Value Conflicts in Social Work: Categories and Correlates

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Abstract

This quantitative study explores the experience and correlates of categories of reported value conflicts in social work. Results indicate variance between categories of conflict in both frequency of experiences and their correlations. In addition supporting the need for further research to distinguish categories of value conflict and implications for professional practice.

Keywords: value conflicts, professional socialization, ethics, social work values, value priorities

Introduction

Interest in the relationship between professional and personal attitudes, values and behaviors (e.g., Comartin & Gonzalez-Prendes, 2011; Landau, 1999; Osteen, 2011) is rooted in the centrality of values to the profession of social work. National and international social work organizations have developed codes of ethics that underscore professional values and guide practice. The International Federation of Social Workers Statement of Ethical Principles (IFSW, 2012) put forth principles to guide social workers' professional responsibilities (social justice, human rights and human dignity), as well as providing guidelines for professional conduct. In the United States, the preamble of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics identifies the core values of the profession as "service, social justice, dignity, worth of the person, importance of relationships, integrity and competence" (NASW, 2008). As the "foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective" (para. 3), these values should be infused into the education and socialization of social work students to promote common values, increase professional identity and provide guidance for social work practice.

Social Work Values and Professional Socialization

The transmission of the values, ideas, ethics, and attitudes of the profession occurs through the process of professional socialization (Patchner, Gullerud, Downing, Donaldson, & Leuenberger, 1987). This dynamic process contributes to the development of professional identity and the internalization of group norms as students are integrated into the professional culture of social work (Barretti, 2004; Miller, 2010). It is also a process that is mandated by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) as a necessary educational outcome. As an outcome of social work education, a student should "Identify oneself as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly" (CSWE

EPAS, 2008, p. 3). While Urdang (2010) asserts that the "development of the professional self has long been viewed by many educators as the most essential component of graduate social work training" (p. 524), this process should begin at the undergraduate level for those in the baccalaureate social work programs.

Despite the importance of shared professional standards and ethics there are inevitably differences in social workers' personal values, political affiliations, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Osteen (2011) found that "It was not uncommon for [social work] students to encounter value incongruity at some point during their educational program" (p. 434). This value incongruity may also be encountered by practicing social workers. "Often, in the course of practice, social workers encounter situations that bring them face to face with conflict between their personal values and the values of the profession" (Comartin & Gonzalez-Prendez, 2011, p. 5). Evidence of value conflicts are also documented in a body of research in the social work literature that addresses both the nature of the core values of the profession and personal-professional value conflicts (Reamer, 2000).

Personal and Professional Value Conflicts

The literature documents the existence of professional and personal value conflicts in social work practice (e.g., Comartin & Gonzalez-Prendes, 2011; Levy, 2011; Osteen, 2011; Stewart, 2009; Streets, 2008). Previous research includes a qualitative study of students' motivations for entering the profession of social work and the congruence of personal values with professional ones (Osteen, 2011). There are also case studies and personal accounts of the resolution of personal-professional value conflicts (Comartin & Gonzalez-Prendes, 2011; Levy, 2011), and articles on the interface between religion and social work values (Hodge, 2006; Landau, 1999; Spano & Koenig, 2007; Streets, 2008). The literature suggests that both the source and resolution

of value conflicts are related to an individual's understanding and use of the NASW Code of Ethics and to individual differences in cognitive processing. Some social workers view the Code of Ethics as a guide for ethical behavior and decisions (Spano & Koenig, 2010) while some see it as a "deontological code" (Adams, 2009, para. 5). Mattison (2000) identifies differing approaches to ethical conflicts and notes that some individuals favor exercising their own discretionary judgment in situations of conflict and decisions while others prefer to follow rules or policies. Stated differently, there are individual differences as defined by absolutism and relativism (Mattison, 2000). Such differences in the use of the Code of Ethics, in differing approaches to value decisions, and in the influence of personal values on behaviors (McCarty & Shrum, 2010) all point to the need for a greater understanding of the complexity of value conflicts in social work practice.

