RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

A Thesis
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri – Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Josephine Butler

Dr. Richard Callahan, Thesis Supervisor

December 2012

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

RELIGIOUS LITERACY IN THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

presented by JOSEPHINE BUTLER,
a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

_____
Dr. Richard Callahan

_____
Dr. Debra L. Mason

_____
Dr. Nathan Hofer

DEDICATION

I owe a big ‘thank you’ to Dad, Mom, and JC for all of the support, encouragement, and commiseration throughout the past year. To Jessica Allen, Jami Bamat, Robyn M. Pashke, Danie Becknell and Jessica Choi- I am incredibly lucky to have all of you as friends. Thanks again for the support!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Callahan for his support throughout the process of writing and revising my thesis. You gave me fresh perspectives with which to approach my work. Dr. Mason and Dr. Hofer, thank you for agreeing to be on my committee! Both of your suggestions gave me new fuel to approach my project – I appreciate all of your help! I would also like to thank Dr. Baum for taking me under his wing my first semester in the Graduate Program and challenging me to explore new ways to combine social work and religion in my research. To Jill Hartleip , the rock star: thanks for your encouragement these past couple of years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

My interest in this research began to take shape in January 2008. That year I graduated from the Saint Louis University School of Social Work with a MSW (Master of Social Work). A month later I packed up my belongings and moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, where I would have my first post-MSW job as the Interfaith Outreach Coordinator for a non-profit domestic violence agency. For the next year and several months, my job would entail establishing relationships with various religious and spiritual organizations in the Las Vegas community in order to form a network of support for victims of domestic violence, often termed intimate partner violence (IPV) in social science literature. Part of my duties required that I give community presentations at different churches and other religious establishments to explain the dynamics of intimate partner violence, how religious groups can help survivors of IPV, and the services the agency provides.

The work was simultaneously rewarding and frustrating. The rewards came from spreading information about domestic violence and the resources available for survivors and people who wanted to assist them. The frustrations came from the inaccuracies and overall ignorance in the community about the vast richness of the world religions. It was disheartening to see that other educated people at the agency I worked for did not understand the complex dynamics that religion as a part of culture could have on domestic violence survivors' emotional reaction to the violence they experience and their willingness to seek professional help.

My experiences at the agency in Las Vegas and the social work program I completed at Saint Louis University provided insight into a glaring gap in the

professional education of many social workers – they are inadequately prepared to analyze how their clients' religious or spiritual affiliations (or lack thereof) influence their worldview. The academic discipline of Religious Studies could have a powerful influence on the ways in which social work students, educators, and practitioners approach their interactions with clients from diverse religious backgrounds. It is my hope that this project contributes to a new understanding and exchange between the academic disciplines of Religious Studies and Social Work. Social Work students, practitioners, and educators could gain valuable tools in understanding the role of religion in people's lives *if* they had exposure to Religious Studies' methodology and scholars. Throughout the project, I will utilize my professional and personal experiences as a MSW and community advocate underscoring various arguments about the need for social workers to be religiously literate in 21st century United States. I will demonstrate that Religious Studies can assist social workers in practicing their chosen profession in a religiously literate manner.

Introduction

Multiculturalism is a word we hear frequently. From politics to education, different aspects of American life are continuously analyzed for their multicultural representations. Oftentimes, when the terms 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' are discussed issues of race, gender, or sexual orientation are brought to the forefront of the conversation. In the last ten years, the public is beginning to be aware of religion as a category that should be included in the discourse on multiculturalism. This statement is true of the social work profession as well. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the governing body of social workers in the United States, provides a *Code of Ethics* social workers in the United States are expected to follow in their professional lives. The *Code of Ethics* states that social workers should practice their profession with these core values in mind: "service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence."[1] In addition to the profession's core values, social workers are expected to follow the ethical standard of "Cultural Competence and Social Diversity." This standard obligates social workers to "understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures."[2] Not only should social workers recognize the inherent strengths of all cultures, they should be able to "demonstrate competence" in utilizing services sensitive to a client's particular culture. Simply stated, the *Code of Ethics* explains that professionals should:

---

[1] NASW Code of Ethics – http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp
[2] Ibid.

> …obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, *religion*, and mental or physical disability.[3]

Furthermore, the CSWE (Council on Social Work Education – the agency that accredits Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral Social Work programs in the United States) requires universities to include curriculum about religious diversity, but it does not specify *how* to do it. Currently, the challenge modern social workers have is to expand the concept of cultural competence to include religion. This expanded concept of cultural competence should include two aspects: 1) Social workers should be able to speak to the role religion as a social category plays in the lives of their clients and 2) Social workers must be able to recognize and interact in a culturally sensitive manner to the religious diversity they are bound to encounter in their professional lives. That is to say, they need to have religious literacy to practice social work. While the *Code of Ethics'* standards are admirable, it simply serves as a compass – not a map – about how a social worker should "obtain education" and attempt to understand diversity in all its forms. The academic discipline of Religious Studies can guide social workers in their learning and understanding about religion. As the United States becomes increasingly religiously diverse, individuals from underrepresented religions will need to seek out social services at various organizations and agencies such as schools, hospitals, and unemployment offices. The increase in diverse populations seeking social services will compress the space between social workers and religious diversity in the country. For many clients, social workers may be the first point of contact for seeking some of these services. If professional social workers are not able to work with clients in a religiously literate

[3] Ibid. (emphasis mine)

manner, the clients' needs would remain unmet and these social workers would be ignoring the *Code of Ethics'* mandate.

The profession is beginning to acknowledge the importance of religious diversity, but theories and methodologies in the study of religion are generally not included in the literature and the curriculum in schools of Social Work. The field has a journal, *the Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, dedicated to analyzing issues of religion and spirituality in the social services, but overall there is no guiding methodology in how to approach the study of religion and spirituality. A glance at the recent issues of the journal attest to the fact that there is interest in the study of religion and its impact on social work practice, but a coherent understanding of religion/spirituality is lacking. For instance, a few recent articles include "Ethical Issues in the Use of Spiritually Based Interventions in Social Work Practice: What We are Doing and Why,"[4] "Resilience and Resistance in Professional Identity Making: Gleanings from the Classroom Experiences of Devout Christian Social Workers,"[5] and "Social Work Faculty's Attitudes Toward Marginalized Groups: Exploring the Role of Religion."[6]

One article in particular that does hint at the blossoming interest in religious diversity appeared in 2010 in the aforementioned journal. Written by theologian Paul F. Knitter, "Social Work and Religious Diversity: Problems and Possibilities" explains

[4] Sheridan, 2009
[5] Thaller, 2011
[6] Dessel, Woodford, and Gutierrez, 2012

Knitter's conviction that social work and religion are essential for the other to function.[7] As Knitter explains:

> I am deeply convinced that the world of social work and the world of religions (especially in all of its diversity) are important for each other. For each to do its job, it has to know something about the other.

Knitter's article is useful because it encapsulates the sentiment many articles about social work convey: religious diversity is a fact of life and it is something to be celebrated, so all of us need to embrace it. His approach emphasizes the importance of religious dialogue, which he defines as an engaging interaction between two or more parties that allows each party to share their beliefs and learn about one another's differences.[8] Of course, appreciating and engaging in conversations about religious diversity is useful and necessary for everyone in society, not just social workers. However, what is lacking in the discourse about religion and religious diversity in social work practice is a strong foundation of the theories and methodologies developed by Religious Studies scholars, which could help guide social workers in the understanding the dynamics of lived religion. The academic discipline of Religious Studies would be incredibly useful in filling this professional and intellectual void for social workers. Religious Studies scholars Robert Orsi and Thomas Tweed's studies in lived religion would be useful in assisting social work practitioners, educators, and students in conceptualizing the role of religion in clients' lives. Instead of utilizing Religious Studies theories to bolster his argument about the necessity for religious dialogue, Knitter employs the work of Professor Catherine Cornille, whose research has found that

---

[7] Knitter, 256
[8] Knitter, 260

engaged dialogue requires that both parties have the following: "humility, commitment, trust in our common humanity, empathy, and openness to change."[9] Religious dialogue, of course, needs the aforementioned guidelines to be successful, but having a sound knowledge regarding the theories on the role religion plays in people's lives and society is just as necessary.

Knitter is correct to emphatically convey that religious diversity in the United States will increase. Knitter also emphasizes that 9/11, in particular, reintroduced the strong connection between religion and politics. He persuasively argues that while social workers may not be interested in the political side of religion, they might be interested in the "psychological power" religion has for adherents' sense of identity.[10] Exploring the impact religion has on a client's identity may prove useful for social workers in their work with clients, and the discipline of Religious Studies can provide theories to help guide social workers understanding of religious diversity.

The Problem of Religious Illiteracy in a Religiously Diverse Country

Religious diversity is a fact of life in the United States now. Religious diversity, also called religious pluralism, refers to the vast array of belief systems, spiritual traditions, and religions known and practiced in the world today. While so-called world religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism are represented under this phrase, smaller traditions such as Santeria, indigenous beliefs, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are also included.

---

[9] Cornille, 2008 cited in Knitter, 260
[10] Knitter, 259

In 2010, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life published the results of a survey measuring Americans' knowledge of major world religions.[11] The survey was composed of 32 questions about a broad range of religious topics. The results offer a peek into the knowledge Americans have about major world religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The results of this survey reveal that while religious practice is still an important part of many Americans' lives, Americans know surprisingly little about the subject. Stephen Prothero, author and professor of Religion at Boston University, makes the same point in his book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*.[12]

Religious ignorance is found among a cross section of U.S. citizens. Astute cultural critics have commented on the growing tension and division between Americans based on religious or spiritual affiliation. For instance, author and interfaith[13] activist Eboo Patel commented on the urgent need for Americans to engage in interreligious dialogue. He notes that about a century ago the African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois observed that "the color line" was the defining challenge of the twentieth century.[14] Patel remarks that the defining issue of the 21st century "will be shaped by the

---

[11] http://www.pewforum.org/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey.aspx

[12] Harper Collins, 2008. For the purposes of this project, I will use the term *religious literacy* to refer to the understanding of theories and methodologies in the academic discipline of Religious Studies as well as understanding general facts about religions, unlike Prothero's use of the term, which he defines as simply knowing facts about different religions' traditions and beliefs.

