M=3.07$, $SD=1.32$) and community students ($M=2.38$, $SD=1.21$) with $t(50)=1.95$, $p=.05$. The WDS questions from the *Axiological Dimension* inquire about moral values. Thus, differences detected in the study reflect students' differences on moral dilemmas in social work practice. The differences in nominal values of the means between both concentrations suggest that community concentration students lean more conservatively on social justice issues compared to clinical concentration students. This difference, however, is marginal and may not be entirely due to course material. Participant's faith commitment accounts for a substantial influence on their views, which the methodology of this study, however, didn't take into consideration.

The analysis of the data providing understanding to the research question on the diversity of MSW students' worldviews suggests no statistically significant differences between concentrations. The means for both concentrations indicate that the entire sample exhibits *Moderate Christian* worldview for the *Theological*, *Ontological* and *Deontological Dimensions* and *Secular Humanistic* worldview for the *Epistemological Dimension* are similar (Table 4). The differences in worldview are obvious in the *Axiological Dimension* with clinical students exhibiting a *Secular Humanistic* worldview and community students with a predominant *Moderate Christian* worldview. Due to the fact that the difference was found to be statistically marginal, we view as a contributory factor the specificity of the cohort rather than the curricula content.

Table 4. Worldview index by five-dimensional worldview scale

WORLDVIEW DIMENSIONS	WORLDVIEW SCALE INDEX				
	MSW	0 – 1	1 – 3	3 – 5	5 – 7
	Concentrations	Biblical Theism	Moderate Christian	Secular Humanism	Atheism/ Socialism
Theological	Clinical		1.85		
	Community		1.39		
Ontological	Clinical		2.71		
	Community		2.38		
Epistemological	Clinical			3.29	
	Community			3.20	
Axiological	Clinical			3.07	
	Community		2.38		
Deontological	Clinical		2.71		
	Community		2.63		

5.3 Which Dimension(s) of MSW Students' Worldview Are More Stable and Which Are More Susceptible to Change?

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare worldviews of MSW students prior to and after one semester class (Table 5). The test found no significant difference in the scores for all five worldview dimensions. The scores of paired t-test are as follows: *Theological Dimension* pre-test (M=1.64, SD=1.61) and post-test (M=1.62, SD=2.50) with $t(51)=.077, p = .94$; *Ontological Dimension* pre-test (M=2.56, SD=1.50) and post-test (M=3.25, SD=1.34) with $t(52)=.34, p=.73$; *Epistemological Dimension* pre-test (M=3.25, SD=1.77) and post-test (M=3.44, SD=1.51) with $t(51)=-.82, p=.41$; *Axiological Dimension* pre-test (M=2.75, SD=1.30) and post-test (M=2.60, SD=1.33) with $t(51)=.92, p=.35$; *Deontological dimension* pre-test (M=2.67; SD=1.82) and post-test (M=2.54, SD=1.92) with $t(51)=.59, p=.55$.

Table 5. Changes in worldviews in APU MSW students within one semester

Paired Sample Test					
APU MSW STUDENTS					
Worldview Dimension	Social Work Concentration	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Theological	Pretest	1.64	1.61	.77	.93
	Posttest	1.62	1.44		
Ontological	Pretest	2.56	1.50	.34	.73
	Posttest	2.50	1.34		
Epistemological	Pretest	3.25	1.77	-.82	.41
	Posttest	3.44	1.51		
Axiological	Pretest	2.75	1.30	.92	.35
	Posttest	2.60	1.33		
Deontological	Pretest	2.67	1.82	.59	.55
	Posttest	2.54	1.92		

The results suggest that worldview structures are stable. At this stage of personal and professional development individuals have established life views and opinions that don't submit to change within one course material.

5.4 How Do the Worldviews of Current MSW Students Differ from Alumni?

In order to provide the most-valid answers to the research question above, MANOVA and ANOVA studies/methods were employed. The test showed statistically significant differences in values for *Social Justice* for alumni (M=1.96, SD=1.54) and for MSW students (M=2.63, SD=1.22) and $t(160)=-1.91, p=.05$ (Table 6).

Table 6. Differences in worldviews between MSW students and alumni

TESTS OF BETWEEN-SUBJECTS EFFECTS					
Between Clinical and Community Concentrations MSW Students					
Worldview Dimension	Social Work Concentration	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Human Nature	Alumni	2.14	1.62	-1.00	.31
	MSW Students	2.52	1.43		
Social Justice	Alumni	1.96	1.54	-1.91	.05
	MSW Students	2.63	1.22		

Further, Pearson's chi-squared test of association was applied to investigate if there is a relationship between five worldview dimensions as paired categorical variables for alumni and MSW students. Out of the five worldview dimensions, the test identified a marginally significant difference between the *Ontological Dimension* values for alumni and MSW students, $\chi^2(3, N = 162) = 8.010, p < .05$. Frequencies distribution (Table 7) visualizes the *Ontological Dimension* differences between the two groups. Conservative views are shared by 31.8% of alumni compared to 15.4% of currently enrolled MSW students. A majority of MSW students (56.7%) identified with *Moderate Christian* views while the distribution among alumni was evenly positioned between *Biblical Theism* (31.8%) and *Moderate Christian* (37.3%) worldviews. Among MSW students, 5.8% share an atheistic worldview compared to only 0.8% among alumni.