Current study

Despite the body of research focused on the conflict and congruence between personal and professional values and beliefs (e.g., Osteen, 2011; Rosenwald, 2006; Spano & Koenig, 2007; Stewart, 2009), a greater understanding is needed as to the complexity of these conflicts and how they are experienced while being resolved by practicing social workers. An earlier exploratory study (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014), using a sample of licensed social workers from one state, concluded that while few participants reported experiencing value conflicts between religious beliefs and professional roles, differences between religious and political beliefs should be further distinguished and other potential correlations further explored. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the larger body of research on professional and personal value conflicts in social work by using a quantitative survey research design to examine social workers' experience of conflicts between professional values, personal values, religious beliefs and political ideologies.

Method
Participants and procedures

Using a cross sectional survey design, a self-constructed electronic survey was made available to members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and social work educators belonging to the Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD) list-serv. The survey link was posted on the NASW Linked-In website and sent via electronic mail to all members of the BPD list-serv. A cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey, noted Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and affirmed the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey accompanied the survey link. The survey link was posted twice on Linked-In with a two-month interval between postings, and was emailed once to the BPD list-serv. Responses were collected through the survey software with no individual identifying information or links to users. Two hundred nineteen survey responses were received. Forty-five of the respondents answered no to the item "I am a social work practitioner" and five did not answer. These responses were removed leaving 169 participants from 40 different U.S. states included in the analyses. Of the respondents who were omitted from the study only 11 (24.4%) reported having a baccalaureate or master's degree in social work. The decision to eliminate responses of these participants was made because of the lack of clarity in their status as social work practitioners.

Measures

Survey item development was guided by previous research (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014) and included both equivalent and new questions. Previously used variables included: social work practitioners' experiences of value conflicts and beliefs about the prioritization of the values used to resolve the conflict, religiosity, age, sex, years of social work experience, current primary work function, practice environment, work setting, political beliefs, and importance of religion in daily life. New survey items included specific categories of value conflicts, a scale of political activity, and additional measures of religiosity. New items related to work settings included agency type (private or public), and faith-based agency affiliation. Items that identified social work educators were added in order to identify those directly involved in the professional socialization and integration of common values of future practitioners. A description of the measures follows.

Conflict and Priority questions

Four questions measured the dependent variable of "value conflict". Prior research has suggested that "there is a need for research of conflict and prioritization beyond and within the construct of religion" (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014, p. 175). For this purpose, conflict items asked the extent to which participants experience conflict between their (a) professional and personal values, (b) professional values and religious beliefs, (c) professional values and political views, and (d) religious beliefs and political views. These Likert-type items had 5 levels of responses ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

A separate item intended to measure "value priority" asked participants for the primary source of direction for decisions when faced with any conflict between values/views ("In my social work practice, when faced with a conflict between values/views, the primary source of direction for my decision is"). Responses offered included (a) professional values, (b) personal values, (c) political views, (d) religious beliefs, or (e) other (please specify).

Work-Related Items

Participants were asked about their years of social work experience, their current primary work function and area of practice, the work setting of their current position, and years of social work experience. Although years of experience was collected as an open-ended response, it was grouped categorically for analysis with 1 = "less than 2 years", 2 = "2-5 years", 3 = "6-10 years", 4 = "11-15 years", 5 = "16-20 years" and 6 = "more than 20 years". "Current primary work function" was based on the National Association

of Social Workers (NASW) membership description categories and included direct practice, administration, advocacy/community organization, social work education, and "other." In addition, categorical variables were used to record participants' area of practice, status of agency as private, public non-profit or public for-profit, and whether the agency had a religious affiliation (faith-based).

Religiosity and Politics

Survey questions about religiosity and politics were designed to address the complexity of religious and political beliefs and practices on value conflicts and value priorities. Self-reported religiosity as well as the importance of religion in daily life were recorded as scaled responses through three separate items. Religiosity was measured by one item asking how often participants attend religious services and one item asking how often participants use religious beliefs/ faith as a guide in making decisions/choices in their life. Responses to both of these items used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Almost never*) to 6 (*Daily*). The importance of religion in daily life was measured by the question "How important is religion to you in your daily life" with responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*).

Participants' political views and involvement were measured by items asking political ideology as well as an 8-item political activity scale constructed by the authors for this survey. The political ideology item asked participants to indicate the best descriptor for their ideology on a scale from very conservative (1) to very liberal (5). Participant involvement in political activity was measured by calculating the sum of responses to 8 questions regarding various types of involvement (voting, campaigning, contacting legislators, participating in political rallies/marches/etc., helping to organize political rallies/marches/etc., signing a petition, donating or raising money for a political purpose, and engaging in a boycott). All items in this measure used responses from 1 (never) to 3 (many times). The sum of responses to all 8 items was used as a measure of political activity with a possible range of 8-24 with higher scores indicating greater political involvement.