[13] Interfaith refers to a recent movement to educate people about different religious beliefs and promote social justice. The organization Patel founded, Interfaith Youth Core, is one of the leading interfaith groups in the United States.

[14] Patel, xv

question of the faith line."[15] Increasingly, people are beginning to realize that one of the essential components to living in a modernized, global society is interacting with people whose religious affiliation may be different from their own. Patel's remarks, therefore, are particularly poignant after the events of September 11. Scholars from several disciplines and professions – including sociology, medicine, psychology, journalism, and education – have recognized the importance of studying religious diversity in America. Stephen M. Merino, professor of Sociology at Pennsylvania State University, analyzed ways Christians perceive and accept non-Christians in the US.[16] Merino's study is unique because it specifically analyzes "the relationship between theological beliefs *about* religious diversity and attitudes *toward* religious diversity, including the willingness to include non-Christians in community life."[17] Merino's analysis provides an important glimpse into Americans' beliefs about religious diversity. For instance, almost 90 percent of the participants "strongly or somewhat agreed" to the statement "religious diversity has been good for America."[18] However, when the participants were presented with scenarios asking if they would "welcome or not be bothered by" a mosque or Hindu temple in their communities, the percentage of supporters dropped to 64 percent for a Hindu temple and 57 percent for a mosque.[19] The results underscore Americans' acceptance of religious diversity only in the form of Christian diversity.[20]

According to an extensive survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, America's religious demographics have undergone many changes. While

---

[15] Ibid., xv
[16] Merino, 231
[17] Ibid., 232 (emphasis in the original quote)
[18] Ibid., 238
[19] Ibid., 238
[20] Ibid., 238

Christianity still has the most adherents in the United States with 78.4 percent of adult Americans identifying as Christian, other non-Christian religions are gaining adherents at a noticeable rate too.[21] The Jewish population comprises 1.7 percent of the country, while Hindus comprise 0.4 percent.[22] Altogether, Buddhists consist of 0.7 percent of the population.[23] Muslims are another group that have a significant number of adherents at 0.6 percent of the population.[24] Although their size is smaller than Jews and Buddhists, Muslims have been the center of attention regarding the US' changing demographics.[25]

The field of Religious Studies has the theoretical tools to assist social workers and other human service professionals in handling religiously diverse communities. Diana L. Eck, professor of Comparative Religion at Harvard University, studies the ways religious diversity affects communities in the United States. Her book *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian' Country Became the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* is a fascinating overview of the history of religious diversity and the challenges it presents.[26] Through anecdotes, case studies, and historical sources, Eck analyzes the myth of the country's founding history as a Christian nation to becoming the most religiously diverse

---

[21] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life – http://religions.pewforum.org/reports. Retrieved November 11, 2011

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Due to the increased attention on the Muslim communities in the United States in the last decade, I will focus many of my examples on the challenges they face and how this might impact their use of social services. My focus on Muslim communities should not be perceived as a rejection of other religious groups in the United States. Rather, I am using Islam as a case study for social workers to convey the importance of religious diversity in general.

[26] Harper San Francisco, 2001

nation in the world.[27] One point Eck emphasizes is that religious diversity requires understanding and acceptance. It will certainly change the way people interact with one another – on an individual level and at an institutional level. For instance, 1996 saw two milestones in Americans' acceptance of a non-Christian religion. First, Lieutenant M. Malak Abd al-Muta' Ali Noel became the first Muslim chaplain commissioned by the U.S. Navy. Second, the White House hosted its first observance of Eid al-Fitr, the celebration in Islam that marks the end of Ramadan.[28] While these examples may seem trivial, they illustrate the ways religious diversity permeates different levels of society and the adjustments that need to be made to accommodate these differences.

In addition to her research about religious diversity, Eck directs the Pluralism Project at Harvard University (www.pluralism.org). The Pluralism Project is an informative clearinghouse of current research in which staff and students explore the ways religious differences affect American society. According to the mission statement on the website, the Project's purpose is to "help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources."[29] The Project website engages users with links to video clips of rituals and lectures, as well as links to current news articles about religious pluralism.

Diana Eck's book and her work on the Pluralism Project provide an interesting glimpse into the challenges people face in a multicultural and multi-religious society. One of the key questions her research presents is: how will these changes in the US' religious makeup affects the ways we interact with one another? The way U.S. citizens negotiate

---

[27] Eck, 4
[28] Ibid., 10
[29] http://pluralism.org/about/mission

their religious diversity in their communities will have positive or negative consequences for all of us. "The ongoing argument of who "we" are – as religious people, as a nation, and as a global community – is one in which all of us, ready or not, will participate."[30] Because Americans will have to participate, voluntarily or involuntarily, in a new era of religious diversity for the country, it is disheartening to know that Americans in general, as historian Stephen Prothero has noted, are religiously illiterate.[31] Religious illiteracy can mean the lack of knowledge about basic religious practices and beliefs, but the consequences of religious ignorance are not trivial. Violence and unrest have been ignited over incidents such as the U.S. military burning old Qurans in Afghanistan.

A TIME cover story illustrated the unease surrounding Islam and the presence of Muslims in the United States after 9/11. The article asks "Is America Islamophobic?" and discusses the anti-Islamic rhetoric that appeared to be so pervasive in 2010, which was initiated soon after an imam announced the construction of Park 51, a proposed Islamic community center and mosque in New York City near Ground Zero.[32] The anger over the unfinished Park 51[33] building and the other anti-Islamic incidents reported around the country reveal many things, one of them being that people were afraid of change and religious difference. According to Pamela Gellar, a blogger who helped inflame the anti-Park 51 sentiments, people fear Islam and its possible "expansion" and "domination" in the US.[34]

---

[30] Eck, 385
[31] Prothero, *Introduction*
[32] Ghosh, 24
[33] Park 51 Community Center was completed and opened its doors in September 2011. Although Muslims spearheaded the community center and mosque, it is intended for use by the entire community – it is an interfaith space. Refer to http://park51.org/.
[34] Ghosh, 24

Organizations that track hate crimes, including religious hate crimes, such as CAIR (the Council on American-Islamic Relations) and the Southern Poverty Law Center, record detailed accounts of hate speech and crimes against Muslims. Especially after 9/11, these organizations also disseminate information to counteract the harmful effects of stereotypes and Islamophobia. According to a FBI 2010 Uniform Crime Report (UCR), there were 1,552 victims of religious hate crimes, and 12.7 percent of these were victims of anti-Islamic incidents.[35] In addition to hate crimes, there has been an increase since 9/11 in anti-Islam rhetoric and practices. One of the most disturbing examples was Rep. Peter King's hearing in 2011 entitled "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community's Response." King's reasoning behind the hearing was to find the root of homegrown Islamic terrorism he suspected was present in mosques in the United States.[36]

It is in light of the mounting tension surrounding the growing religious diversity in the United States that makes the reality of religious illiteracy particularly urgent. The lack of religious literacy is especially troublesome among individuals working in the helping professions like medicine, psychology, sociology, and social work. In several professions, scholars and researchers are advocating that professionals develop their cultural competency level to meet the challenges of living in a multicultural society – this includes an understanding of various religious traditions.

---

[35] http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2010/narratives/hate-crime-2010-victims

[36] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/09/AR2011030902061.html?sid=ST2011031002070

Religious Diversity and the Professions: Overview of the Research

Accommodating and accepting diversity in the workplace has been an ongoing challenge. In the past, the public discourse about diversity largely focused on race, gender, and sexual orientation. Legally, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people from discrimination in "hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, fringe benefits, job training, classification, referral, and other aspects of employment, on the basis of color, religion, sex, or national origin."[37]

Research is emerging in various professions about the best practices for dealing competently with religious diversity. Education, healthcare and medicine, and psychology are just several of the fields exploring the intersection of religious diversity and the workplace in the United States. An overview of some of the current research in these fields is useful in framing the discussion about social work practice and religious literacy.

For example, research in education and pedagogy notes the rise in the number of religiously diverse students in public schools. In order to effectively accommodate this type of diversity, the literature's authors argue that educators need to be knowledgeable about world religions. According to some research, teachers themselves report feeling unprepared to teach religious diversity topics because they do not have any training in the subject.[38] Charles Haynes, Director of the First Amendment Center, also reflects this sentiment.[39] Additionally, the First Amendment Center staff suggested that teacher

---

[37] U.S. Department of Labor – http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/discrimination/ethnicdisc.htm.
[38] Carrie Kilman, Teaching Tolerance – http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-32-fall-2007/one-nation-many-gods
[39] Ibid.

training programs across the country include courses about Religious Studies and that every current teacher have access to in-service training in religion.[40]

A teacher's religious literacy is essential to promoting a culturally competent environment in the classroom. Whittaker, Salend, and Elhoweris explain that when issues of diversity are handled competently and sensitively, students feel safe and prepared to learn.[41] Whittaker et. al. review methods for teaching students about religious diversity. Activities such as inviting guest speakers from various religious traditions, studying religious symbols, and using media such as DVDs and videos from History Channel, PBS, and Discovery Channel are a few suggestions for teachers to incorporate religious diversity into the curriculum.[42] Other studies, such as one conducted by Suzanne Rosenbluth and Bea Bailey[43], provide evidence that in order for students to develop the skills that they need to live and work in a diverse world they must be prepared with curriculum emphasizing Religious Studies in public schools. Rosenbluth and Bailey emphasize that in order to "cultivate religiously literate students," a curriculum must exist that demands students utilize critical thinking.[44] In order to encourage a comprehensive understanding of religion, the two authors advocate a broader curriculum covering topics on religious thought and traditions, as well as religious literature, art, history, culture, laws and politics.[45]

---

[40] Ibid.
[41] Whittaker,Salend, & Elhoweris, 314
[42] Ibid., 317
[43] "Comprehensive Religious Studies in Public Education: Educating for a Religiously Literate Society," *Educational Studies*
[44] Rosenbluth & Bailey, 97
[45] Ibid., 97