Table 7. Frequency distribution within the ontological dimension for alumni and MSW students

Group		Ontological Dimension				TOTAL
		Biblical Theism	Moderate Christian	Secular Humanism	Atheism/Socialism	
Alumni	Count	35	41	32	2	110
	%	31.8%	37.3%	30.1%	0.8%	100%
MSW Students	Count	8	27	12	5	52
	%	15.4%	56.7%	22.1%	5.8%	100%

6. Discussion

The discussion in this section will follow the logic of addressing the four research questions posed earlier. The first research question investigated differences in worldviews according to students' concentration specialization. Analysis from the two independent samples revealed that students' concentration is not a determinant to their views on human nature and social justice. The results from both samples display consistency testifying that concept development on social justice and human nature (Tier I) for both concentrations are equivalent. A consequent conclusion from the results implies that despite differences in curriculum, students from both concentrations have developed similar views on important concepts like social justice and human nature. The results are an assurance of curriculum design adequacy in which teachings on social justice and human nature assume a predominant place.

The same set of data was subjected to the study of WDS' five-dimensional structure (Tier II). The object of attention was to determine differences between clinical and community concentration students on the understanding of social work issues from theological, social, political, economic, ecological perspectives (second research question). The results were homogenous for four out of five dimensions. Both cohorts formed indexes identifying them as having *Moderate Christian* worldview as measured by *Theological, Ontological and Deontological Dimensions* and *Secular Humanistic* worldview for *Epistemological Dimension*.

Analysis of the data confirmed partly the initial hypothesis that MSW students and alumni would tend to identify as theologically conservative and socially liberal. Alignment with the secular humanistic values under the *Epistemological Dimension* is indicative of a departure from more theologically conservative positions when the issues at hand are related to mental health clinical practice. Since questions under the *Epistemological Dimension* inquire about the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Q17), use of prayer (Q23) and consideration of demonic possession in diagnostic assessment (Q26), these practices may have been viewed as conflicting with NASW *Code of Ethics* guidelines for ethical social work practice. When, however, the questions concern macro practice applications, the views of cohorts are split. The differences under the *Axiological Dimension*, even though only statistically marginal, describe the community concentration students as more conservative on social issues compared to their counterpart in the clinical cohort. Questions under the *Axiological Dimension* concern poverty (Q5, Q8), social welfare (Q3, Q7), private property (Q6), and economic development (Q11, Q9). Conservative and liberal stance on these issues is demarcated between sustainability and dependency on one hand and distributive justice on the other hand. The outcome may be due to the fact that community concentration curricula include training in recognition of political, economic and environmental human rights abuses and developing sustainable solutions for alleviating them. Additionally, due to the fact that the difference was found to be only statistically marginal, it may be influenced by the specific religious representation of the cohort rather than the curricula content. Data on self-rating religious affiliation and participation, however, was not collected as part of this study.

The third research question inquired whether students' worldviews change on foundational social, political, economic and ecological issues over the course of one semester while under the MSW training program. The fact that the MSW program is situated at a religious institution, Azusa Pacific University, it would be natural to assume that students' exposure to Christian values would have an effect on their worldviews. The study, however, didn't find statistically significant differences in students' worldviews between: 1) pre- and post-students' self-identification as measured through WDS within one semester of study; and 2) between students from clinical and community cohorts. The study shows that even though students may lean liberal on some issues they continue identifying with the Christian worldviews. The findings are consistent with previous research data indicating the stability of college students' worldviews (Bowman, Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2015; Bowman, Felix & Ortis, 2014; Mayhew & Bryant Rockenbach, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The fourth research question compared current MSW students and alumni on their positions on human nature and social justice. Results yielded a statistically significant difference between both groups on the social justice section. According to the WDS instrument's scale, both groups' indexes fall under a *Moderate Christian* worldview. They, however, represent the two ends of a spectrum within this worldview. While alumni mean with a value of 1.96 borders with more conservative *Biblical* worldview position, the mean value of 2.63 for MSW students associates them with the *Secular Humanistic* traditions (Table 2).

The study posed questions for further inquiry. It is of scholarly interest whether alumni's worldviews have been influenced by their current practices and whether the conditions identified were exhibited also during their course of study. Answers to these questions require additional study with longitudinal data on values, religious beliefs and spiritual practices that encompasses the periods of their training and work related practices.