Results
Descriptive Analysis
Participant Characteristic Variables

Table 1 displays the demographics of the participants. The mean age of participants was 48.28 (SD = 12.99). The majority of participants were between 30 and 59 years of age (89.8%, n=123) and female (78.7%, n = 133). Participants' political beliefs were overwhelmingly liberal (m=4.31, SD=.99) with a response of "4" corresponding to "somewhat liberal" and a response of "5" corresponding to "very liberal". On the political activity scale, with a range of 8-24 and higher scores indicating greater political activity, participants scored a mean of 16.11 (SD=3.71). The mean scores on religiosity items indicated participants' attendance at religious services fell between monthly and a couple times a month (m=2.52, SD=1.51), and use of faith to guide decisions in daily life to occur between weekly and a couple times a week (m=4.31, SD=2.11) on the 6-point scale. The use of faith to guide decisions also showed greater variance among participants than attendance at religious services. The mean of the importance of religion in daily life fell between neutral and somewhat important (m=3.38, SD=1.56) on the 5-point scale. In sum, results indicate that participants report the use of faith/beliefs to guide decision in personal life to a greater extent, and with greater variance, than they report the importance of religion in their daily life. Attendance at religious services has the least reported frequency in aggregate on the religiosity items.

Finally, participants were asked with which religion they identified given a list of 10 choices and "other". Some choices received insufficient responses for data analysis, only those categories with ≥ 5 responses were used for a total of 112 responses (i.e., Protestant, Jewish, Roman

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Participant Demographics	%	n
Sex		
Male	21.3	36
Female	78.7	133
Age		
< 30 years	7.3	10
30-39 years	28.5	39
40-49 years	27.7	38
50-59 years	33.6	46
>60 years	7.3	10
Political ideology		
Very Liberal	50.6	81
Somewhat Liberal	24.4	39
Moderate	15.6	25
Somewhat Conservative	5.0	8
Very Conservative	0.6	1
I attend religious services		
Daily	0.6	1
A couple times a week	7.9	10
Weekly	27.0	34
A couple times a month	15.9	20
Monthly	3.2	4
Almost never	45.2	57
I use my religious beliefs/faith as a guide in making decisions/choices in my life		
Daily	53.6	67
A couple times a week	8.0	10
Weekly	4.8	6
A couple times a month	5.6	7
Monthly	5.6	7
Almost never	22.4	28
Importance of Religion in daily life		
Very Important	34.4	55
Somewhat Important	21.9	35
Neutral	12.5	20
Somewhat Unimportant	9.4	15
Very Unimportant	21.9	35

Catholic, Buddhist, Agnostic and Atheist). Fifty-seven (50.9%) participants reported to be Protestant, followed by Roman Catholic (20.5%, n=23), Atheist (14.3%, n=16), Jewish (9.8%, n=11), and Buddhist (4.5%, n=5).

Work-Related Items

Table 2 illustrates the work-related responses. On average participants had 15.41 (SD = 12.56) years of social work experience, with almost a third (29.3%, n=48) reporting more than 20 years' experience. Half of the participants reported their primary work function as direct practice (50.6%, n=83) followed by social work education (31.7%, n=52). The largest percentage of participants reported working in mental health (36.0%, n=58) with almost equal numbers in the next most common areas of practice, child/family welfare (12.4%, n=19) and health (12.4%, n=19). Other categories (i.e., occupational social work, addictions, community development, public welfare, advocacy) resulted in too few responses for