Researchers in various fields are expanding their understanding of diverse religions by exploring how a profession, such as medicine, is affected by faith and religious practice. One of the most prolific researchers on this subject of religious practice and its affect in medicine is Dr. Harold G. Koenig. Throughout his career, Koenig has investigated the role religion plays in a patient's health, and as the Director of the Duke University Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health[46] Koenig has also written a series published in the *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* discussing a gamut of issues about the history of religion and medicine, the positive and negative effects of religious beliefs and practices, and the impact of religion on mental health. One of his articles, for instance, explains that while many prominent mental health professionals like Sigmund Freud and Albert Ellis believed that religion negatively affected people's mental health - recent studies demonstrate that religion can have a positive impact on mental health. A few of the reasons religion might improve mental health are: the positive outlook religion provides to negative and positive events, the sense of comfort during rituals and a sense of social support, and elicits positive emotions during meditation and deep prayer.[47]

Research regarding religion and psychology is a burgeoning field, and studying the psychological effects of religion is a complex endeavor. While many articles validate the claim that religious practices and beliefs improve the lives of adherents, it is important to remember that religion can also occupy a detrimental space in people's lives. So while the positive aspects of religious practice are seen because religious people, in

---

[46] Duke Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health – http://www.spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu/about/hkoening/
[47] Koenig, 105

general, are more likely to follow prescribed physicians' treatments for ailments and engage in routine exercise regimens,[48] certain religious practices can prove to have a negative effect on people's overall wellbeing. Koenig's research presents the complex connection between religious practices and beliefs and health. For example, certain denominations require their adherents to refrain from seeking professional medical care. The Church of Scientology discourages members from using psychiatric medication,[49] while Jehovah's Witnesses routinely refuse blood transfusions.[50] The refusal of potentially life-saving medical procedures and medications reflect the complexity of a patient's religious belief system. Jehovah's Witnesses believe if they accept blood transfusions, Jehovah (God) will deny them salvation.[51] Christian Scientists encourage the use of prayer alone to heal severe diseases such as spinal meningitis, leukemia, and diphtheria over western-style medical care.[52] The list of religious groups discouraging scientific and medical care for ailments, even serious ones, is extensive. It is important to mention, however, that specific religious groups also encourage their members to utilize modern medical care. The Seventh – Day Adventists are a group in which members were more likely to detect an early breast cancer diagnosis.[53] The aforementioned facts may seem useless to a social worker or doctor when they are faced with helping an individual find safe housing, leave an abusive partner, or heal from a chronic illness. I argue, however, that social workers and other professionals must be religiously literate to better

---

[48] Jones, 319
[49] Koenig, 389
[50] Ibid., 390
[51] Ibid., 390
[52] Ibid., 390
[53] Ibid., 390

understand their clients' worldviews and struggles and assist their clients in making an informed decision about the treatments they receive.

While the amount of medical research surrounding the role of spirituality and religion is extensive, Koenig's research appears to focus mostly on Christian denominations. Other research, however, explores religious diversity and its impact on healthcare and medicine. A surge of interest has developed in medical literature regarding Arab-Muslim patients and health practitioners' understanding of Islam. Marcia C. Inhorn and Gamal I. Serour, both professors at Yale and Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, respectively, underscore the need for medical professionals to understand Muslims' orientation to science and medical care and Arab-Muslim patients' challenges in accessing and receiving culturally competent treatment. Inhorn and Serour's excellent article explains the Islamic theology behind pressing medical issues like infertility[54] and the impact recent immigration from predominantly Muslim countries could have on the U.S. medical profession. The authors' emphasis on understanding Muslim beliefs about medicine can serve as a model for the social work profession and the impact religion might have on social workers' clients.[55]

Hospital chaplaincy is another related healthcare profession beginning to embrace cultural competence. Researchers Wahiba Abu-Ras and Lance Laird's qualitative study included discussions with 33 chaplains of various faiths about their perceptions of Muslim patients' needs and the effectiveness of interfaith chaplaincy. Ten of the participants were Muslims, seven were Jewish, and sixteen were Christian.[56] Seventeen

---

[54] Inhorn and Serour, 937
[55] Ibid., 941
[56] Abu-Ras and Laird, 50

of the chaplains told researchers they have had Muslim patients request items such as a prayer mat, an imam, a Qur'an, and *halal* food. In general, healthcare professionals must be attuned to the religious needs of their patients as Abu-Ras and Laird's article demonstrates. For instance, a hospital chaplain, as well as doctors, nurses, and other professionals, should be knowledgeable about Ramadan and the difficulties Muslim patients could face regarding ingesting medications and liquids during this holy month. Although Muslims are exempt from fasting if health is a concern[57], healthcare professionals should at least be aware of any issues that could arise. In this particular study, one of the Christian chaplains thought of herself as an advocate on behalf of Muslim patients. As a chaplain, she reported feeling that it is her "job to intervene on behalf of the patient, and become their advocate. You can get the doctor to prescribe the medication twice a day, so they can take it before and after the fast. You can give it intravenously."[58]

This is a simple example of the complexities an individual's religious practices can present in a healthcare setting. Abu-Ras and Laird's article discusses an interesting development within professional chaplaincy – an interfaith model in which chaplains from various religious backgrounds can offer pastoral care to diverse religious patients. The goals of interfaith chaplaincy are inclusive; it strives to be "open, embracing, welcoming, supportive, and comforting to people of all faiths and none."[59] Yet the push to create a "generic spirituality" that both patients hospital chaplains can utilize to engage

---

[57] Qur'an 2:185; for further information about fasting and health, refer to *A Comprehensive Guide: Fasting in Islam & the Month of Ramadan* by Ali Budak

[58] Abu-Ras and Laird, 53

[59] Ibid., 55

the patients in a discussion about the meaning of their illness is a trend that is troublesome given that the discourse surrounding spirituality is still centered on a Protestant model of chaplaincy.[60] Not only does an interfaith model of chaplaincy lump an entire group of people's needs into one pot, it glosses over the distinct differences and rituals various religions include in periods of life transition, such as death.[61] Just as important to the discussion of religious diversity is the fact that non-Muslim chaplains in Abu-Ras and Laird's study reported perceiving that some Muslim patients they attended to rejected or distrusted their offers to assist.[62]

Reviewing the literature about religious diversity and its impact in the medical/healthcare profession is worthwhile because healthcare practitioners must assist patients on an intimate level in a way other professionals might not have the opportunity to. Social work is another field, however, in which professionals must be attuned to the intimate details of their clients' lives (i.e., illness, religious practices and beliefs, mental health) in order to fully assist them in confronting their problems. Social workers can work in a variety of locations (hospitals, schools, child protective services, etc.), they must be able and willing to assess their clients' religious diversity and the ways religion intersects with other aspects of a client's daily life.

---

[60] Ibid., 55
[61] Ibid., 56
[62] Ibid., 58

The Profession of Social Work in the United States: A Historical and Contemporary Overview

Scholars trace the development of the American social work profession to the 19th century.[63] The Charity Organization Societies (COS) and the settlement movement, both of which began in England, were the beginning of an organized group of professionals attempting to solve the social ills in the country. During this time, COS created the professional role of caseworkers, which were responsible for assisting the destitute in society. The settlement movement in England implemented welfare centers to assist people living in destitution, offering social services like childcare, job training, and education.[64] These centers recruited employees to "settle" or live at the centers to create different social service programs for clients.[65] While the settlement movement was a community response to the destitution and social ills in society, the COS responded in an altogether different way by spreading the idea that the burden of destitution rested on the poor individual's character, i.e. moral behavior. In 1875, Secretary Charles Stewart Loch said he refused to believe that social and economic structures caused poverty. Instead, he promoted the idea that the "failure to achieve 'self-dependence' was a problem of the weakness of the individual's character."[66] Loch also did not belief the government had a role to play in providing assistance to the poor. The burden rested solely on the poor individual's shoulders to maintain a job.

U.S. social workers owe a lot to the settlement movement, which was the catalyst for establishing settlement houses in various cities around the country. As the divide

---

[63] Howe, 13
[64] Columbus Federation of Settlements - http://www.cfsettlements.org/The_Settlement_Movement.html
[65] Ibid.
[66] Howe, 16

between the wealthy and the poor became greater at the dawn of the twentieth century, social reformers, including clergy, were instrumental in creating these settlement houses where the poor could get assistance. Settlement houses in particular were created to help immigrants adjust to their new lives in the United States. Social reformer Jane Addams founded one of the most famous settlement houses, Hull House, in Chicago in 1889. Settlement house workers differed from COS caseworkers in their analysis of the plight of the poor. Instead of blaming the poor for their misfortunes, settlement house workers believed there were environmental and social factors that caused poverty.

Regina G. Kunzel, author of the book *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work 1890-1945*, includes another aspect in the profession's history. Kunzel argues compellingly that the reform movement to help unmarried young mothers was a major force in the professionalization of social work in the U.S. Beginning in the late 19th century, these maternity homes were the projects of evangelical women dedicated to helping these 'fallen women' develop their domestic/homemaking skills while finding salvation in the Gospel. Kunzel points out that the women creating maternity homes identified as evangelicals because they had "heard a call" and felt religiously compelled to help unmarried mothers.[67] Social workers began to take notice of the social issue of unmarried mothers in the 1910s. The social workers, mostly women, held a distinctive perspective in dealing with the issue of unmarried mothers differently than the evangelical women had. Social workers wanted to change "benevolence into a profession."[68] Instead of conceiving of charity work as a religious "calling" to save wayward women, social workers' aim was to establish themselves as

---

[67] Kunzel,10
[68] Ibid., 37

experts in finding solutions to social problems and challenges.[69] The first social work class was offered at Columbia University in 1898[70]; nearly twenty schools of social work would be established by the 1920s.[71]

The surging interest in establishing social work as a legitimate profession coincided with a societal shift to ensuring that every piece of knowledge was scientifically validated. The push to develop a scientific knowledge base was not limited to social work; Kunzel notes that engineers and doctors also "struggled to prove themselves rigorously and unassailably scientific."[72] In order to prove their professional expertise, social workers had to develop theories and methods that would hold up under external scrutiny. For instance, Mary Richmond, one of the profession's pioneers, described the purpose of casework utilizing the language of the scientific method in 1917.[73] Meanwhile, the emphasis on professionalism and science in the field led to the general push to attract more men to the profession. The popular thought was that an increase in male social workers would increase the prestige of the profession.[74]

After nearly 125 years, the profession of Social Work is well-established in the U.S. Currently, the profession of social work in the United States is monitored by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral education programs are monitored by the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE). The profession is still female-dominated according to research conducted by the

---

[69] Ibid., 37
[70] NASW - http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/general/history.asp
[71] Kunzel, 38
[72] Ibid., 40
[73] Ibid., 41
[74] Ibid., 45

