THE USE OF SELF AS A TOOL FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CHANGE

AGENCY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: A QUALITATIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

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by

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2016

ABSTRACT

Many social service and healthcare professionals are often challenged in engaging in
culturally appropriate practice, particularly when working with diverse populations that differ
from their own (Rothman, 2008; Sue, 2010). Those who are the most vulnerable are the
populations in which social workers provide service delivery (Davis, 2007; Gilgun &
Abrams, 2002). Social workers who are not culturally competent may not provide equitable
nor culturally relevant care (Davis, 1997; Heydt & Sherman, 2005; Lu, Lum & Chen, 2001;
Sue, 1992, 2010). The purpose of this research study was to explore how social workers
describe their use of self in urban-based practice settings. The traditions of phenomenology
and case study provided the methodological framework. The theoretical frameworks of
Cultural Competence and Multiculturalism were used, along with the supporting interpretive
theories of self-reflexivity and social constructionism as paradigmatic underpinnings. The
participants’ cases were utilized to investigate the overarching research question: What are
social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agents? Six social workers
participated in the study through purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling. The data
sources included in-depth, semi-structured interviews and self-reflexive field notes. Sampling
tools consisted of an invitational email and a preliminary assessment instrument to help
determine eligibility. The primary method of data analysis was transcendental
phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) for the in-depth interviews. Findings from the in-depth
interviews suggests that social workers must first, be culturally aware of themselves and
second, obtain relevant knowledge about the diverse populations they serve in order to
provide culturally responsive service delivery.
APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “The Use of Self as a Tool for Culturally Responsive Change Agency in Social Work Practice: A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study” presented by Gloria Anderson, proposed candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Psalm 32: 8 reads: “I will instruct you and teach you the way to go; I will guide you with My eye”. The Hebrew word for “teach” is yarah and means “to direct the flow of something; cast in a straight manner.” I first give honor and glory to God for bringing me through this dissertation journey victoriously. I have experienced firsthand that all things are possible with God’s presence, power, and provision. I thank my parents, my daughters, Tracee and Tammy, along with their spouses, Antonio and Ugo, respectively, and my niece, Tosha, who believed in me and prayed to see this day fulfilled—a season God declared for my life’s purpose. I dedicate this work to my grandchildren: Kieran, Victoria, Josiah, Julian, Austin and Tyler—and those future generations to come. I also dedicate this work in loving memory to my late brother, Leonard Maurice Adger, who passed away during the last part of my dissertation journey. I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Kenyon C. Burke, who has taught me so much about how to live joyfully and wisely. Your profound wisdom never ceases to amaze me. I am thankful for my friends, Dr. Jacqueline Leonard, Cheryl Graves, and Dr. Carolyn Thompson, who were always there to give helpful feedback along the way. I acknowledge my chair, Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu, and thank my magnificent committee members, Dr. Dianne Smith, Dr. Shirley Marie McCarther, Dr. Donna Davis, and Dr. Candice Schlein for your profound insight and guidance. This dissertation was possible through your prayers, support and belief in me to accomplish this goal. I am grateful for what I learned about qualitative inquiry from my research professor, Dr. Loyce Caruthers. Lastly, I express heartfelt gratitude to my dear friends, Sharon and John Butler, Joan Schwartz, and Nina Ingram for your encouragement and prayers. May peace and blessings from God be with all who stood in faith on my behalf and gave me your loving support.
THE RESEARCHER’S PERSONAL JOURNEY TO USE OF SELF

The concept of genuine use of self is a social work term I learned in the Masters of Social Work program. The notion of the “genuine use of self” is often referred to as a social worker’s most effective tool in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, collectively known in the profession as “clients” according to the NASW Code of Ethics (1999). Heydt and Sherman (2005) state that the concept of “conscious use of self” is a term defining the social worker as the “instrument” purposely used to promote change with client systems. Lietchty (2005) defines use of self as “the ultimate integration of practice and theory—embodied in the person of the social worker and enacted in the social worker-client relationship” (p. 113).

I immediately connected with the phrase, in part because of my passion to better understand ways in which a social worker might use his or her self as an effective tool for positive change in the helping process. As a young girl growing up in the urban core, I witnessed the complexities of “white flight,” a rapid demographic shift in a community that occurs when whites move out as people of color move in (Howard, 2006, p. 131). Having experienced the effects of covert racism served to fuel my interest in others and their attitudes and beliefs about people who are different from themselves.

My first memorable experience confronting prejudice based upon assumptive thinking occurred during my freshman year in college. I attended a predominantly white university after graduating from a majority black inner city high school, while my white college roommate (alias Amy) grew up in a rural, small town in Iowa. We were from
different worlds. For most of the semester we avoided any interaction with each other, which created a tense, uncomfortable living situation. It was as though an imaginary line existed, drawn between us, dividing the room into separate quarters—her side and mine. One weekend Amy’s friend, (alias John) came to visit her.

He greeted me with a warm smile and handshake, which surprised me. John, who was also white, seemed to sense fairly quickly that something was “not right” between Amy and me and posed a question neither of us had considered to ponder: “Why don’t you all talk to each other?” I answered first, “Amy doesn’t like me.” Amy retorted, “That’s not true, Gloria. That’s not it at all!” Amy went on to explain that she had never seen black people in the community she grew up in and had only seen negative images on television and in the news. Those negative images appeared to have produced an unfounded fear that impeded her willingness to get to know me. Sue (2010) writes, “the mass media that includes printed materials (newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.), television, film, and radio often dispense powerful images of race and racial beliefs to the general public” (p. 119). Strong continuous repetitions of themes about race often include criminality and poverty, as well as intellectual deficiencies and serve as an informational source that provides knowledge about groups within a society (Cortes, 2004).

Once we had openly addressed these false assumptions, my roommate and I engaged in candid dialogue that helped clear the air, allowing us to co-construct a more respectful and honoring relationship. A different, more positive and accepting atmosphere came about as we embarked upon our newfound revelation of otherness. John’s insightfulness aided us both in recognizing how unchallenged misconceptions can manifest into alienation unless
acknowledged and confronted. Dispelling stereotypical beliefs can start with a simple, direct question like John proposed to us.

That one question caused Amy to re-examine an erroneous generalization and assumption about Black people that had unconsciously become her own. She chose to change her point of view after becoming aware of her bias. Based upon the reality of her own experience with the other, she became more open to learn about me as an individual, rather than seeing me as a stereotype through the lens of social conditioning. I believe her change of heart may have come about because Amy chose to self-reflect and question her own beliefs and values about Black people. I also willingly chose to examine my beliefs about “whiteness.” I, too, had been socially conditioned through my lived experiences and influences from certain individuals in my environment that expressed their intense dislike for white people. Howard (2006) identifies three white identity orientations: (1) fundamentalist, (2) integrationist, and (3) transformationist. Howard explains that fundamentalist whites hold supremacist and dominance constructs, where integrationist whites acknowledge diverse perspectives with dissonance. Transformationist whites, however, actively seek to challenge and dismantle white dominance (p. 104). Like Amy, I had been taught things about white people that did not apply to all white people. I realized through this experience that not every white person is racist.

Social conditioning is something most human beings experience without conscious awareness of its ability to produce prejudice and stereotyping behaviors. I believe self-reflection and examination can help deconstruct the past when one learns from it, while reconstructing the present by changing harmful attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate the status quo.
Self-awareness of one’s own social conditioning, values, and beliefs can broaden understanding about others who are different and build bridges to better communication. Most importantly, awareness of self can provide the opportunity to become more authentically congruent. The real story of an individual’s life is represented through his or her own lens of truth, knowledge, and experience. I envision all of life as curriculum, which means “a course of life.” This life curriculum continuously unfolds through the multiplicity of lived experiences and contextual stories of being and becoming. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) coined the term “personal practical knowledge” to capture the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 25). As a social work educator and practitioner, I have come to recognize that my personal and professional self intertwine. How I use self can help or hinder effective change in social work practice and in relationships with others. Being in the helping profession of social work provides daily opportunities for me to serve as an instrument of effective change. My heart’s desire is to be the best self I can through conscious mindfulness of knowing that difference does not equate to deficit or detriment, but rather to diversity.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The face of America is changing and increasingly becoming more diverse, reflecting a multiplicity of cultural worldviews and ways of being. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), the U.S. population is projected to reach 400 million in 2051, increasing from 319 million to 417 million. Based on U.S. Census data, the Asian population is projected to nearly double from 5.4 percent to 9.3 percent of the total U.S. population by 2060. The Hispanic population is projected to increase from 17 percent to 29 percent by 2060. The Black population is expected to grow slightly from 13 percent to only 14 percent by 2060, while the non-Hispanic White population, reflecting 62.2 percent of the total U.S. population in 2014, is projected to decrease to 43.6 percent by 2060. Care for these growing diverse populations must be culturally relevant; the alternative may result in increased health disparities for people of color (Starr & Wallace, 2011).

These data are compounded with poverty rates of 35 percent or higher in the Midwestern city that this research effort investigated. People of color are much more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods than whites, with 8.4 percent of people of color living in high-poverty tracts compared to only 0.9 percent of whites (PolicyLink & PERE, 2013). Additionally, the average poverty rate is approximately 30 percent in neighborhoods housing the majority of people of color (60 percent or more) compared to 8 percent for all other neighborhoods, and 11 percent for the region overall (PolicyLink & PERE, 2013). Data indicate that social workers in behavioral health are less diverse in racial and ethnic backgrounds than the client populations they serve in the U.S. civilian labor force. According
to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 36.3 percent of the population is composed of people of color (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

Demographically, the social work profession is predominately composed of white professionals. The possible implications of this demographic gap include concerns that the majority of social workers are White/Caucasian, and the predominant populations with whom they work are people of color (Gilberman, 2005; Whitaker, Clark & Weismiller, 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau (2014) projects that by the year 2044, over 50 percent of the population in the United States will belong to groups that are non-Hispanic white or people of color. The need for culturally competent social workers has been identified by the profession in order to provide culturally appropriate service delivery to these ethnically diverse populations. Contextual and culturally specific practice considerations may be overlooked if social workers are lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to work with people of color.

Although these statistics do not reflect the racial and ethnic demographics of all members in the profession, they do show an urgent need for more inclusion of racial and ethnic practitioners, particularly in urban-based settings. Jones, Hopson, and Gomes (2012) provide rationale for this need in the social work workforce. They contend that “social work interventions are best applied when tailored to meet the specific needs of the target population” (p. 37). Therefore, the urgency to prepare culturally competent workers to meet this need is imperative as the U.S. demographics continue to change.

The Center for Workforce Studies (2006) reports that 84 percent of Master of Social Workers (MSWs) practice in metropolitan areas, while only 2 percent practice in rural areas. This is a significant observation meriting serious consideration in light of compelling evidence that race and ethnicity correlate with persistent, and often increasing health and
mental health disparities among U.S. populations (Kawachi, Daniels, & Robinson, 2005). Culturally and ethnic competence has been identified as a need for social workers in light of the discrepancy between the demographic makeup of clients and the current social work labor force (Gilberman, 2005). Cultural competency connects the relationship of culturally appropriate communication to provision of best care practices. Hence, the profession of social work recognizes the importance of preparing social workers to provide culturally appropriate services to these diverse populations (NASW, 2011). To better understand and accept diverse cultures in a global society, social workers must recognize the social, political, and economic elements in the context of lived experiences of a larger cultural community.

Schlein’s (2009) work speaks of the cross-cultural gap in educational settings that exists between mostly Caucasian, middle-class, English-speaking teacher populations and the increasing number of culturally and linguistically pluralistic students (p. 163). This cross-cultural divide also exists in the professional field of social work where nationally, 89 percent of Master social workers in behavioral health are non-Hispanic white, 4 percent are Black/African-American, 3 percent Hispanic/Latino, and 1 percent Asian/Pacific Islander (Center for Health Workforce Studies, 2006). Many social service and healthcare professionals are challenged when it comes to engaging in culturally appropriate communication, particularly when working with diverse populations that differ from their own (Rothman, 2008; Sue, 2010). Some social workers have not been trained to be culturally responsive to diverse others, in part due to the dominant Eurocentric approach to social work practice.

Cultural competency remains a major concern for social work practitioners (Guy-Walls, 2007; NASW, 2011). Social workers need the required training and abilities that
prepare them to effectively communicate with diverse populations. Equally significant is the social work profession, as a whole, regards the helping process as a primary modality of change agency. This process invariably consists of the therapeutic relationship between client and social worker co-constructing and establishing a culturally appropriate alliance that works toward desired change. The client/therapist relationship is considered the “primary tool used for change” (Edwards & Bess, 1998, p. 89). Additionally, Edwards and Bess report that “the presence of the therapist’s personhood is a natural and essential ingredient in the establishment of an effective therapeutic alliance” (p. 93).

Therefore, a key component in providing culturally responsive service delivery is the social work practitioner’s own self. The idea portrays the social worker as the “instrument” to promote change in client systems with the idea that the self can affect the development of an effective helping relationship (Heydt & Sherman, 2005, p. 25). Thus, the notion of use of self as an agent of change was explored in this study through the theoretical paradigms of cultural competency and multiculturalism, with particular focus on how personal values, beliefs, and attitudes, along with acquired knowledge, skills, and education, might influence the goal of providing culturally responsive care, specifically in diverse urban communities. Social work standards emphasize the importance of being self-aware and having the skills and knowledge to effectively relate to and work with diverse populations. The social worker’s use of self provides the forum for such professional expectations. Personal values, beliefs, and attitudes can potentially influence the expected outcomes of mandated social work standards.
Problem Statement

The Surgeon General dispensed a groundbreaking report in 2001 revealing the high level of unequal treatment and health care disparities in the United States toward people of color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). According to Davis (2007), clients of color in mental health experience greater prejudice from therapists, have higher dropout rates from services, and acquire fewer positive outcomes due to practitioners. Additionally, the shift from hospital-based settings to varying community-based health care environments has further contributed to the need to rethink treatment approaches that promote greater cultural alignment with these diverse communities (Wells, 2010). Although efforts have been made over the past two decades by researchers and clinicians to reduce disparities, the problem continues to exist (Kohn-Wood & Hooper, 2014). Therefore, social workers and other health care providers still face the need to improve service delivery to the changing demographic populations in the U.S due to racial and ethnic disparities (Kohn-Wood & Hooper, 2014).

Many social service and healthcare professionals interact with poor, urban communities of color and are challenged in engaging in culturally appropriate communication, particularly when working with diverse individuals unlike themselves (Wells, 2012). Differences in customs, languages, beliefs, values, and worldviews can impede culturally appropriate treatment when consideration of these factors go unaddressed. Moreover, those most vulnerable are often the clients to whom social workers provide service, and many of them live in urban-based environments (Davis, 2007; Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). Further, Gilgun and Abrams (2002) state:
Persons who are social work’s constituencies—children who have been maltreated, poor people of color, homeless families, persons with mental illness and frail elderly, among many others—are typically disenfranchised and excluded from the political system. Their voices are routinely suppressed within the many arenas in which their fates are debated and shaped—public opinion, the mass media, legislatures, and sometimes even social service agencies. (p. 42)

Social workers who are not culturally competent may not provide equitable and culturally relevant care (Davis, 1997; Heydt & Sherman, 2005; Lu, Lum & Chen, 2001; Sue, 1992, 2010). Given the changing landscape of the U.S. with increased population growth of many racial, ethnic and linguistic groups, social workers who are not culturally responsive in client engagement can hinder the helping process with diverse populations. Based on the gravity of this challenge, there is an urgent need to delve more deeply into determining ways for social workers to become more culturally responsive. This research explored how the use of self-concept can be an effective change agency tool as described through the lens of urban-based social work practitioners.

**Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Maxwell (2013) describes the purpose of a conceptual framework as an innovative way to integrate various components into an interacting whole. This integration process can help the researcher assess his or her own personal experiences and beliefs, as well as consider important theories, preliminary studies, research and literature about the issues, settings and people to be studied (p. 4). Although different worldviews exist among researchers and the audiences they want to reach, the notions of epistemology (study of knowledge acquisition) and ontology (the study of reality) are common variables to all (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell (2009) defines worldview as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p. 6). He also states, “post positivist assumptions impose structural laws and theories that do not fit
marginalized individuals in our society or address issues of social justice” (pp. 9-10). As the researcher, I concur with Creswell’s perspective and therefore intentionally chose a stance of subjectivity rather than subscribing to the notion of objectivity for this study. Piantanida and Garman (2009) echo this rationale with their statement: “The capacity of humans to make meaning of life events and to exercise a sense of agency in their lives is not considered a confounding variable to be controlled through research procedures” (p. 50).

Additionally, to broaden this theoretical framework, the research study moved beyond these stated philosophical traditions by including epistemologies that seek to heighten ethnic sensitivity and awareness of people of color (Banks, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The conceptual framework derived from core competencies mandated by The Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) and from the National Association of Social Work Standards on Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and adopted by the NASW Board of Directors on June 23, 2001 (NASW, 2001). The NASW identifies ten essential standards to create a framework that provides culturally responsive service to differing cultural and ethnic populations: (1) ethics and values; (2) self-awareness; (3) cross-cultural knowledge; (4) cross-cultural skills; (5) service delivery; (6) empowerment and advocacy; (7) diverse workforce; (8) professional education; (9) language diversity; and (10) cross-cultural leadership.

All content in this critical document is applicable toward achieving culturally competent practice at every level of social work education and practice for the purpose of this study. I have carefully analyzed and selected five specific standards that are most relevant to the use of self phenomenon related to this study: Standard 2: Self-Awareness;

These standards are core dimensions for multicultural education that guided the rudiments of this study and focused on the use of self concept in professional social work practice. Saleebey (2009) describes a perspective “as a standpoint, a way of viewing and understanding certain aspects of experience. It is a lens through which we choose to perceive and appreciate. It provides us with a slant on the world built of words and principles” (p. 15). The following perspectives were used as paradigmatic underpinnings in this study.

**Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is a positionality that rejects “the very notion of an inherent human nature existing across persons,” but rather emphasizes how “contextual, linguistic, and relational factors combine to determine the kinds of human beings that people will become and how their views of the world develop” (Raskin, 2002, p. 9). All knowledge is believed to be negotiated within a given context and time frame between people. The social constructionist perspective emphasizes reality viewed as dependent on how groups of people collectively describe their ideas and the unlimited ways realities can be socially constructed (Raskin, 2002).

The sense of self is one of the primary aspects of this socially constructed reality perspective. From a constructionist paradigm, the social worker’s personal and professional use of self encompasses a contextual interdependent mix of intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, cultural, and societal dimensions (Froggett, Ramvi, & Davies, 2015).

This perspective is referring to one’s *intrapersonal* (interaction within one’s self), *interperson* (interaction with others), institutional (schooling and formal systemic structures),
cultural (one’s own way of being as related to cultural norms and lifestyles) and societal dimensions (influences from the society at large, including media and politics), all of which contribute to the composition of “self.” In relation to multicultural, urban-based practice, it is important for social workers to be aware of the magnitude of issues in urban life, and be knowledgeable, willing, and able to co-construct culturally appropriate interventions based on this reality (Delgado, 2000).

Social constructionists emphasize the “primacy of relational, conversational, and social practices as the source of individual psychic life” (Stam, 1998, p. 199). This is conducive to social work practice with diverse populations, as it gives voice to both the client and the therapist in a co-construction of reality for the individual client. Equally significant, social constructionism is considered useful for understanding non-dominant and oppressed groups in a non-marginalized manner (Hutchinson, 2003; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Chanda, 2006).

The social constructionism theory undergirded this study as the philosophical and epistemological premise. Ringel (2003) puts forth the significance of two social constructionist principles regarding the use of self. First, meaning is derived through unique encounters due to many ways of knowing that are experienced interpersonally; and secondly, self-reflection is integral to clinical practice, suggesting that knowledge is built more upon direct experiences in therapy rather than theoretical models. This postmodern theory of social constructionism aligns well with the exploration of the use of self because it emphasizes how contextual, linguistic, and relational factors intertwine to determine the way people are and how their worldviews develop (Raskin, 2002). Thus, social constructionism, along with the self-reflexivity interpretative perspective, sufficiently supported the research project’s
intention to explore the said phenomenon contextually through multiculturalism and cultural competency frameworks.

**Self-reflexivity**

Reflective practice is “the ability to work across differing worldviews without promoting oppressive practices or sacrificing one’s commitment to his or her own worldview” (Adamowich, Kumsa, Rego, Stoddart, & Vito, 2014, p. 141). Kondrat (1999) delineates reflective awareness from reflexive awareness, distinguishing reflective as “awareness of a self who is experiencing something” as opposed to reflexive, which is “the self’s awareness of how his or her awareness is constituted in direct experience” (p. 451).


Reflective and reflexive perspectives are implicitly accepted and considered essential for competent social work practice (Kondrat, 1999). Self-reflection calls attention to the thinking and rethinking process that encourages reflective practice, which is particularly beneficial when working with diverse clients and cultural influences (Ruch, 2002). Lee and Greene (1999) maintain that reflexivity is heightened in clinical social work that occurs in multicultural communities where differing values and norms often are presented.

Of particular importance is the social worker’s interpersonal role as change agent, which bears an expectation to competently enhance the therapeutic relationship. Therefore, in social work practice, being self-aware and having self-understanding plays a major role in how the practitioner reacts to different people and social issues (Chow et al., 2011, p. 142). The self-reflexivity theory points to individuals within the context of critical introspection and understanding of their own human capacity. Additionally, it beckons one to consider the
reciprocal relationship between the inner self and the socio-cultural container of experience (Finlay, 2002; Longhofer & Floersch, 2012). These authors further demonstrate how self-reflection and the social constructionist perspectives align to the concept of use of self when stating that “reflective thinking on one’s contributions to the clinical encounter, and the ability to be flexible, spontaneous, and creative seem to be inherent in the social constructionist model” (p. 18).

Three considerations of reflective practice in social work as outlined by Ruch (2002) are: (1) the centrality of self (with its acknowledgement and integration of rational, intellectual understanding and emotional awareness); (2) the recognition that anxiety is acceptable; and (3) the belief that talking (on both rational and affective levels) is essential (p. 211). Each of these points connects to the use of self phenomenon and the relevance of self-reflexive practice in social work. Thus, both the social constructionist and self-reflexivity paradigms were useful in the concept of use of self as they provided a viable mechanism through which the social worker might consciously explore self-awareness within the context of otherness.

This qualitative, phenomenological case study examined how social workers perceive their use of self as change agents in service delivery to diverse populations. Schwandt (2007) defines phenomenology as a complex, multifaceted philosophy that defies simple characterization because it is not a single unified philosophical standpoint. He further explains that phenomenologists insist on careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life, known as the lifeworld (p. 225). The use of self concept aligns with this phenomenological stance. The notion also parallels with the descriptive focus of a phenomenological qualitative approach in that it seeks to understand the essence of an
experience (Creswell, 2013). By looking at the phenomenon through the lens of social workers’ own perceptions, I, as researcher, sought to elicit a better understanding of how social work practitioners describe using their use of self as a change agency tool in urban-based practice settings.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological case study was to understand social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agents in the provision of culturally responsive care in urban-based practice settings. This study sought to examine how social workers describe their use of self with diverse populations and to explore their perceptions of factors that may be contributors or barriers to culturally responsive service delivery. The aim of this research is to benefit practice and societal change because of the dire need for more qualified and culturally responsive social workers.

The National Association of Social Workers cites in its Code of Ethics the commitment to “promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally” (NASW, 2000, Code of Ethics, Section 6.04). This case study aspired to contribute to this ethical commitment in order to improve the practice orientation of social workers. Additionally, the research sought to advance societal change that promotes culturally responsive service delivery in social work settings, specifically located within urban communities. My motivation as researcher was to contribute the findings of what is learned to the social work literature and propose recommendations that will engender more effective change agency with diverse clients through the use of self concept in educational venues, community social service organizations, and healthcare facilities.
**Methodological Overview**

This phenomenological case study explored social workers’ perceptions of their use of self in urban-based social work practice. The qualitative traditions of phenomenology and case study were the methodological framework used for the study. The theoretical framework consisted of The Cultural Competence and Multiculturalism perspectives with supporting interpretive theories of self-reflexivity and social constructionism as paradigmatic underpinnings. Six social workers participated in the research effort through purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling. The sampling tools used were the invitational email to participate in the study and the pre-participant assessment instrument that was used to help determine eligibility. The data sources included semi-structured, in-depth interviews, reflexive field notes, and the analysis of the Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice document. The primary data analysis method was transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and all audio-taped interviews were transcribed for data analysis. According to Grbich (2013), “phenomenology is an approach that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these” (p. 92). This methodological approach incorporated these processes and provided significant data that served to enrich the research study.

**Research Questions**

This study investigated the overarching research question: What are social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agents? There were four sub-questions:

(a) How do social workers perceive their use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency?
(b) How do social workers describe their professional preparedness to work with diverse populations?

(c) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to hindering or impeding culturally responsive service delivery?

(d) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to helping or facilitating culturally responsive service delivery?

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to better understand the dynamics of cultural competence perceptions of social work practitioners and their utilization of use of self in urban-based practice settings. This is important because social workers who are not culturally competent may not provide equitable and culturally relevant care (Davis, 1997; Lu et al., 2001; Sue, 1992). Kondrat (1999) highlights the importance of social workers being able to reflectively self-examine their own narratives and the stories they tell themselves about self while interacting with clients. The significance of this study was predicated upon the notion that cultural competence in social work is an expectation and goal within the profession. By gaining social workers’ own interpretations of use of self, other professionals in the field may be able to glean helpful knowledge that will lead to increased culturally responsive care in direct practice application. Incorporating the use of self concept in acquisition of necessary knowledge, skills, and training may possibly contribute to increased cultural competence in multicultural social work practice.

This study served as a vehicle to gather data that reflects challenges, benefits, and awareness social workers experience as they attempt to provide culturally competent service delivery by using the self as a change agency tool. Social work students, educators, and
practitioners who work in multicultural settings located within predominately urban vicinities may find this research most relevant. Social work students may find the data helpful in preparing to work with diverse populations. According to Lee and Greene (2003), one of the major challenges social work educators face is preparing social work students to effectively practice in a multicultural society. Bender, Negi and Fowler (2010) state that schools of social work have a major responsibility to prepare graduate students to be culturally responsive in their future practice (p. 35). This makes it relevant for educators who bear the responsibility of teaching and preparing future social workers. The relevancy for practitioners is to gain better understanding of the nature of cultural responsiveness in their direct care practice settings.

Dewees (2001) points out that scholars in social work emphasize the critical need for social work practitioners to have an understanding of their own values and positionality in order to provide culturally responsive practice. Multicultural social work competence embeds the worker with self-transformation through the genuine use of self. Howard (2006) writes that developing multicultural competence engages the genuine use of self, which includes authenticity, compassion/empathy, honesty, transformative thinking, and action.