Table 2: Work-Related item responses by frequency

Participant Demographics	%	n
Years of Social Work Experience		
<2 years	7.3	12
2-5 years	19.5	32
6-10 years	17.1	28
11-15 years	15.2	25
16-20 years	11.6	19
>20 years	29.3	48
Current primary work function		
Direct practice	50.6	83
Administration	8.5	14
Advocacy/Community organizer	5.5	9
Social Work Education	31.7	52
"Other"	3.7	6
Area of practice		
Aging	6.2	10
Child/Family Welfare	11.8	19
Criminal Justice	3.1	5
Health	12.4	20
Mental Health	36.0	58
Public Assistance	1.2	2
School Social Work	6.8	11
Other	22.4	36
Work setting		
Urban	49.7	81
Suburban	25.2	41
Rural	25.2	41
Type of agency		
Private	29.6	48
Public non-profit	48.8	79
Public for-profit	12.3	20
Religious affiliation (faith-based agency)		
Yes	19.1	31
No	80.9	131
Teach social work		
Yes full-time	42.3	69
Yes, part-time	9.2	15
No	48.5	79

analysis and were therefore included in the category of "other". The work settings of participants were almost half urban (49.7%, n=81) with the remaining participants evenly distributed between suburban (25.2%, n=41) and rural (25.2%, n=41) settings. Finally, almost half of the participants worked within public non-profit agencies (48.8%, n=79), more than three quarters worked within non-religiously affiliated agencies (80.9%, n=131), and an almost even number of participants were teaching social work full- or part-time (51.5%, n=84) as were not (48.5%, n=79).

Conflict and Priority Items

Table 3 includes frequencies of overall responses to the conflict items and the priority item. Overall, few participants reported frequent value conflicts on any of the four categories of conflict identified in the survey. Only 11.8% (n=19) of participants reported experiencing

Table 3: Frequencies of responses to Conflict and Priority Items

Questionnaire Item	Level of Agreement	n	%
I have experienced conflicts between my professional values and personal value	Very often	5	3.1
	Often	14	8.7
	Occasionally	68	42.2
	Rarely	64	39.8
	Never	10	6.2
I have experienced conflicts between my professional values and my religious beliefs	Very often	2	1.3
	Often	4	2.5
	Occasionally	38	23.8
	Rarely	62	38.8
	Never	54	33.8
I have experienced conflicts between my professional values and my political views	Very often	4	2.5
	Often	8	5.0
	Occasionally	38	23.6
	Rarely	86	53.4
	Never	25	15.5
I have experienced conflicts between my religious beliefs and my political views	Very often	1	0.6
	Often	11	6.9
	Occasionally	33	20.8
	Rarely	56	35.2
	Never	58	36.5
When faced with a conflict between Values/views, the primary source of direction for my decisions is	Professional values	138	86.3
	Personal values	11	6.9
	Political views	0	0.0
	Religious beliefs	2	1.3
	Other	9	5.6

conflicts between professional and personal values often or very often with the remainder reporting experiencing conflicts occasionally (42.2%, n=68) and rarely or never (46%, n=74). Few participants reported conflicts between professional values and political views very often or often (7.5%, n=12) with the majority reporting rarely or never (68.9%, n=111) and the remainder reporting occasionally experience conflict in this area (23.6%, n=38). The same number of participants (7.5%, n=12)

reported often or very often experiencing conflict between religious beliefs and political views, 71.7% (n=114) reporting rarely or never, and 20.8% (n=33) reporting occasionally. Even fewer participants reported often or very often experiencing conflicts between professional values and religious beliefs (3.8%, n=6), with 23.8% (n=38) reporting occasional conflicts in this area, and the remaining participants divided between rarely (38.8%, n=62) and never (33.8%, n=54)

experiencing such conflicts. In sum, the area with the fewest reported experiences of conflict was between professional values and religious beliefs. The area with most reported experiences of conflict was between professional and personal values.

The majority of participants indicated professional values (86.3%, n=138) as their primary source of direction for decisions when faced with conflict. Personal values (6.9%, n=11) and Other (5.6%, n=9) followed, with only two participants (1.3%) indicating religious beliefs and none indicating political views as a primary sources for decision making direction. All nine participants who chose "Other" completed a qualitative response. These responses were "a combination of personal/professional/religious values," "agency policy/practice," "combo of personal and professional," "dynamics of interpersonal relationships," "keeping neutral to assist client in THEIR identification," "NASW Code of Ethics," "never has been a conflict," "supervision," and "the values of my client."

Inferential Analysis

Relationships were examined between each of the following variables: conflict items, religiosity, age, and years of social work experience, political ideology, participation, and importance of religion in daily life. The results indicate interesting distinctions between correlates of each of the different conflict categories.