NASW.[75] A brief overview of the profession is important in order to understand a social worker's function. Social workers attend to the micro (individual/personal), meso (community), and macro (organizations) levels of society through their work as clinical social workers, hospital social workers, social service administrators, community health advocates, and substance abuse counselors just to name a few possible positions. According to the US Department of Labor, the social work occupation will grow a total of 25 percent from 2010- 2020, which is faster than all other occupations in the country.[76] In order to provide a greater illustration of the blossoming social work profession, consider the following statistic: in 2010, there were a total of 650,500 social workers. By the year 2022, there will be an estimated 811,700 professionals.[77] In other words more than 800,000 professionals who have insight into the profound traumas, stressors, and frustrations of the clients they see every day. The demand for social workers will expand to different fields such as school and family social work, mental health and substance abuse, and healthcare. The increased need for social workers is expected due to several reasons, including the need to handle the influx of increased students registering for school and investigate child abuse cases, more people seeking treatment for substance abuse and mental health issues, and the aging of baby boomers.[78]

---

[75] http://workforce.socialworkers.org/studies/SWatWork.pdf
[76] US Bureau of Labor Statistics - http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Community-and-Social-Service/Social-workers.htm#tab-6
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

Historical Connections between Religion and the Social Work Profession

Social work scholars have emphasized the historical link between social work and organized religion. Frank Loewenberg, author of the 1988 book *Religion and Social Work Practice in Contemporary American Society*, was one of the first contemporary social workers to point out the growing necessity for practitioners to consider the relevance of religion in the field.[79] "Whatever their personal convictions and beliefs," Loewenberg asserts, "a social worker should not close their eyes to the possible impact of religion on social work practice."[80] While his suggestions are worthwhile, his research focuses mostly on Judeo-Christian traditions. The lack of religious diversity covered in his book is professionally troublesome. Although the book was published in the 1980s, religious diversity was still a reality in America. When Loewenberg notes, "all modern social services can be traced back to organized religion," he is referring to Christian church groups that provided social services to the destitute as acts of charity.[81]

Ram Cnaan, another prominent social work scholar, explores the association between religion and social work. Cnaan has researched the ways religiously based organizations are still an essential provider of the social services in modern U.S. He categorizes these organizations as follows:[82] 1) Local congregations 2) Interfaith and ecumenical organizations 3) City or regionally based sectarian agencies 4) Nationally active organizations or projects operating under religious doctrine, but not officially affiliated with any denomination 6) International organizations with religious connections.

---

[79] Columbia University Press, 1988
[80] Loewenberg, iv.
[81] Ibid., 14
[82] Cnaan, 27

Examples of these different categories are easily found in most major cities, including St. Louis, Missouri. For instance, Doorways: Interfaith AIDS Housing and Services provides much-needed assistance to men and women suffering from AIDS. Doorways is an example of an Interfaith agency because it was founded by Christian and Jewish organizations that recognized the need for safe housing for AIDS patients. Doorways adheres strongly to serving diverse clients, as demonstrated by their mission statement: Doorways " serves all people, regardless of age, color, creed, physical or mental disability, ethnicity, familial status, gender identity and expression, national origin, race, religion, pregnancy, sex, or sexual orientation."[83]

Two other agencies illustrating Cnaan's categories are Catholic Charities (Archdiocese of Saint Louis) and the Islamic Social Services Association. Both agencies represent Cnaan's third category: city or regionally based sectarian agencies.[84] Cnaan argues throughout his book that religious-based services help to fill the gaps in social services that many government agencies do not or cannot provide. While a thorough overview of the social services religious institutions provided in America since its beginnings are not the focus of this paper, it is necessary to have some background information regarding the link between religious organizations and social services.

Individual Christian churches and entire denominations in the United States provided social services out of the theological imperative to serve the needy and poor.[85] Additionally, once the Social Gospel movement swept through the country starting in the late 1860s, more and more churches felt compelled to provide assistance to the pressing

---

[83] Doorways - http://www.doorwayshousing.org/. Retrieved 10 October 2012
[84] Note: Catholic Charities is a national organization, but St. Louis has a chapter.
[85] Cnaan, 71

social issues of the period such as mistreatment of the poor, slums, migration, and urban decay.[86] The Social Gospel movement propelled the activities of many churches and Christian individuals into solving the social problems of the day. During this period, the Salvation Army began as a group that also became heavily involved in service to the poor.[87] Nowadays, the Salvation Army also assists with more complex social problems of the world, as an international agency providing services related to human trafficking, substance abuse, and homeless services, among others.[88]

The link between social services and religious institutions became strained, however, due to increasing secularization as described by scholar and sociologist Peter Berger, and related to the conflicting needs of the increasingly professionalized social service community and religious communities.[89] As early as the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. social workers began to distance themselves from the religious roots of their work in order to establish a field perceived as more professional and legitimate, similar to the professions of law and medicine. These professions, "based on tested and approved knowledge," require their professionals to rely on scientific knowledge.[90] Therefore, if social workers wanted to be highly regarded as professionals, then "social work cannot be or even be perceived to be associated with empirically groundless, faith-based philosophies."[91] The last struggle for social workers to be regarded as professionals is one that continues still. Since April 2009, in an effort to increase the professionalism of social work, the Missouri Legislature has required everyone with a bachelor's or master's

---

[86] Ibid., 122
[87] Cnaan, 123
[88] http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf - Retrieved on January 22, 2012
[89] Cnaan, 70
[90] *Ibid*., 70
[91] *Ibid*., 74

of social work to be formally licensed in order to call themselves social workers. To obtain this license, an individual must pass an exam about such topics as theories and practice in social work and psychology.[92]

The Integration of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice: Operational Definitions and a Literature Review

In order to understand the complex issues surrounding religion and spiritual diversity in social work practice, a review of some common definitions of *spirituality* and *religion* in social work literature is necessary. Historically, the profession's attempts to define spirituality were heavily rooted in Christianity. For instance, social workers such as S. Spencer and Charlotte Towle believed that Christian themes such as service, love, and freedom and church based social services were appropriate to utilize in social work practice. Spencer and Towle's understanding of spirituality was influential in the 1950s and 1960s.[93] In general in the 1970s and 1980s, the profession overall never conducted research and education about spirituality unless a social worker's practice was explicitly religious in nature.[94] From the1990s to present-day, social workers are beginning to realize the dynamics of spirituality and religion in practice settings, but there is still disagreement about how to handle complex ethical issues that may arise when religion is openly discussed. For instance, client autonomy is an issue. If a client does not feel comfortable discussing his or her religious beliefs, or is not religious, a social worker

---

[92] http://pr.mo.gov/boards/socialworkers/Beginning%20the%20Licensure%20Process.pdf
[93] Canda and Furman, 65
[94] Ibid., 65

would act unethically if he or she tried to convince the client to convert to a specific religion.[95]

In a social work textbook entitled *Social Work in the 21st Century*, author Morley D. Glicken cites research that synthesizes multiple definitions of spirituality into main themes or categories.[96] The themes in these definitions of spirituality touch upon items such as "religious/spiritual private practices, religious/spiritual participation, religious/spiritual commitment," and "religious/spiritual support."[97] Stacey L. Barker and Jerry E. Floersch, authors of the article "Practitioners' Understandings of Spirituality: Implications for Social Work Education," describe spirituality as "a way of knowing."[98] The definition for *spirituality* in *The Social Work Dictionary*, a widely used text published by NASW Press, states:[99]

> Devotion to the immaterial part of humanity and nature rather than worldly things such as possessions; an orientation to people's religious, moral, or emotional nature.

It is interesting to point out that *The Social Work Dictionary* does *not* include an entry for *religion*.

Many articles and texts broach the issue of religion and spirituality, but the focus is normally one- dimensional due to the lack of sophisticated theories surrounding religion and spirituality. When these topics are mentioned, it appears that social work researchers and practitioners believe they can understand the role religion and spirituality

---

[95] For more information on ethical issues in social work refer to Hodge (2011) and *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice* (7th ed.) by Ralph Dolgoff et. al.
[96] George, Larson, Koenig, and McCullough (2000) cited in Glicken, 360
[97] Glicken, 361
[98] Barker & Floersch, 357
[99] Robert L. Barker, 414

plays in a client's life by emphasizing religious diversity and conceptualizing spirituality as divorced from a cultural context.

One recent book published in 2009 that addresses the issues of religion and spirituality in the social work profession is *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: the Heart of Helping*. This book delves into the complex issues of acknowledging and incorporating religion and spirituality in social work practice. Little is mentioned about the academic discipline of Religious Studies and its theories for understanding religion in innovative ways.

The authors, Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman, are both professors of social work. Interestingly enough, Canda also received his Master of the Arts in Religious Studies from the University of Denver, and Furman is the Principal Investigator of the International Study of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice (ISRSSWP).[100] Still, with the additional knowledge these scholars have about religion, their book does not delve deeply into any contemporary theorists. The usual individuals are mentioned – William James, Huston Smith- but none of the innovative theorists, like Thomas A. Tweed and Meredith B. McGuire who are changing the ways scholars view religion, are taken into consideration in their text. And while Canda and Furman provide ample non-Christian traditions to emphasize the ways compassion and social service are understood in various religions,[101] the lack of well-established theories to ground the role of religion and spirituality in social work belies the fact that the

---

[100] International Study of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Practice - http://spiritualityreligionsurvey.com/bios.aspx. The ISRSSWP conducts international research in the United States, Norway, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand to analyze the intersection of religion and social work practice in the 21st century.

[101] Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are just a few of the religions Canda and Furman explore in their analysis of religion and social work.

profession still has a long road to tread regarding how to conceptualize and engage religion and social work.

Prolific scholars such as David R. Hodge have written a myriad of articles about incorporating religion and spirituality into social work practice, but even he has not delved into modern Religious Studies theories. Hodge, who is known as an authority in the profession about spirituality and social work issues, has written articles delving into complex topics such as spiritual assessment, religious diversity, and social work practice with Muslim clients. While his articles provide great introductions to religious issues for social workers who may be unfamiliar with these subjects, they lack orienting theories. This is what the discipline of Religious Studies can provide for the social work profession.