It is my hope that the findings shared from this research effort will help further the discussion globally on social work cultural competence through the practitioner’s use of self as a change instrument. Most cultural competence models focus on cultural competence as a process within systemic environments, such as society and the workplace. Concentration is primarily toward organizational and structural dynamics that impede service delivery to people of color. This focus is needed—in fact—essential; however, the individual
responsibility to cultural competence should also be examined more thoroughly in an evolving multicultural world.

**Definitions of Terms**

For the purposes of this research study, the following terms are conceptually defined from composites in literature and my professional collective experience of ten years in the field of social work education and practice.

**Social worker**: Change agents who work with a wide variety of client populations in a vast array of settings, engaging in both micro and macro practice in order to address social problems to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people (Ritter, Vakalahi, & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

**Use of Self**: The notion of the “genuine use of self” is often referred to as a social worker’s most effective tool in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, collectively known in the profession as “clients” according to the NASW Code of Ethics (1999). Heydt and Sherman (2005) state that the concept of “conscious use of self” is a term defining the social worker as the “instrument” purposely used to promote change with client systems. Lietchty (2005) defines use of self as “the ultimate integration of practice and theory—embodied in the person of the social worker and enacted in the social worker-client relationship” (p. 113).

**Urban**: Delgado (2000) refers to urban as “a geographic entity (the inner city) consisting of sub-areas with high concentration of undervalued groups with social problems” (p. 19). The literature describes urban as economically disadvantaged, inner city neighborhoods (Chovanec, 2014; Nugent, Koenen, & Bradley, 2012; Smith & Patton, 2016; Van Soest & Bryant, 1995). However, for this study, I chose to use the U.S. Census Bureau’s
(2010) definition that an urban area is a nucleus of 50,000 or more people; a cluster containing a core population density of 1,000 persons per square mile.

**Culturally responsive care**: Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively.” This definition aptly applies to social work as well. Thus, an adapted, modified version of Gay’s definition will be used in this study as follows: “culturally responsive social workers use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse clients as conduits for providing effective helping services that meets the clients’ needs in culturally appropriate ways” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

**Cultural competence**: T. L. Cross’ (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989) definition of cultural competency has become one of the most widely accepted in the literature and adopted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2000, p. 61). Cross defines cultural competence as:

> A set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program, or among individuals that enables people to work effectively across cultures. It refers to the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services, as well as staff who are providing such services. Cultural competence is a dynamic, ongoing, developmental process that requires a long-term commitment and is achieved over time. (p. 13)

**Reflective practice**: “the ability to work across differing worldviews without promoting oppressive practices or sacrificing one’s commitment to his or her own worldview” (Adamowich et al., 2014, p. 141).

**Reflexive practice**: “the self’s awareness of how his or her awareness is constituted in direct experience” (Kondrat, 1999, p. 451).
Social constructionism: A positionality that rejects “the very notion of an inherent human nature existing across persons,” but rather emphasizes how “contextual, linguistic, and relational factors combine to determine the kinds of human beings that people will become and how their views of the world develop” (Raskin, 2002, p. 9). All knowledge is believed to be negotiated within a given context and time frame between people.

Multicultural education: Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Banks and Banks (2013) describe multicultural education as “an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process” (p. 3).

CSWE: Council of Social Work Education, recognized as the sole accreditation body of governance for all levels of professional social work education (Council of Social Work Education, 2015).

NASW: National Association of Social Workers, deemed the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world working to enhance professional growth, create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound, social policy (National Association of Social Workers, 2011).

EPAS: Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master’s Social Work Programs that support academic excellence by establishing thresholds for professional competence (Council of Social Work Education, 2015).

Limitations of the Study

As researcher in this study, I identified two potential threats to the validity and reliability that may be considered weaknesses and liabilities: (1) the accuracy of the data to
be captured; and (2) the interpretation of events as seen through the researcher’s lens (bias). According to Lincoln and Denzin (2003), all writings reflect the particular standpoint of the inquirer/author. They further stated that all texts arrive shaped implicitly or explicitly by the social, cultural, class and gendered location of the author. Richards and Morse (2007) point out that the researcher’s experience will surely affect the research. They maintain the important question to ask is, “how do you monitor and account for the ways your values, beliefs, culture, and even physical limitations affect the process and quality of data?” (p. 125). To answer that question, I utilized bracketing as a mechanism to separate personal experiences from that of others in the proposed study. In phenomenological research, researchers bracket all a priori knowledge about the topic by writing their assumptions, knowledge and expectations (Richards & Morse, 2007). Additionally, member checking was used to ensure against personal biases in the research process.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Institutional Review Board regulates ethical procedures to protect voluntary research participants. These mandates include: do no harm, avoid deception, negotiate informed consent, and ensure privacy and confidentiality (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracey, 2010). The Belmont Report’s (1979) regulations require the researcher to honor the autonomy of participants, acknowledging their own capacity to deliberate and act upon their personal goals in the research process. All participants in this study were made aware of their rights to know and understand the nature and potential consequences of their voluntary participation through informed consent (Tracey, 2010).
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review was to expand on the rationale of this study, which investigated how social workers describe their use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency. This chapter reviewed scholarly contributions from the literature pertaining to the use of self concept and examined critical elements of social work education and practice deemed relevant to the exploratory efforts in this research. The emphasis of this literature review was to provide exemplary content related to the phenomenon with deliberate attention given to interdisciplinary contributions from the professional fields of social work, education, healthcare, psychology, and sociology.

Four primary strands of literature supported this dissertation study: (1) a historical premise of the use of self concept; (2) the social constructionist self defined (i.e., the use of self in 21st century social work practice); (3) professional preparedness for critical multicultural social work education and practice (including cultural competence frameworks, curriculum theories, and research for multicultural social work); and (4) the use of self for culturally responsive client engagement and change agency (consisting of key intrapersonal components of use of self—personal awareness, attitudes, beliefs and values; cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and training; cross-cultural conceptions for social work; and barriers and bridges to culturally responsive service).

**A Historical Premise of the Use of Self Concept**

The use of self has its roots in early social work beginning with Jane Addams, one of the most influential leaders in social work before it became professionalized (Ritter,
Addams founded the Hull House in Chicago in the 1890s, the first settlement that provided a variety of services to immigrants who were living in deplorable situations and plagued with such problems as discrimination, inadequate schools, crowded living conditions, and unclean environments (Ritter et al., 2009; Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008). Hull House was situated within that community in order to serve as advocating voices for those who lived in these oppressive conditions. This effort by Jane Addams launched the Settlement House movement to help provide services and advocacy for immigrants of the day and those who were poor (Connelly et al., 2008, p. 447; Ritter, Vakalahi, & Kiernan-Stern, 2009).

Prior to settlement homes, the American Charity Organizations was initially formed to help those with severe social problems (Ritter et al., 2009). Additionally, the Christian protestant movement influenced this general concept in seeking to fix those considered broken in society through religious and moral transformations efforts. Scholars disagree as to whether the “social gospel” movement emerged as a response to North American societal developments, from a socially conscious moment in history, or the internal dynamic of Christianity (Herrick & Stuart, 2005, p. 338). The use of self and the notion of self are historically and culturally specific concepts rooted in specific philosophical and disciplinary orientations (Adamowich, et al., 2014, p. 131). Freud’s work influenced the formulation of the self in psychoanalysis around the concept of countertransference, which has underpinned the understanding of use of self as referenced in clinical social work practice (Adamowich et al., 2014, p. 132).

Other pertinent historical events that led to this non-verbalized use of self occurred during the 1930s and 1940s when Otto Rank’s work evolved out of Freud’s classical theory,
propelling functionalist workers to argue against the idea that human behavior was prone to the dictates of diagnosis (Ritter et al., 2009). By this time, workers referred to themselves as active collaborators and participants with their clients as relational beings and not as detached clinical observers. Casework began to dominate the field of social work, in part due to the seminal research and writing of Mary Richmond’s *Social Diagnosis* (1917) and the various psychiatric related wartime experiences (Herrick & Stuart, 2005). The initial efforts involved the additional role of a therapeutic and public mental health provider (Bisno, 1956; Flexner, 1915; Herrick & Stuart, 2005; Lee, 1929; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

By the 1980s, social work practice was regulated by the states, with most requiring licensure and the obtainment of a higher education degree, minimally a baccalaureate education, and increasingly since the 1990s a master’s or doctorate degree has become either necessary or desired (Herrick & Stuart, 2005). A critical shift in social work function as a profession occurred in 1996 when the Clinton administration reformed the federal-state public assistance program for families and children, setting time restraints and work requirements (Herrick & Stuart, 2005). This evolution of social work as a profession has at its origin the concept of use of self, albeit non-concretely formulated.

Other professions in the social sciences, such as nursing and psychology, also use the term, use of self and its alternate phrases, therapeutic use of self, conscious use of self, and genuine use of self in similar fashion as social work, broadly referring to it as an assessment process that the worker employs to evaluate the extent to which his or her personal characteristics, values, and practice affect interaction with others (Freshwater, 2002; Kwiatek, McKenzie, & Loads, 2005). Use of self has been referred to as “a core component” in the relational-centered activities rendered in social work practice and as a central part of
professional training and supervision (Ramsay, 2003). However, Mandell (2008) contends that of late, the construct of use of self in social work appears to have considerably diminished in light of current trends that move away from the individual worker’s personhood.

With the advent of evidence-based trends in social work literature, a de-emphasis on the use of self as a professional practice competency has occurred (Butler, Ford, & Tregaskis, 2007; Deal, 1997; Dewane, 2006; Ringel, 2003). A reliability and validity study was conducted by Anderson, Sanderson, & Košutić with 375 therapists using the Therapist Use-of-Self Orientation Questionnaire (TUSO-Q), which revealed three orientations: Transpersonal, Contextual and Instrumental (2011). They define the therapist’s use-of-self orientation as “a representational system comprised of attitudes, beliefs, and values that influence the stance the therapist takes in-relation-to his or her clients” (p. 366). Further they surmise that the worldview the therapist holds influences their use-of-self orientation, prompting clinical approach choices that align with their “primary use-of-self orientation” (p. 366). Additionally, Jamieson, Shechtman, and Auron (2010) believe that “Who we are” always goes with us into each of our roles and situations” (p. 5). Larrison (2009) sternly warns, “This devaluation of the self of the practitioner highlights a disturbing trend within the discipline” (p. 18). She further notes how multiple researchers argue that this 21st century’s focus on evidence-based human service provision has contributed to diminishing the critical relational components central to effective social work practice (Polkinghorne, 2004; Ringel, 2003).

Theoretical trends toward evidence-based practice has relegated the importance of a holistic and relational perspective to a lesser space that deemphasizes the contextual use of
self and rather hones in on a more prescriptive and technical-based approach (Butler et al., 2007; Deal, 1997; Dewane, 2006; Larrison, 2009; Ringel, 2003).

The Social Constructionist Self Defined

The use of self has been called the conscious use of self, the genuine use of self, and the therapeutic use of self (Adamowich et al., 2014; Seaton, 2003; Wosket, 1999). This concept involves putting into practice one’s personal characteristics with the intention of influencing the client in the therapeutic process (Wosket, 1999). Lietchty (2005) defines use of self as “the ultimate integration of practice and theory—embodied in the person of the social worker and enacted in the social worker-client relationship” (p. 113). Before use of self can be discussed fully, the term, self needs to be defined more clearly as it relates to social work practitioners and students in this study. Ironically, defining the self in the literature presents an arduous task, as many theorists continue to assign multifaceted meanings from varying perspectives, including philosophical, psychological, cognitive science and psychoanalytical (Chadha, 2011; Higgins, 1987; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Linville, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Wosket, 1999).

Self in the U.S. often refers to an autonomous and self-determining individual possessing a personality that interacts with others out of one’s own sense of choice and free will (Okun, Fried, & Okun, 1999). In other cultures, self exists in relationship to others and usually carries some role identity and expectation that has little or no connection to one’s personality as viewed in Western societies (Okun et al., 1999). Geertz (1986, cited in Okun et al., 1999) states:

The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both
against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however, incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures. (p. 126)

Use of self is a concept that is universally accepted yet remains equally ambiguous and has a vague theoretical definition (Dewane, 2006). The framework of psychodynamic theories has been the primary backdrop for the use of self in clinical social work literature (Dewane, 2006). Dewane (2006) suggests that by describing the use of self from a behavioral stance and delineating an operational definition can yield a theoretical definition. To define this melding process has been difficult to describe and may even diminish the uniqueness of each self (Edwards & Bess, 1998). Warren and Rosenberg (2004) explain that the self contains many sources of personal standards. Since the early 1980s, social psychologists inspired by James and Mead have theorized the self as a multifaceted entity containing several representations of actual and desired self-images (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Rosenberg, 1997). Based upon the wide range of self definitions and the preponderance of its usage, Moustakas’ (1956) definition seems most aligned to the social constructionist context for this study:

The self is not its symbol or external behavior. The self is itself alone existing as a totality and constantly emerging. It can be understood only as unique personal experience…. The self is undifferentiated in time and space. It is being, moving, undivided from the world of nature or the social world. (pp. 3-4)

Canda, Robins, and Chatterjee (2012) further expand upon Moustakas’ meaning with a phenomenological approach to viewing the self, deeming it a conscious ongoing process that is focused on the “intentionality of consciousness” that examines the conscious-subject as well as the practical methods (such as language) used to identify or display its essence, a never static process that consciously creates and recreates to give self-meaning through
accounts, descriptions, assumptions and common sense-knowledge (p. 328). The nature of the self is often described as

a consequence of either social and cultural forces (such as social structure, social organization, roles, norms, and values) or a consequence of internal forces (such as id impulses, ego strivings, attachment needs, or genetically transmitted personality traits). (Canda et al., 2012, p. 328)

The social constructionist self approaches practice with a stance of not knowing, recognizing that social work practice itself is an ongoing, fluid process that consists of mutual interchange between the client and themselves. The use of self from a social constructionist perspective employs an intentional focus to view practice with different others from a contextual understanding of their lived experiences (Hutchison, 2008; Robbins et al., 2006). The use of self is often referred to as a social worker’s most effective tool in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities, collectively known in the profession as “clients” (NASW, 1999, p. 1).

Yet, the actual measure of what this really looks like in real lived experiences poses a challenge due to the individualized uniqueness of characteristics that accompany this phenomenon and how it does not lend itself to a standard, operational method of assessment or achievement. Although the use of self is primarily considered a social work concept, various meanings of its use exist in the literature. For example, Cournoyer (2000) refers to the worker’s self as a filter or medium, explaining that “because social work practice involves the conscious and deliberate use of oneself, you become the medium through which knowledge, attitudes, and skill are conveyed” (p. 35). Similarly, others describe a social worker’s self in terms of an instrument, like a carpenter’s use of a hammer (Heydt &
Sherman, 2005). These theorists argue that the social worker is the primary instrument or tool to facilitate change (Elliott, 2000; Heydt & Sherman, 2005).

The Use of Self in 21st Century Professional Social Work Practice

Cournoyer (2000) distinguishes that competent social workers of the 21st century integrate the following characteristics of professionalism throughout all aspects of their service: “integrity, professional knowledge and self-efficacy; critical thinking and lifelong learning; self-understanding and self-control; cultural competence and acceptance of others; social support” (p. 6). The use of self implies that one is authentic in their communication with others. Vannini and Williams (2009) describe authenticity as “feeling something with honesty, integrity and vitality and to express in one’s life the truth of one’s personal insights and discoveries” (p. 243). Social workers that consider the personal and professional self holistically can perhaps, ponder what they have to offer based on their strengths rather than their weaknesses (Reupert, 2007).

Garfat and Charles (2006) contend that in recent times the nature of the worker’s self has been an evident concern. A move toward reflective practice has occurred in the profession, and the exploration of the self has become “central to the effective helping process in all aspects of the system from service design to delivery” (Garfat & Charles, 2006, p. 7). In his book, Social Selves: Theories of Self and Society, Ian Burkitt (2007) states that all people are born into a place and time they have no control over and into a social relations network they did not choose:

Each of us is born into a society composed of social relations that bear the imprint of a power structure including a hierarchy of social classes or other groupings according to rank and status, along with a culture with its beliefs and values, such as religion, or other bodies of knowledge, like science. The position into which we are born as an individual—our family, neighborhood, social contacts, social class, gender, ethnicity
and the beliefs and values, in which we are educated—will put a sizable imprint on the self we become. (p. 3; italics by researcher)

Consideration of these factors that contribute to the self a social worker is becoming are important to think about in a reflective practice process. Personal evaluation and understanding of one’s own composition can help social workers recognize how cultural influences impact not only their lives, but also the diverse lives of those they serve, thereby increasing cultural sensitivity. The individual is comprised of multiple self-identities within societal life. Social workers, like other human beings, are not separate from these relational factors. We are born into a society that already exists, and we become socialized through shared cultural norms and behaviors in that society, predominately by our experiences. John Dewey (1938) argues that an experience is a “moving force.” According to Dewey, every experience both takes up something from those that have gone before, and modifies in some way the quality of those that come after. This fluid process and changing wave of growth is termed “continuity of experience” and serves to transition us without perceived abruptions as we move between our experiences (Dewey, 1938). Thus, we are not separate from our previous experiences, history, knowledge, and attitudes. Nor are we detached from the historical foundations that have and continue to influence the changing landscape of societal life on a personal and professional level. Dewey (1938) asserts that we are adding to or building upon what currently exists and what existed previously.

Viewing cultural competency from the inward perspective of the genuine use of self in the 21st century encourages the social work professional to explore these factors within his or her own practice, particularly with diverse others. Who we are is largely comprised of what we believe and value, which also includes our physical, emotional, psychological, and
spiritual makeup. The composition of individuality uniquely sets the framework for our differences, even within the parameters of our cultural commonalities. Our individuality connects us to the self. The use of self can thus become a tool that affects positive change, particularly when the social work value that promotes “human well-being” is contextually applied. The 2001 Preamble to the NASW Code of Ethics provides the rationale for such internal contemplation and self-reflection:

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty. (NASW, 2001, p. 9)

These fundamental guidelines promote not only the skills and knowledge acquisition of the social work professional, but also the important asset of empathy and a culturally responsive caring ethic when engaging with diverse clients. These principles may be actualized through one’s own sense of self, consciously implementing a commitment to social and economic justice for vulnerable and oppressed populations.

Very few empirical studies in the literature addressing the use of self in social work practice and education have been conducted. Larrison (2009) points out recent studies on the topic that include an exploration of Australian practitioners’ perceptions of their use of self in therapeutic practice through in-depth interviews with six participants (Reupert, 2007); educator definitions of use of self through focus group interviews of BSW faculty (Liechty, 2005); and an examination of the development learning processes of one cohort of MSW students in understanding their use of self by utilizing a mixed methods design (Deal, 1997). In fact, Liechty’s (2005) research revealed that only a small number of studies have focused on the professional self and its development in MSW students, and no research was located
regarding the professional self and its development in BSW students. She states: “While theoretical literature has explored the meaning of use of self from various perspectives, there has been virtually no research exploring the use of self for or with MSW or BSW students” (p. 12).

Additionally, Larrison (2009) points out that her review of the literature found very few empirical studies that address use of self as a phenomenon within social work education and practice (p. 27). Further, she states:

For the most part, research has been limited to exploratory studies and gaining knowledge about the phenomenon from specific sub-sets of participants. These studies sought to define use of self and aimed to understand how use of self is utilized in practice. No studies to date have regarded how use of self is understood, experienced, and developed through the teaching-learning processes and interrelational transactions within a social work program. (p. 27)

No studies were located by the researcher that focused on the use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency in urban-based social work practice. The need still exists in the profession to examine the use of self and how the social work practitioner is using his or her self to provide culturally appropriate care; this is further rationale for the present research study.

The examination process often begins in the educative realm. For example, Froggett, Ramvi, and Davies (2015) developed a professional education course for social work students on the use of self and contend that the concept serves as an alternative to positivist evidence-based practice, which has become a focal point over the past 30 years. Further, they note a renewed interest through constructivism to rehabilitate the use of self to support empirical research is coming to the forefront in practice. They suggest that the use of self becomes an object of research as well as clinical inquiry, explaining “this would help
develop practice-near research strategies better adapted to the situated helping of the relational professions than a positivist or practice-distance evidence base” (Froggett & Briggs, 2012, as cited by Froggett et al., 2015, p. 135). These researchers assert that the use of self continues to be a viable concept in the client and practitioner relationship as well as the outcomes of the therapeutic process. Social work practitioners are encouraged to remain cognizant that “in practice situations both conscious intentions and unconscious projections influence all parts of the system” (p. 140).

A qualitative research study was conducted that consisted of 10 reflective social work practitioners who carried out in-depth dyadic conversations (Adamowich et al., 2014). Five major themes emerged: (1) Training, (2) Finding Self, (3) Supervision, (4) Tensions in Practice and (5) Institutional Self-Reflection. They concluded that the use of self has not yet disappeared from practice and that it is a viable and malleable concept that practitioners can conform to their specific practice areas (p. 140). The use of self concept interweaves the professional, personal, and practice dimensions of the social worker, connecting him or her to the actualization or lack of ideals of culturally responsive service delivery in 21st century practice. Dewane (2006) points out, “melding the professional self of what one knows (training, knowledge, techniques) with the personal self of who one is (personality traits, belief systems and life experience) is a hallmark of skilled practice” (p. 544). Heydt and Sherman (2006) further expound upon this meshing together of the personal and professional self as they note how the conscious use of self affects the development of effectual helping relationships, the foundational premise in which change agency might occur. Further, they maintain that in order to move toward compliance with the National Association of Social Workers Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (NASW, 2001),
integrating cultural competence in the development of self-awareness through the conscious use of self is crucial (p. 26). Additionally, these authors note that unexamined attitudes, personal habits, and interactional patterns do not enhance the use of self as an agent of change in client relationships.

Consequently, the social worker’s use of self necessitates skillful use of not only the personal self, but also the professional self to espouse equitable and culturally responsive service provision with diverse clients. Shadley’s (2000) study integrated multiple therapists’ definitions of the professional self as “a constantly evolving system, which is changed by the conscious and unconscious interplay of the numerous systems impacting the clinician” (p. 194). Therapists in the study differentiated the personal self from the professional self, but most agreed that the two are essentially intertwined.

Thus, the social worker’s self is significantly connected to who they are as a person and how they provide service delivery as a professional worker. In fact, one study revealed that the personal qualities that social workers bring into their practice are just as important as the techniques and theories they utilize in clinician training and supervision (Reupert, 2007). Self-reflection, personal evaluation, and increased understanding of one’s own self can help in the process of increasing cultural sensitivity. Being self-aware is considered an essential element in the knowledge base of culturally competent practice (O’Hagan, 2001).

Social workers, human service professionals, and educators must be able to see themselves as they are situated within cross-cultural settings. To be willing to examine and re-examine one’s own cultural competence is the initial step to confronting values and beliefs that can hinder multicultural responsiveness toward others. Social workers must be able to adapt to the changing multicultural landscape in which they work. One distinct difference
social workers have from other helping professionals is their responsibility and charge “to understand the importance of situating the subject of difference within the context of larger socio-political-structural forces that exist in every society” (Garran & Werkmeister-Rozas, 2013, p. 99).

The global definition of social work by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) further demonstrates this perspective as it relates to social work education and practice:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (International Federation of Social Workers, 2016, n.p.)

In order to promote community and human wellbeing actualized through one’s own knowing of social work’s purposeful quest for social and economic justice, there must be inclusion of self to advocate, change, and prevent conditions that limit human rights, eliminate poverty and enhance quality of life for all persons. This cannot be accomplished in society without “real” people who are committed to these principles and also recognize their own internal hidden biases, prejudices, values and beliefs that counter their external commitment to effectively implement positive change in the lives of those they serve in direct practice settings. The genuine use of self suggests operating innately from a center of compassionate will that recognizes and honors the cultural narratives of people they serve.
Professional Preparedness for Critical Multicultural Social Work Education and Practice

One of the biggest challenges in social work education is preparing students to work in an increasingly diverse society (Van Soest, Canon, & Grant, 2000, p. 463). Social work educators are confronted with the task of preparing students to work toward transforming “unjust and oppressive social, economic and political institutions into just and non-oppressive alternatives” (Gill, 1998, p. 1). Daniel (2008) contends that although mandated in social work education, little discussion has occurred in multicultural literature about the kinds of knowledge needed to prepare students to work toward ending oppression and other forms of injustice in the actual work.

Guy-Walls (2007) surveyed the effectiveness of a bachelor of social work (BSW) multicultural curricula to see how well students were professionally prepared for multicultural social work practice. Using D’Andrea, Daniels and Heck’s (1991, cited in Guy-Walls, 2007) Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey (MAKSS), they found that senior level social work students were not being sufficiently equipped for culturally responsive practice.

Multicultural social work education is often described in the literature as consisting of three basic components reported in the National Association of Social Workers standards: cultural awareness, cultural-specific knowledge, and skills (Green, 1999; Lum, 2003). Although this approach is heavily emphasized, it is considered a major challenge in regard to being a process of effective teaching. One major reason that seems to counter critical multiculturalism is the mandate’s purpose itself, which states “multicultural education in social work is to increase students’ alternatives for understanding and being accurately
understood within a wide variety of cultures so they can provide culturally competent social work services to clients from diverse backgrounds” (Lee & Greene, 2003, p. 2). Critical multiculturalism entails social justice issues pertaining to racism and oppression that include the broader society as well as in the classroom (Banks & Banks, 2004). This purpose alone, does not address the underlying factors that contribute to social injustice and inequities toward oppressed groups, particularly when students are not prepared to engage in reflexive self-examination without condemnation or guilt.

According to Pope-Davis and Ottavi (1994), research shows that white Americans often do not focus on their sense of belonging to their white ethnic/racial group, nor do they spend much time pondering what it means to be white. Not having a developed ethnic and racial identity or awareness of self can result in potentially problematic situations, as has been indicated as a predictor of students’ levels of confidence and ease in co-constructing a therapeutic relations with diverse clients (Ottavi et al., 1994).

According to Schiele (1996), the majority of human behavior theories that social workers and social scientists are exposed to in the U.S. have originated from a Eurocentric perspective, primarily due to the political and economic hegemony perpetuated over U.S. social institutions by European Americans (p. 286). Schiele (1997) further asserts that the theories and paradigms used in social work practice “almost exclusively emanate from the writings of white intellectuals and practitioners” (p. 802). Daniel’s (2008) research supports Schiele’s discourse on Eurocentric hegemony in social work after her unpublished study with students of color revealed barriers to recruitment and completion of a master’s of social work degree. She states:
Their stories revealed that certain aspects of the professionalization process produced and reproduced race, class, and other forms of inequality. The results also indicated that, for the most part, the multicultural curriculum continues to ignore issues of race and ethnicity and emphasizes the dysfunctional aspects of minority people’s experiences. As one student stated, “There was a lot of frustration about the way clients are discussed. It started to feel like people of color are the only ones that are downtrodden…and have serious problems.” Minority students also suggested that the social work curriculum keeps Eurocentric hegemony alive and promotes a politics of difference that produces and reproduces social inequality. (Daniel, 2008, p. 20)

Some research has occurred to study more about students’ preparation to work with diverse clients. Bender et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore the relationship between self-awareness and graduate level social work students’ commitment and understanding of culturally responsive social work practice using data from a reflection paper assignment (N=23), that asked them to describe their ethnic/racial background and ancestors’ process of assimilation. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, most of whom were female (N=22, 96%) ranging from 25 to 40 years of age. The majority of students identified as white (N=18, 78%), Jewish (N=6, 26%, and a few identifying as Italian, Irish, German, Hungarian, Russian, and English. Two were Latina.