7. Limitations and Reflection on Future Research

The study was designed to investigate the worldviews of MSW students and alumni. It didn't collect self-identifying information on religious practices and commitments of the participants. It is important to recognize that there may be differences between self-identification with certain religious practice and worldview scoring of the WDS instrument. Personal observations support the fact that very often students are not able to articulate the beliefs and value system that represent their worldviews. Studies have found that even self-professed Christian students are not familiar with the precepts or the doctrine of their acknowledged tradition. These observations are consistent with Barna's (2003, 2009) findings 9% of all American adults have a biblical worldview, concluding that even the Christian population is quickly becoming influenced by post-modernistic thinking and lacks a biblical worldview. Other studies with college students also identified significant disconnect between conceptualizations of religion and spirituality with their relevant terms and those found in the Bible. Further, students' understandings of those concepts only loosely reflect general understanding within the higher education literature (Craft, 2011). Future studies should address this discrepancy and be designed to capture the accuracy with which MSW students identify with the tenets and the values of the particular religion they self-associated with.

The academic community would benefit from a comparative study with MSW students trained in a non-religious institution. Further, the academic horizon would expand with a similar data comparison of alumni from different generations from different institutions. Such studies would provide understanding of possible shifts in professional values, views and opinions as dictated by social, cultural and economic changes through several generations. When extrapolated into the future the findings from such reach data may serve the academic community as a springboard of proactive measures to be considered in designing the future MSW higher education curricula.

8. Conclusion

Worldview structures appear to be stable and not yielding to change within the length of one semester course. The research design didn't include participants' demographics but the fact that the participants were MSW students with successful completion of bachelor degree and significant practice experience in the field of social work placed them within the young adult population. This population, according to research data mentioned earlier, is most affected by post-modernistic views. The results, however, didn't align participants' view in a total eclipse with post-modernistic views. As a cohort MSW students and alumni aligned predominantly with *Moderate Christian* worldview.

The study didn't find discrepancies in worldviews between clinical and community cohorts on issues of human nature and social justice. Differences in the academic curricula for clinical and community concentration students appear to have no disadvantageous affects on the development of important social work concepts on human nature and social justice. Despite the differences in micro and macro practice these two concepts appear to have been integrated equally well within the diverse concentration curricula.

Detailed analysis on the impact of the content of the course material on students' worldviews along the five-dimensional WDS instrument was consistent with earlier finding. Major dimensions of participants' worldviews were not susceptible to change. Participants display unwavering positions on their views on God, origination of life, knowledge and practice of biblical ethics. The marginal statistical difference found for the *Axiological Dimension* should be taken with precaution, considering two possible factors: 1) personal religious commitment; and 2) specialized course content for clinical and community concentration students. The clinical students were found to predominantly exhibit a *Secular Humanistic* worldview while the community students identified predominantly with *Moderate Christian* worldview. Since the *Axiological* ethics is part of the social justice (*Tier II*) questions, the results may be indicative to the cohort-specific course material on social justice that may have contributed to more conservative views exhibited by community concentration students.

The study yielded similar results between alumni and MSW students. Alumni were found to differ statistically significant on their views on the social justice concept compared to MSW students. The results may suggest that years of social work field practice may have contributed to the alumni's more conservative views on social justice. The results, however, should also be taken with precaution due to being only marginally statistically significant. In addition, no baseline for comparison of alumni's worldviews on social justice concept while in MSW training exists. The differences may also be generational.

9. Practical Recommendations for Social Work Education

Based on results derived from this study we assert the applicability of WDS instrument as pedagogical tool for integration of religious and spiritual issues in social work education. The instrument is easy to implement and the scores are quickly to calculate for immediate results within traditional classroom setting. The instrument may be disseminated via Google forms or any similar venues of choice. Students are able to calculate their own scores and instructors are able to calculate a score for the entire group. Each student then is able to compare and contrast the individual and group outcomes. Further, scores under each worldview dimension comprise of a rich classroom material for in-depth reflection and discussion of personal and group data.

The implementation of the worldview instrument in social work education accomplishes pedagogical tasks congruent with CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS requirements. The instrument facilitates learning of four Competencies: 1) diversity of expression on religious/spiritual matters (Competency #2 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS); 2) recognizes that each person, regardless of position in society, has basic human rights and should not be discriminated against personal association with specific religious beliefs and spiritual practices (Competency #3 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS); 3) the instrument is congruent with the requirement for ethical consideration in dealing with spiritual issues as part of diversity training (Competency #1 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS); 4) being congruent with the cognizant pedagogical approach of training on religious/spiritual issues, it lends itself to the expansion of critical thinking skills capability (Competency #9 of the CSWE 2015 Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards-EPAS).

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