One of Hodge's articles, written with social workers Lisa M. Baughman and Julia A. Cummings, analyzes 71 "influential" social work textbooks in order to measure the attention certain religious groups received.[102] The authors focused on the portrayal of Muslims and evangelical Christians in these social work textbooks that were used in courses such as *Human Diversity, Social Work Practice, and Human Behavior and the Social Environment*.[103] As noted in the article, Muslims and evangelical Christians are two of the largest religious minorities in the United States.[104] Out of the 71 textbooks surveyed, evangelical Christians were mentioned twice. When evangelicals were

---

[102] Hodge et. al., 211
[103] Hodge et. al., 215
[104] Note: According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Evangelical Protestant Christians comprise 26.3% of the population in the United States. Hodge's article, however, describes them as a 'religious minority.'

mentioned it was under the derogatory term of "fundamentalists."[105] Muslims did not fare any better in the textbooks. As a group, they were mentioned only *eight* times.[106] Although this study was published in 2006, it is relevant to social work practitioners, students, and educators. It demonstrates that though the profession upholds standards of cultural competency, the profession's definition of "cultural competency" often omits religion. As Hodge et. al explain:[107]

> Religious stereotypes and spiritual prejudices hinder the ability of social workers to provide services to people of faith in much the same way that biases related to race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can effect service provision to populations to whom these traits are salient factors.

It is worth asking what content could be included in social work textbooks if more awareness regarding Religious Studies scholarship existed in the profession. Would inclusion of Religious Studies theories help the authors of these influential textbooks discuss issues of religion with a new perspectives, vocabulary, and conceptualizations?

I know that my academic background in Religious Studies has given me new theories to understand the role religion plays in clients' lives. In the four years since I have graduated with my MSW, I have attended various lectures, trainings, and seminars discussing the need for professionals in the social services to work in a culturally competent manner and "embrace diversity." These trainings have inevitably ended in a general edict that diversity in all its forms – racial, sexual orientation, gender, disability, religious, etc.- enhance our lives as human beings. While the issues of race, sexual orientation, gender, and disability have been researched and analyzed using various

---

[105] Ibid., 218
[106] Ibid., 218
[107] Ibid., 213

disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology, the challenges religious and spiritual diversity bring to the social work profession have not been analyzed with the theories of the most obvious discipline that could assist.

An exhaustive review of Religious Studies as an academic discipline is beyond the purpose of this project. However, noting some of the highlights of Religious Studies' development into a serious and respected academic discipline will aid those readers from a social work background who may not be familiar with the discipline. Oftentimes, when I have told colleagues that I am pursuing my Master of Religious Studies, the response is typically one of confusion or people ask me if I plan to go to seminary. The general public confuses Religious Studies with Theology, or they simply assume the study of religion must be the study of Christianity.

A Brief Overview of Religious Studies

Religious studies as an academic discipline has changed since the 19th century when Western scholars began to analyze religion as a phenomenon in its own right. Although individuals were interested in the analysis of religion, the discipline in its early years had an ulterior motive – to advance a specific religion. Historically, the academic study of religion has been the domain of European, educated men.

Throughout its development, the field of Religious Studies as we know it today has been called the science of religion, history of religion, and comparative religion, among other terms. Author Eric J. Sharpe's book *Comparative Religion: A History* is a useful introduction to the field of Religious Studies; it explores the detailed history of the discipline and some of the leading scholars who changed the ways we think about the

study of religion. For instance, Friedrich Müller is credited with bringing the study of comparative religion to the West. Müller called the study of religion a 'science of religion'.[108] Müller, a 19th century philologist, used a similar approach to study religions as he did languages. He is credited as saying that when studying religion "He who knows one knows none."[109] During Müller's time, he encountered critics who felt that the comparative study of religion was ineffective, but Müller responded, "…all higher knowledge is acquired by comparison…our researches [sic] are now based on the widest evidence that can be obtained."[110]

The study of religion went through many transformations and had many influences. Darwin's theory of evolution, for instance, had a major impact on the ways scholars viewed indigenous practices. Sir John Lubbock was one of the main scholars to advance the theory that monotheism was the most highly evolved form of religion, while animism, fetishism, and totemism were the least evolved.[111] It would be incorrect to assume the study of religion still relies on evolutionary theory to explain why certain people developed different belief systems. As the field became more sophisticated, scholars continuously drew inspiration from other academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology to further develop the academic study of religion. William James (a 19th century psychologist), Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (20th century anthropologists), and Edmund Husserl (an early 20th century philosopher) all contributed different methodologies to the study of religion. James examined religion with a psychological lens; Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown

[108] Sharpe, 28
[109] Ibid., 31
[110] Müller, 12
[111] Sharpe, 47

contributed social anthropology's understanding of the dynamic relationship between field worker and participant observer; Husserl contributed to phenomenological study of religion and its goal of uncovering the "essence" or "general structures" of the religion.[112] Eventually, scholars began to employ the term 'Religious Studies' in the 1960s because it could encompass the different methodological approaches to the study of religion.[113] In the late 20th/early 21st centuries, Religious Studies scholars have made vast methodological strides in studying the role of religion in people's lives.

The purpose of providing a (brief) history of Religious Studies is not to make social workers experts on the academic discipline of religion and its founding fathers. Rather, the purpose is to bring awareness to the social work profession about what Religious Studies has to offer. The general public does not know much about Religious Studies- many times the academic study of religion is conflated with theology. Understanding the academic discipline of religion is a necessity for social work students, practitioners, and educators in order to fully utilize the theories the discipline has to offer. While there is value in learning about all of the major scholars in the field, there are three whose theories may be particularly helpful to social workers: Clifford Geertz, Thomas A. Tweed, and Robert Orsi. The first scholar's definition of religion, Clifford Geertz, is well-known. Geertz, an anthropologist, defines religion as:[114]

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
> (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

---

[112] Ibid., 224
[113] Sharpe, 298
[114] Capps, 180

According to his definition, religion is intricately linked with symbols, but these symbols only make sense in their appropriate cultural context. Religions can be studied as distinct entities, but they are impossible to understand without taking into consideration the environment in which they are practiced. Geertz's definition is also one that is undoubtedly useful for social workers to be familiar with due to the fact that the profession encourages understanding the role cultural systems plays in a client's life and behavior. As Religious Studies scholars understand, a religious individual's beliefs and practices may appear entirely incongruent to other members of society but still be "uniquely realistic" among members of the same cultural system. For instance, many people scoff at the beliefs of Islamic extremists or members of the Church of Scientology, but their religion is "uniquely realistic" and assists these adherents in "formulating conceptions of a general order of existence". It has meaning and truth *for them*.

The scholars whose work is the most exciting and relevant to social work are those who specialize in the study of people's day-to-day religious lives – the lived religion. Two scholars that exemplify this trend towards lived religion are Thomas A. Tweed and Robert Orsi. Their work is critical for social workers because these scholars examine both the interconnectedness of religion and spirituality with other social categories such as race, ethnicity, and gender *and* the ways these categories interact to affect people's understanding of lived religion. These scholars, especially Tweed, have acknowledged the importance of viewing the phenomenon of religion as a dynamic experience, mediated and fluctuating based upon an individual's societal status and experiences. His theory eliminates the previous notions of religion as a static

phenomenon, disconnected to the rest of human life. Emphasizing the movement and transition of religion, Tweed's theory is useful in conceptualizing how religious individuals cope with the constant changes occurring daily in our modern lives. His definition states:[115]

> Religions are confluences of organic –cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.

This attention to detail in the ways social and political factors negatively or positively transform an individual's religious identity is paramount to understanding religion for social workers. After conducting research with Latino migrants to the United States, Tweed posited the concept of positionality, reminding scholars that everyone, even scholars, have a location in society; no one can enjoy "a view from everywhere-at-once or nowhere-in-particular."[116] A principal component of social work training requires the social worker to engage reflectively about her own privilege before she attempts to assist clients with their difficulties and oppression. Tweed articulates the necessity for scholars to position – or locate – themselves and address their privilege in society. He explains his location as a middle-class, Irish-Catholic man who "can't see everything. Culturally mediated objects enter and leave my sensorial and conceptual horizon."[117] Although Tweed's comments about verbalizing our respective social locations are directed at scholars, his advice is applicable to social workers. It is impossible for everyone to investigate, research, or otherwise know everything. Social workers in particular have a certain amount of power in the relationships they have with clients; many times clients

---

[115] Tweed, 54
[116] Tweed, 7
[117] Tweed, 18

are at the lowest points in their lives when they first meet a social worker. Because social workers are educated, and often licensed, it is not a stretch to say that social workers are often more educated than the clients they serve. Such distinctions could lead social workers to assume an elitist stance by maintaining that the professional's viewpoint carries more validity than the client's. Tweed's dynamic theory can be a useful tool for social workers to remind themselves that circumstances in life – including religious belief and practice – are continuously changing.

The second scholar, Robert Orsi, also contributes to theories about lived religion. His research accentuates the importance of attempting to understand religious practices post – September 11th. The questions we ask about the lived experience of religious individuals have urgency now more than it did before September 11th.[118] Orsi uses Islam as an example for studying religion in a post- 9/11 society. The word 'Islam', Orsi explains, really does not mean anything in and of itself.[119] While the suicide bombers responsible for 9/11 identified as Muslim, their interpretation of Islam was expressed differently from other Muslims. In order to gain a deeper insight into the suicide bombers worldview and understanding of Islam, Orsi concludes that what matters is the way in which Islam is understood and engaged with on a fundamental level. People have to realize that Islam, as any religion, is more than just a "set of authoritative texts or doctrines."[120] Truly understanding Islam requires that we examine "how it was discussed and practiced, inflected and constituted within [the] bonds of friendship, family, and

[118] Orsi, 169
[119] Ibid., 169 (emphasis in the original)
[120] Ibid., 169

memory…"[121] Orsi steers us away from making generalizations about religions; his approach centers on the familial and community connections that are involved in religious practices – not just broad theories about doctrine.[122]

One could see how Orsi's theory of lived religion can be applied to all religions and spiritual traditions, not just Islam. His theory, however, is extremely relevant given the political, social, and religious tensions and fear regarding differences. Lived religion is kinetic; it is unreasonable to imagine that religious practices and beliefs, and people's identities, would remain static over a period of time. In order to effectively examine the continuously changing role religion plays in people's lives, it is necessary to change the way we think about the word "religion" Orsi says. We need to engage in "rethinking religion as a form of cultural work," which requires that we study "institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas – all as media of making and unmaking worlds."[123]