Bender et al.’s findings revealed white students recognized the “many economic, social, and emotional advantages afforded to them due to their race and acceptance into mainstream society” (p. 51). Additionally, students were able to connect this awareness of privilege to social work, acknowledging possible challenges to interacting with diverse ethnic clients in the therapeutic process that included potential feelings of distrust. The study also found that the participants’ exploration of their ethnic/racial roots and identity led to many eye-opening insights related to the development of cultural competence. Self-awareness and understanding of one’s own ethnic and racial identity appear to play a significant role in development of cultural competence in the helping relationship.
The researchers emphasize that having an understanding of how students process their own background as it relates to their work with diverse client systems is particularly relevant to social work educators who are seeking ways to develop students’ cultural responsiveness in the classroom setting. Lum (1999) contends that cultural awareness, knowledge acquisition, skills development, and inductive learning are needed elements for effective cross-cultural social work. He states:

[c]ultural competency includes acceptance of and respect for cultural differences, analysis of one’s own cultural identity and biases, awareness of the dynamics of difference in ethnic clients, and recognition of the need for additional knowledge, research, and resources to work with clients. (p. 29)

Although the Council for Social Work Education’s standards have established mandates to incorporate diversity related content, many social work programs are required only to demonstrate that these materials are visible throughout the curriculum in the foundation level reflected in their syllabi, course titles, or assigned readings to be compliant (Hooyman, 1995). Yet, many educators in social work at both the baccalaureate and masters degree levels have not taken steps to incorporate multicultural content into their actual teachings (Diggs, 1992; Lum, 2007). This is significant because social work practitioner candidates may not be given the opportunity to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for multicultural social work practice.

The Council for Social Work Education (2010) has also observed that most social work programs use various classroom-based measures along with field placement evaluations to measure student competencies (cited in Drisco, 2014). Although the competency-based education movement is less than 25 years old, the majority of the conceptual core components were formulated in the 1970s when the focus was on grade acquisition and
taking tests. Many social work educators rely upon these former concepts and consider students are competent because they get good grades primarily through test taking.

McClelland (1973), a psychologist, disagreed with this approach to determine competency by arguing that this process does not seem to have “much power to predict real competence in many real life outcomes, aside from the advantages that credentials convey on the individuals concerned” (p. 6). McClelland further contends that this occurs because testers “have believed so much that they were testing true competence that they have not bothered to prove that they were” actually competent (p. 6). Subsequently, his pioneering work to define competencies in social work led to a more thorough conceptualization and valid way to test competence (Drisco, 2014). As a result, an increasing body of literature reflects multiple approaches to teaching theories and methods to social work students with the intent of imparting effective practice strategies with diverse populations (Boyle & Springer, 2001; Drabble, Sen, & Oppenheimer, 2012; Krentzman & Townsend, 2008).

The Council on Social Work Education mandates social work curricula prepare students to effectively work cross-culturally with diverse populations to promote social and economic justice (Drabble et al., 2012). Additionally, Drabble et al. (2012) report a broad range of studies using multiple pedagogical frameworks to assess student learning as it relates to cross-cultural social work preparation and education. These include diversity and anti-oppressive strategies (Heron, 2004, Phan et al., 2009; Schmitz, Stakeman, & Sisneros, 2001; van Wormer & Snyder, 2007); critical race theory (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Ortiz & Janis, 2010); empathy and cultural sensitivity approaches (Lu, Dane, & Gellman, 2005); postmodernism (Feldman, Barron, Holliman, Karliner, & Walker, 2009); and cultural competence frameworks that employ social work practice core components of knowledge,
skills, and values (Cordero, 2008; Guy-Walls, 2007; Lee, Brown, & Bertera, 2010; Manoleas, 1994; Steiner, Brzuzy, Gerdes, & Hurdle, 2003). In their study, Drabble et al. (2012) found that introducing and infusing a transcultural model into the social work curriculum supports student learning, despite the limitations they encountered in their research.

One recent qualitative study by Marlowe, Appleton, Chinnery, and Van Stratum (2015) that tracked 15 third-year bachelor level social work students in their first field placement found three primary considerations for social work field education: mindfulness practice, focus on developmental tasks, and the importance of supportive and critical supervision. Further they affirmed the view that students are at different levels in the development stages and therefore have differing amounts of critical awareness, as well as ability to incorporate reflection and reflexivity. Without a holistic framework that includes elements proposed in critical multicultural education, social workers’ awareness, knowledge, and skills may be highly restricted. Perpetuation of the status quo potentially can occur by default, hindering culturally responsive service delivery and care.

**Cultural Competence Frameworks**

Although cultural competency models may differ across various disciplines and professions, three particular tenets of competencies seem apparent within all models: awareness, knowledge, and skills. Some researchers assert that culture serves as the premise for competencies and expand these competency components to include the term “cultural,” connecting it to provide further clarity (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin & Wise, 1994). Moreover, culturally responsive social work expounds on the notion of cultural competence more thoroughly. The rationale for using the term culturally *responsive* rather than culturally
competent is that cultural responsiveness “moves beyond and enhances definitions of cultural competence” (Basham, 2012, p. 453).

Models of competence can assume a static role, whereas a culturally responsive approach seeks to consider the complex intersection of meanings that individuals use to define themselves, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, language of origin, and ability. According to Harrison and Turner (2011), cultural competence has become a major concern in health and social work literature as well as in human resources training and organizational policy. Although the concept of cultural competency is a significant issue, it transmits conflicting understandings due to multiple meanings that are contextually misinterpreted.

Historical underpinnings of cultural competency provide a point of reference to connect the relationship of culturally appropriate communication to the provision of best care practices. The historical movement of multicultural influx is altering the way many people live and how they experience everyday life. While the focus of cultural competency has shifted in past years to include a broader range of these complexities, the primary reason for cultural competency seems to stem from issues about race (Feagin, 2010, p. 29).

Definitions of cultural competency initially included the word “minority” as a reference to non-European ethnic groups. For example, Gallegos (1982, cited in NASW, 2001) defined cultural competency as “procedures and activities to be used in acquiring culturally relevant insights into the problems of minority clients and the means of applying such insights to the development of intervention strategies that are culturally appropriate for these clients” (p. 12).
The literature cites a number of cultural competence models used in social work (Fong & Futuro, 2001, p. 93). Green’s Multietnic Approach uses an ethnographic knowledge base that seeks to understand relevant components of the client’s culture that includes the kinds of behaviors attributed to help-seeking in that specific culture (1998). Green (1998) asserts that cultural competent service delivery largely depends upon the social worker’s understanding about the cultural attitudes towards seeking help and the role of family that the client brings into the therapeutic relationship.

Lum’s Process-Stage Model consists of four components: (1) cultural awareness; (2) knowledge acquisition; (3) skill development; and (4) inductive learning. Lum’s model is considered a practice-oriented approach that has five phases: contact and relationship-building, problem identification, assessment, intervention, and termination (Lum, 2004). These stages include the four cultural competency tenets working together to deliver culturally responsive care to diverse clients. Devore and Schlesinger’s Ethnic-Sensitive Model operates from a broader framework of ethnic sensitivity that focuses on the integration of cross-cultural skills and knowledge, using “layers” of understanding to help practitioners apply ethnic-based knowledge to contribute to cultural competence. A primary consideration in this approach is that the worker recognizes and acknowledges the client’s ethnic reality, which may consist of factors related to poverty, racism, discrimination, and oppression that affect their ability to cope with stressors and access needed resources. Additionally, Devore and Schlesinger (1995) maintain that it is the professional responsibility for the social worker to employ activism, social action and advocacy on behalf of the client.

These models are generally accepted by professionals in social work education and practice and apply to a broad variety of issues and contexts (Rothman, 2008). However, more
recently, three additional cultural competency frameworks have been introduced in professional social work practice and education: The NASW Cultural Competence Framework, The T. L. Cross’ Cultural Competency Model, and Sue’s Microaggression Process Model.

**NASW Cultural Competence Framework.** The concept of cultural competency evolved from the notion of cultural diversity and pertains to differences between people based on shared ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, customs, and meanings associated in a way of life (Wells, 2000). According to the NASW (2001), cultural competency engages a process where social work practitioners, researchers, and agencies encourage respectful and beneficial interaction with all people regardless of individual differences in culture, race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and religion (Bender et al., 2010). The social work profession uses the Cultural Competency Model conceptual framework to enhance education, professional practice, and research. This model has been deemed to present a “culturally sensitive” framework that provides a process by which social work professionals might examine cultural attitudes, values, and beliefs and gain knowledge about diverse cultural populations to develop effective therapeutic interventions (Arredondo et al., 1996).

Conversely, not all researchers agree with the framework that the social work Cultural Competence model uses. The model has been criticized in the literature for categorizing racial and ethnic individuals into distinct cultural classifications primarily based on a person’s skin tone (Bender et al., 2010). These researchers contend that these cultural classifications also rely on the sharing of similar values, traditions, and beliefs. Some early Cultural Competence frameworks emphasized a learning approach to diverse populations by segmenting people into five commonly agreed-upon ethnic identity based categories: African
Americans, Latinos, Asian/Americans, Native Americans, and Anglo Americans (Fong & Furuto, 2001; Okun et al., 1999; Rothman, 2008).

By exclusively recognizing these five racial groups as the foundational cultural diverse population base within the Cultural Competency Model, its exclusionary classifications negate the acknowledgement of differing racial and ethnic minority identities and communities. Ethnic subgroups such as Nigerian, Ethiopian, Haitian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, and many others are often absent within cultural competency’s construction and analysis of cultural groups. As a result, skin tone becomes the most essential characteristic identifying one’s assignment or classification to one of the four cultural groups. White skin tone becomes the physical descriptor used to assign racial and ethnic minorities to distinct classifications of race (Bender et al., 2010).

Williams (2006) suggests that cultural competence might be better defined “by the capacity to work across multiple paradigms to find ways to engage with clients” (p. 209). This approach encompasses a much broader reach of inclusiveness that moves beyond exclusively select diverse groups and acknowledges accepting space for multiple others who are also people of color. Professional social work practice guidelines mandate that workers be culturally competent (Basham, 2012). Multicultural competence involves the attainment of appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable practitioners to provide effective care for diverse populations within care systems as emphasized in The National Association of Social Workers Cultural Competence Indicators (Simmons, Diaz, Jackson, & Takahashi, 2008).

**T. L. Cross’ Cultural Competency Model.** T. L. Cross’ (Cross et al., 1989) definition of cultural competency encompasses a more inclusive position that has become
one of the most widely accepted in the literature and adopted by the National Association of Social Workers (2000). Cross defines cultural competence as:

A set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program, or among individuals that enables people to work effectively across cultures. It refers to the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services, as well as staff who are providing such services. Cultural competence is a dynamic, ongoing, developmental process that requires a long-term commitment and is achieved over time. (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13)

Additionally Cross’ model implicates a continuum of cultural competency that consists of six points:

1. **Cultural Destructiveness**, the most negative end of the continuum, is purposeful destruction of a culture, such as the historical practices of some agencies to dehumanize people of color through access denial and medical experiments without their knowledge or consent;

2. **Cultural Incapacity** is the next point on the continuum where agencies act unintentionally as agents of oppression through discriminatory practices and racist policies;

3. **Cultural Blindness** is the midpoint on the continuum, which functions from the stance that all people are the same, often with a viewpoint that the dominant culture’s helping approaches are universally applicable. This position ignores cultural strengths and propagates assimilation;

4. **Cultural Pre-Competence** is where agencies began to move toward the positive end of the continuum as they recognize and make efforts toward cultural sensitivity and civil rights;
5. Cultural Competence is where agencies reflect a commitment to policies that enhance services to diverse clients, adapting service delivery to meet the needs of people of color from a respectful acceptance of difference;

6. Cultural Proficiency is the most positive end of the continuum and is characterized by holding culture in high regard, seeking to change attitudes, policies and practices to advocate for equitable practices (Cross et al., 1989, pp. 14-17).

Some researchers have expanded Cross’ organization-structure model to include the individual levels of competence on an adapted continuum framework (Comas-Diaz, 2012; Sue & Constantine, 2005). The continuum graph (Figure 1) highlights this expansion and provides a depiction of the multiple achievement levels of cultural competency:

![Figure 1. Continuum of Cultural Competence (adapted from Cross et al., 1989).](image)

**Sue’s Microaggression Process Model.** This model provides a current perspective that substantiates the relevancy of a cultural competency process that has developed through the recent seminal research of Sue and his associates (Sue, Capodilupo & Holder, 2008; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Their research findings from two separate studies
revealed that racial microaggressions toward marginalized groups fall into five domains or phases (Sue, 2010). Sue (2010) identifies five domains that seem to occur when racial microaggressions potentially appear:

- **Phase One—Incident:** An event or situation experienced by the participant;
- **Phase Two—Perception:** Participant’s belief about whether or not the incident was racially motivated. Responses reflect: Yes/No/Unsure, Questioning;
- **Phase Three—Reaction:** Participants’ immediate response to the incident;
- **Phase Four—Interpretation:** The meaning the participant makes of the incident, answering such questions as: Why did the event occur? What were the person’s intentions?
- **Phase Five—Consequence for Individual:** Behavioral, emotive, or thought processes which develop over time as a result of said incident (Sue, 2010).

Further, Sue and other researchers agree that the need to identify and proactively “devise functional survival or adaptive mechanisms that can be used to immunize people of color, women, and LBGT against the stress and distress of microaggressions” exists and warrants future research (Sue, 2010; Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Liao, 2008; Yoo & Lee, 2008).

Additionally, numerous researchers have identified various strategies in the literature that might be helpful for personal and professional development for educators that embark upon facilitating difficult topics of racism (Bell, 2003; Bolgatz, 2005; Sue, Lin et al., 2009; Sue, Rivera et al., 2009; Watt, 2007; Willow, 2008; Winter, 1977; Young, 2004).

Subsequently, Sue (2010) outlines these eight strategies for educators to explore their own biases and prejudices as they also actively seek to increase awareness, knowledge and skills:
1. possess a working definition and understanding of racial microaggressions and difficult dialogues;

2. understanding self as a racial/cultural being by making the “invisible, visible”;

3. intellectually acknowledge one’s own cultural conditioning and biases;

4. emotional comfort in dealing with race and racism;

5. understanding and making sense of one’s own emotions;

6. control the process and not the content;

7. do not be passive or allow the dialogue to be brewed over in silence;

8. express your appreciation to the participating students (p. 250).

Bhui, Warfa, Edonya, McKenzie, and Bhugra (2007) conducted a systemic review of cultural competence models in mental health that evaluated the quality of mental health care for ethnic groups. Only nine out of 109 potential papers actually included an evaluation of a model to improve cultural competency practice and service delivery. Recognizing that cultural competency is now a core requirement for mental health professionals working with culturally diverse patient groups, these researchers contend that cultural competency training may improve the quality of mental health care for ethnic groups. Furthermore, they pointed out that a few studies actually published their teaching and learning methods, and only three studies used quantitative outcomes. One of the quantitative studies did reflect a change in attitudes and skills of staff after receiving training, suggesting that self-reports from participants showed intentions to change, particularly in the context of communication skills (Ferguson, Keller, Haley & Quirk, 2003). The paper written on the cultural consultation model showed evidence of significant satisfaction by clinicians using the service, with 86% reporting how it helped them in managing patients (Kirmayer, Groleau, Guzder, Blake, &
Jarvis, 2003). None of the studies investigated service user experiences and outcomes. Bhui et al. (2007) concluded that limited evidence is available on the effectiveness of cultural competency training and service delivery and further work is needed to evaluate improvement in service users’ experience and outcomes.

**Curriculum Theories and Multicultural Knowledge in Social Work Education**

The Council of Social Work Education has mandated that multicultural and cultural competency content be included in the curriculum (Lee & Greene, 2003, p. 2). Curriculum, in the broadest sense, encompasses almost “the entire range of educational thought” across multiple educational domains (Connelly et al., 2008, p. x). Connelly et al. (2008) view curriculum and instruction as multi-faced engagement between practice, context and theory, shaped by the stakeholders, students, parents, teachers, educators, curriculum policymakers, and administrators (p. xii). According to these researchers, curriculum and instruction is one of the largest and most diverse set of activities within the field of education, consisting of three main sub-fields and specializations: (1) curriculum subject matters; (2) topics and preoccupations; (3) general curriculum or curriculum theory. Curriculum and instruction is delimited by a specific configuration of factors working together in a practical, real world environment known as “commonplaces” (Schwab 1960, as cited by Connelly et al., 2008, p. ix). Furthermore, the authors point out the significant role of multicultural curriculum in birthing different ways of knowing and being that counter “taken for granted, forms of logic, practice and theory, and rationality” (Connelly et al., 2008, p. xi).

Daniel (2011) points out the significant role that social work multicultural curriculum can assume by contextually constructing diverse students’ experiences, histories, and cultures for critical discussion about issues of power and inequity. Critical multicultural knowledge is
essential to understanding how the practitioner has acquired knowledge in this area as well as being aware of the how stereotypes and media images from the larger society influence knowledge construction. This task falls heavily upon the shoulders of social work educators, who are the channels to help develop competencies for critical multicultural social work practice. What is taught impacts what is learned.

Some research has occurred to learn more about students’ preparation to work with diverse clients. Many social work educators who are proponents of multicultural education agree that a critical approach to curriculum development is needed in order to prepare students for effective multicultural practice (Daniel, 2008). This knowledge construction approach includes the following key elements in curriculum development: (1) to respect those who are different from one’s self and promote human rights; (2) to promote knowledge concerning the historical and social realities of oppressed groups; (3) to teach understanding of racism, classism, and other forms of inequality; (4) to demonstrate ways of ensuring social, economic, and political equality; (5) to examine power in relationships; (6) to increase understanding of how oppression impacts people’s lives; and 8) to facilitate critical thinking skills development (Daniel, 2008; Gill, 1998; Schmitz et al., 2001; Van Soest, 2004).

A qualitative study conducted by Daniel (2011) sought to describe and analyze the narratives of 15 graduate social workers who were students of color to examine their perceptions and experiences with instruction on multicultural curriculum and the meaning they assigned to these experiences. A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct personal interviews with all of the participants, which were audiotaped and transcribed. The findings revealed five core themes that emerged from the data: the struggle to be heard; speaking out; that’s me you are talking about; intersection of race, class, and gender; and
resistance and affirmation. One student described his thoughts about why multicultural education topics in the classroom may not be discussed:

One of the reasons that we don’t go there often is because the professors are uncomfortable. Students quickly get the message that these kinds of discussions are off-limits so no one brings them up either. At the end of the chapter there might be something on multiculturalism, but that’s as far as some professors are prepared to go. (p. 255)

Social workers’ and students’ anxiety and resistance have been recognized as major issues in multicultural education (Helms et al., 2003). To alter this culture, change must occur within institutions that consist of exploring new patterns of teaching and learning. Institutions must also understand the cost for professors to discuss such content in terms of student evaluations. Students also must understand that professors pay a cost in low evaluations and administrator perceptions if they are too vocal about equity and social justice. An example illustrates this critical consideration through the words of a multicultural educator who describes her personal experience as a professor teaching multicultural education to a majority student body. Ukpokodu (2002) writes:

Overall, the students felt vulnerable and threatened and therefore became defensive. I was glad when the semester ended. The students’ feelings and dispositions were well reflected on the end-of-course evaluation. The evaluation was low, with many written negative comments such as “racist,” “unfriendly,” “defensive,” “unsympathetic,” “white-hater,” “stickler,” “slave-master,” etc. Some students commented that I am not an American and I should not teach white students. I felt very disappointed and disillusioned because of what is at stake—the lives of many young children, which could be harmed if touched by some of these preservice teachers—and because I had worked so hard to help them develop a deeper grasp of social reality. I wanted them to become aware of the persistent and pernicious nature of dominance and privilege, so that they would recognize that as teachers, that each choice they make regarding what and how to teach and interact with students would have implications for equity and social justice. I felt a sense of failure. My overall goal to produce multi-culturally literate and competent practitioners was defeated. (p. 2)
Teachers and students must co-construct content that represents those cultural groups and histories that have either been omitted or misrepresented in the curriculum. This knowledge omission must become an integral part of the classroom dialogue. Knowledge construction through a multicultural framework entails critically analyzing one’s schooling and societal curriculum, which normally has tremendous influence on what is learned about ourselves and others (Banks & Banks, 2004). These two sources play an essential role that provides the foundational framework we attain to learn language, acquire culture, obtain knowledge, develop beliefs, internalize attitudes, and establish patterns of behavior (Banks & Banks, 2004). Additionally, Banks states: “Teachers need to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed” (2013, p. 19).

This ideal certainly presents an obvious, or perhaps not so obvious challenge to consider. Social work educators must be able to do so for themselves by first recognizing and understanding how curriculum and instruction encompass not only subject matter content, but also includes a massive range of sociopolitical and economic subfields that influence the shaping of these curricular activities. Multiculturalism in social work education is one of the most immediate topics and preoccupations being infused and integrated into both the academic and training experiences, such as student field instruction and practicum placements (Anderson & Carter, 2003). In their review of professional education approaches to diversity inclusion, Corvin and Wiggins (1989) identified three common factors:

1. A basis assumption that an individual’s ethnic or cultural ground significantly influences his or her worldview and the way in which he or she experiences and understands life and its problems.
2. An emphasis on learning about various cultural groups (i.e., cultural worldviews) so that there is some understanding of how an individual from a particular group may experience life and its problems.

3. A focus on teaching helping skills and interventions appropriate for use with members of various ethnic groups. (p. 105)

Multicultural education serves to meet these common denominators found in the literature, and its inclusion in social work curricular development, implementation, and evaluation can provide a relevant framework to gain culturally relevant knowledge, skills, and values central to social work learning activities (Anderson & Carter, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2009) provides five culturally relevant conceptions of knowledge for teachers that social work educators can also consider in their curriculum development: (1) Knowledge is not static or unchanging and thus, is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by teachers and students; (2) Knowledge is viewed critically; (3) Teacher is passionate about content; (4) Teacher helps students develop necessary skills; and (5) Teacher sees excellence as a complex standard that may involve some postulates but takes student diversity and individual differences into account (p. 89).

Daniel (2008) believes that the focus of this knowledge approach to curriculum is not intended to indoctrinate students, but to help them use multiple knowledge sources to become more informed and better equipped to practice culturally responsive work. Additionally, these elements particularly encompass aspects that the literature addresses in regard to transformative learning models that can effect social change, as is emphasized in the work of Mezirow (2000) and Dewey (1933). Geneva Gay (2002) identifies five culturally responsive teaching elements that are essential for teachers who work with diverse student populations. However, these concepts can appropriately serve as a model for social workers who work
with diverse clients. The first fundamental principle to examine is developing a knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity. The second element to examine is demonstrating a caring disposition. The third is building a learning community. The fourth principle is to be able to communicate with ethnically diverse clients, and fifth, to respond to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction for teachers. For social workers, it would equally apply to service delivery in practice settings (p. 106). Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as:

> using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Culturally responsive social work can also be assessed by these elements, and the definition offered by Gay as a way to examine one’s own practice and interactions with diverse client systems. Transformative learning is considered extremely relevant in multicultural social work education (Lee & Greene, 2003). In her study on multicultural education pedagogies, Ukpokodu (2009) states, “the theory of transformative learning is concerned with how learners critically reflect on experiences including existing knowledge and beliefs and how they integrate new knowledge to reflect a change in experience” (p. 1). Daniel (2008) suggests that social work needs to experience a paradigm shift in multicultural education for social work practice because of the near absence of the kinds of knowledge that are needed to educate and prepare social work students to work in a multicultural society. The governing bodies of social work, The Council of Social Work Education (2008) and the National Association of Social Work (2001), both emphasize the need for social workers to be
culturally competent in order to provide culturally responsive service to diverse populations. Without employing these types of approaches, achievement may be diminished considerably to meet this goal.

Curriculum theories related to multicultural education applicable to urban social work are person-oriented and emerge from the humanistic space of personal meaning and self-actualization (Banks & Banks, 2004). Additionally, value-oriented curriculum theories further support urban realities. Banks (2004) describes value-oriented curriculum theories this way:

They analyze the value beliefs and assumptions that undergird curriculum actions and artifacts, envision educational possibilities that are less hegemonic and not skewed toward perpetuating the power and privilege of middle-class European American males, and promote more humane, just and egalitarian learning and living across class, race, and gender categories. (p. 37)

James Banks (Banks & Banks, 2004) has written extensively about multicultural education and states that race, ethnicity, class, gender and exceptionality and their interaction are critically significant factors that influence how people respond to differences (p. 4). Banks’ (1993) discussion of multiculturalism has brought cultural competency to the forefront, along with an awareness of prejudices, biases, and blatant disdain for people of color. He intends to help inform and educate those who may have unconscious racism that comes through in behaviors, responses, and attitudes.

Banks elucidates five dimensions of multicultural education, which are: content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure (Howard, 2006). These dimensions provide a critical approach to ensuring multicultural infusion in the educative process. Banks (2004) gives four approaches to integrating multicultural content into curriculum: (1) the
contributions approach that focuses on explicit cultural mores, such as holidays and famous people of color; (2) the additive approach, which adds content, concepts, and themes to the curriculum, but does not change the structure of it; (3) the transformative approach, in which the structure of the curriculum is changed to provide diverse perspectives of other cultures outside of the dominant culture; and (4) the social action approach, which engages students to make decisions on significant social concerns while simultaneously taking action to help find resolution (Banks & Banks, 2004).

The latter two approaches, transformative and social action, put forth necessary steps to activate real change agency in social work education and practice. Banks believes these critical components are necessary for culturally competent engagement. He states, “Teachers must critically analyze their ideologies, journeys, dispositions, and engage in personal transformation” (Howard, 2006, p. xii). His statement can easily be adapted to relate to the field of social work—“Social workers must also critically analyze their ideologies, journeys, dispositions, and engage in personal transformation.” Social work educational programs and trainings should be preparing students and practitioners alike to promote inclusive, culturally responsive change agency (Anderson & Carter, 2003). Banks provides a viable framework for social work educators, students and practitioners alike to better understand the rationale for multicultural education.