Both of the religiosity items and importance of religion in daily life were positively correlated with the experiences of conflict between professional values and religious beliefs (faith/ belief used to guide decisions, $r=.213$, $p=.018$; attendance at religious services, $r=.364$, $p=.000$; and importance of religion in daily life $r=.407$, $p=.000$) and between religious beliefs and political views (faith/belief used to guide decisions, $r=.237$, $p=.008$; attendance at religious services, $r=.210$, $p=.019$; and importance of religion in daily life $r=.369$, $p=.000$), but not with conflicts between either professional and personal values or professional values and political views (see Table 4). The more frequently participants attend religious services, use faith/beliefs to guide

Table 4

Correlations between conflict items and religiosity items

	Importance of religion in daily life	Faith/belief used to guide decisions in daily life	Frequency of attendance at religious services
Experience conflict professional and personal values	.037	-.044	-.028
Experience conflict professional values and religious beliefs	.407**	.213*	.364**
Experience conflict professional values and political views	-.013	.112	.015
Experience conflict Religious beliefs and Political views	.369**	.237**	.210*

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

decision making in their lives, and report religion being important in daily life, the more conflict they experienced between professional values and religious beliefs, and between religious beliefs and political views. This was not true for conflicts between professional and personal values, or between professional values and political beliefs, so it was significant only on conflicts stating religious beliefs explicitly.

Significant positive relationships were found between all conflict items and political ideology indicating that the more liberal participants reported their political ideology to be, the fewer conflicts of any category they reported experiencing. Political activity, however, only correlated with conflict between professional values and religious beliefs and between religious beliefs and political views. So, those participants who scored higher in political activity reported fewer experiences of conflicts only in categories of conflict that included religious beliefs (see Table 5).

No significant relationships were found between conflict items and either age of the participant or years of social work experience.

Table 5

Correlations between conflict items, items of religiosity, importance of religion in daily life and political ideology and political activity

	Political ideology	Political activity
Experience conflict professional and personal values	-.256**	-.102
Experience conflict professional values and religious beliefs	-.382**	-.218**
Experience conflict professional values and political views	-.321**	-.076
Experience conflict religious beliefs and political views	-.422**	-.247**
Importance of religion in daily life	-.302**	-.210**
Faith/beliefs used to guide decisions in daily life	-.236**	-.160
Frequency of attendance at religious services	-.225*	-.152

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

Religion and Politics Comparisons

Comparisons of political ideology by responses to the value priority item, the primary source of directions for decisions when faced with value conflicts (professional values, personal values, political views, religious beliefs, or other) were made using a One-way ANOVA. Results revealed a significant difference $(F(3, 156)=3.31, p=.022)$ in political ideology by value priority. Tukey post-hoc analysis indicates that participants who reported using professional values or other primary sources to guide decision-making when faced with a value conflict identified as more liberal $(m=4.31, SD=0.85$ and $m=4.33, SD=1.12$ respectively) than those who reported using religious beliefs as the primary sources of direction $(m=2.50, SD=0.71)$.

Analysis using one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences in the reported importance of religion in daily life $(F(4, 112)=16.26, p=.000)$ and political ideology $(F(4, 107)=4.25, p=.003)$ by religion. Tukey post-hoc analysis indicates that atheist participants rated the importance of religion in daily life lower $(m=1.69, SD=1.25)$ than each of the other religions including Protestant $(m=4.33, SD=1.02)$, Roman Catholic $(m=3.35, SD=1.30)$, Jewish $(m=3.73, SD=1.19)$ and Buddhist $(m=3.60, SD=1.95)$. On the 5-point scale, atheists reported the importance of religion as between very and somewhat unimportant, Protestants between somewhat and very important, and all others between neutral and somewhat important. In comparisons of political ideology, Tukey post-hoc analysis indicates that Protestant participants identified as more conservative $(m=3.82, SD=1.02)$ than either Jewish $(m=4.73, SD=0.65)$ or atheist $(m=4.71, SD=0.83)$ participants. On this 5-point scale Protestant participants reported political ideologies between moderate and somewhat liberal, while Jewish and atheist participants reported between somewhat and very liberal.