One of Orsi's well-known works, an anthology he edited entitled, *Gods of the City*, captures the essential need to consider location when trying to understand the lived religious experiences of adherents. Although the book was published in the 1980s, Orsi's study of the religious lives of urban inhabitants in South Bronx still provides an instructive study on how scholars (and lay people too) can think about religion in a diverse, contested social place. As Orsi explains, the 'city' is the site of controversy, misunderstandings, and fear. City inhabitants in America "have always had to live in

---

[121] Ibid., 169
[122] Ibid., 170
[123] Ibid., 172

other people's ideas of where they live as well as in real places on the ground."[124] While Orsi's study also explores the tensions among individuals with different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds, his exploration does not end with only these considerations. Religion is a category that complicates social interaction, especially after waves of immigrants and migrants began to make New York their home as Orsi documents in his historical scholarship. In the late 1800s, Irish and German immigrants brought their Catholicism to the new city. The impact of immigration should not be underestimated. From 1840 to 1890, 7.5 million German and Irish immigrants resettled in the United States; nearly three-quarters of these immigrants were Catholics.[125] As Orsi aptly observes, immigration transformed the religious terrain of the country permanently.[126] Migration and immigration did more than simply transform the demographics of the country – it transformed the ways religions were practiced in these new locales. Orsi's study provides insights into the reality of Muslims' experiences in the United States – as one religion that has grown significantly since the U.S. expanded immigration in 1965. Muslims, both immigrants and citizens, are under an enormous amount of public scrutiny. Muslim identities are being questioned, fought over, and analyzed in ways that do not allow them the space to practice their religious traditions.

For example, media outlets announced that the NYPD engaged in routine spying on Muslims.[127] While the legality of spying can be debated *ad naseum*, this news story is

---

[124] Orsi, 6
[125] Blum et. al. cited in Orsi, 16
[126] Ibid., 16
[127] http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/03/bloombergs_fear_of_muslims_helped_drive_the_nypds_shameless_spying.html

just one example among many over the past 10 years in which Muslims become have the targets of other people's misconceptions. The new realities some Muslims find themselves in post-9/11 - one in which they are sometimes perceived to be suspicious and dangerous - creates a division between Muslims and the rest of American society. These misconceptions influence their identities and the ways Muslims practice their religion. For instance, due to safety reasons, some Muslim women may feel unsafe wearing *hijab* or other Islamic clothing because they could be easily identified as a Muslim[128]. This is an example of a concrete change in religious practice, a way to negotiate a public space and make it safer for them to embrace their identities as Muslims.

Social work practitioners could greatly benefit from Orsi's theory of religion and his attention to cultural products, which reflect the ways religion is practiced. His approach is not too different from the approach social workers are trained in at graduate and bachelors' programs across the country. Essentially, Orsi's comments reinforce what social workers already know – we must attend to every level, every aspect, of an individual's life in order to understand his or her challenges and worldview.

Looking at Islam and Muslim Identity: An Example of Religiously Literate Social Workers

In the past decade, the social work profession has been steadily increasing its awareness of other religions. For instance, the CSWE (Council on Social Work

[128] Muslim Women's League - http://www.mwlusa.org/topics/Sept11/hijab_dangerous_times.htm

Education) developed the CSWE Religion and Spirituality Work Group in 2011 whose mission is as follows:[129]

> to promote social workers' knowledge, values, and skills for ethical and effective practice that takes into account the diverse expressions of religion and spirituality among clients and their communities.

In order to encourage knowledge about diverse religious traditions, the CSWE web site offers links to different organizations and agencies whose purpose is to further interfaith understanding. The CSWE provides links to the Society for Spirituality and Social Work, the North American Association of Christians in Social Work, and the Islamic Social Services Association, among others. All of this information is wonderfully useful, but no suggestions or resources appear that could aid social workers in discovering modern theories about religion.

Scholars in social work are beginning to pay attention to the 'lived religion' of their clients. An article written by Dr. Betsy L. Wisner published in the *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* explores the concept of lived religion specifically working with Buddhist clients.[130] Wisner's article demonstrates the importance of using theories from Religious Studies to provide a vocabulary and methodology to understanding the complex role religion plays in clients' lives. Wisner notes many well-known scholars in the field (Geertz, Evans-Pritchard, and Eliade) in her overview of the theories Religious Studies has to offer social workers, but she does not mention some of the more recent theoreticians such as Orsi and Tweed whose approach could complement social workers' understanding of religion. Her article does, however,

---

[129] CSWE http://www.cswe.org/CentersInitiatives/CurriculumResources/50777/54108.aspx
[130] Wisner, 385

provide a useful case study of Buddhist clients' in the United States and the specific challenges that may arise. As the article demonstrates, religious literacy requires more than just knowing facts about a religion. It requires integrating these facts into a client's life situation, the worldview. Wisner delves into the impact immigration has on the Buddhist population in the United States. Immigrants from Tibet, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam bring their local Buddhist practices to the US whereas American converts to Buddhism have their unique understanding about the religion. In fact, out of all the Buddhists in America, three quarters identify as converts.[131] The wonderful aspect of Wisner's article is that she opens up the *possibility* of what a merging between the Religious Studies and Social Work disciplines might look like. While she has chosen to focus her exploration on Buddhism, her statements could be applicable to Islam, Christianity, or any of the thousands of religious traditions people follow.

Wisner's article provides an interesting segue into the reality of Islam in America. Like Buddhists, Muslims come from diverse socioeconomic, racial and ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Islam is a rich tradition with various branches and theological teachings. Although Americans mostly hear about Sunni Islam, Muslims also identify as Sufi, Shi'a, among other groups. Islam has a long history in the United States. Scholars trace African slaves as the first Muslims to step upon the country's shores.[132] Although this piece of history gets lost in modern discourse about Islam, it is an important and interesting fact that can remind social workers (and all of us) that our perceptions of religion are historically limited.

---

[131] Wisner, 393
[132] Smith, 78; Diouf, 45

Muslims are a diverse religious group in this country. Their racial and ethnic backgrounds vary from Arab, South Asian, African-American, and Caucasian. Recently, people of Hispanic/Latino descent have converted to Islam, which is changing the identity of the American Muslim community as well.[133] The Muslim presence in the United States is growing. According to a CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) report, there were 2106 mosques in the country in the period from August 2010 through November 2011.[134] In 2000, when an earlier survey was conducted, the number of mosques totaled 1,209.[135] The state of Missouri had a total of 39 mosques according to the 2011 CAIR report.[136]

St. Louis is an interesting example to consider due to the many immigrants that come to the area to live. Various local agencies, including the Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma and the International Institute[137], were established to help immigrants relocate and acclimate to life in the United States. These agencies end up assisting individuals from regions as diverse as Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Albania, Vietnam, and Ethiopia. When people relocate, their culture relocates with them, including their religious or spiritual beliefs. Considering agencies like Center for Survivors of War Trauma and the International Institute employ social workers to assist these refugees and immigrants, it is imperative that these professionals have a strong background in religious studies theories that could enrich their understanding of religion. Because many of these immigrants are coming from countries with a high population of

---

[133] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/09/nyregion/09muslims.html; Smith, 68
[134] http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/The-American-Mosque-2011-web.pdf
[135] http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/The-American-Mosque-2011-web.pdf
[136] http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/The-American-Mosque-2011-web.pdf
[137] http://stlcenterforsurvivors.org/ and http://www.iistl.org/

Muslims, it is essential that social workers are trained to integrate modern theories of religion with the lived experience of their clients. Of course, the situation in St. Louis is replicated many times over in different parts of the country and the need to understand religion does not suddenly stop at Islam. In their line of work, social workers are just as likely to deal with atheists and agnostics as they are with Jews and Christians.

Social workers and scholars in the United States and abroad are beginning to negotiate the challenges religious diversity brings to society as a whole. For example, Amnesty International issued a report about the various forms of discrimination Muslims face in Europe. The report, based on field research conducted in Spain, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Switzerland, provides a glimpse at the different forms of discrimination Muslims face, whether it is discrimination in employment to discrimination at public schools.[138] The issue of religious discrimination becomes even more poignant when it involves a Muslim woman choosing to wear *hijab* or other forms of Islamic dress. The report documents the case of Amel, a Muslim social worker living in France who chose recently to begin wearing *hijab*. Amel was applying for different not-for-profit jobs, and during one interview with a domestic violence agency, "she was openly told that her professional profile suited the requirements but that she had to remove her headscarf".[139] The employer she interviewed with was worried about her ability to "ensure neutrality" and willingness to persuade a potential Muslim client to forgo wearing the headscarf in order to find a job.[140] The Amnesty International report

---

[138] *Choice and Prejudice – A Summary: Discrimination Against Muslims in Europe* - http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR01/002/2012/en/d9765dfe-058c-4edf-a15d-5cc31da93c06/eur010022012en.pdf

[139] Ibid., 5

[140] Ibid., 5

demonstrates the repercussions religious discrimination can have on an individual's livelihood and social integration into society.

The Amnesty International report is one example of the discrimination religious minorities face in different European countries and other parts of the world. In 2009, the estimated population of Muslims living in Europe was 38 million according to data collected by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.[141] Awareness about the impact religious diversity will have on the social work profession is growing abroad as well. The British Association of Social Workers *Code of Ethics* mentions the importance of challenging all types of discrimination, including religious discrimination[142] so it is clear the issue of religious diversity is affecting people in different countries.

The book *Islam and Social Work* explores the religious competence issues social workers must be prepared to deal with on a daily basis using cases studies from the United Kingdom. *Islam and Social Work* could be considered an example of Tweed's dynamic theory of religion in practice, although he is not mentioned specifically in the book. Authors Crabtree, Husain, and Spalek use positionality, current events, and culturally specific examples to analyze the ways in which Muslims live and function in British society and how British social workers can effectively assist Muslims clients in whatever challenges they may face. One of the authors, Sara A. Crabtree, explained in the *Introduction* of the book that she came to realize

---

141 http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedfiles/Orphan_Migrated_Content/Muslimpopulation.pdf

142 BASW - http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_112315-7.pdf

> …that there is a distinct gap between Islamic principles, as found primarily in the Holy Qur'an, and those beliefs and customs that were not basically Islamic, but instead were embedded in localized, traditional responses.[143]

While Crabtree's gradual awareness about the role cultural traditions play in religious practices might have been a moment of epiphany for her as a professional British social worker, students in any introductory Religious Studies course would have been taught the same concept much sooner.