One of the driving concepts of curriculum research is the notion of knowledge construction. Three critical questions fuel the argument for the use of self in cross-cultural service delivery: (1) How is one’s knowledge constructed? (2) Whose knowledge is considered legitimate? (3) Who benefits from that knowledge? These questions undergird the rationale for critical reflection about the curriculum theories of current social work education.
and practice. Beauchamp (1986) presents curriculum theoretical conceptions that offer three ways curriculum is conceptualized—curriculum as a substantive phenomenon or document, as a system, and as an area of professional scholarship and research (Banks & Banks, 2004). Beauchamp (1986) further explains that the purpose of curriculum as an area of professional scholarship and research is “to advance knowledge about various curricula and curriculum development systems” (p. 69). Additionally, he writes that this theoretical definition “explains the relationship among curriculum variables, individuals involved in these pursuits typically evoke psychological and philosophical foundations; historical precedents and experiences; social, political, and cultural influences; and research designs and procedures” (p. 69).

Social work education certainly encompasses each of these important elements in some capacity and relates the use of self as a critical variable in knowledge construction. These components provide a foundational basis for curriculum theories and research frameworks in social work practice and education. Knowledge construction is an essential key in how one uses his or her self in multicultural urban-based social work practice. This use of self can either hinder or help in the provision of cross-cultural service delivery. Knowledge construction plays an integral role in this process (Bitonti, Albers, & Reilly, 1996, p. 71).

The increasing need for culturally responsive social work professionals is more evident as racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity occurs in society (Lee, 2013). Although there are multiple studies that propose how to educate social work students and practitioners to become more culturally competent, there are none to date that provide a precise, grounded, theoretical framework addressing how multicultural training fosters growth for the
individual. The researcher maintains that an explicit explanation is needed on how multicultural education fosters self-growth in learners. Lee further elucidates that self-cohesion and self-regard can help promote multicultural education from an “ethically responsible teaching” perspective (p. 75). Concluding, the researcher points out that the “dialectical process of learning and teaching as well as a lifelong process of personal and professional growth are essential in multicultural education” (p. 75).

**The Use of Self for Culturally Responsive Client Engagement and Change Agency**

Traditional roles of conventional counseling approaches have been widely criticized, primarily due to the lack of training in indigenous and culturally appropriate helping modalities (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1998; Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993; Banks & Banks, 2004). Without a holistic framework that includes these essential elements, social workers may be gravely restricted in their efforts to engage with clients in a culturally appropriate manner. In fact, researchers argue that the profession as a whole has been lethargic in developing a conceptual framework that incorporates culture as a central core concept, which has delayed the emergence of culturally relevant strategies, programs, and practices in working with diverse racial and ethnic populations (Banks & Banks, 2004; Pedersen, 2000; Sue & Sue, 1999). As a result, the concept of Multicultural Counseling and Therapy Theory (MCT) is being developed to meet the demands for the increasing need to provide more culturally relevant and inclusive helping strategies that better assist multicultural clients in the therapeutic relationship. The theoretical basis of MCT is yet to be completed, though the literature suggests its emergence is forthcoming as a major paradigm shift (Banks & Banks, 2004). This emergent process is a variable that may influence the
current cultural competency models, particularly as it unfolds to address cross-cultural
service delivery more fully. A definition of MCT proposed by D. W. Sue (2001) states:

Multicultural counseling and therapy can be defined as both a helping role and
process that uses modalities and defines goals consistent with the life experiences and
cultural values of clients, recognizes client identities to include individual, group and
universal dimensions, advocates the use of universal and culture-specific strategies
and roles in the healing process, and balances the importance of individualism and
collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of client and client systems.
(p. xx)

These indicators further support the critical need for social work professionals to
become more knowledgeable about themselves and others who are culturally different.

According to Banks and Banks (2004), researchers agree that helpers need to do four things
in order to bridge the cultural gap in working with multicultural client systems:

• Become more aware of one’s own cultural values, biases, stereotypes, and
  assumptions about human behavior (Pedersen, 2000; Sue, Arredondo, &
  McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1998)

• Ask themselves: What are the worldviews they bring to the counseling encounter?
  What value system is inherent in their theories of helping? What values underlie
  the strategies and techniques used in the therapeutic relationship with diverse
  others? (Banks & Banks, 2004)

• Begin the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the worldviews
  of culturally different clients (Sue et al., 1992)

• Begin the process of developing culturally appropriate intervention strategies in
  the counseling process (Sue, 1990)

Therapeutic approaches are numerous and utilize various cognitive and affective
concepts, mostly derived from Eurocentric theories, leaving a huge gap in offering culturally
appropriate viewpoints (Banks & Banks, 2004). For example, the Afrocentric perspective espouses that use of Eurocentric theories of human behavior to explicate African Americans’ culture seems inappropriate, as these behaviors were developed in European and Anglo-American traditions (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004). Sue (2010) expounds upon the importance of understanding that therapeutic actions from a Western perspective may be considered unhelpful, but may be viewed favorably by different cultural groups.

Regardless of the school of thought—be it behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, or psychoanalytic—the reality is individuals possess all of these facets within the self. D. W. Sue (1992) describes this more fully:

The problem with traditional theories is that they are culture-bound and often recognize and treat only one aspect of the human condition: the thinking self, the feeling self, the behaving self, or the social self. Few include the totality of the human experience, and few include the cultural and political self. (p. 32)

This quote specifically supports the curriculum research and person-oriented theory of use of self. Further, effective cross-cultural service delivery is contingent upon the social work practitioner’s holistic use of self in their urban-based practice with diverse populations. Additionally, culturally responsive engagement with potential clients is predicated upon the social worker’s ability to be self-reflexive and to understand their position of power in relation to the client’s voice. The theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and self-reflexivity can help provide a foundational basis to initiate and maintain culturally responsive engagement with potential and existing client.

Subsequently, these particular perspectives offer a viable connection to the most significant factors of effective engagement—the social worker’s use of self and the client’s own voice in the therapeutic relationship. Gergen (1994) intensely asserts the social
constructionist perspective provides a process to reexamine cultural practices that can become oppressive as well as promote interpersonal collaboration. This can be helpful to social workers with diverse populations, as it gives a platform to both the client and the therapist to co-construct the reality from a contextual position of engagement. Thus, aligning well with the use of self concept as it emphasizes how contextual, linguistic, and relational factors intertwine to determine the way people are and how their worldviews develop (Raskin, 2002).

The ability to engage in a contextually and culturally responsive manner relies significantly upon these factors. In fact, this critical need has been emphasized by the Council of Social Work Education’s most current Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) standards, which specifically state expectations for professional social workers to engage in diversity in their practice by adhering to the following mandates:

- Social workers understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the intersectionality of multiple factors including age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, political ideology, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

- Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim.

- Social workers recognize the extent to which a culture’s structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power; gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups; recognize and communicate their understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences; and view themselves as learners and engage those with whom they work as informants. (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, EPAS, Competency 2, p. 7)

To effectively engage with diverse others, social workers must be able to understand these significant dimensions of diversity, appreciate those differences and know themselves
in and through the communication process. Cultural competency may be viewed as being more about self-awareness than other-awareness. Understanding all diverse populations that exist, along with the multiplicity of sub-cultures within each, is highly unlikely. Rather than focusing on external observations that can lead to assumptive stereotyping, the focus needs to be shifted toward one’s own internal realities—those ways of being and seeing that emanate from within one’s self. Nonetheless, the premise of culturally responsive engagement practice has evolved from a diagnostic perspective in its conception to a more collaborative approach in the 21st century. In summation, culturally responsive engagement with diverse clients in the social work field is essential to providing the appropriate care, contextually and consistently.

**Cross-Cultural Conceptions for Professional Social Work**

Sue et al. (1982) provides a general definition of cross-cultural social work as a relationship where participants have differences of cultural backgrounds, values, and lifestyles. Yan and Wong (2005) affirm Dewees (2001) in the belief that there is a wide acceptance within the profession that recognizes the importance of social workers knowing how the role of culture affects them in their practice, particularly when the client’s and the worker’s cultures are different. The term “culture” is an elusive one because there are multidimensional factors to consider when assessing cultural conceptions. Helman (1994) describes culture as a set of explicit and implicit guidelines that individuals have as members of a particular ethos. These guidelines influence how they view the world, how they experience it emotionally, and how they behave in it relationally with others, to supernatural deities and to the natural environment (p. 2).
The American Psychological Association’s multicultural guidelines (2003) posit a more definitive view of culture, stating that it is “the embodiment of a worldview through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices, including religious and spiritual traditions. It also encompasses a way of living informed by the historical, economic, ecological, and political forces acting on a group” (p. 377). Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture as the means by which people “communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action” (p. xi). Ethnicity is only one cultural facet, which is often the most focused upon in cultural competency discussions. According to Pai, Adler and Shadiow (2006), students, families, schools, and organizations can have multiple cultures (pp. 4-5). Culture also includes the commonalities that groups of people use to associate with one another, and individuals also have multiple cultural identities.

Culture moves past individual characteristics and expands to encompass organizations, businesses, government, and other macro entities. The structures of policies, procedures, and practices represent a cultural perspective that guides the operation of these entities. The concept of culture is often popularly manifested through celebrated holidays and activities, such as dance, music, dress, and food. Social workers continue to learn cultures through phases referred to as the four F’s: fairs, food, festivals, and folktales, which does not present a holistic understanding of race, power, privilege, and oppression to the professional practitioner or social work student (Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner, & Schmitz, 2008). The unifiers may be as diverse as the group, including religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and a multiplicity of other differences that can be used to categorize people.
Culture encompasses a group’s generational social history, rituals, beliefs, behaviors, and material artifacts (Johnson & Munch, 2009).

Looking at culture from a contextual stance is important in social work practice. The Council on Social Work Education speaks to the issue of “context” in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, stating that social workers are informed, resourceful, and proactive in responding to evolving organizational, community, and societal contexts at all levels of practice (CSWE, 2008, Educational Policy Section 2.1.9). Social workers must be mindful of these cultural influences in working with diverse populations in order to effectively engage with their clients. Recognizing the why behind the what can be helpful to relate contextually to diverse others. Often behaviors are based upon one’s reasoning and thinking patterns. Cultural influences often underpin actions, responses, and behaviors. Knowing this, social workers can approach diversity from a contextual position that considers the clients’ ways of being and seeing the world. Despite the recognition of the need for workers’ awareness of their own culture, the influence of the worker’s culture on how the client’s problem is defined and handled has received only limited attention. For instance, both Green (1999) and Lum (1999) suggested four principles of problem identification in cross-cultural social work: (1) the client’s definition and understanding of an experience as a problem; (2) the client’s semantic evaluation of a problem; (3) indigenous strategies of problem intervention; and (4) culturally-based problem resolution.

These four principles do not include any element that relates to the culture of social workers and how it affects them in assessing the client’s problem and in formulating intervention goals. Instead, reference is made solely to the culture of clients. Indeed, despite variations in the understanding of cultural difference, almost all cross-cultural social work
approaches, including the cultural competence model, are mainly concerned with how social workers can break through the cultural barrier and effectively work with clients of different cultural backgrounds. Seemingly, through pre- and post-intervention self-reflection, social workers are presumed to be able to manage the influence of their own cultural values and to sustain their professional objectivity when they engage in a professional relationship with clients from different cultures.

This notion of professionalism suggests that the worker’s cultural heritage can be contained and/or suspended by factors such as the use of the professional self, through which the social worker can maintain self-discipline (Imre, 1982). After all, as Hamilton (1954) has long contended, the whole purpose of being self-aware is for social workers to make full professional use of their personal self. D. W. Sue and D. Sue (1990) suggested an awareness of his or her own cultural values, biases, preconceived notions, and personal limitations is one of the basic characteristics of a culturally competent worker. Self-awareness thus becomes the foundation of an effective cross-cultural social work relationship (Green, 1999).

Good intentions, however sincere, are not enough to render culturally responsive care in a multicultural society. The Council of Social Work Education (2015) Educational Standards, specifically on Intervention (Educational Policy 2.1.10(c), explicitly states the role of a social worker in relation to the client. Specific actions of social workers include the following: (1) Initiate actions to achieve organizational goals; (2) Implement prevention interventions that enhance client capacities; (3) Help clients resolve problems; (4) Negotiate, mediate, and advocate for clients; and (5) Facilitate transitions and endings.

These objectives give credence to the essential need for social workers to be able to relate cross-culturally with diverse populations, particularly with those in urban-based
communities. Cross-cultural social work, like many other human services, thus becomes a site where client and worker from different cultures negotiate and communicate (Yan & Wong, 2005).

**Key Intrapersonal Components of Use of Self**

**Personal awareness.** The literature reflects that a primary agreed upon tenet for culturally responsive social work is the practitioner’s self-awareness. Researchers concur that self-awareness is considered the first step toward being culturally competent (Harry, 1992). Other researchers in the literature share the rationale that developing a deeper awareness of one’s own cultural heritage and identity helps the practitioner gain an appreciative attitude and sensitivity toward cultural others (Baruth & Manning, 1991; Campinha-Bacote, 1994; Chan, 1990; Hanson & Lynch, 1995). Yan and Wang (2005) describe self-awareness as a process of reflexive awareness whereby social workers are cognizant of how their self might contribute to their perception and experience in the interaction with the client and the behavior of the client.

Furthermore, they maintain reflexive awareness is a process in which social workers are enriched through being open to include the client’s worldview into theirs as they seek to understand and relate to the client. Kondrat (1999) includes this perspective, but also suggests consideration of two additional approaches often reflected in social work: simple conscious awareness and reflective awareness. Additionally, Kondrat (1999) explains that the use of self is based upon the premise that the social worker can know his or her self very well, which is considered a prerequisite to effective interpersonal helping. Numerous researchers support the reflexive awareness approach, seeing the self as an entity that is conceptualized through relations with and to others (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994; Tomm, 1993;
Taylor, 1989). Moving toward cultural competence begins with cultural awareness that focuses on conscious exploration of personal biases, stereotypes, prejudices, assumptions and other racial or ethnic-derived constructs about populations who are culturally different from one’s self (Campinha-Bacote & Campinha-Bacote, 2009).

This critical self-awareness and reflexive examination should begin in the educative process when social workers are being prepared to enter the real world. However, this unfortunately is not the reality and many students leave the realm of education without the needed knowledge, skills, and values to work with multicultural clients. Diller (1999) uses himself as an example about becoming self-aware of differences in beliefs and cultural values, acknowledging the challenge of “accepting cultural ways and values that are at odds with our own” (p. 14). He writes, “as a success-oriented, hyperpunctual individual of Northern European ancestry, I might find it very difficult to accept the perpetual ‘lateness’ of individuals who belong to cultures where time is viewed as flexible and inexact” (p. 14). His candid disclosure is an example of being self-aware, particularly when you encounter and interact with someone from a different background or culture.

Communicating effectively with different others in a culturally relevant manner has been associated with this critical notion of being self-aware. In order to demonstrate the standards outlined in the NASW Cultural Competence document (2006), one must consider the relevance of Standard 2 Statement on Self Awareness, which states: “Social workers shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people” (p. 2). Researchers concur with the Standard and reiterate the most significant first step to cultural sensitivity begins with self-awareness of one’s own cultural background (Cross et al., 1989;
Sue et al., 1982). By gaining insight into one’s own self-identity, the worker will likely explore various facets of themselves, such as racial identity, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, socioeconomic status, and other contributing characteristics of cultural diversity. Self-reflection, personal evaluation, and increased understanding of one’s own “self” can help in the process of increasing cultural sensitivity. The literature reflects that being self-aware is considered an essential element in the knowledge base of culturally competent practice (O’Hagan, 2001). To support this idea, Moustakas (1994) contends:

Full appreciation of the process of recognizing individuality focuses on awareness and understanding of oneself. To value oneself, one must value what is within, savoring it, soaking it up, coming to terms with it, rather than classifying, judging, and evaluating it. The heuristic focuses on the inner truth of being with one’s own values and meanings. In such moments, the individual is patient and permits what is to be, to linger and endure. Being patient means that what exists as authentic has its own timetable, recognizes that growth is an unfolding process and that new forms emerge through a readiness, a gradual opening and awakening, and through reflective consideration. (p. 14)

The focus on self-awareness and social workers’ beliefs about what factors constitute being self-aware and how these attributes contribute to their level of consciousness of themselves and the world around them are significant to the development of the use of self. Understanding one’s own personal and professional cultural awareness is an essential step on the road to cultural competence (Lum, 2003). Research on ethnic and racial identity development suggests that personal familial history within geographic, cultural, relational, and societal contexts also be included as points of critical exploration in self-awareness (Bender et al., 2010).

**Attitudes, beliefs and values.** Much of the social work literature emphasizes the importance of helpers having appropriate beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about their own cultural backgrounds, biases, stereotypes, and values. Additionally, the focus is on the need
for workers to have knowledge of different ethnic and cultural groups in order to effectively work with culturally diverse clients (Anderson & Carter, 2003; Diller, 1999; Lum, 2000; Neukrug, 2002). Being able to recognize that ingrained cultural norms can influence the communication process is important for the practitioner. This critical step often begins with self-awareness of one’s own cultural background (Cross et al., 1989; Sue et al., 1982). In fact, Sue (1990) maintains that one of the basic characteristics of a culturally competent worker is being aware of one’s own cultural values, biases, and preconceived notions, as well as one’s personal limitations. Studies show that social workers’ personal beliefs and values can influence their treatment toward clients (Roman, Charles, & Karasu, 1978).

Being cognizant of one’s own conscious and unconscious intentions can help the social worker grasp the multi-dimensional aspects of the self, which broadly consists of their intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional/cultural, and societal experiences (Froggett et al., 2015). The use of self closely aligns with the social work value that seeks to engage cross-cultural interaction and human relationships. The social worker’s conceptualization and understanding of his or her role in this relational position with the client is the foundational premise of this concept. Additionally, one must consider the cultural dynamics that interplay with one’s own personal values and belief systems and that of cultural others. Erickson (2004) maintains that culture “can be thought of as a construction—it constructs us and we construct it.” He further espouses that “we are culturally constructed and constructing beings, and in that construction we are never standing still” (p. 39). Social workers play a major role in the lives of clients they serve, and the values and beliefs they hold about diverse others can hinder culturally responsive care. This realization is essential since those who are the most
vulnerable are often the populations to whom social workers provide service delivery, and many of these marginalized clients live in urban-based environments.

**Cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and training.** The National Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Education report the significant focus of social workers’ knowledge, skills, and awareness is central to the basis of social work competencies, not only in educational programs, but also in practice. Having self-awareness, knowledge, and skills is considered essential for social workers to provide culturally appropriate care; however, training that is primarily focused on learning about other cultures has proven ineffective. Although The NASW Cultural Standards Indicator (2006) points out these standards of competency, determining what constitutes their attainment has not been clearly delineated in social work education curriculum. Competence in social work is widely viewed from the perspectives that include knowledge, values, and skills (Drisco, 2014, p. 416). As a matter of fact, the profession’s mandate to actively work toward incorporating content that address diversity, political and sexual orientation, discrimination against persons of diverse race, ethnicity, ability, status, age, and gender is intended for implementation at all levels of education and practice (Guy-Walls, 2007). With this intent, the Council of Social Work Education (2008) has formalized these components in the accreditation requirements that are also found in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (“Code of Ethics,” 2008).

This is noteworthy as it pertains to social work education and practice. Professional competence is an expectation identified in the six core values that are central to the acquisition of gaining the knowledge, values, and skills in the profession. The six values are “(1) service, (2) social justice, (3) dignity and worth of the person, (4) importance of human
relationships, (5) integrity, and (6) competence” (Code of Ethics, cited in Drisco, 2014, p. 416). Incorporating these core values into a multicultural curriculum that assesses the mandated competencies can appear elusive. Cultural competency continues to be a primary concern for social work educators and practitioners as well. The need for multicultural social work education exists not only in the classrooms, but also in the field. A national study by Allen-Meares and Dupper (1998), who used survey research methods in the investigation of tasks involving the job knowledge, skills, and abilities of entry-level school social workers (N=862), found that practitioners needed more diversity education and training (Teasley, 2005).

Although the literature supports having self-awareness, knowledge, and skills as essential components for social workers to provide culturally appropriate care, training that focuses primarily on learning about other cultures has proven ineffective. In response to this, an empirical study conducted by the Nevada Human Services sought to measure the levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills of 300 mental health, child welfare, early childhood, and parole workers delivering culturally diverse care to vulnerable populations (Bitonti et al., 1996). By using a modified version of the Multicultural Counseling Inventory, significant findings emerged that reflected women service workers scored higher than men on the total and three subscales. Those with graduate degrees scored higher than bachelor level workers on the total and two subscales. Early childhood workers scored highest on the total, and youth parole workers scored lowest. People of color scored higher than other workers in awareness. This study provided a baseline of information on multicultural competencies among Nevada human services workers and concluded that strong consideration should be
given to training based upon knowledge of workers’ competencies as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

Social work education in the 21st century faces dichotic contradictions and conflicts about what constitutes “valid knowledge” for practice (Larrison, 2009, p. 20). Van Manen (1995) labeled this validity as phenomenological knowledge. While valuing the extensive cognitive knowledge base required for professional social work preparation, other knowledge forms and reflective practices must also be included to address the “embodied and existential qualities and virtues of being a practitioner” (Larrison, 2009, p. 20). Thus, practicing social workers and students preparing to enter the field need to understand the major role that knowledge construction plays, particularly in practical application with diverse clients. The social worker’s use of self also plays a critical role in how that constructed knowledge can help or hinder culturally responsive service delivery and care.

**Barriers and Bridges to Culturally Responsive Service Delivery in Social Work**

Provision of social services is meant to have positive outcomes. When client engagement is hindered because of inaccurate perceptions, assumptions, and biases toward those being served, it can cause negative impacts that affect these outcomes. A clinician may be unaware that they may have unconscious biases that impede culturally responsive service delivery (Sue, 2010). Effective communication with others is imperative to reach stated objectives and goals for service delivery. What beliefs and values might one hold that impede their ability to effectively provide equitable care to diverse others? Dewees (2001) states that social work practitioners should have an understanding of their own values that come through their backgrounds and societal positions in order to provide culturally responsive care to people from other cultures (Bender et al., 2010). According to Furlong and Wight
(2011), the question to focus on is that of identity and selfhood: “How is the self rendered in the defining texts of culture and the various professional disciplines that serve this culture?” Further, they propose using “critical awareness” rather than “cultural competence” because of its lack of conceptual coherence (p. 39). By introducing “critical awareness,” they explain two reasons for doing so: (1) An attitude of critical awareness encourages the practitioner to work to the principles of “curiosity” and of an “informed not knowing”; (2) This orientation establishes a context for practice that regards “the other” as a mirror upon which the practitioner can see the outline of their own personal, professional, ideological, and cultural profile” (p. 39).

Furlong and Wight (2011) maintain that without individual development of a capacity for reflective self-scrutiny, it is impossible to learn to work cross-culturally. Social workers can benefit from an evaluative process to examine their use of self and how their personality, social conditioning, personal values and beliefs, and worldview affect the level of cultural competency in which they might operate in relation to diverse others. Change can take two forms—hinder effective interaction with clients, colleagues, organizations, and communities; or helping these stockholders attain the goals they have expressed in a culturally appropriate manner. Researchers agree that certain behaviors and attitudes exhibited by counselors and helping professionals hinder culturally responsive care (Fontes 2008; Lynch & Hanson, 2011; Pack-Brown & Williams, 2003; Srivastava, 2007). Certain behaviors and attitudes have been associated with contributing to cultural miscommunication in client relationships and service delivery.

Sue (2010) explains how attitudinal qualities might facilitate the impediment of cross-cultural communication with diverse others. These include such things as “unclear or
inappropriate communication, lack of credibility in the eyes of the client, pathologizing the client’s communication style, professing color-blindness, and denial of possible bias or racism” (pp. 256-257. He adds:

rational microaggressions that blame the victim, ascribe to labels of dangerous/criminality, are culturally insensitive and antagonistic in treatment, and accept denial of individual racism or racial biases are only representative of a few attitudinal traits that can seriously undermine the therapeutic relationship. (p. 261)

This list does not provide all of the kinds of self-attitudinal qualities reflected in the literature; however, these traits have been selected for this study as a starting point to encourage a self-initiated, reflexive conversation with one’s own self to examine whether or not these qualities might be contributing to inequitable and unfair treatment toward those different from themselves. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2003) contends that “colorblind racism” serves to shield white people in particular (although not exclusively) from accusations of racism and “otherizes [racial minorities] softly” (pp. 3-4; as cited by Connelly et al., 2008, p. 181).

The literature reflects certain traits as being helpful to social workers that work cross-culturally with diverse clients. According to Cournoyer (2000), “Effective social workers consistently demonstrate the following essential facilitative qualities in their work with clients: empathy, respect and authenticity” (p. 7). Some specific traits of effective helping professionals include empathy, caring, non-possessive warmth, acceptance, affirmation, sincerity, and being encouraging toward clients (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999; Cournoyer, 2000). Carl Rogers popularized “empathy” as a fundamental quality that helps workers in the therapeutic relationship with clients. He writes:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which
pertains thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition. (Rogers, 1959, pp. 210-211)

Empathy has been deemed possibly the most important helping skill for the human service professional (Neukrug, 2002). Carkhuff (1969) operationalized the empathy skill through the development of a five-point scale that measured different kinds of empathic responses, widely used in trainings (Egan, 2001; Gazda, Asbury, Balzer, Childers, & Phelps, 1999; Ivey & Ivey, 1998).

Multiple studies reflect that having good empathic skills correlates to achieving progress in the helping relationship (Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977; Neukrug, 1980). The term empathy is widely used not only in social work, but other helping professions (Altmann, 1973; Bohart & Greenberg, 1997; Bozarth, 1997; Keefe, 1976; Pinderhughes, 1979; Rogers, 1975). Empathy is not an expression of feeling for or feeling toward, as in pity or romantic love, but rather a “conscious and intentional joining with others in their subjective experience” (Cournoyer, 2008, p. 9). Empathy helps the social worker get an understanding, appreciation for, and sensitivity to their clients, which can contribute to developing productive working relationships (Cournoyer, 2008, p. 9). Additional qualities that are considered essential for social workers to possess in developing and maintaining effective cross-cultural relationships include regard, authenticity, and professionalism (Cournoyer, 2008).