Correlations between the importance of religion in daily life, political ideology and political activity were also analyzed (See Table 5). Results indicate that the more liberal participants' political ideology the less important they rated the importance of religion in daily life $(r= -.302, p=.000)$, the less frequently they report using religious beliefs/faith as a guide in making decision in life $(r= -.236, p=.009)$, and the less frequently they attend religious services $(r= -.225, p=.013)$. The more a participant engages in political activity, the less important he/she reports the importance of religion in his/her daily life $(r= -.210, p=.009)$, and the more liberal a political ideology he/she reports $(r=.419, p=.000)$. Political activity was not, however, significantly correlated with either using religious faith/beliefs to guide decisions in life or the frequency of attendance at religious services.

Sex Comparisons

Results of an independent samples t-test indicated no differences between men and women in reported experience of any of the categories of conflict measured. Using Crosstabs and Chi-Square, there were also no significant differences between men and women in response to which values or beliefs are the primary source of direction for decisions in resolving the conflict.

Work-Related Comparisons

One-way ANOVAs were used to analyze differences by primary work function, area of practice, work setting, public, private nonprofit or private for profit agency type, and faith-based agency or not on responses to each of the conflict items. The only statistically significant difference found was that of the work setting (urban, suburban, rural) and conflict between professional values and religious beliefs $(F(2, 156)=3.114, p=0.047)$. Tukey's post-hoc analysis found those who work in suburban settings $(M=2.28, SD=.916)$ reported significantly more experience of those conflicts than those who work in urban settings $(M=1.86, SD=.873)$. Although not statistically significant, those who worked in rural settings $(M=1.93, SD=.848)$ were more similar to those working in urban settings in the reported experience of such conflicts.

Respondents who taught social work at a college or university were compared to respondents who did not using an independent samples t-test. No differences in the reported experience of value conflicts were found. Further analysis also showed no significant differences between those who teach and those who do not in the primary source of direction for value conflict decisions. A dichotomous variable was constructed to compare respondents in direct practice and all other types of practice with no significant results in any category of conflict measured, or in the value priority item.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest two primary directions for discussion. The first is the overall infrequency of experience of value conflicts and consensus on the priority of professional values in guiding practice decisions when a conflict does arise. And second is the distinction between categories of conflicts indicated by variance in frequency of experience, correlates and differences by religiosity, religion, political ideology and work setting.

Experience of value conflicts and value priority in decision-making

Consistent with previous research (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014) participants did not report frequent experiences of value conflicts and the vast majority of respondents indicated that they use professional values as a decision-making guide when faced with a conflict. This is encouraging as it lends additional quantitative support to the effectiveness of professional socialization in social work. Since professional socialization should facilitate the internalization of professional values and roles in social work students (Allen & Friedman, 2010; Baretti, 2004; Miller, 2010), the infrequency of conflict and priority of professional values as the primary source of direction for decision-making suggests that the socialization process may be taking place effectively. It is also possible that many students who choose a career in social work approach their education

with an existing predisposition to social work values (e.g., Abbott, 1988; Barretti, 2004; Osteen, 2011). Hughes' (2011) qualitative study of social work students provides evidence of both self-selection and effective professional socialization. While some of the student participants found it natural to align their personal values to those of the profession (i.e., self-selection), other students went through change in their personal values such that their personal values became more closely aligned with the profession (i.e., professional socialization). Osteen (2011) also noted that students were motivated by personal values to pursue an MSW, yet also faced conflicts between personal and professional values as they progressed through their education. In sum, evidence supports the presence of a common professional identity through both self-selection and the process of professional socialization.

A further understanding of the process of professional socialization is provided by current findings through the comparisons between participants who teach social work and those who do not. The results of this study did not show differences in either the frequency of value conflicts experienced nor in the primary source of direction for resolution and decision-making when faced with a conflict between the two groups. The lack of differences between social work educators and non-educators (all of whom are social work practitioners) indicates that there does not seem to be a layer of separation between the "real world" and social work education in the experience and resolution of value conflict. This bodes well for the process of professional socialization since educators, whose task it is to socialize new social workers to professional values show similarities in the experience of value conflicts of all categories, and have a similar belief that professional values should serve as the primary source of direction for decision-making.

In sum, the minimal experience of any category of value conflict for social workers and the priority of professional values in decision making indicate consistency in the professional

values held and utilized by practitioners and educators. This is both an encouraging statement on the place of professional socialization in social work and a reason to continue to explore greater depth in understanding the complexities of values and value conflicts in an effort to continuously strengthen methods of education and training for effective socialization.