Among the issues that social workers will have to contend with depending on the clients they will see are women's roles in society and family issues according to the book. The authors are careful to use culturally sensitive terms when explaining Islamic theology in relationship to women's roles. They delve into topics such as a woman's right to work outside the home, modesty, and family matters. For instance, although the family is considered the ideal social arrangement in Islam, different cultures demonstrate their ideas about family life in a variety of ways. Crabtree et. al. provide examples from different countries to illustrate how an understanding of family and gender roles can transform in different locales. In the more industrialized countries in the Arab Gulf, for example, men and women live in family units considered to be traditional, while others follow the Western models of cohabiting adults.[144] Educated Black American Muslim women, the authors report, may have trouble finding suitable husbands due to external social issues not specifically related to their religion.[145] Although family and women's roles are an important issue in Islam (as in other religious traditions), the authors remind the readers that Muslims from different cultures will have a different understanding of

---

[143] Crabtree, Husain, & Spalek, 13
[144] Ibid., 67
[145] McCloud, 1995 cited in Crabtree, Husain, and Spalek, 74

gender roles and family issues based on their unique experiences relating to culture and locale.

Examples of Religiously Literate Social Work

It may be difficult to conceptualize what religiously literate social work practice would look like. The idea that social workers are religiously literate does not mean that they know can recite verbatim passages from the Qur'an or that they know obscure facts about the history of a particular religion. Of course, general knowledge about a religion's beliefs and practices are a part of religious literacy, but it is more than the recitation of facts. As a social worker, being religiously literate means being able to utilize professional theories and resources to assist clients in maintaining their religious practices and identity while simultaneously helping them solve the challenges they face.

For instance, if a Muslim woman is fleeing her abusive partner and seeks assistance at a domestic violence shelter and the first thing she wants to do is pray after she is assigned a room, then a religiously literate social worker would find a way to make that happen for her. Knowing that a Muslim will use her entire body to perform the prostrations, the social worker could attempt to find a quiet, private space for the client to pray. Another way for a social worker to demonstrate sensitivity to the client's religious needs would be to ask the client to explain her religious practices and investigate if a religious leader in the community, such as an imam, would be willing to counsel the client while she is in the shelter.

Religious literacy also involves being cognizant of the language we use as social workers. For instance, I worked for a St. Louis non-profit whose purpose was to provide support to individuals living with a chronic autoimmune disease. Part of my job at this

agency was to co-facilitate a support group for people with this particular disease. The other co-facilitator had an MSW as well. During one of the support group sessions, she told the group members that developing a spiritual life was important when living with a chronic illness. Then she asked everyone, "Do all of you attend church?" The question she asked in curiosity and without any bad intent had the potential to alienate a lot of people. Although the question seems innocent enough, it is an example of social workers needing to be inclusive all of the time, especially with matters of religion. Her question could have caused barriers between people who are not Christian or do not practice any religion at all.

Conclusion: Connecting Religious Studies to Social Work Practice and Education

The purpose of this project is to encourage social work practitioners, educators, and students to be proactive in meeting the NASW standards in cultural competence through educating themselves about religious diversity with Religious Studies theories. To be sure, this is not an easy task. With the array of information accessible on the Internet, social workers may think they are accessing scholarly, peer-reviewed information, when the reality may be that it is not. This project is meant to be a starting point for those social workers unfamiliar with the discipline of Religious Studies to begin to utilize its tools to enhance their cultural competency skills. Of course, cultural competence is not a static skill set, but rather it is a continuous process requiring continuing education, evaluation, and self-awareness on a range of issues that affect

clients' lives – religion is just one of many.[146] The reality of the social work profession is that the United States is becoming an increasingly diverse, complicated, and difficult society to navigate. And social workers are trained to deal with difficulty.

The social work profession utilizes many theories to orient its practitioners to society's concerns and problems. The strengths perspective and systems approach are two of these theories. The strengths perspective compels professionals to recognize and nurture the strength clients have to defy their challenging situations. In short, this perspective strives to "recognize and value the *resilience* and *resourcefulness* possessed by many people living in adversity."[147] Instead of emphasizing the problems negatively affecting a client's life, a professional operating under the strengths perspective would be inclined to elucidate the positive traits the client exhibits in order to confront these problems. Instead of viewing clients as victims of harsh circumstances, the social worker's job is to assist them in harnessing their energy towards affecting positive change using the strengths they already possesses.

The scientist Ludwig von Bertalanffly is credited with developing systems theory. First applied to the biological sciences in the late 1960s, later family therapists began to apply systems theory to family therapy and psychology. Therapists began to theorize the family unit as a system itself. In general, systems theory posits that each individual is interconnected. Everything can affect everything else in a complex web, so when one part of the system is altered it changes another part of the system. In his concise overview of systems theory, Howe provides a useful analogy using a thermostat and heating

---

[146] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights, disability rights, and gender expression are just a few of the issues that social workers must educate themselves about in order to work with diverse clientele.
[147] Howe, 100

system.[148] A thermostat is linked to a boiler that heats water. When the room temperature drops or increases, the thermostat sends a signal to the boiler to adjust accordingly. If the room is too cold, the thermostat will send the signal to the boiler causing it to turn on and warm up the room. This cycle will continue in order for the room to remain at a steady temperature, in order for the room to maintain homeostasis. This simplistic analogy is applicable to human life as well. Human interaction is a complex, delicate system.

A discussion of systems theory is also presented in author John F. Longres' seminal textbook *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*. This textbook, used in many social work programs, delineates systems theory into domains – biophysical and psychological.[149] The biophysical domain, as is implied by the name, includes the biological mechanisms and processes that allow an organism operate properly. The psychological domain encompasses the cognitive, motivational-affective, and behavioral subsystems. There has been debate within the realm of psychology about whether it is appropriate or not to add spirituality as a distinct domain as well, noting the lack of the inclusion of spirituality as a separate category as led to the development of a different branch of psychology known as transpersonal psychology.

The purpose of this project has been to demonstrate why utilizing the theories of Religious Studies will be beneficial to social workers' professional development. While the discipline offers vast resources that may or may not be useful to social workers in different areas of practice (i.e. medical social work, community education and outreach, clinical social work), awareness of key resources will help to guide social workers in their educational process in developing a sound base of Religious Studies knowledge and

---

[148] Howe, 109-110
[149] Longres, 26

theorists. Although the suggestions I provide are by no means an exhaustive list, they providing good starting points for those who do not have an academic background in religion. My suggestions are a combination of web sites, academic journals, and books.

The AAR, or American Academy of Religion, is one of the best places to begin to familiarize oneself with the academic study of religions. The AAR was originally established in 1909 as an organization dedicated to Biblical Studies. Now the organization's goal is to provide a professional space where scholars studying diverse religious traditions can discuss their research at regional and national conferences and in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* The AAR web site also includes a database of accredited graduate programs in Religious Studies, theology, and seminaries in the United States.[150]

Two websites providing immediate, up-to-date information about the role of religion in society and current events are the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (hereafter, the Forum) and the American Religion Data Archive. According to the web site, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducts social science research in order to "promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs."[151] The Forum highlights research the influence religion has on pressing social issues such as the death penalty, gay marriage, politics, and social welfare. For example, in 2009, the Forum published its analysis "Religious Groups Weigh in on Health Care Reform."[152] Health care reform is an issue social workers are familiar with, especially

---

[150] AAR - https://www.aarweb.org/
[151] http://www.pewforum.org/Pew-Forum/About-the-Pew-Forum.aspx
[152] http://www.pewforum.org/Social-Welfare/Religious-Groups-Weigh-In-on-Health-Care-Reform.aspx

those that work in hospitals and medical centers. However, examining health care reform from the perspectives of religious adherents might be a novel idea. The Forum's research on a variety of international social issues broadens the discussion about religion's role in individual's lives.

The Center on Religion & the Professions[153] located at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri offers links to articles and other web sites that analyze the role religion plays in a variety of professions, including social work. The Center provides contact information for houses of worship in central Missouri categorized by faith tradition and a lending library of films, both recent and classics, that discuss religion's impact on society.

Another informative web site is ARDA, the Association of Religion Data Archives, which provides data about religious changes in the United States and internationally. Located at Pennsylvania State University, ARDA offers research about best practices in engaging in scientific research about religion as well as detailed information about demographics and geography in relation to religious practice. ARDA is a useful tool for social workers unfamiliar with the guiding principles of the sociological study of religion and specific beliefs and practices of different religious traditions. On the website a user can search for the State of Missouri and find an extensive list of current trends on religious adherents, as well as scholarly articles informing readers about the current discourse in religious trends. Articles such as "Rethinking Islam and Secularism" by John L. Esposito, Georgetown University Professor of Islamic Studies and Professor Grace Davie's article "Thinking Sociologically about Religion: A Step Change in the

---

[153] http://www.religionandprofessions.org/

Debate" provide insightful analysis about the academic study of religion and its impact on how we understand religion's role in people's lives today.[154]

Both the ARDA and Pew Forum websites are examples of Orsi and Tweed's dynamic understanding of religious life. Tweed's definition that religions are "confluences of organic-cultural flows"[155] is reflected in the ARDA and the Pew Forum's highly useful and dynamic research regarding the ways religion is incorporated into the seemingly mundane spaces of our lives.

PBS and NPR (National Public Radio) offer timely stories about religion and current events. Via the PBS web site, www.pbs.org, users can download podcasts of their show *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*. The shows *Talk of the Nation* and *Fresh Air* highlight current events and issues of interest, sometimes focusing specifically on religious current events. For instance, in March 2012, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, one of the individuals who proposed what became known as the "Ground Zero Mosque," was interviewed about concerns Muslims face in the United States.[156] These particular websites, as well as many others, illustrate Tweed's concept of religion as something dynamically interdependent with other aspects of life, as his mathematical and physics metaphors allude to.[157]

For social workers interested in learning specifically about the traditions of Islam and contemporary Muslim life, there are several worthwhile Internet sites to visit. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA - http://www.isna.net/) is an organization dedicated to improving the lives of Muslims in North America. The site offers

---

[154] http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp
[155] Tweed, 57
[156] http://www.npr.org/2012/05/09/152192549/creating-a-new-vision-of-islam-in-america
[157] Tweed, 62

translations of the Qur'an in English, Spanish, and additional languages. Position papers and articles covering topics such as the Islamic community in the United States and religious diversity are freely accessible to visitors of the site. One of the most useful resources on ISNA's web site is the bi-monthly magazine called *Islamic Horizons*, which ISNA publishes. *Islamic Horizons* features stories relevant to the Muslims in the United States – recent featured stories include "NYPD Spying: Citizens Discover being Muslim Makes You a Suspect and Take Action to Prevent New Targets" (May/June 2012), "Feeling Comfortable in Your Workplace" (January/February 2012), and "The Legacy and Role of African American Muslims" (January/February 2012).