Regardless of the choice of intervention approach and theoretical orientation selections, those workers deemed most effective tend to reflect similar traits in their service to others. Helping professionals express those qualities differently, based upon the individual client. They also take into consideration the particular circumstances of the person-and-
situation, the nature of the social worker’s role, and the phase on the service continuum. Supplementing this position, Raines (1996) asserts that the degree to which social workers meet people who have suffered malignant deprivations and losses is one of the differences between social work and other therapeutic professions: “only the provision of an authentic person will suffice” (p. 373). Curran, Seashore, and Welp (1995) point out that Marshak (1990) views congruence as an “aspect of authenticity that can be defined as acting out of one’s core values and beliefs around change theories, one’s models of individual/group/organizational functioning, and one’s beliefs about oneself as a change agent” (p. 1). Mezirow (1990, 1991) describes how authenticity (a genuine, empathetic approach) translates into a transformational perspective. He defines transformation as “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world…and making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (1991, p. 167).

The self as a social worker connects to cultural competency through this transformative process described by Mezirow (1990, 1991). Further, the term *authenticity* refers to genuineness in relating to others where one’s words and deeds are congruent verbally, nonverbally, and behaviorally (Cournoyer, 2000, p. 10). The strengths perspective framework in social work affirms that the client’s belief in the authenticity and genuineness of the therapist’s concern and care for him or her is an essential component in the helping process (Saleebey, 2009). Rogers (1957, 1961) is credited with the phrase “unconditional positive regard,” which suggests an attitude of noncontrolling, warm, caring, nonpossessive acceptance of other people (Cournoyer, 2000). Regard or respect includes the genuine acceptance of differences, particularly in cross-cultural and intercultural interactions (p. 9).
Social work is a profession that espouses that all people be treated with dignity and respect—a vision for a socially just, equitable, and inclusive society for all of humanity. Attainment of this vision will require that social workers understand and implement multicultural strategies in their practices, engage in transformative social action, and employ their use of self to initiate effective change agency in a global society. Connecting the use of self to cultural competence in multicultural social work practice and education can potentially be a key factor to acquire more fluid achievement of the profession’s goals and standards. Through self-awareness, social workers may be better able to recognize the influencing factors that contribute to who they are and how they are toward different others. By infusing multicultural knowledge into practice theoretical frameworks, social workers may be better able to incorporate values of social justice and transformative action in their practice interventions. Having the necessary skills to implement best practices can link these components together, working simultaneously to promote culturally responsive service delivery through the use of self in professional social work whether one is a social work student, educator, or practitioner.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological case study explored social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agency tools in the provision of culturally responsive care within urban-based practice settings. The significance of this project is based upon the idea that cultural competence in social work is an expectation and goal within the profession. By gaining social workers’ own interpretations of their use of self, other professionals in the field may be able to learn more about appropriate cultural responsiveness and its application in their practice.

The overarching research question was: What are social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agents? Four sub-questions were also posed:

(a) How do social workers perceive their use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency? (b) How do social workers describe their professional preparedness to work with diverse populations? (c) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to hindering or impeding culturally responsive service delivery? (d) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to helping or facilitating culturally responsive service delivery?

This chapter fully explains the methods used for this study. The rationale for the research design selection, as well as the role of the researcher and assumptions behind the methodology, are covered. Detailed data collection and analysis procedures, along with the limitations and ethical considerations, are also outlined in this chapter. A Master’s of Social Work Student Pilot Study conducted by the researcher has also been included in this chapter.
Rationale for Qualitative Research

This phenomenological case study used qualitative methodology to allow the participants’ voices and their multiple perceptions to emerge through the collection and analysis of data. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative researchers use an emerging approach to study the problem as a “process flowing from philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens and on to the procedures involved in studying social or human problems” (p. 44). This qualitative research inquiry was framed within a social constructionist paradigm, which seemed best suited for the emergent process described by Creswell (2013).

As an interpretive framework, Creswell (2013) writes that social constructionism views the nature of reality (ontology) as multiple realities constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others. He notes that the social constructionist epistemological belief (how reality is known) views reality as co-constructed between the research and the researched, shaped by individual experiences. Social constructionism also holds to the axiological belief (role of values) by honoring individual values that are negotiated among individuals. The goal of this study was to explore social workers’ perceptions of their use of self in practice settings within an urban Midwestern city.

As the researcher, I set out to learn more about the use of self phenomenon and how social work practitioners see themselves using themselves as tools of change agency in their practice with diverse populations. Creswell (2013) writes that phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of the experience and its descriptive capturing of the lived phenomenon. The phenomenon of use of self aligns with the descriptive focus of the phenomenological qualitative approach used in this study.
Phenomenology was the major qualitative tradition used in the study (Creswell 2013) as well as the data analysis framework. Moustakas (1994) notes two distinct types of phenomenological analysis: empirical and transcendental. Transcendental phenomenology was employed in this study because the phenomenon to be explored, the use of self, was based on an interpretative description by the participants (Patton, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2007). Moustakas (1994) summarizes transcendental phenomenology as:

a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness. Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for phenomenological reflection. The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus designing the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience. (p. 49)

Transcendental phenomenology derives research evidence from individuals’ own accounts of their experience with phenomena. Phenomenological analysis is a multifaceted process that encompasses the development of three separate reports for each participant’s experiences, reflecting a textural, structural, and textural/structural description. Textural descriptions inform us about the “what” of the phenomenon, and structural descriptions provide the “how” of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. The combination of both the textural and structural descriptions give an account of what emerged as significant and how that significance was actualized for each participant.

The theoretical tradition of phenomenology offered a methodology to understand the experiences and perceptions of social workers’ use of self in their urban practice working with diverse populations. This strategy also supported the intent of the research to focus on a specific, societal group as noted by Marshall and Ross (2006), who point out qualitative researchers are fascinated by the meanings that participants attribute to complex social
interactions that occur in daily life. They explain that this interest moves the researcher “outside of the laboratories into natural settings that foster research that is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in people’s lived experiences” (p. 2). In addition, the theoretical tradition of a case study was used because it is the preferred strategy when the inquirer is seeking to answer how or why questions (Yin, 2002). A case study denotes the process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit of analysis (the bounded system, the case) or the end product. As the product of an investigation, a case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). The object of this study, gaining insight into how social workers describe their use of self, is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, which Yin (2002) states is a sound reason to use case study methodology. Further, case study methodology allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon with an expectation of unfolding a “thick description” that is holistic and grounded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359). Thus, this study utilized a qualitative methodological framework using these theoretical traditions in its implementation process.

**Theoretical Tradition of Case Study**

This phenomenological case study facilitated the free-flowing process for participants to provide their own meanings and interpretations of the phenomenon. This study was a multiple case study comprised of six social work practitioners that work with diverse populations within an urban Midwestern city. Each case consisted of in-depth interviews and other descriptive documents developed through the process of transcendental phenomenology. A pluralistic approach was used to describe (descriptive), explore (exploratory) and explain (explanatory) the use of self phenomenon. Merriam (2009) defines
a descriptive case study as the presentation of a detailed account of the phenomenon.

Answers to how and why questions are provided through an explanatory case study (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, a case study may consist of a single or multiple cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). To safeguard the validity of this research project, a multiple case study approach was used. “Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put ‘all your eggs in one basket.’ More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial” (Yin, 2009, p. 61). Additionally, he argues:

In general, criticisms about single-case studies usually reflect fears about the uniqueness or artifactual conditions surrounding the case (e.g., special access to a key informant). As a result, the criticisms may turn into skepticism about your ability to do empirical work beyond having done a single-case study. Having two cases can begin to blunt such criticism and skepticism. Having more than two cases will produce an even stronger effect. (p. 62)

In consideration of these research concerns, this study consisted of six cases. Stake (1995) describes three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Inquirers of intrinsic case studies usually have an intrinsic interest in the case, where inquirers in instrumental case studies use a specific case to get knowledge or insight about something. A collective case study consists of multiple individual studies, which was the approach and design of this study.

**Theoretical Tradition of Phenomenology**

Grbich (2013) says, “phenomenology is an approach that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these” (p. 92). The term phenomenology has caused confusion for some as its use has gained more widespread popularity, causing its meaning to become diluted (Patton, 2002). Grbich (2013) states the term can refer to different concepts: “a philosophy” (Husserl, 1967);
an inquiry paradigm (Lincoln, 1990); an interpretive theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000); a social science analytical perspective or orientation (Harper, 2000, Schutz, 1967, 1970); a major qualitative tradition (Creswell, 1998); or a research methods framework (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

Richards and Morse (2007) refer to phenomenology as one of the most important philosophical movements of the twentieth century, founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). They provide Van Manen’s (2006) classification of phenomenology in four distinct orientations: Transcendental, Existential, Hermeneutical and Linguistical, each with a specific perspective and approach. Transcendental is described as interpretative and explores the way knowledge comes into being based on insights rather than objective characteristics to constitute meaning of the phenomenon. This differs from Existential phenomenology, in that the observer is believed to be inseparable from the human reality of lived existence that creates a reciprocal relationship between the observer and the phenomenon that includes all thoughts, moods, efforts, and actions as pre-reflected experiences. Hermeneutical phenomenologists believe that knowledge comes into being “through language and understanding, which yields interpretation as an evolving process that utilizes culture (symbols, religion, art, myth, poetry and language)” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 49). Lastly, Linguistical phenomenology “perceives meaning residing in language and text, rather than in the subject, consciousness or lived experiences” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 49).

Transcendental phenomenology as a perspective best aligned with this research project and therefore was selected for the data analysis process. German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) coined the term “Verstehen,” a concept that means understanding (Schwandt, 2007, p. 314). He contends that human (mental) sciences cannot
be determined based upon natural science explanations, which positivist and empiricist epistemologies declare. Rather, Dilthey argues that meaning is derived from the agent’s or actor’s point of view. He states: “Nature we explain; psychic life we understand.” We are shaped by the way we see the world, what we believe, and what we value. How we believe knowledge is constructed and what we see as truth influences our worldview and how we see ourselves and others in the world. What knowledge claims we hold give credence to our way of being and seeing in the world; thus, if one holds to the positivist perspective of scientific objectivity, he or she may find it challenging to see the world through Verstehen. Therefore, the rationale for choosing transcendental phenomenology for this qualitative research study emanates from this philosophical perspective and provided the foundational premise for its framework.

In the next section, I describe a pilot study that was also instrumental in decisions related to the design of the study. While it was not a phenomenological study, I was able to develop more concise research interview protocol questions and create an invitational email to seek potential participants to volunteer for the research study.

**Master of Social Work Students Pilot Study**

I conducted a series of four guest lectures at an urban-based School of Social Work with 50 MSW students in Practice courses that consisted of 24 foundational level students and 26 advanced level students. These interactive presentations occurred in the Fall of 2014, in part as an assignment in a Multicultural Education seminar. The data collected from these interactive lectures was obtained anonymously, voluntarily, and with granted permission to use student responses for publication and/or this dissertation. The requested lectures sought
to gain an understanding of students’ perceptions regarding multiculturalism, cultural competency, and the use of self as an agent of change in social work.

Additionally, these lectures gave me an unobtrusive way to observe the students’ responses to the topics named above. They also provided an opportunity for me to look at the level of ease or challenge the students demonstrated during the interactive sessions. Although the information gathering was not considered an actual research study, I acknowledged and understood the regulations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that mandate procedural ethics to protect participants who are voluntarily involved in research. These mandates include do no harm, avoid deception, negotiate informed consent, and ensure privacy and confidentiality (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracey, 2010).

Recognizing the need to respect and honor the participants’ rights, transparency was acknowledged at the beginning of each presentation. I openly shared the intention to use their perceptions in a publishable paper assignment and dissertation proposal. Each participant was made aware of their right to know and understand the nature and potential consequences of their voluntary participation in this activity (Tracey, 2010). This kind of effort seems justified given the lack of literature on evidence-based methodology regarding cultural competency and multicultural education in the field of social work. Specifically, self-awareness, knowledge, and skills are cited as standards for cultural competence in social work practice; however, determining what constitutes their attainment has not been clearly delineated in social work education curriculum (NASW, 2006, Cultural Standards Indicator, pp. 19-26).

The four interactive presentations I facilitated with MSW social work students specifically targeted these standards. Heydt and Sherman (2005) suggest that Practice courses “usually become the laboratory where most students practice applying conscious use of self”
The sessions were held in foundational and advanced level practice courses, providing me the opportunity to pilot key concepts related to my research questions. Student participation and discussion was encouraged, and their responses to the group exercises were largely positive in all four voluntary sessions.

**Pilot Study Data Collection, Analysis, and Results**

Document collection included three worksheets adapted and modified by the researcher used previously in diversity training workshops. These personal documents are handouts that elicit self-report responses pertaining to the phenomenon being explored and the research questions associated with the phenomenon use of self. They were: (1) An Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge (ASK) worksheet; (2) A Personal Beliefs Assessment; and (3) A set of five questions pertaining to multiculturalism, cultural competency, and the use of self concept. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the phrase “personal documents” refers to any first-person narrative describing an individual’s actions, experiences and beliefs and is broadly used in most qualitative research traditions” (p. 133).

More specifically, the Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge worksheet is an opinion-based document that seeks to find out what participants think are the attitudes, skills, and knowledge needed by social work practitioners in general, as well as a section that asks for their own self-assessment of these three components considered as foundational expectations in professional social work. The Personal Beliefs Assessment worksheet ascertained each participant’s responses to ten Yes or No statements that had no right or wrong answer. The purpose was to explore differences in beliefs and values that may influence interaction with those who differ from one’s own cultural self. The participants were asked to check the response that best reflected their honest answer. The one-page worksheet also stated the
purpose of the activity and provided instructions to complete it. These three documents served as sources to provide a thicker, richer description of the phenomenon from the individual students’ perspectives as it related to the theoretical framework of cultural competency from a social constructionist perspective.

Data collection consisted of completed worksheets that were used to gain students’ responses. I collected and transferred the hand-written forms to typed documents in order to provide a clearer format to examine the data. This project allowed relevant procedures to be piloted in order for me to prepare for my actual dissertation research, especially the design and methods.

**Design and Methods**

Patton (2002) states that the qualitative researcher attempts to capture different perspectives by using a variety of methods to examine the implications from differing perceptions without deeming one more “true” or “right” than another (p. 98). In phenomenological research inquiry, one seeks to discover meaning making of the participants’ descriptions and perceptions of the phenomenon. Their interpretations are the focus of the research project, not the quest to objectify or quantify data. Post-positivist theories maintain the notion of scientific objectivity and do not support subjective meaning-making that recognizes knowledge existing apart from the researcher. Creswell (2013) quotes Gilgun (2005) echoing this counter to post-positivism when he states: “this silence is contradictory to qualitative research that seeks to hear all voices and perspectives” (p. 215). For this reason, a qualitative design and methodology was chosen for this study.

One of the data collection approaches for qualitative, phenomenology studies is in-depth interviews with the most important point of “describing the meaning of the
phenomenon” for each participant (Creswell, 2013, p. 161). Creswell also recommends some basic procedures to doing interviews and observations that include: (1) deciding on the research questions, (2) determining the type of interview, (3) using adequate recording procedures, (4) designing and using an interview protocol, (5) pilot testing and determining the place for the interview, (6) using a consent form, and (7) using good interview procedures. Table 1 reflects the overarching research question and sub-questions aligned with data sampling tools, data sources, and data analysis.

**Setting for the Study**

The setting for this study was an urban-based community located in the Central Midwestern region of the U.S. For the purpose of this study, “urban based” is defined as communities within a Midwestern metropolitan area that have a large concentration of people of color (Delgado, 2000, p. 19). According to an Equity Profile report of the region, concentrated poverty is on the rise, currently reflecting 40 percent or higher, where the number of poor households have doubled between 1980 and 2010 (PolicyLink & PERE, 2013). Additionally, the report states that “people of color are nine times more likely to live in these very high poverty neighborhoods than its white population” (p. 5). The demographic projection for this region points out that by the year 2040, 42 percent of the city population will be people of color (PolicyLink & PERE, 2013, p. 2).

**Selection of Participants**

One question that Creswell (2013) posed is, “What are typical access and rapport issues?” For a phenomenological approach, this would point to “finding people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 148). Access and rapport requires getting permission of the
Table 1

*Research Design of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overarching Research Question:</td>
<td>• Pre-participant assessment instrument</td>
<td>• Transcendental phenomenology analysis process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are social workers’ perceptions of their <em>use of self</em> as change agents?</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>• Transcription of audio-taped interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflexive field notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question:</td>
<td>• Pre-participant assessment instrument</td>
<td>• Transcendental phenomenology analysis process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) How do social workers perceive their <em>use of self</em> as a tool for culturally</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>• Transcription of audio-taped interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsive change agency?</td>
<td>• Reflexive field notes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question:</td>
<td>• Pre-participant assessment instrument</td>
<td>• Transcendental phenomenology analysis process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) How do social workers describe their professional preparedness to work with</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>• Transcription of audio-taped interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse populations?</td>
<td>• Reflexive field notes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question:</td>
<td>• Pre-participant assessment instrument</td>
<td>• Transcendental phenomenology analysis process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>• Transcription of audio-taped interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to hindering or impeding culturally responsive service delivery?</td>
<td>• Reflexive field notes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question:</td>
<td>• Invitational Email assessment instrument</td>
<td>• Transcendental phenomenology analysis process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>• Transcription of audio-taped interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to helping or facilitating culturally responsive service delivery?</td>
<td>• Reflexive field notes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

individuals and obtaining approval of IRB to begin the data collection process (Creswell, 2013, p. 151). I obtained IRB approval to begin the data collection process on March 2, 2016 (see Appendix E). For this study, the sampling strategies to select participants was purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling types. Snowball sampling identifies potentially “information rich” participants from people who know other people through a referral type.
process. Criterion sampling requires that all cases within the research project meet some established criteria (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling in a phenomenological study requires that all participants selected for the study to have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) states that qualitative inquiry using purposeful sampling focuses on a relatively small sample size in order to gain understanding of a phenomenon in depth. Dukes (1984) recommends a sample of 3 to 10 participants for a phenomenological study. Patton (2002) further explains purposeful sampling is a widely used, effective technique in qualitative research that identifies and selects “information-rich cases” when there are limited resources. This sampling strategy best suited my outreach efforts to obtain a diverse group of social work participants, which I was able to accomplish.

Criterion sampling required that all participants met the same criteria, which was three-fold: (1) hold a Master’s of Social Work degree; (2) have five or more years in direct social work practice; and (3) have worked or currently work in an urban-based setting. Each of the six participants, as a case in multiple case study, met the criteria and all of them currently worked with diverse ethnic clients. Snowball sampling was initiated through the invitational email (see Appendix A) that was sent out to three organizational listservs related to social work and human services, along with several emails sent to individuals asking them to share with others in their own networks who might be interested in participating in the study. Within the first few hours, several people had responded to the invitational email. In the next few days, eight responses were received. One was not qualified to meet the criteria of five years as a social worker because she had only been in the field for two years. The remaining seven social workers who met the criteria for the research study were each sent the Pre-Participant Assessment instrument
This document served two purposes: (a) to provide more information about the participant selection and (b) to give the researcher a better understanding of subjects' existing perceptions on the topic of use of self (see Appendix D). This instrument also helped me to become more familiar with my participants. I was able to obtain a quick synopsis of their background knowledge and interests. Two social workers did not respond to the Pre-Participant Assessment instrument within the specified time period designated, which was ten days from the invitational email notification. They were not considered for the study, leaving five who did return the Pre-Participant Assessment instrument. Additionally, a social worker contacted me on the tenth day who learned of the study from one of the listservs and asked to be a participant. He was a white male and since the study did not include a white male at this point, a Pre-Participant Assessment instrument was emailed to him, which he returned within 24 hours. This gave me six, diverse participants, with different ethnicities, ages, gender, and work experiences to contribute their voices to this study (see Table 2). I had initially stated that I wanted to have five to seven participants in all, so I was pleased to have six.

All six participants completed and returned the Pre-Participant Assessment instrument prior to scheduling their interviews. Each participant selected the date, time, and location for his or her interview. I knew two of the six participants from the MSW program at a university located in the urban, metropolitan area where this research took place. I met the remaining four for the first time at their interview. The pre-participant assessment instrument and the in-depth interviews assisted me in establishing rapport with all participants, which contributed to the validity of the data. Angen (2000) notes that validity in interpretative
Table 2

Participants’ Background Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID #</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th># Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>001A</td>
<td>Mary Ann</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>Case Manager</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>002B</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>003C</td>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>Hospice Social Worker</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>004D</td>
<td>Birdie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White-Non Hispanic</td>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>005E</td>
<td>Bauer</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>Child Therapist</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>006F</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Youth Counselor</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

research is “a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research” (p. 387). One of the last questions that I asked during the in-depth interviews was, “What was it like for you talking to me like this?” They all responded positively. Here are some of their responses:

- Ah…I mean, it’s been a good challenge for me though to really think about what I am using with clients and what am I bringing to my meetings with clients

- Oh, yeah, it was good! (she laughs) Ah, it’s kind of…I haven’t sat down and done this before, so it’s a good experience

- Nerve wrecking! Inspirational!

The interviews took place in different locations, each designated by the interviewee. The participants and their interview sites were kept confidential for privacy protection of all persons involved in the study.
Data Collection

Sampling tools consisted of an invitational email and a preliminary assessment instrument to help determine eligibility. Data sources included in-depth, semi-structured interviews and self-reflexive field notes. The pre-participant assessment was emailed to each person who responded with interest to potentially participate in the study. The information requested was related to the topic, use of self, and asked three preliminary questions to gather helpful data in the participant selection process. The pre-participant assessment instrument served to gather personal narrative about the phenomenon, use of self, as well as to provide background information to the researcher on the participants’ beliefs and existing knowledge about the phenomenon. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) consider “personal documents” as any first-person narrative describing an individual’s actions, experiences, and beliefs and note the broad use of these in many qualitative research traditions (p. 133).

The first data source consisted of in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with six social workers who were the participants in the research study. The second data source was my reflexive field notes that I recorded throughout the data collection and analysis. Horvat (2013) points out that field notes are the researcher’s written observations that can help to understand the patterns of possible meanings of the phenomenon. She further writes that the method used is irrelevant, but stresses the importance of keeping track of “what happened and what you think of what happened is key” (p. 66). I used my reflexive field notes to capture my own thoughts, wonderings, and assumptions in order to revisit them prior to data analysis for bracketing purposes. I have included relevant entries from those reflexive notes in the transcendental phenomenology data analysis steps. Collectively, these three data sources and two sampling tools served to provide triangulation of the data to
preserve the validity of the study. All instruments used in the data collection process are included in the Appendix section of this research study (see Appendices A-D).

**Interviews**

In-depth interviews provided the primary data source for this study. In an article on qualitative research, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) observe that when a researcher is designing an interview schedule for phenomenology, their questions should elicit as much information as possible while also being able to meet the aims and objectives of the study. According to Marshall and Ross (2006), interviewing as a data collection method has a number of strengths. It fosters face-to-face interaction with participants and is useful for uncovering participants’ perspectives. Data collection is in natural settings, versus laboratory type environments, and can be useful for describing complex interactions.

Naturalistic qualitative design allows the phenomenon of interest to naturally unfold without having predetermined categories (Patton, 2002). One form of naturalistic inquiry is to use open-ended, conversation-like interviews rather than using questionnaires that contain pre-set response categories (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) explains that interviewing people helps to find out things from them that we cannot observe directly. Interviewing is considered the best technique to use when conducting case studies of a few selected participants as well as to collect data from a large number of people representing multiple ideas (Merriam, 2009). The main purpose of an interview is to gain information from others when observation of their behavior, thoughts, and intentions cannot relay how they organize the world and the meanings that they attach to what goes on in their world (Patton, 2002). The purpose of these interviews was to gather a
deeper understanding of social workers’ perceptions of their use of self in their urban-based practice settings.

In preparation for their interviews, I developed an interview guide (see Appendix C) that would help maintain a consistent procedural process during the interviews. The overarching question and sub-questions from my research project were used to construct the guide. All participants were told that their data collection would remain anonymous to protect their real identities. All participants read and signed the informed consent document (see Appendix B), and each one was again verbally made aware that this was completely voluntary. Each participant chose the option to create his or her own alias (e.g., fictitious name). Case study numbers were assigned to each participant based upon a simple numeric and alpha coding system to further de-identify the data collected from the interviews. To ensure that all participants had been given sufficient time to respond to the interview protocol to their satisfaction, my last question, “Is there anything else that you would like to share about yourself, your life and/or your work?” provided an opportunity to capture any additional thoughts that might enrich the study. All interviewees appeared eager to share their thoughts about their own practice, cultural competency concerns, and how they felt about their professional preparedness to be a social worker. I developed a sense of connection to the participants’ recorded voices and the research questions that guided the interaction.

Comprehensive, audio-taped interviews were used to obtain the participants’ personal experiences with the use of self phenomenon through open-ended questions and conversation. The interviews lasted approximately 50-60 minutes each. Four of the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed within the first 24 hours of each individual interview. The last two interview transcriptions were completed within 3-5 days following the
interviews due to an unexpected occurrence that delayed me from meeting the intended goal of 24-hour transcriptions. Member checking, which is the process of participants’ reviewing what was transcribed, was done at this point. All participants preferred to receive a copy of the transcribed interview via email, and each was sent their individual completed transcription to review, correct, and approve. All participants either returned the corrected transcriptions with their changes added or sent an email approving it as transcribed. All corrections were made as requested and a copy of both, the request for changes and the changed document were saved, as well as the original transcription.

To begin the coding of the data, I first developed a starting codebook and began to list every term that I thought might be associated with my research questions. Saldaña (2013) calls this “first cycle coding.” This process allows the researcher to begin with a list of descriptive codes, derived deductively from the research questions and theoretical framework of the study, but remain open to the possibilities of other inductive meanings or themes in the data. My list consisted of over 75 words and phrases that emanated from my theoretical framework. I then added the interpretive code definitions to each of the words listed. I read through each of the six participants’ interview transcriptions to ensure that I had thoughtfully gleaned emergent meaning codes by doing a line-by-line search based on frequency of occurrence in each transcription.

The next step involved searching for common themes that started to emerge through the activity of coding the interview transcriptions. This coding was instrumental in formulating interpretive patterns that begin to appear. Coding enabled me to “retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so [I could] quickly find, pull out and cluster the segments related to a particular research question…or theme” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014,
p. 72). I kept a journal of possible themes and ideas that were contained in the transcriptions. Where relevant, I made connections to the thematic analysis (Grbich, 2013), a hallmark of qualitative analysis. Transcendental phenomenological data analysis was used for the in-depth interviews.

**Transcendental Phenomenology Data Analysis Process**

This study utilized Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis process, which is more complex than the enumerative and thematic coding. Transcendental phenomenology consists of the following steps: (1) epoche, (2) phenomenological reduction, (3) horizontalization, (4) imaginative variation, and (5) textural and structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) asserts that phenomenological analysis is the primary method of analysis in a phenomenological case study. Transcendental phenomenology seeks to look at the phenomenon with a fresh eye and an open mind. The development of three separate reports were created based upon each participant’s experience with the phenomenon, use of self. These reports include a textural description (the what), a structural description (the how), and a textural/structural combined description that gave an account of what emerged as significant and how that significance was actualized for each participant. Each of the following steps entails a description of the procedure that I followed to adhere to Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis process.