Categories of value conflicts

Even with self-selection to the profession, and effective professional socialization, value conflicts do still occur although low in frequency. A critical contribution of this current study is the classification of value conflicts into four categories and the differential frequencies and correlates of each category. Although the frequency of conflict was found to be at a minimal level overall, conflicts between professional and personal values were most common while conflicts reported between professional values and religious beliefs were reported the least frequently. Furthermore, correlates of conflict categories differed significantly. Items of religiosity, for example, correlated only with conflict categories that included religious beliefs. Those higher in religiosity (higher reported importance of religion, more frequent attendance at religious services, and using religion in daily decision-making) experienced more conflict between the value conflict categories of "professional values and religious beliefs" and "religious beliefs and political views." Those scoring higher in political activity reported fewer experiences of conflicts in categories of conflict including religious beliefs. Finally the experience of value conflicts in practice were reported more often by those working in suburban settings.

On the surface these results are not surprising, yet they have important implications. On a broad level, the variance between categories of value conflict suggests that the source of value conflicts is complex and confounded by many factors including the categories of conflicts. Research, therefore, should extend beyond what seems to be a common reference to value

differences that encompass broadly "personal" values (e.g., Comartin & Gonzales-Prendez, 2011; Osteen, 2011; Spano & Koenig, 2010), and move beyond the general construct of religion (e.g., Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014; Levy, 2011). Current findings build on the important contributions of previous studies and indicate that greater specification of various types of value conflicts are important to our understanding and suggest directions for future research. Reference to "value conflicts" should not be overgeneralized and requires differentiation. In practice, tools such as ethical decision-making models need to consider the use of more specific terms than personal values. Reamer (2000) refers to "personal values" in his commonly cited ethical decision model, but he suggests "including religious, cultural, and ethnic values and political ideology" to further clarify and guide practitioners. Lowenberg, Dolgoff and Harrington (2000) and Mattison (2000) both guide practitioners faced with an ethical dilemma to consider their own "personal values" in relation to the dilemma. Spano and Koenig (2007) use the term "personal worldview" but do not expand further or provide additional definition as they encourage practitioners to be self-aware of one's worldview and its potential impact on practice and ethical decision-making. While we are not suggesting that these classic tools are not useful, we are suggesting that greater specificity of the terminology used in the models reflect the complexity of the construct of personal values.

A methodological limitation of this study, and more broad issue for electronic survey research (The Pew Research Center, 2015) is the use of social media to collect responses. Although internet survey research is becoming increasingly common for many reasons, similar to any survey research utilizing a nonprobability sample, results should not be overgeneralized (The Pew Research Center, 2015). In this study the use of social media for survey distribution allowed for the inclusion of participants across a national geographic area, but it could not avoid the

limitations inherent to this type of data collection. Despite these limitations, our findings contribute to the ongoing discussion of value conflicts in social work. Although we expanded previous measures of politics and religion (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014), our current findings suggest that future research should include greater differentiation in the measures of religious affiliation, religiosity, and political ideology.

Conclusion

The results reported in this paper provide a foundation for a fuller understanding of the complexities of value conflicts in social work practice. They also underscore the need for additional research. Our results were similar to previous findings indicating that value conflict and prioritization may not be primarily a religious issue (Valutis, Rubin & Bell, 2014) and support the need for further research about the complexity of religious and political interactions. Future efforts are also needed to establish working definitions of the categories identified by our findings so that "personal values" and "religious beliefs" can be operationalized and differentiated. This should include the consideration of cultural influences on values. "While the profession shares a common history and intellectual basis, there are values and practices that must be acknowledged and addressed within different cultural contexts" (Hawkins & Knox, 2014, p. 249). Abbott (1999) also noted the need to examine social work values across cultures and countries. These distinctions will add clarity to categories of conflict (i.e., religious beliefs and participation, political ideologies and activity, professional values, culture) and measures should continue to be developed and expanded. Finally, although the vast majority of respondents agreed that professional values take precedence when faced with a value conflict, how those values are used can also vary. As indicated by Mattison (2000), some may favor the use of their own discretionary judgment in conflict situations, while others prefer a set of rules or policies to be followed. For this reason further research should include greater differentiation in the measure of the priorities in value conflict research.

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