Two other notable resources for social workers interested in learning about Islam and Muslims are the Islamic Studies Center (ISC) at Duke University and the Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary. Duke University's Islamic Studies Center (http://islamicstudies.duke.edu/) provides scholarly research about Islam and contemporary issues facing Muslims in the United States and around the world. The ISC hosts events covering issues such as politics, current events in the Middle East, and discrimination against Muslims in the West. Likewise, the Macdonald Center web site has many articles about the history of Islam, gender roles, the Qur'an and hadith, and Ramadan to name several examples. As the full name of the Center conveys, part of its mission is to facilitate understanding between Christians and Muslims and to "challenge scholars, students, the media, and the general public to move beyond stereotypes and develop an appreciation of Islamic religion, law, and culture."[158]

---

[158] Duncan Black Macdonald Center - http://www.hartsem.edu/macdonald

Moving in the direction of a social work oriented site, Islamic Social Services Association (ISSA) is a great resource to be aware of. ISSA (http://www.issausa.org/) does not provide direct social services, but the staff provides trainings and workshops to various social service providers about how to work with Muslim clients in a culturally competent manner. ISSA's webpage also includes the option to buy pamphlets and books about Islamic practices and beliefs.

The Internet, therefore, documents religions' "move[ments] through time."[159] Podcasts, YouTube videos, blogs, etc trace the ways people live their religions in their daily lives - sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes with flare and controversy. The websites I have mentioned are just a small slice of what people can discover about how religion functions in people's lives. The Internet offers a wealth of resources about how people live religion in the 21st century.

Several journals and books are good starting places for social workers in their exploration of people's religious lives. *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* features discussions about all aspects of religious life – from New Age spirituality to the intersection of politics in religious expression. The books I have to suggest are particularly useful for grounding oneself in the modern lives of Muslim Americans. As discussed throughout the paper, the religion of Islam is representative of the diversity that is present in the United States. The book *Islam and Social Work: Debating Values, Transforming Practice* is a concise introduction to the guiding principles of Islam and the interchange between Islam and social work practice. Although the book is based on social work practice and uses case examples from the United Kingdom, the general

---

[159] Ibid., 62

discussion about the role of religion in clients' lives, especially as people express their religion in a post-9/11 world is extremely useful and fascinating. Another book entitled *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* tackles the challenges and stereotypes Muslim women face in their daily lives. Written by Yvonne Y. Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. Moore, this ethnography traces the challenges that define Muslim women's lives in America. Part sociology, history, and ethnography, this book provides snap-shots of Muslim women's daily life and the discrimination, ignorance, and faithfulness they confront.

The selections of websites, journals, and books in this project provide a compass for social workers to begin to educate themselves about the complex workings of religion in individuals' lives. What's more, they will be able to think about religion utilizing perspectives gleaned from the discipline of Religious Studies. While cultural competency in the form of religious literacy is beginning to gain traction among professional social workers, the field can greatly benefit from Religious Studies scholars in expanding the way they think about religion in the lives of their clients.

Bibliography

Abu-Ras, Wahiba and Lance Laird. "How Muslim and Non-Muslim Chaplains Serve Muslim Patients? Does the Interfaith Chaplaincy Model have Room for Muslims' Experiences?" *Journal of Religion and Health* 50.1 (2011). 46-61. Print.

American Academy of Religion. Web. 10 July 2012.

The Association of Religion Data Archives. Web. 10 July 2012.

Barker, Robert L. *The Social Work Dictionary*. Washington, D.C.: NASW Press, 2003. Print.

Barker, Stacey L. and Jerry E. Floresch. "Practitioners' Understandings of Spirituality: Implications for Social Work Education." *Journal of Social Work Education* 46.3 (2010). 357-370. Print.

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967. Print.

British Association of Social Workers. Code of Ethics. Web. 16 September 2012.

Budak, Ali. *A Comprehensive Guide: Fasting in Islam & The Month of Ramadan*. Somerset, New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2006. Print.

Cadge, Wendy, David Smilde, and Peggy Levitt. "De-Centering and Re-Centering: Rethinking Concepts and Methods in the Sociological Study of Religion." *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 50.3 (2011). 437-449. Print.

Capps, Walter H. *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. Print.

Canda, Edward R. and Leola Dyrud Furman. *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping (Second Edition)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Print.

The Center on Religion and the Professions. Web. 11 August 2012.

Cnaan, Ram A., Robert J. Wineburg, and Stephanie C. Boddie. *The Newer Deal: Social Work and Religion in Partnership*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Print.

Crabtree, Sara Ashencaen, Fatima Husain, and Basia Spalek. *Islam and Social Work: Debating Values, Transforming Practice*. Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2008. Print.

Dessel, Adrienne B., Michael R. Woodford, and Lorraine Gutierrez. "Social Work Faculty's Attitudes Toward Marginalized Groups: Exploring the Role of Religion." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*. 31.3 (2012). 244-162. Web.

Diouf, Sylviane A. Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas. New York: New York University Press, 1998. Print.

Dolgoff, Ralph, Frank M. Loewenberg, and Donna Harrington. *Ethical Decisions for Social Work Practice*. 7th edition. Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole – Thomson Learning, 2005. Print.

Duke Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health. Web. 20 July 2012.

Duncan Black Macdonald Center. Web. 11 August 2012.

Eck, Diana. *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian' Country Became the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001. Print.

"Equal Employment Opportunity: Ethnic/National Origin, Color, Race, Religion & Sex Discrimination." *United States Department of Labor*. Web. 15 November 2011.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1977. Print.

Glicken, Morley D. *Social Work in the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE

Publications, 2007. Print.

Hodge, David R. "Using Spiritual Interventions in Practice: Developing Some Guidelines from Evidence-based Practice." *Social Work*. 56.2 (2011). 149-158. Print.

Hodge, David R., Lisa M. Baughman, and Julie A. Cummings. "Moving Towards Spiritual Competency: Deconstructing Religious Stereotypes and Spiritual Prejudices in Social Work Literature." *Journal of Social Service Research* 32.4 (2006). 211-232. Print.

Howe, David. *A Brief Introduction to Social Work Theory*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009. Print.

Inhorn, Marcia C. and Gamal I. Serour. "Islam, Medicine, and Arab-Muslim Refugee Health in America after 9/11." *Lancet* 378 (2011). 935-943. Print.

Jones, James W. "Religion, Health, and the Psychology of Religion: How the Research on Religion and Health Helps Us Understand Religion." *Journal of Religion and Health* 43.4 (2004). 317-328. Print.

Kilman, Carrie. "One Nation, Many Gods." *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*. Fall 2007. Web. 15 November 2011.

Koenig, Harold G. "Religion and Mental Health II: Religion, Mental Health, and Related Behaviors." *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* 31.1. 97-109. Print.

Kunzel, Regina G. *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work 1890-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.

Lippy, Charles H. "Religious Studies: The Shaping of a Field and a Guide to Reference Resources." *OAH (Organization of American Historians) Magazine of History* 6.3(1992). 10-14. Print.

Loewenberg, Frank M. *Religion and Social Work Practice in Contemporary American Society*. New York: Columbia Press, 1988. Print.

Longres, John F. *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*. Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc. 2000. Print.

McCloud, A.B. *African American Islam*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Merino, Stephen M. "Religious Diversity in a "Christian Nation": The Effects of Theological Exclusivity and Interreligious Contact on the Acceptance of Religious Diversity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 49.2 (2010). 231-246. Print.

Missouri Division of Professional Registration. Web. 20 July 2012.

Müller, F. Max. *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution with Two Essays on False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873. Print.

Muslim Women's League. *n.p*. Muslim Dress in Dangerous Times. *n.d.* 21 August 2012.

National Association of Social Workers. Code of Ethics. Web. 11 November 2011.

Orsi, Robert A. "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? SpecialPresidential Plenary Address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42.2 (2003). 169 – 174.
Print.

Orsi, Robert A. *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. Print.

Pals, Daniel L. *Seven Theories of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.

Patel, Eboo. *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2007. Print.

Park 51 Community Center. Web. 10 July 2012.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. Web. 10 July 2012.

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University. Web. 10 July 2012.

Prothero, Stephen. Religious Literacy: *What Every American Needs to Know – and Doesn't*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007.

Rosenbluth, Suzanne and Bea Bailey. "Comprehensive Studies in Public Education: Educating for a Religiously Literate Society." *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 42.2 (2007). 93-111. Print.

Sheridan, Michael. "Ethical Issues in the Use of Spiritually Based Interventions in Social Work Practice: What We are Doing and Why." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*. 28.1-2 (2009).99-126. Web.

Smith, Jane I. *Islam in America*. 2nd edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print.

Taller, Jonel. "Resilience and Resistance in Professional Identity Making: Gleanings from the Classrom Experiences of Devout Christian Social Workers." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*. 30.2 (2012). 144-163. Web. 18 September 2012.

Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Print.

"U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey." *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010*. Web. 20 October 2011.

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. United States Department of Labor, 29 March 2012. Web. 21 August 2012.

Weaver, Hilary N. *Explorations in Cultural Competence: Journeys to the Four Directions.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2005. Print. Iglehart, A & Becerra, R.M. (1995). *Social Services and the Ethnic Community*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Popple, P.R. & Leighninger, L.H. (1990). *Social Work, Social Welfare, and American Society*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Wisner, Betty L. "Exploring the Lived Religion of Buddhists: Integrating Concepts from Social Work and Religious Studies." *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 30.4 (2011). 385-404.

Whittaker, Catharine R., Spencer Salend, and Hala Elhoweris. "Religious Diversity in Schools: Addressing the Issues." *Intervention in School and Clinic* 44.5 (2009). 314-319. Print.