**Epoche**

Moustakas (1994) points out that epoche is a process that the researcher engages in to remove prejudicial viewpoints or assumptions about the phenomenon being researched. The purpose of the epoche process is to help the researcher become aware of preconceptions and prejudices that may impede the study or interfere with the natural flow of the research.
"Epoche" is a Greek word that means “to stay away from or abstain.” The objective for the researcher is to bracket or table any preconceived ideas and take no position whatsoever regarding the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994). In epoche, the researcher suspends everything that interferes with seeing the phenomenon with fresh eyes and an open mind. Moustakas (1994) writes, “I must practice the Epoche alone, its nature and intensity require my absolute presence and absolute aloneness” (p. 87). Like Moustakas, I found it necessary to be alone, to be completely free from my everyday thoughts and ways of being. This aloneness process enabled me to focus my energy completely on seeing the participants’ individual renderings and perceptions about the phenomenon, use of self. During the process of epoche, I did self-reflective meditation to clear my mind and help me to become more receptive to seeing the phenomenon with fresh eyes. Moustakas (1994) suggests that this added dimension of epoche enables one to let preconceptions enter into their consciousness and exit from it freely, being welcoming to them just as he or she is to “the unbiased looking and seeing” of the phenomenon (p. 89).

To further address this critical first step, I took time to memo my own a priori knowledge about the phenomenon in my reflexive field notes. According to Richards and Morse (2007), researchers bracket all a priori knowledge about the topic by writing their assumptions knowledge and expectations. Transparency of the researcher’s own thoughts, feelings and perceptions is acceptable in qualitative research, but must be minimized in order to maintain integrity of the data collection. The following field note entry reflects my own examined views prior to conducting my first interview:

As I am preparing to do my first semi-structured interview for my study, I began to think about what Richards and Morse wrote pertaining to what can be a definite limitation to a study and that is a priori knowledge.
So, I pondered the following questions: (1) What are my assumptions about the use of self concept? (2) What knowledge do I hold about it? (3) What expectations do I have from this process? To address these questions, my response was as follows:

An assumption about anything requires one to assume something. To assume is to “presuppose, guess, imagine” according to Microsoft Word, Thesaurus. With that premise, I suppose my assumptions about the use of self are primarily influenced from the literature research I have done so far on the topic. I imagine that the use of self is directly related to the personage of an individual and how they interact relationally with others. Being aware of this supposition helps to remind me to remain vigilant in keeping my own thoughts out of the process. I will intently focus my attention to the participant’s voice and practice listening skills, without judgment or adding comments.

The knowledge I hold about the use of self comes from my Master’s social work program Practice class where the term was introduced to me for the first time. I immediately was drawn to the concept, partly because of my way of thinking and being. It personifies a picture of someone who is in a helping ministry or vocation. Additionally, the knowledge constructed on this topic is largely due to the literature research I have done on use of self. Again, it is imperative that my personal thoughts, feelings and perceptions be excluded from this process as possible.

**Phenomenological Reduction**

Phenomenological reduction is the second step and entails “bracketing,” which requires the researcher to deconstruct the phenomenon being studied by isolating preconceptions or existing standards of meaning about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). He explains that “the process involves a pre-reflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and thematic” (p. 91). To address this step, I wrote reflexive field notes throughout the data collection and analysis process to record my own interpretations, responses, and thoughts that might influence my research effort. I have included some of the relevant entries below; however, the writings that were too personal or unrelated to the study have been omitted:
• On March 5, 2016, I wrote: “I just thought about the statistics on social work being mostly white women in the profession and as I am trying to find participants in my study, the majority of the responses so far are from white females. In fact, four white females, two black females, but no males as of yet. I have personally contacted three diverse male social workers, but I have not received any response.”

• On Monday, March 7, 2016, I wrote: “The thought came to me just now what the participants would look like? What would catch my eye? And perhaps, what would cause me to prejudge? I wrote out my a priori knowledge earlier today to make sure that I am aware of my own biases. I need to keep focused on the purpose of this research project and keep my own thoughts and perceptions out of this interview and the ones to follow.”

• March 10, 2016 8:45 p.m. I wrote: “After interviewing Sophie today her responses were very succinct and to the point. She said she has learned to do that in her work to “state the facts.” I must admit my own assumptive thought came forth when I saw Sophie at the restaurant. Just on-sight, looking at her, I assumed she was white. However, I was wrong. Sophie is Hispanic. That revealed to me my own bias associated with external characteristics and that they exist subconsciously, even when I am aware of its potential, it can be on automatic pilot in spite of my intellectual knowledge and good intentions to refrain from assumptive judgment of others.”

Phenomenological reduction through bracketing requires a keen and repeated look at what is going on in order to understand what the phenomenon is like for each individual. The process that I used relied on my “ability to attend, recognize, and describe with clarity” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 93). Once bracketing had occurred, I began the process of horizontalization to organize all the data in such a way as to supply equal weight and value, as well as to establish meaning units. Horizontalizing requires that each statement is initially considered to have equal value as one reflects and seeks out its essence (p. 95). The details of this process now follows.

**Horizontalization**

Horizontalizing is another dimension of the phenomenological reduction, a never-ending process that reveals new horizons of our experience with the phenomenon.
Moustakas (1994) points out that horizons are unlimited, and upon each entrance into our consciousness, the possibility for unlimited discovery evolves. To complete this step, each phenomenon was viewed as having equal value. As I explored the experiences of each participant, I looked for the nature and essence of that experience, refraining from imposing my own meanings. I had to examine my own experiences to reveal the horizons of experience for each participant. I constructed a complete textural description of the experience for each participant beginning with epoche. Moustakas (1994) states, “nonrepetitive constituents of the experience are linked thematically, and a full description is derived” (p. 96). Finally, repetitious or overlapping statements in the interview transcripts were deleted so that the initial report comprises the textural meanings or the “what” of the phenomenon. Identifying textural meanings consist of “close and repeated readings of the transcript (or other text) in search of “meaning units” that are descriptively labeled so that they may serve as building blocks for broader conceptualization” (Padgett, 2008, p. 152).

I conducted three rounds of examining the data using a detailed process that included repeated readings of each transcript to identify meaning units or themes. I coded the data by labeling each statement with a descriptive code, determined the frequency of each statement, then grouped similar statements together to form meaning units or themes. It should be noted that in phenomenology, invariant constituents or meaning units are equivalent to themes in generic, qualitative analysis. Moustakas (1994) states, “From the invariant constituents, the researcher, using phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation, constructs thematic portrayals of the experience” (p. 131). The process of clustering the invariant constituents or meaning units into core themes allows the researcher to construct meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
The three rounds of data analysis were critical to the process of identifying common meaning units in all six of the interviews. Round One consisted of combining all six interview transcripts’ frequency meaning unit counts derived from the horizons in each participant’s data file. Horizons are “the textural meanings and invariant constituent of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Invariant constituents or meaning units help to communicate an understanding of an experience. Questions that I posed during this process were:

1. Does the statement fully communicate an understanding of the experience?
2. Can the statement be abstracted and labeled?

Next, I eliminated repetitive or overlapping statements, clustered the invariant constituents into similar themes, and checked invariant constituents and themes against interview scripts and the research questions in the study in order to delete inconsistencies. I captured the responses written in the interviews that directly addressed research questions in the study and added those meaning units to the Round One document. I used the meaning units I created initially based upon the initial coding process that resulted in over 75 codes. In Round One, these codes were aligned with the invariant constituents or meaning units from all six interviews. From this point, I looked for textural meanings and invariant constituents, placing a number next to each meaning unit that was represented in the interview transcripts. This process enabled me to derive the frequency of the meaning units represented in each participant’s data file. Some of the meaning units emerged directly from my interviewees’ words, known as *in vivo* (Padgett, 2008, p. 154). I was able to take large chunks of data and group them together to formulate the emerging themes that are presented in this chapter. Next I followed the steps of Imaginative Variation.
Imaginative Variation

This step supported the identification of structural themes from the textural descriptions of phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994) states, “Through imaginative variation, the researcher understands that there is not a single end road to truth, but the countless possibilities emerge that are intimately connected with the essences and meanings of an experience” (p. 99). The uncovering of meanings that might be invisible is essential to imaginative variation where “anything whatever becomes possible” (p. 98). In Round Two, I reviewed all six individual data files and further combined the meaning units that had three or more entries checked. I deleted all irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping statements and those that had less than two marks checked per statement from each individual data file. Round Two resulted in 20 remaining meaning units from the original 75+ list derived from the participants’ transcription code books.

Textural and Structural Descriptions

The next step in transcendental phenomenology was conducting the textural, structural, and textural/structural portrayals of each theme. This step was three-fold and entailed the development of each participant’s “what” of the phenomenon (textural), the development of each participant’s “how” of the phenomenon (structural), and a combined description of them both (textural/structural). The textural is described as “an abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration, but not yet essence” (Patton, 2002, p. 486). These were used to introduce a profile of each participant including their background history, and their perceptions of a culturally responsive social worker and social work preparedness. The structural description provided the participants’ implementation of how they perceived use of self for change agency in their practice. The third portrayal consisted of
the combined textural/structural descriptions that served to develop the composite group report, which reflects the essence of meanings of the phenomenon of all participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Role of the Researcher**

Eisner (1991) writes: “The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. It is the ability to see and interpret significant aspects. It is this characteristic that provides unique, personal insight into the experience under study” (p. 33). The question of how a professional social worker employs his or her use of self is one that I explored to investigate the traits and behaviors participants described in regard to the phenomenon. Knowing, understanding, and reflective awareness were key factors I constantly thought about as “self as researcher.” I subscribe to the belief that the natural world and the social world are entirely different and cannot be approached with the same research methodologies.

Piantanida and Garman (2009) relate to this position as researchers in their work, stating: “The capacity of humans to make meaning of life events and to exercise a sense of agency in their lives is not considered a confounding variable to be controlled through research procedures” (p. 50). Their premise provided an underpinning for my relational and subjective stance in this research study, understanding and appreciating that one’s own meaning-making will occur and therefore, needs to be systematically recorded throughout the research effort to maintain integrity of the data collection process. Written, reflexive field notes were used to track my thoughts, perceptions, and ideas for further exploration and reflection.

As researcher, I also view knowledge as subjective and constructed within contexts of one’s ways of being in the world, shaped holistically, encompassing their sociological,
historical, political, gender identification, economic status, ethnicity, cognitive, emotional, spiritual, biological, and experiential perspectives. Creswell (2013) notes that all writing is “positioned” within the author’s own life experience and worldview (p. 215). Recognizing that these contextual factors exist in myself as well as in the participants, I intentionally exercised deep self-reflection to avoid interference with the natural evolution of the research.

In conclusion, I have provided the rationale of the study and all of the methodological processes that I used to design the study including, participants, setting, data sources and data analyses. My original purpose was to incorporate phenomenology to understand the essence of the use of self for six participants. This purpose did not change over time. Table 3 is a timeline that depicts each step that was taken in the process of the research study development and completion. I follow the Timeline (see Table 3) with the discussion of validity and reliability, focusing on limitations and ethical considerations.

**Validity and Reliability**

In the spirit of becoming one with the data, I manually conducted all the data collection, actual transcriptions, and the data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), immersing one’s self in the data is needed to become familiar with the data content’s depth and breadth. This immersion process consists of active multiple readings of the data to look for meanings and patterns to emerge. I read each data set twice before beginning the research analysis to become more familiar with the participants’ voices on content related
### Table 3

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 2, 2016</td>
<td>IRB Research Study Approval received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 4, 2016</td>
<td>Research Study Invitational Interview email sent to prospective listservs and individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 4-9, 2016</td>
<td>Pre-Participant Assessment sent to prospective participants and returned to researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 7-13, 2016</td>
<td>Scheduled and conducted six interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 8-17, 2016</td>
<td>Completed transcriptions of six, 50-60 minute long, In-depth Interviews, totaling 107 pages; Collective time taken was 41 hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18-April 3, 2016</td>
<td>Conducted and completed Moustakas (1994) Transcendental Data Analysis Process by Developing 18 individual reports (3 per participant) consisting of: (1) textural, an average of 5-8 pages each; (2) structural, approximately 2-4 pages each; and (3) textural/structural, average of 4-6 pages each. One group composite report was created, accounting for approximately 30 hours of time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directly to the phenomenon and to help ensure the validity and reliability of the study by making sure that the participants’ views and perceptions were represented without bias or manipulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member-checking, a process that involves asking the participants to go over transcripts of their interviews to check for accuracy, is often used in qualitative research to help ensure reliability and accuracy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I employed member-checking to allow participants in this study an opportunity to review their individual interview transcriptions for accuracy. To make the study believable, I provided thick
descriptions through quotes from the data that represented the participants’ voices. Lastly, crystallization, the most recent qualitative practice for ensuring validity, was utilized in this study. Ellington (2014) purports that a strong point of crystallization is its flexibility as an overall framework for research as an enhancement to traditional research design by incorporating one or more elements.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), novice researchers can experience confusion as they attempt to make sense of the multiple qualitative inquiry terms, such as validity, trustworthiness, and credibility (p. 124). However, there is agreement by some authors that certain common practices are essential to establishing validity in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). These procedures include member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The terminology a researcher uses to describe these inquiry processes may be influenced by the lens and paradigms from which they approach qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) introduced three paradigm assumptions: postpositivist, constructivist, and critical.

Postpositivists view qualitative validity as a rigorous and systematic process that mirrors a quantitative inquiry in its approach. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the positivist approach does not allow for multiple constructed realities, but rather is grounded in “naïve realism” (p. 295). Constructivists believe in “pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized perspectives that are sensitive to place and situation toward reality” (p. 125). The critical lens seeks to uncover “the hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed, read and interpreted,” calling into question the accepted assumptions of research
inquiry. Based upon these paradigms, this research project took a constructivist paradigm as it best fit the purpose and lens of the study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative research has four general types of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Thomas, 2006). These terms are suggested as an alternative phraseology to positivist language that is mostly used in quantitative research methodology. Constructivists embrace validity through the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). For example, credibility replaces the term internal validity, which signifies that the research is replicable based upon the findings. Qualitative inquiry is more interested in reflecting the interpretations of multiple realities that participants experience with the phenomenon. Positivists often use the term external validity, which purports to be generalizable to other populations and to “different types of persons, settings and times” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 291). The term transferability aligns most closely to the constructivist qualitative inquiry paradigm.

Trustworthiness demonstrates that the participants’ perceptions and views are represented without bias or manipulation. The interpretations must be rendered by the participants—not by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rigor to ensure that this occurs is essential to the integrity of the research if it is to be trusted and believed (Merriam, 2009). The criteria dependability and confirmability are realized through the data findings that support the inquiry. Dependability is the alternate language criterion for the quantitative notion of reliability, which is considered the ability for consistent repetition and predictability of a study. Confirmability is the naturalistic term for objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the qualitative research process is not predictive, but rather, it is emerging and open to multiple realities to come forth as it
proceeds. This research used the best of multiple worlds that purposefully engaged the voices of social workers to render thick, rich descriptions of their lived experiences with the phenomenon use of self.

**Limitations**

In this study, two potential threats to the validity and reliability were identified that may be considered weaknesses and liabilities: (1) the accuracy of the data to be captured; and (2) the interpretation of events as seen through the lens of the researcher (bias). According to Lincoln and Denzin (2003), “all writings reflect the particular standpoint of the inquirer/author and all texts arrive shaped implicitly or explicitly by the social, cultural, class, and gendered location of the author” (p. 17). Richards and Morse (2007) point out that the researcher’s experience will surely affect the research. Therefore, these two areas were identified as possible threats to the validity and reliability of this study. They maintain the important question to ask is, “How do you monitor and account for the ways your values, beliefs, culture, and even physical limitations affect the process and quality of data?” (p. 125). To answer that question, I utilized bracketing as a mechanism to separate personal experiences from that of others in the study. In phenomenological research, researchers bracket all *a priori* knowledge about the topic by writing their assumptions, knowledge, and expectations (Richards & Morse, 2007). Additionally, member checking to ensure against personal biases was used in the research process. All six participants were involved in reviewing and approving their transcripts before data analysis began. Being self-aware and acknowledging these personal and professional perceptions was critical to my conscious effort of deliberate bracketing.
Ethical Considerations

“Just as multiple paths lead to credibility, resonance, and other markers of qualitative quality, a variety of practices attend to ethics in qualitative research that includes procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics” (Tracey, 2010, p. 847). The Institutional Review Board regulates procedural ethics that include specific mandates to protect participants who will voluntarily become involved with research. These mandates include: do no harm, avoid deception, negotiate informed consent, and ensure privacy and confidentiality (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracey, 2010). Relational ethics embraces the ethic of care that “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4).

These ethical considerations were well noted and received. A sincere commitment to be truthful with participants about my intentions for conducting this qualitative study were made clear, along with the promise to engage in relationally ethical investigation that included ethic of care principles. The Belmont Report (1979) commands the criticalness to honor the autonomy of research participants that acknowledges their capability to deliberate about personal goals and to act upon them in the research process. Each participant was made aware of their right to know and understand the nature and potential consequences of their voluntary participation in this study (Tracey, 2010). In adherence to these authoritative agencies, I ensured that all six participants acknowledged their voluntary participation through informed consent documentation.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The problem I addressed in this study pertained to culturally competent social work practice. Social workers who are not culturally competent may impede equitable and culturally relevant service delivery, particularly in working with diverse populations in urban communities (Davis, 1997; Lu et al., 2001; Sue, 2010). Those who are most vulnerable are often the clients that receive social work services, and many of them live in urban-based environments (Davis, 2007; Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). With the problem in mind, the purpose of the study was to ascertain the perceptions that urban-based social workers describe about the phenomenon use of self in their own practice. In order to provide an inclusive framework of the participants’ experiences, the qualitative tradition of phenomenology was the primary guide of inquiry. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenologists focus on describing the commonalities of the participants’ experiences with the phenomenon.

This was a phenomenological case study that used Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental model of phenomenology that relies on in-depth interviews as the major data source for capturing the essence of the phenomenon use of self for participants. Each participant in the study is viewed as an individual case that is part of the larger case of six participants bounded by the phenomenon of use of self. As noted in Chapter Three, case study is preferred when the inquirer is seeking to answer how or why questions (Yin, 2002).

I also incorporated the theoretical underpinnings of social constructionism and self-reflexivity as outlined in the methodology. These theories are significant constructs of phenomenological inquiry. Social constructionists recognize the viability of knowledge
claims as opposed to positivist researchers, who value the validity of knowledge. Human participation is key to the construction of knowledge, and the emphasis is on how people know as much as what they know subjectively instead of objectively (Raskin, 2002, p. 2) (italics by researcher). The self-reflexivity theory points to individuals within the context of critical introspection and understanding of their own human capacity. Additionally, it beckons one to consider the reciprocal relationship between the inner self and the socio-cultural container of experience (Finlay, 2002; Longhofer & Floersch, 2012).

Further, my interest in the viability of knowledge through a social constructionist lens spurred my decision to use a case study approach to explore phenomena with a distinct boundary. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out case studies provide a grounded and holistic methodology to capture thick descriptions. By using case study methodology along with the selected theoretical frameworks, I was able to: (1) explore cultural competence standards for professional social work; and (2) apprehend the essence of participants’ perceptions about their use of self with greater meaning through in-depth interviews. The resulting reports in this study constituted the phenomenological essence that unfolded from the participants’ lived experiences as practicing social workers in urban settings. These traditions aligned with my focus and intent to better understand how social workers see themselves and how they describe their personal and professional connection to providing culturally responsive care to multicultural clients.

To report the findings of the study, I first answer the research questions that guided the inquiry using the interview transcripts and the composite group report. Answering the research questions is a culminating element of the study that was addressed and contributed to unfolding the essence of the phenomenon of use of self for participants. The in-depth
interviews that comprised the composite group report revealed themes connected to rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) that can help readers enter the worlds of the participants. The more descriptive findings (textural, structural, and textural/structural) of the six participants tell a fuller and richer story of the phenomenon and was analyzed thorough transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas 1994), which produced the three collective, descriptions. The textural descriptions are used to introduce the profile of each participant. The structural descriptions communicate how participants preferred to implement their urban practices, and the third combines the textural and structural. Finally, I present the Composite Group Report (Moustakas, 1994), which mirrors the analysis process for the textural and structural descriptions, clustering the invariant constituents or meaning units into core themes to tell how the group implemented the use of self as change agents in their urban practices.

**Reporting on the Findings Based on the Research Questions**

The participants’ cases were used to investigate the phenomenon use of self as a tool for change agency in their urban practices. I posed the overarching research question: What are social workers’ perceptions of their use of self as change agents? Four sub-questions were posed: (a) How do social workers perceive their use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency? (b) How do social workers describe their professional preparedness to work with diverse populations? (c) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to hindering or impeding culturally responsive service delivery? (d) What personal and professional characteristics do social workers attribute to helping or facilitating culturally responsive service delivery?

The responses to the research questions were uncovered through themes identified in the Group Composite Report, a compilation of in-depth interviews that formed the 18
descriptions for the six participants. The printed in-depth interview transcripts were manually reviewed to determine themes for each of the research questions, which served to validate the categories through the frequency of common key words and phrases. Theme organization was achieved by first, identifying meaning units and then putting them into categories that appeared common among all of the participants in relation to the phenomenon. This identification process revealed common themes or meaning units, which were highlighted to bring them forward more visibly.

The themes from the Group Composite Report that depicted the essence of the phenomenon for the six participants were: (1) Client-centered advocacy, (2) Social work preparedness, and (3) Culturally responsive social worker. I define client-centered advocacy as “helping those receiving services by standing in representation of social justice and equity on their behalf.” Social work preparedness is defined as “training and preparation to do social work practice effectively.” The theme, culturally responsive social worker is defined as “a professional social work practitioner that has the ability to provide appropriate and relevant services to diverse populations.” While the interpretative codes or meanings that the participants attributed to use of self were different in some instances, the three themes were common in all six participant responses. Table 4 delineates the themes and interpretative codes identified along with the invariant constituents or themes from the composite group report.

The themes from the Composite Group Report show the commonalities of participants’ responses in the data. In support of the findings, excerpts from various quoted text from the participants have been intentionally incorporated to ensure their voices on the phenomenon use of self speak resolutely in this study. Each sub-question is reported with
Table 4

Themes from the Composite Group Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Client-centered advocacy</th>
<th>Social work preparedness</th>
<th>Culturally responsive social worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Codes (Frequency)</td>
<td>Helping (21)</td>
<td>Experience (23)</td>
<td>Culture (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Clients (57)</td>
<td>Education (20)</td>
<td>Diversity (43)</td>
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themes from the data that are grounded in relevant theory and research. I begin with the first sub-question that centers on the use of self in the social work field.

Sub-question a) How Do Social Workers Perceive their Use of Self as a Tool for Culturally Responsive Change Agency?

To address this question, the theme of culturally responsive social worker is to be considered in providing culturally responsive change agency to clients. The definition given to the theme based on meanings gleaned from participants’ data is to consciously show deference for others’ ways of being who are different from one’s own self. The theme of culturally responsive social worker included the participants’ thick rich descriptions in their own urban practice that contributed to this awareness factor in service delivery to diverse clients. This theme, depicted through the interpretative codes of culture and diversity, reflected the participants’ perceptions of valuing these terms when interacting with people different from themselves. Beth’s description of the phenomenon use of self in her in-depth interview where she stressed the importance of a social worker being self-aware and particularly understanding their clients was as follows:
I would say that is a social worker who is aware... of whatever particular culture or group of people, you know, that he or she is serving. Ah... when you are culturally responsive that means that you have at least a basic understanding of this population, regardless of what culture it is, whether that’s race or gender or people’s lifestyles.

Bauer expressed a novel perspective of the use of self, comparing the social worker as a passenger in a vehicle driven by the client. Bauer noted that a culturally responsive social worker is not only familiar with their clients, but also recognizes the cultural perspective that the client brings to the situation. He suggested that social workers should “step back and be a passenger in that vehicle in allowing that client to basically tell their story, specifically when it comes to their values, their norms---their beliefs.”

Leo connects to the interpretative code of culture through the importance of understanding self as a change agency tool in order to work effectively with diverse clients:

I think most of the time I don’t necessarily say anything but it’s my awareness of myself, whatever my feelings are, my understanding of human process and human development and human emotional expression. I think it is absolutely crucial for me to listen to students, to understand what they are saying, what they are feeling, and to verbally reflect that back to them so that they hear that I understand.

Johnson and Munch (2009) describe culture as a way of life that encompasses a group’s generational social history, beliefs, behaviors, and rituals. Misurell and Springer (2013) state, “administering culturally responsive treatment involves a consideration of clinician, client and model specific factors” (p. 138). The National Association of Social Workers Standards for Cultural Competence (2006) states that practitioners must be knowledgeable of their clients’ beliefs and values along with having self-awareness of their own cultural beliefs. All six participants appeared to agree that the theme, Culturally responsive social worker, is one that social workers need to be cognizant of in their work with diverse populations.
Diversity also connected to the theme of **Culturally responsive social worker**.

*Diversity* means differences, and Birdie pointed out how she understood the significance of her own awareness as a member of the majority race in terms of working with diverse populations. She described how she uses herself in these client interactions:

> Over the years you know I worked in the inner-city and I’ve had lots of, you know, I work with lots of different ethnic groups and I just tried to think as a part of the majority in the United States? I tried to like, go above and beyond when I’m with the patient who is a minority.

Mary Ann also spoke to using herself by seeking to understand the experiences that her diverse clients bring to the work. She works with different ethnicities and cultural groups, including Latinos, Blacks, and LGBTQ populations. She is aware of how all of these identities intersect and how critical it is for her to be mindful of differences in serving these diversity groups. She reiterates her perspective:

> So being mindful of how each have an impact on their life experience. And then again, so knowing that my view of what their experience is like as a black woman or as a Latino man, like knowing that based on how their experience is, I don’t know at all, just because I know they are Latino or Black.

Davis (2007) asserts that standards delineated in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (NASW, 2000), Standards for Cultural Competence (NASW, 2001), and Indicators for the Achievement of the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (NASW, 2007) clearly elucidate the importance of social workers’ competence in their work with diverse groups. Graham, Bradshaw and Trew (2010) conducted a study on cultural appropriateness for Muslim populations, reporting that the participating practitioners described culturally sensitive services to include “integrating the awareness of cultural characteristics into practice” (p. 343). All of the participants in this...
research study voiced their perceptions of how they individually use self as a tool for effective change agency through their knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity.

The Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice document is supportive of the theme **Culturally responsive social worker** through an emphasis on **cultural diversity**, a major theme formed through three interpretative codes: *diverse client services, cultural competency,* and *understanding language.* In the document, the term “clients” refer to the individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities that are served through the social work profession. Clients differ in ethnic and cultural backgrounds, some with linguistic differences that can require language translation in order to provide service or care. A pilot study examined using a Multi-Family Psycho-education Group (MFPG) to work with culturally diverse clients suffering from severe mental illness. The study found that culturally competent service delivery was improved through the implementation of the MFPG (Chow, Law, Andermann, Yang, Leszcz et al., 2010, p. 364). Further, these researchers emphasized their findings reflected the importance of cultural and linguistic matching between clients, families, and practitioners. They write, “The sharing of common culture and language allows in depth discussion of values, health beliefs and the use of alternative medicine. Both verbal and non-verbal communications were also enhanced because of similar ethnic backgrounds” (p. 369).

The NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001, 2006) support these findings on the importance of considering how culture and diversity influence service delivery. Additionally, it provides a description of cultural competence, the primary tool needed by the social worker to be an effective change agent:
Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. (p. 11)

Garran and Werkmeister-Rozas (2013) reason that social workers “now have an obligation to deliver culturally competent services” based on these standards (p. 98). The second sub-questions sought to understand the extent to which social workers perceive their prepared to work with diverse clients.

**Sub-question b) How Do Social Workers Describe their Professional Preparedness to Work with Diverse Populations?**

The theme of *Social Work Preparedness* was reflected in the group composite report of the six participants and identified *experience* and *education* as the two primary attributes that contribute to the provision of culturally responsive service delivery to different populations. This theme based on participants’ data is defined as, “having the necessary training, skills and experiential learning.” The participants voiced their perceptions on how critical the preparedness element is to their professional work as agents of change. Birdie and Leo felt that their life experiences of being with different types of people and cultures have most prepared them in their work with multicultural populations. Sophie placed more emphasis on her social work education, while Mary Ann considered both her college and life experience as contributors to her professional preparedness. Mary Ann, who is a white social worker in her twenties, talked specifically about how her college experience exposed her to diversity, helping her gain the knowledge she needed to work with diverse populations. She stated that working and learning about social justice has contributed to her professional preparedness in her urban practice:
So, the work was divided into prevention; there was a women’s center… you know…feminist approaches, the LGBT community resource center, and then the multicultural resource center, so I had exposure to diversity and it was essential in me getting to where I’m at now because I grew up in a very white suburbia neighborhood and so I had stuff when I got to college…you know ideas that weren’t okay, ah…and so through exposure to different students, I was able to learn about white privilege, what that is, what that means to me, how that affects my work with clients.

Mary Ann also attributes having good professors that used their real life experience to teach, along with some diversity training as having helped her prepare, but she still emphasized how her life experiences have been most beneficial to her in actual practice. She said, “like I did get a training on cultural competency and diversity, but again like, you can’t get a life-long…you can’t fit that in a 3-hour training. (she chuckles) You have to figure out and learn, like, in life.” Birdie and Leo reflected similar sentiments. Here are a few of their comments illustrating the same:

Birdie: I didn’t receive any cultural sensitivity training while I was in graduate school …at my workplace, we’ve had some cultural sensitivity training. It’s more of what I learned on my own. But really most of my, most of my education has been through my own ah, experiences.

Leo: I think most of it is just my personal experience of living and working with others. Now one of the things, the greatest thing that I appreciate about my high school education is, when I was in high school, it was a very integrated school and that’s been a treasure for me ever since then…

Beth, on the other hand, gave a lot of credit to her social work education, in particular the courses on human behavior, known as Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) and her field practicums. HBSE is one of the foundational courses required for accredited social work programs by the Council on Social Work Education (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2001). Beth stated:

I think that, definitely, ah, my education helped me. You know, we take all the different classes of human behavior, what’s it called, HBSE? I think that my practicum played a big role in being able to work with diverse populations.
Field-based practicums are a requirement from the governing body of CSWE, and these placements are where students actually get to work in various agency environments to gain direct experience with the populations served in that particular organization (Ward & Mama, 2006). Beth and Bauer, both people of color, expressed a strong emphasis on their field practicums as conduits for their professional preparedness with diverse cultures. Bauer, who is Haitian American, said that “putting him in the urban core” through his practicums definitely helped him become more prepared to work as a professional social worker. Sophie too, gave credit to her social work education as a primary source of her professional preparedness to work with diverse populations, along with diversity trainings:

Having my Master’s degree in social work helped and going to an urban school and taking classes and then I became a, a diversity educator through the health system so I was doing that for a season, ah…providing orientation to new employees to learn about differences, which was really helpful. Pretty eye-opening too.

Although field practicums are meant to provide experiential learning opportunities, not all students come into these settings with open minds to diverse ways of being. Beth, who is African-American, gave an example of how a white female student placed at her city jail social work practicum site received strong resistance from the inmate population. This student came into the field placement with a disposition of “knowing,” which Beth spoke of as a handicap that impeded the student’s ability to be an effective change agent. Beth explained what she meant when she shared a particular instance that infuriated her:

And one day we were all just sitting there and this was like when we first started working and I remind you that I had already been there a year, so you know, been there a year, we’re in the inner city, mostly people are minorities. I know a little something about that. (she chuckles) I ain’t never been to jail, but I’m black, okay? (she laughs) And ah, so she tries to tell me, you know…we were talking about just growing up and where we want to live and I just said, you know, I grew up in a
government project. It’s not the same as the city, because I live in the country, you know? But that’s not somewhere where I want to go back.

And here is this white girl who grew up in privilege tries to tell me, “I grew up in the suburbs and I will never want to do that! I think people that want to live in the suburbs, that’s just ridiculous!” I said, “how dare you say that though? You can’t say that about someone, just because I don’t want to go back to the project and I prefer the suburbs don’t mean that I done forgot who I am.

Field placements and educational settings can provide exposure to diversity, but students must be willing to respect norms that may not align with their own. Beth felt that this new student was using her own frame of reference as the gauge to judge others whose lived experiences were unfamiliar to her. Howard (2006) emphasizes the need, particularly for white educators, to “see how the lives of our students have been scripted by their membership in groups differing in degrees of social dominance and marginality” (p. 34). When students come into multicultural settings, be it classrooms or field placements, having this knowledge can help them to better understand the interplay of their own positionality and that of client populations who have experienced marginality and oppression due to their skin color or socioeconomic status.

The theme of Social Work Preparedness was also pertinent in the document, Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. Standard 8, Professional Education, states: “Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession” (p. 26). Professional preparedness to work with diverse clients was described by the participants as having a combination of real life experiences, along with exposure to diversity through education, training and practicums. Sub-question three helped to illuminate social work practices that are oppositional to culturally responsive service delivery.
Sub-question (c) What Personal and Professional Characteristics Do Social Workers Attribute to Hindering or Impeding Culturally Responsive Service Delivery?

To answer this question, the theme of **Client-centered advocacy** emerged from the group composite report with the interpretative codes, *helping* and *family/clients*. The theme, **Client-centered advocacy**, is defined as helping individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in social work by standing in representation of social justice and equity. All of the participants in this study provided commentary on factors that can hinder culturally responsive service delivery. Birdie noted that social workers can unconsciously promote incompetence when they are not aware of their own biases:

To me, I know that it is telling that I’m invested in being aware of myself, my identity and what I bring to, ah...to my work, and I feel like it is, ah...helpful, because I can catch when I am falling into prejudice or bias. And I’m real aware of when I might not be considering the whole picture, but just my picture for them.

According to Heydt and Sherman (2005), “Even those with the highest motivation and best of intentions may inadvertently express themselves in unhelpful or harmful ways without adequate self-awareness” (p. 27). Cournoyer (2000) concurs with this position:

Because social work practice involves the conscious and deliberate use of oneself, you become the medium through which knowledge, attitudes, and skill are conveyed….You might have the most noble and idealistic of motives, intending only to serve others. Nonetheless, if you lack self-awareness, you may unwittingly enact emotional or behavioral patterns that harm the very people you hope to help.(p. 35)

Non-client centered behaviors can result in hindering culturally responsive care. Social workers’ personal values, attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs may directly or indirectly affect their professional relationships with clients. Social workers can impede appropriate helpfulness to clients when their personal values, attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs remain unchecked. Heydt and Sherman (2005) observe that the “display of unexamined attitudes, either consciously or unconsciously, may be perceived as barriers by micro-, mezzo-, and
macro-level client systems” (p. 27). These levels of service delivery are defined as micro: individual; mezzo: group or family; and macro: community/agency (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2001, pp. 6-7).

Bauer works with all three service delivery levels in his urban practice and feels strongly that social workers who make immediate assumptions can hinder culturally responsive service and change agency:

In my time of being a social worker, I’ve come across practitioners who feel as if they know a culture. You know, they make—again going back to these assumptions of—oh, this population fits in this box and they’re difficult, they’re a difficult population. Well what makes them difficult? Is it because that they have a lot going on?

Sophie expressed her thoughts about agency-level service delivery and its shortcomings in provision to diverse populations that she works with in her urban-based practice:

A lot has to do with I think, your agency. I run into that a lot with our dominant population is, you know, white middle-class and we’re kind of used to providing care in a certain way and sometimes we have to slow down and do things a little bit differently with other people or you know, make some kind of concessions to meet their needs.

Social services and human services are terms that refer to agencies, organizations, and agency personnel (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2004). Often agency policies and regulations have a direct bearing on what the social worker can or cannot do in their client relationships. Sometimes agencies can impede culturally responsive service and sometimes workers themselves can hinder client advocacy and well-being, according to Sophie’s response. One participant’s view on what characteristics might hinder culturally responsive service delivery mirrored some of the same traits cited in the literature. Mary Ann talked about cultural blindness, which is the midpoint on the cultural competence continuum presented by
Cross (Cross et al., 1989). This position is one where all people are viewed as the same with no regard for cultural differences that, factually, exist. Cross et al. (1989) say that this viewpoint is often projected through the dominant culture’s lens of universally applied helping approaches that promote assimilation. Mary Ann talked about this cultural competence deterrent with these words:

So, I think that cultural blindness is ah, is something that can hinder an interaction with a client, so, so really not, not seeing the big picture of a client, who they are, what they bring to the table, ah, you know, in a perfect world you could just look at a person for who they are, but we have to be mindful of all...so, just not having any clue about different cultures, you know, different people, and carrying your own biases and prejudices into interactions with clients...

Leo said the first word that came to his mind when thinking about attributes that hinder culturally responsive service delivery was “rigidity.”

If somebody is very rigid in this is how things must be, this is the way kids must be, this is the way clients need to look at things, how they need to perceive and this is what they need to do, I think this will block a social worker’s ability to relate to a client, to understand what a client wants and perceives."

Sue (2010) introduced the notion of microaggressions that impact mental health practice through conscious and unconscious biases toward people of color, the sexual-oriented different, and females. He points out how the underlying messages from microaggressions can devalue diverse others, such as with the notion of color blindness. This refers to one who says that they do not see racial differences, where the underlying message is “race and culture are not important variables that affect people’s lives” (p. 262). Agencies and social workers alike need to be mindful that diversity is a reality, and the profession calls for respecting cultural differences, regardless of one’s own beliefs and values. The social workers that participated in this study all gave voice to how these particular traits did not
contribute to effective change agency through the use of self. The last sub-question helped participants to reflect on helping and facilitating attributes needed for culturally responsive service delivery.

**Sub-question (d) What Personal and Professional Characteristics Do Social Workers Attribute to Helping or Facilitating Culturally Responsive Service Delivery?**

Similar to sub-question three, the theme that surfaced from the group composite report was **Client-centered advocacy**. All of the participants’ responses suggested that *helping* and *family/clients* were connected to rendering culturally responsive service delivery to diverse populations. Additionally, their voices aligned with the work of Heydt and Sherman (2005), who define the conscious use of self as a concept of “the social worker as an ‘instrument’ purposely used to promote change with client systems” (p. 26).

The **Client-centered advocacy** theme signaled the meaning of what all six participants either explicitly or implicitly identified as significant traits social workers should possess in order to effectively work with diverse populations. These combined personal and professional traits included: being authentic, genuine, self-aware, respectful of differences, open and willing to listen and learn, having empathy, and being understanding and compassionate toward diverse cultures. Some provided short narrative examples in their responses to the questions related to their use of self in their urban-based practices. Five of the six participants communicated the message that understanding and empathy were important qualities that help to promote culturally responsive care in social work practice. Bauer felt that a major characteristic to possess was that of genuineness. Mary Ann and Birdie also stressed the importance of being authentic. Mary Ann stated:
I guess I just try to be authentic with clients. Ah, because clients are smart and they know when you don’t trust them, when you don’t believe them, when you don’t want to help them.

Leo emphasized the importance of having compassion. He said, “I think one has to have compassion and understanding that life is difficult and everyone has probably experienced trauma to some degree or other.” He adds, “having integrity, self-respect, respect for others and others’ differences, and healthy interpersonal boundaries are important also.” Beth echoed his sentiments about having compassion. She states, “I think with compassion, it brings about respect, it brings about integrity, it brings about, you know, wanting to work hard. I would say my number one top quality is compassion. I just love helping people, period.”

The participants believed that it was critical to relate to their clients with kind concern and a sense of authentic caring. These personal and professional qualities can be reflected in the social worker’s self. Heinz Kohut (as cited in Cooper & Lesser, 2002) is credited with establishing the clinical concept of “empathy” that stresses it is more than just “feeling” in the client/worker interaction. Further, Dewane (2006) suggested that the therapist’s empathy is the “scientific tool of psychotherapy” and by being understanding of the patient, the therapist gives affirmation that is vitally critical to establish a meaningful relationship (p. 550).

Mezirow (1990) points out the importance of recognizing that authenticity as a genuine, empathetic approach can lead to “perspective transformation” (p. 167). Dewane (2006) states that the ability to be authentic in a therapeutic relationship can assist a client in transforming perspectives (p. 544). Therefore, based upon the participants’ responses, the
social worker’s personal and professional qualities will have an influence on client change agency and advocacy.

**Summary**

Findings of the study suggest **culturally responsive social worker, client-centered advocacy** and **social work preparedness**, garnered in the Composite Group Report, are participants’ collective perceptions of use of self as tools for change in the lives of others. Having self-awareness and being mindful of what is in the best interest of the client emerged from the participants’ perceptions about using self as tool for effective change agency in their urban practice settings. All participants inferred that using self for culturally responsive social work relied upon having the client’s best interest as the primary focus of their practices.

In the following sections, I present descriptions on the “what” (textural) and “how” (structural) meanings of the phenomenon for all six participants, with the third description communicating a holistic view of what and how (textural/structural) of use of self. The descriptions allow the reader to enter the worlds of the participants to understand their meanings of the use of self and its application in their urban practices.

**Reporting on the Transcendental Phenomenological Data: Textural Descriptions**

The process of clustering the invariant constituents or meaning units into core themes allows the researcher to tell the story of the data through imaginative variation and synthesis of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The following textural descriptions report the **what** of the phenomenon use of self. To determine the **what**, in-depth interviews were closely examined, resulting in the identification of two common themes among the six cases: **culturally responsive social worker** and **social work preparedness**. I begin with
Bauer’s individual textural description followed by those of Birdie, Sophie, Beth, Mary Ann and Leo. The placement of their descriptions was randomly done; however, for the sake of ease to the reader, all of the descriptions remain in the same order by the names listed above.

**Bauer’s Individual Textural Description**

Bauer is a child therapist who is somewhere between the ages of 20 and 39. He is a Haitian American social worker and has been in urban social work for six years. We met at a local restaurant on a late Sunday morning. Bauer seemed to have a high energy personality and talked about his family with joy. He showed me a picture of his young daughter, and he said that she will probably be a social worker because he and his wife are both social workers. He gave an example of how his daughter responded to another kid who was crying because she was playing with his toy. She sat next to him and spoke softly in “baby language” and then began to rub his back as if to comfort him. With two social work parents, it certainly is a strong possibility! The participant looks African-American, but he is Haitian American. He is dark skinned, of medium build, about 5’10”. It bothers him that sometimes people assume he is Black.

Bauer attributes his beginning career in social work to an adjunct professor who taught at the School of Social Work located in an urban metropolitan area. He was in the last year of his undergraduate degree majoring in sociology. He knew that he wanted his Master’s degree, but did not know in what field. Initially he thought it was going to be in sociology, but that changed after his sociology professor told him that he did not foresee him sitting behind the desk doing paperwork. He saw Bauer working in the field with people. Bauer explained what happened next:
and then I took this intro to social work class and here was this guy with this Hawaiian shirt, shorts, sandals and scruffy beard and he was talking about how he’s a therapist and he plays with kids and families and all these awesome things, and that’s what I wanted to do, so, I looked into it and the rest is history as they say.

Bauer grew up in a two-parent home. His parents are from Haiti, and he says that makes him Haitian American, but he is often thought to be Black American. He states:

And the reason I say that it bothers me sometimes when people look at me and automatically assumed that I am an African-American. I had to learn—it really came from college, but my parents are from Haiti, that makes me Haitian American. There is more to a person than the color they harbor.

**Culturally responsive social worker.** Bauer succinctly expressed his thoughts about the characteristics of a culturally responsive social worker:

I think a culturally responsive social worker would incline that social worker to not assume that they know the population they work with, but to step back and be a passenger in that vehicle and allow that client to basically tell their story, specifically when it comes to their values, their norms—their beliefs. Also do your homework. If you know you’re working with a specific subgroup, research it. It doesn’t mean to take what you’re reading and implement that within—“oh, I know exactly about your culture—but no, have that as a guideline. Something to reference back to, in a sense.

He further illustrated his point by saying, “basically don’t go in there with your work with the family with your blinds on.” I asked him what that meant and he said, “more of having a veil over.”

**Social work preparedness.** When I asked Bauer to describe his professional preparedness to work with diverse populations, the first thing he said to me was, “You want me to be honest with you?” I said yes. He said thoughtfully:

I always go back to human behavior. Yeah. I always go to the strengths perspective, the definition of that, I always go back to our code of ethics—dignity, worth of the person, there’s two, oh my God! There is dignity, worth of the person, and understanding the importance of human relationships. Those are two values I really hold dear when I’m working with families.
The strengths perspective is a theoretical social work practice perspective that explicitly emphasizes clients’ strengths rather than focusing on the challenges they might be facing (Kisthardt, 2002). Bauer then went on to tell me that a big part of his professional preparedness has to do with experience. He talked about hearing stories from other workers and how they have negatively interacted with family members and how disgusted he was in hearing some of those stories. For example, he stated:

There’s been times where I’ve worked with families and they have been so bombarded by the system, and here’s this other person who represents what they, in a sense, loathe or are afraid of and they have those walls up.

He said that this is not the way he wanted to do his practice or the way he wanted to interact with family. Bauer also credits his urban-based practicums with his preparation to work with diverse populations. He reflected on his first placement, which was at an alternative high school, and his second year practicum, which was a facility serving children. He exclaimed with a jolt of excitement in his voice, “And man…man! That was a culture shock! Um, even where I did my second practicum, that was a culture shock too!”

There were several theoretical frameworks that Bauer preferred to work with in his practice. He liked working from the strengths perspective and systems theory that he says he uses a lot. He also uses Bowen and Virginia Satir a lot. In regards to Virginia Satir, he said, “Yeah. Yeah. I love the saying of ‘people have good intentions, just poor ways of communicating.’ I love that (chuckles) and it’s so true.”

Some of the families I work with in the urban core? Some of them do not know how to talk to each other because they’ve seen horrible ways of communicating. They’re trying their best, they really want to, but they just—it’s how they were raised, that’s their world, so, and it’s hard not to, it’s hard not to judge? but, more practical to understand.

Bauer acknowledges that this field (social work) is not easy, but thinks it should be.
And it should be easy. Ah… through life. I’ve learned that it takes more than experience, it takes more than just being smart and reading and be book smart as they say.

**Birdie’s Individual Textural Description**

Birdie is a Caucasian, non-Hispanic female who has been in social work since 1993. She is between the ages of 40 to 59 and seems very passionate about social work. I met Birdie at her home, which was a quaint space—quite eclectic, personable and very tranquil overlooking the city and downtown. She had just gotten off work and offered me fresh strawberries, almonds, cranberries, and tea. We talked about the project a little before she read and signed the informed consent form. I gave her a copy, as I have done for all participants.

The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Birdie works full time as a social worker for an insurance company. She works at home and works telephonically with Medicare members across the United States. She receives referrals from the nurse case managers, who reach out to members with certain disease processes, and when the nurses or members have a need, they consult with her. Birdie also works for a local hospice organization on some weekends and goes to evaluate patients at various hospitals within the city to make sure they are appropriate for hospice care. When asked how long she had been doing social work Birdie laughed and said, “My whole life!” Birdie has worked at various psychiatric institutions throughout the course of her early career and while she was in graduate school. Her love for people led her into the social work profession. She said:

Well, I love to help people. That was it really. (chuckles) Whenever I see somebody—you know, even if I my driving or walking by somebody and ask me for money, like a homeless person on a corner or somebody that has an obvious disability, I feel my heart being pulled. And like I want to help them, so I’ve always… I’ve always loved helping people
I noticed that Birdie had a deep sense of spiritual awareness. Throughout our interview she interjected her spirituality and its meaning to her in her life and work.

I’m very spiritual and I have a very close relationship with God. I see that we are all children of God, that we are all here to love and serve each other, because that God. We are all manifestations of God and God is in me and in you and if I would show disrespect to someone, I would be disrespecting God

Culturally responsive social worker. Birdie described how she sees her self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency. She states:

Ah, you know, I’m very spiritual and I know how important that is to many people. It’s important to allow people to ah… express their spiritual beliefs and practices. And I just ah… honor that. And I, you know, will just share that, my own spiritual practices, with patients and families. It gives them permission to do what they need to do.

Birdie continued her discourse on how she uses her self in practice, saying that she encourages and talks about her faith if clients are open to that and if they bring it up. She invites them and encourages them to bring their Bibles or she will share DVDs and CDs of religious music with them in the hospice house. She talked about sharing her own spiritual beliefs over the years:

I shared that with a lot of families, and I think that it gives them a sense of peace. The ones that are really struggling and just from my own personal experience with my parents’ death.

Social work preparedness. Birdie gave her thoughts about being prepared professionally to work with diverse populations. She states:

Well, you know I try to educate myself about, you know, different groups. People who are of different religions and race and you know, sexual orientation and age, you know the whole bit. So I try to educate myself on all the groups and be sensitive. I may not be an expert on all the different groups—I didn’t receive any cultural sensitivity training while I was in graduate school, but in my workplace, we’ve had some cultural sensitivity training.
Birdie disclosed that these trainings were helpful for her, but what she has learned on her own has helped her most. She then said that her full-time job offers some cultural training and when you pull up their work site website to go to work, they have postings of different diversity acknowledgments:

And then at my workplace, there’s a...like when we pull up on the website to go to work, you know we get on our page and it has like what’s going on yada, yada, yada? Whoever, whatever month we’re like celebrating, I mean, they will have information on that like where to go, like you know, it’s like your Yahoo account, you pull it up and there’s all that information. So my job is big on that and so there’s always that kind of information just on our little page that we turn on.

Birdie told me that most of her education has been through her own experiences. She says that she’ll ask families what’s important to them. Surprisingly, she told me that she does not credit her MSW education and schooling to being the most important facet of her professional preparedness.

You know it’s been so long ago, that I was in graduate school? And I don’t remember as having—I mean, we would talk about groups and the importance of recognizing the differences? But I never had any kind of training on all of the different groups. I don’t remember that. I don’t remember any kind of training like that in school.

Birdie did recall in her graduate program on the last day of school a particular activity that stuck with her:

We, ah...it was in my Practice class, we kind of went around the room and talked about our experiences while we were in graduate school? And there was a lot of people that said, you know yeah, I’ve learned a lot, but really, I really learned more from my Practice classes? You know, the didactic, you know it was all theory!

I asked her what particular theoretical frameworks that she preferred to work within her practice now. She told me that she likes Fritz Perls and Carl Rogers and more of the humanistic theorists. I asked her why she preferred these particular theorists, and her response was:
Because I just want to look at that whole person. It’s so important you know. We are more than just our physical bodies, you know? We’re spiritual…emotion…physical…beings and to be whole, we need to be aware of all that…and just like all the people we work with — all the different diverse groups? We are all manifestations of God on earth. If I disrespect someone, I am disrespecting God. We’re all this body of Christ here on earth. So we are all part of the same—you know we’re all part of the same body of Christ here on earth.

I could tell that spirituality was very important to Birdie because she then said, “So I kind of look at that, so that might be—put that in there too.” I assured her that this was going to be included, as I would transcribe everything so that she can look at everything. Then Birdie replied, “So spirituality that is really my ah…frame of reference. My primary frame of reference.”

Sophie’s Individual Textural Description

Sophie is a Hispanic female who works in hospice and home care social work. Sophie is somewhere between the ages of 40 to 59 and has been doing social work for 16 years. Sophie chose a local restaurant to meet for the interview early one weekday morning. She had to meet with a family that was close to where we met. After explaining the project, she reviewed and signed the consent form, at which time I provided her with a blank a copy of it for her records.

Sophie comes from a family tradition of civil rights workers and has a desire to follow her family tradition. Her grandfather was involved in the Civil Rights movement, and several other family members are social workers and public interest attorneys. Sophie stated that becoming a social worker “just felt like a really good fit.” After her divorce, Sophie took back her maiden name. Growing up, she attended all-white schools because her parents wanted her to have a better education. She said, “But it was hard, because it was only a handful of minorities going to school, growing up, so I understood what it was like.” This
experience of segregation is something that Sophie says helps her to work with families because she remembers that. She quickly adds:

But just because that’s my experience doesn’t mean it’s everyone else’s. You know, accepting of differences… and embracing interracial marriages and religions and things—yeah…

Sophie expanded on what is needed to become a culturally responsive social worker that can meet the needs of a diverse clientele.

**Culturally responsive social worker.** Sophie sees a culturally responsive social worker as “someone who’s knowledgeable about the differences in cultures that they’re working with—the populations, because mine is very…varied.” Her use of self involves being able to “put different hats on depending on which family I’m meeting with.” She continued, “And understanding what’s important for them, having an idea, not always assuming it…and having those resources available for them that would be meaningful.” One of the personal and professional characteristics she felt was most significant for social workers to possess in order to be culturally responsive was “willingness to learn something different.” A second trait was “to have sensitivity to differences.” She shared this comment:

To understand that how I approach problems or how my family did, it’s not going to be the same for other people…and to have sensitivity to differences—and the fact that I’m a minority and we have done things differently in my family growing up. I already understand—Oh! Just—I’m Hispanic and growing up in South Texas and you know, my grandfather was heavily involved with the Voters Right Act in the 60s and he told me about how it used to be before I was born, you know, the segregation of people that were of a different color and we had separate bathrooms to use and separate water fountains. Yeah, so I remember those times and I remember how it was like growing up too.

A third characteristic that Sophie felt was important to being culturally responsive was being “willing to listen and to learn.” She also talked about the importance of being knowledgeable about the differences in cultures and not making assumptions about what’s
important to the family. Being respectful was a trait that Sophie says helps her facilitate culturally responsive care.

**Social work preparedness.** Having her Master’s degree in social work helped prepare Sophie for urban social work practice, along with going to an urban-based school. She credits taking classes and becoming a diversity educator through her employer as additional sources that helped her prepare to work with diverse populations. She explained this more fully:

I was doing that for a season, ah…providing orientation to new employees to learn about differences, which was really helpful. Pretty eye-opening too. Ah, because I think a lot of nurses come in and think, I’m just taking care of the body and I’m just taking care of those physical needs and it really opened their eyes to see all different type of diversity and how to work with people and how things can be perceived. And they had a lot of role plays, these video segments of people not doing the right thing and how people would respond and it was really good cause I thought, “Oh I never thought about that.” And you know how people overhear things or just your attitude, your—how you present yourself to people that are different can keep that from being noncompliant.

Sophie’s personal experiences and understanding coupled with her education in social work helped her “process those experiences in a bigger scene and in a bigger way.” Furthermore, going to school and receiving her social work education is helping her to process those experiences and see them in a different light. She stated, “It’s been very helpful and just learning the tools for working with families. And I’m in the middle of my clinical supervision so that’s been very helpful. You know, processing things with my supervisor.” She talked about the theoretical frameworks she uses in her practice:

I do a lot of solutions-focused and cognitive behavior. That’s been very helpful, cause my time with people is very short term and so I can’t do a lot of these long term…ah, interventions cause in supervision we were talking a lot about dialectical behavioral therapy and that’s something—I like the concept and some of the worksheets and things, but that was something I can’t do because I don’t know how long I’m going to be with somebody. It could only be for a couple of weeks. I could only see them once.
So it’s like meeting those urgent needs and maybe dealing with the rest later if we have time. But it’s a lot of crisis management it seems.

Beth’s Individual Textural Description

I had my interview at a local restaurant with Beth, who is a female and African American social worker employed in a local, urban-based hospital. She also works with another agency part-time and has been in the profession for nearly eight years. She is between the ages of 20 and 39. The interview began with general demographic questions as well as an overview of what the interview was about. We had dinner together and paused the interview to say grace over our food, which was initiated by Beth. She has a jovial personality and seemed genuinely passionate about social work. She talked about how people make assumptions about each other based on external looks and often misjudge who people are by doing so. The interview lasted about 60 minutes, with about a 30-minute interruption to have dinner. During our dinner conversation, Beth talked about her life experience growing up poor, black, and in a rural, white community. She specifically talked about grief and the loss of her grandfather at age 10 and the loss of her father only two months before that. She remembers starting to gain weight and the sadness she experienced in her grief, not knowing that her weight gain and sadness were directly related to the grief itself.

She is the youngest of five sisters. Her mother, a single parent, raised all five girls. Her grandfather was a very strong male figure in her life. She and her sisters talk about how nice it would have been to have counselors or support during that time in their lives. Having support and someone to talk to about grief is very important to Beth, and she wants to help educate others to understand that it’s okay to seek professional health.

And especially working and like rural areas, even in the urban core, even helping more minorities understand the importance of getting therapy early on in life. How
we can help break certain cycles, how we can help, you know, just help them get free of things. Cause you know as a black person, therapy was something that was – I didn’t know what therapy was to tell the truth! (laughs)…And grief? When I think back when I was 10 years old my grandpa died and he was the only male I had in my life and when I think back on that I was grieving.

**Culturally responsive social worker.** Beth’s passion for her work with diverse clients seemed contagious as she enthusiastically and energetically talked from her own experiences in the field of social work. Beth believes in having compassion and states that her number one top quality is compassion. She has a deep love for helping people and has worked with people who make seven-figure incomes to those who are literally homeless. She says “at the end of the day, I show them all compassion.” She sees herself as a social worker who is aware of the particular cultures she is serving, and she shared an example from her practicum at the city jail:

I was in my early 20s, like 22, 23? when I started there. So I had to learn early on to work with the inmates because that was a whole—I’m not even talking about the subcultures in there, learning the overall culture of inmates, and then learning the subcultures so that I can relate to them reach them and help them meet their needs.

Beth shared that this approach is one that a culturally responsive social worker takes. She believes that workers need to learn the cultural groups’ likes and dislikes to better understand how they can best help meet their clients’ needs. She was also quite adamant about respecting people and thinks respect and integrity are important when working with diverse groups.

Her own perceptions about cultural responsiveness included the need to have at least a basic understanding of the populations she works with, regardless of their culture, race, gender, or lifestyles. This is something she had to learn to do, in part because of her spiritual beliefs that she grew up with and what she learned in her social work education. She tells the
story of how her spiritual beliefs conflicted with her social work service delivery to certain populations at one time earlier in her career:

Well, I’ll just use myself. You know, I’ll use myself as an example. Again, go back to that personal experience growing up, you know. I am a believer of God. I believe that God exist and that Jesus Christ is the son of God, you know. I grew up reading the Bible. I do believe what the Bible say. And it was very hard when I came into the social work field because I was told that you have to, you have to accept homosexuality. I mean you have to, you have to, you have to, and that was something that I struggle with, because again, I respect them. And that’s why I go back to you may not respect everything someone do but you still yet respect that person as a human and I can honestly say you know that’s something I struggle with, you know like if I help this person does that mean I agree with their lifestyle? You know and so I had to learn how you know, you can get help someone, but that doesn’t mean you agree with everything that they do. And I have worked with people who are homosexuals and they say, “I am who I am. I’m not changing for nobody.” It is what it is!

Another characteristic she told me about is her sense of humor. She says that her sense of humor breaks down a lot of barriers when she talks with clients. She went on to say that she talks with a lot of clients, and at the end of the day people just want to feel good. Beth says that she makes you feel real good about yourself and that’s just who she is! She looked directly in my eyes and said, “I don’t front or fake it, I mean, it’s just part of who I am.”

**Social work preparedness.** Human behavior courses in the profession (referred to as HBSE) was the first thing Beth said helped prepare her for urban social work practice. HBSE is an acronym for Human Behavior and the Social Environment. She credits the different classes to helping her to work with diverse populations. She also emphasized how her practicum played a big role, especially her two-year practicum field placement at the city jail:

I came across a lot of people ah, man, I wouldn’t change it for the world! It was great experience, ah having different classes with different people, learning about different cultures, you know we had Africans, and Black American, white, Asian, so you
know, just learning about different people and being exposed to different people. Ah, the different classes that I took and ah, and the teachers and stuff.

She stated that the practicum really set the base, the foundation for her to be the social worker she is today. Two theories she learned about in her practicum and schooling were motivational interviewing and the strengths-based perspective. Of the two, she preferred the motivational interviewing framework, because it helped most with the clients she works with. She said:

I kinda had this mentality like, “I’m the expert. I’ll tell the client,” but with motivational interviewing it’s like, “No. They’re the expert, right?” They have their own motivation (laughs)...and you’re just a, more of a passenger, not the driver. And so, it taught me let people build on their own skills. Don’t tell them what to do. Listen to them. People have their own motivations. They’re their own expert at what’s going on. And most likely they’ll have their answer (chuckles).

Beth sees herself as a tool by just being present for the client, but not necessarily to answer for them. She thinks both motivational interviewing and the strengths-based perspectives help her to “meet people where they’re at.” Her intention is to work with clients “where they’re at,” a social work phrase that basically means accepting clients as they present themselves. Beth went on to say that her minor in Social Work also contributed to her professional preparedness to work with diverse populations, although she majored in Psychology. It was interesting to hear her explain why:

I would say it was more of my minor, which was in social work, it was more of my social work—cause really the psychology part, up until I started taking social work classes, it was more theoretical, scientific... I kind of felt like no human touch. But then I started taking these social work classes and it was like, No, you know, people are real!

Furthermore, she added:

It was more of my undergrad social work classes and graduate classes because it was more based on real life and it had a human touch whereas psychology, to me, did not. It was more scientific. And unfortunate—Well fortunately, we’re not scientific beings, so thank God there is a social work program! (laughs).
Mary Ann’s Individual Textural Description

I met Mary Ann at a local coffee shop she had selected for her interview. She is a white, female, HIV case manager who works in an urban metropolitan area. She is between the ages of 20 and 39 and has been a Master social worker for nearly six years. Mary Ann appeared warm and friendly, greeting me with a gentle smile. Mary Ann got into social work because she was interested in helping people. Her degree was originally in Communications for only one semester, but she thought social work would be a better fit for wanting to help people and make change in people’s lives. Her aunt is also a social worker. Mary Ann grew up in a very white suburban neighborhood and talked about how that contributed to her having “ideas that weren’t okay.” She says that college is where she was exposed to different students and was able to learn about white privilege, what it is, what it means to her, and how it affects her work with clients. She was actively involved with The Center for Social Justice and learned a lot about social justice through her college experience. The work at the Center was divided into different sections, such as the women’s center, the LGBT community resource center, and the multicultural resource center, which provided her exposure to diversity. She credits her college background to being an essential part in her getting to be where she is now.

Culturally responsive social worker. Mary Ann perceived that her understanding of being culturally responsive is having an idea of who she is and what she brings to a situation or interaction. She further stated that being knowledgeable about her own culture and background can help her to meet a client where they’re at and appreciate what they bring to a situation.
So, you know, having some idea of what different cultures experience in our society, whether that is historical racism, whether that is ah… historical sexism, just, just having an idea of different ‘isms’...and what different communities are struggling with. So just being well informed—and open.

She continued to shed light about herself and what it means to be culturally responsive to those who are different from yourself:

I feel like I am very open to learning about what I still need to improve upon. I think I have the desire and passion to…to be, to use cultural humility…so, being mindful of people and their experiences and trusting the… you know, trusting the clients to make good decisions for themselves. And then I’m really there as a helper.

Mary Ann expressed the difference between cultural competency and cultural humility.

Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) describe cultural humility as incorporating “a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique” (p. 117). Mary Ann stated that cultural competency insinuates that you can reach a level at which you are competent and you don’t need to learn anything else about other people or yourself.

And I don’t believe that. It’s a life long journey and it puts back the focus on the client and that they are the expert of their own life and we are there, to hold their hand, to trust and validate—so using that perspective is really important to me and I try to remember that in my work.

Mary Ann radiated a sense of self-confidence and seemed to have a solid anchor on who she is as a person and a professional social worker. Her youthfulness did not take away from what seemed to be a woman of experience and knowing the ups and downs of real life. She candidly shared her own story of substance abuse recovery and how that helps her be especially sensitive to that issue with clients. Although she is careful not to disclose personal information about herself, she uses an approach that is more gentle and supportive, reminding her clients of resources that are out there to find sobriety. In this sense, she notes,
“I use my experience in knowing how difficult it is to be in recovery, ah, and so I can meet a client where they’re at…” She continues:

   To me, I know that it is telling that I’m invested in being aware of myself, my identity and what I bring to, ah, to my work, and I feel like it is, ah…helpful, because I, I can catch when I am falling into prejudice or bias. And I’m real aware of when I might not be considering the whole picture, but just my picture for them.

**Social work preparedness.** Although her college experience was helpful, she describes it as “okay.” She feels strongly that much of what is learned is learned from experience. She states:

   There’s so much that they can teach you and so yes, they talked about boundaries, they talked about self-care, but until you are in social work and doing it, you have to figure out how to set those boundaries in a way that like, works for you.

Mary Ann attributes her professional preparedness in part to having good professors that used their real life experience to teach as well as any training that challenged her lens. She stated, “I did get a training on cultural competency and diversity, but again like, like you can’t get a life-long…you can’t fit that like in a 3-hour training! (chuckles). You have to figure out and learn, like in life.”

   She went on to explain in greater depth what contributes to her professional preparedness to work with diverse populations in her social work practice. She made it clear that it is a work in process:

   I mean it’s taken time, it’s taken time with working with clients, it’s taken building relationships with people from different walks of life, so it’s been in the classroom, out of the classroom, at work, out of work. I mean it’s taken all of that…um hum…and I’m still not done. I, you know, I still carry um, all of those like prejudices and biases with me, but I better recognize when that’s affecting my relationships and grow to dispel some of those prejudices that I have.
Leo’s Individual Textural Description

Leo is a white male, over age 60 and has been in social work for over 21 years. He currently works with a local middle school as a youth counselor. I met with Leo on a Sunday afternoon at a local restaurant to conduct his interview. We began first with the review of the informed consent. Leo had no questions and signed the consent form before we began the interview. A copy of the consent form was given to him also. The interview lasted approximately 50 minutes. Leo’s career began in 1977 with his work in mental health, youth counseling, substance abuse counseling, and psychotherapy. He has been a Master’s level social worker since 2007 and acquired his clinical social work license in 2013. He jokingly said, “I have various job titles” and commenced to tell me all of them: a qualified mental health professional, a licensed clinical social worker, a prevention specialist, and a district resource counselor—but he calls himself a counselor.

Leo’s entry into the social work profession was not a direct one. In high school he loved math and drafting and thought he was going to be an engineer. He attended a nearby university to pursue that career, but by his sophomore year he got depressed about what he was doing and decided to quit school. He had some adult experiences by just living and traveling. About six years later, he returned to the Midwestern town where he grew up and took courses that were of interest to him. He declared his major as psychology after meeting a psychology professor that he loved, saying, “She’s one of the greatest professors I’ve had in my life.” He earned his BA in Psychology in 1981 and began working with a children’s psychiatric facility. He talked about how he chose social work:

It came out of my own family history, part of it did, but I wasn’t consciously aware of that until my mid to late 20s after I got into psychology as an undergraduate. Because my father was an alcoholic and my parents had a really horrible relationship through
my teenage years. Ah, they never divorced or separated and sometimes I wonder if I and my brother and sister would have been better off if they had. It would have been more of a shock, but it was traumatic living in that household, emotionally, it wasn’t allowed—abusive family… it wasn’t physically dramatic. We were quiet and didn’t talk with one another, especially about feelings and personal reactions. But the energy between my parents was very powerful. They seemed to hate each other and they couldn’t or wouldn’t talk with each other about simply being angry with each other. I thought that they lived in spite and withholding with each other. I know that both of them came from difficult childhoods. So my childhood had a profound effect on me, and in my 20s while I was still an undergraduate in psychology, I did get into therapy.

The brief experience in therapy helped Leo figure out that he didn’t want to be an engineer.

**Culturally responsive social worker.** Leo describes a culturally responsive social worker as:

A social worker who, primarily, is aware of self, of ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation…ah… perhaps even political biases…ah…also aware of one’s own self, emotionally, where when have come from, one’s family history. I also think it’s a good idea for social workers to have—to be in, or have been in therapy themselves.

He further stated that he believes “all of us have emotional issues — reaction in our lives, that all of us have experienced trauma.” He then gives his rationale about parenting that no parents are perfect people, we’re all human beings. Leo’s perception is, “We have a lot to learn about how to be good parents.”

None of us received all of the good parenting and love that we needed, so our lives our path for each of us is to develop more love, caring, compassion and understanding for ourselves. Then we social workers become better able to help others, our clients to love themselves better and take better care of themselves in their lives.

Leo pointed out that obviously there are times when he believes it is his professional responsibility to inform clients that certain behaviors or actions are unhealthy or possibly harmful and therefore he does not recommend certain activities. He states, “However, there is the right to self-determination balanced with the social worker’s duty to warn in case of harm to self or others.” Leo considers his high level of patience and ability to be calm (most of the
time) as personal attributes that help to facilitate culturally responsive service delivery. He then shared a story of an experience he had when a young, African American boy challenged his calm nature. He couldn’t recall the exact situation, but Leo remembers walking with the boy back to his office, and the conversation went something like this between the child and Leo:

“You hate me” and I said, “No, I’m mad at you.” And then I said, “I’m not calling you any names, I’m not hitting you, I’m not threatening you—I’m just mad at you.” And I felt like, I delivered that in a way that this is how a person can live [with] anger without being mean or abusive, verbally abusive or physically abusive to someone else. And I think he learned in my relationship with him, and some of that stuck with him.

In his current work with predominantly all African-American teens, Leo candidly shares how he sees using himself as a tool for culturally responsive change agency:

I think most of the time I don’t necessarily say anything but it’s my awareness of myself, whatever my feelings are, my understanding of human process and human development and human emotional expression. I think it is absolutely crucial for me to listen to students, to understand what they are saying, what they are feeling, and to verbally reflect that back to them so that they hear that I understand.

He continued to talk about how there are times where he shares experiences from his own personal life, relating to his own experiences with substances. He believes that between the ages of 17 and 22 he was headed toward alcoholism.

I didn’t think of it at the time, but looking back I can see my, my drinking behavior that I understand that some people would say that I was in the early stage of alcoholism, so I will tell kids my experience with substances. I will tell them something about my family history and I’m doing that to let them know that I had difficulties in these areas so that I want them to be aware that this can happen as they’re growing up.

Leo told me that it had been good for him to think about himself and his history, where he has come from, and how he has integrated some of his therapy and work:
Because my profession as a social worker is not totally separate from my own life because—that’s another thing about social workers, we—use of self — each one of us brings our own person of who we are into our work, and so it’s very important for us to really understand ourselves and know ourselves and to recognize when we have blocks, or frustrations, or resentment, anger, confusion, doubt…and so working with all of that within ourselves is another thing that can help us be better when working with others.

**Social work preparedness.** Leo attributes most of his professional preparedness to his personal experience of living and working with others. He believes that the greatest thing that he appreciates about his high school education is that it was very integrated and to him that’s been a treasure ever since. He talked about how in his junior and senior years, the school population was nearly 50 percent white and 50 percent black and that was from 1967 to 1969.

We had some major racial conflicts and then white flight happened and many, many white families moved out and black families moved in, so we went from the, well integrated to a predominantly African-American school very quickly and so that was probably my first experience of being in a culturally diverse environment.

Leo also considers the time he traveled to New York while in his early 20s an important part of his professional preparedness to work with diverse populations. He worked in a nongovernmental agency called the Catholic Worker, which was traditionally Roman Catholic, but socially he says it was “very progressive, guided by the works of Mercy” as he recalls. Founded during the Depression years in New York City, they provided soup lines and some housing for people.

And, so there was quite a diverse group of people coming through there, many with mental health issues and problems and so that just exposed me to such a diverse group from society that we don’t normally see. Like even sitting here in this part of town, it’s like that collection of people at the Catholic Worker were so different from the collection of people we have in here.
Leo mentioned that periodically there are or have been required cultural diversity trainings at his agency, and they take an annual online diversity course that lasts about an hour or two.

I think these trainings are more beneficial for those people who are really open to paying attention to the material, who are invested in learning and being open to new information. If somebody says, I’m just going to get through this and do this because it’s required, are they really taking the information into their hearts? I think social workers are called to be open to cultural diversity and to engage that in their mind and work.

Leo also talked about meeting his beloved psychology professor, who connected him with people involved in a Hartford, Connecticut-based therapy training program. He shared how much he loved the training process. When asked which theoretical frameworks he preferred, he said, “Probably mostly it’s been based on the Body Centered Gestalt Therapy. I engaged in my own personal therapy as a client and through my training with the psychotherapy service group.” He stated that the framework focuses on the client’s present state—what is in the foreground for the client and what the client is experiencing emotionally, mentally, and physically in the present moment. Leo talked favorably about one of his trainers who left a great impression upon him.

One of the things that he has said that I remember is that the greatest difference between ourselves as therapists or social workers and our clients, the greatest difference between us, is in our level of training in therapy. And what he means by that, what I understand is that as human beings we all develop an emotional, mental, psychological framework in our lives. Each of us have had our personal experiences, trauma, difficulties, psychological defenses and coping skills.

Leo said he never really met anybody in cognitive therapy or other therapists that he was attracted to study.
Summary

I presented the first description for the six cases by unfolding the *what* (textural) of the phenomenon, the use of self as a change agent, for the participants. The *what* of the use of self involved their perceptions of the work of a *culturally responsive social worker* and *social work preparedness*. The following sections outline the structural phenomena for each case. In revealing the structural meaning, Moustakas (1994) notes that imaginative variation is a key factor in that there is “not a single end road to truth, but the countless possibilities emerge that are intimately connected with the essences and meanings of an experience” (p. 99). It is through the structural descriptions that I used imaginative variation to uncover meanings of how the six participants implemented their urban practices, drawing on endless possibilities (Moustakas, 1994). While the textural descriptions presented common themes for the use of self among the participants, the interpretive codes were connected to codes found in the structural descriptions.

**Reporting on the Transcendental Phenomenological Data: Structural Descriptions**

The structural descriptions provide relevant data pertaining to the “how” of the phenomenon, use of self. All six participants revealed situations in their urban-based practices that gave their rationale for the use of self in working with diverse groups. The significance of the how finds expression through the participants’ individual perceptions about the phenomenon and how their lives are used as culturally responsive change agents. Further, each research participant’s voice is focused upon in shared stories that reflect personal and professional experience with direct practice in urban locales. Lastly, these descriptions reveal their most significant themes as developed from the Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice document, previously analyzed for the purpose
of this study. Table 5 provides a cross-case analysis of these themes and their interpretative
codes identified in the structural descriptions of the six cases. These are discussed in each of
the structural portrayals.

Table 5

Cross-Case Analysis Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Interpretive code</th>
<th>Bauer</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Sophie</th>
<th>Mary Ann</th>
<th>Birdie</th>
<th>Leo</th>
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Bauer’s Individual Structural Description

Structural descriptions provide data based on the “how” of the phenomenon. How
Bauer expressed his individual perceptions about use of self as a culturally responsive tool
change agent was revealed through his enumerative and thematic descriptive codes and their
frequencies. Additionally, he shared from his own urban-based practice knowledge that
reflected how he uses self as a change agency tool in his work with diverse clients. Bauer
spoke frequently about being “family/client-centered” and “helping” those he serves by
assisting them through professional modalities in social work. These notations appear to link
what was most important to Bauer and provide a relational connection to how he uses
himself to align with these values. Bauer shared several stories of his experience that
reflected how he uses self in his urban practice to that end.
I remember — so these are women who have obviously been through extraneous trauma and I remember talking to one of my moms, who I was seeing one of her children in therapy and she asked me the direct question of how to support her child because she was having behavioral problems with her child. And we are in a common area and it was another mom there and unbeknownst to me, her I did not know that her children were in the system. However, she wasn’t their legal guardian but she was still able to have them with her? Because she was going through court to basically basically get them back in her custody. So it was triggering for her, for me being a social worker, and talking to this mom about parenting stuff, cause this mom felt, you know like her kids were taken away because of lack of parenting. Both mothers were black; and the mom that was triggered said I had no right talking, telling this mom about parenting or kids being spanked or corporal punishment. My stance on it was that it does more harm than good.

Bauer then explained that the triggered mom was offended because she was beaten as a kid herself. He said that in her worldview, her perspective, that helped her to fear her parents.

Bauer told her that fear doesn’t always help, and the triggered mom ask him, “how do you know”?

And then I use my self and my experience and I told her that in my culture, my parents—there’s this thing called “Mete w a Jenou”— that’s creole for “on your knees.” And it’s basically where we have to get on our knees and folded our arms as if we were praying? And my dad would spank us with the belt like on our backs. So I remember telling her this and just the look on her face like, “Oh! You kinda do get it!” (he laughs).

Bauer went on to explain that this triggered mom made an assumption due to him working in the field talking about the opposite of corporal punishment that he didn’t know—but he did!

But she wouldn’t have known that if I did not share my truth or experience. And that’s when I use my self, my genuineness, ah, to basically enlighten in a sense of this is why am talking about it because I actually went through it myself.

This illustration shows how Bauer shares his personal experience transparently with clients in order to help them. He wondered how many people, agencies and individuals had devalued one mother in their practice. Bauer asked the question, “How many have actually spoken to her in a real, kind of way?” Then followed by answering it with these words:
instead of judging you, let me share with you, so you know, maybe more relationships in this field with strength and if that occurred (he chuckles) and I know there is a clear line between full disclosure and partial disclosure, obviously I would not tell her about my personal life and where I live, but things that matter to that situation.

Another powerful example of Bauer’s use of self to help a client by sharing appropriate self-disclosure was when he was working with a father who was a single parent raising his five-year-old son. Bauer described this father’s life as a rough one with a lot of chaos and being with the wrong crowd. Bauer explains:

I was doing my intake and doing my genogram to understand his social story and he was telling me about his upbringing and how difficult it was for him to connect with people? Because he didn’t have anyone at home to connect with, so he did things he wasn’t supposed to, so, he was sent to JV for breaking into places, and he met me and said, “you have no idea what that life was like, you probably never got in trouble at all before.”

Bauer says he remembers smirking and saying,

Man, let me tell you somethin.’ Like, no, you’re right, I never robbed anyone or did anything like that but my parents worked a lot and they were never home during the day and so after school I remember just being a freshman in high school and they were very overprotective parents and how they didn’t want anything bad happening to my sibling and I. Because they watch the news a lot and they were like, oh no, our kids are not going to be around all this violence. And so we were very protected and it wasn’t until high school, being a freshman that I was able to have more freedom, like, get on the bus in the train by myself and I lost my mind! (he laughs) in the first few weeks of starting high school I didn’t come home till nine, eight or nine o’clock at night and I was very openly defiant to my parents and the first two years of high school my grades were poor.

He continued to share the story of how his mom sent him to live with his uncle because of his defiant behavior. That experience he describes as “basically like boot camp.” His uncle, an engineer, was very strict, and Bauer hated it. Bauer explained to this father that his uncle’s strong voice and ways possibly spared him from going down the wrong lane in life. The father then told Bauer that he does not want his sons to grow up like him. He wants them to
have respect for themselves. He wants them to be something in the community. Bauer responded:

I kind of told him how mentally my uncle wanted the same thing. You know, and if it wasn’t for his diligence and (chuckles)... his tough love. I don’t know if I would have been able to go to college or have a Masters. I don’t know what I would’ve done if I still lived in New York, to be honest with the trajectory I was going on was bad, and so I used my self in that instance, kind of validating, kind of made him feel, “yeah, I’m not a shitty—I’m sorry—I’m not a bad dad. I’m being looked at as one...I’m being perceived as one,” but, yeah, you’re not.

Bauer expressed another use of himself, which is to be a mentor to some of the boys and girls that he works with. He said, “And using my—I don’t want this to sound crass, but—my color, my gender, to help even young youth who don’t have fathers. A positive role model. I’ve been hearing it a lot—a good positive role model.” Bauer’s perceptions of himself as a tool for culturally responsive change agency was captured in his discourse about self-awareness, making assumptions, and genuine caring for his clients:

I am very conscious. Ah, I think I need to be. I view it as being a disservice to the families I work with, if I’m not. I never want to come across not being authentic to the families I work with because they can feel it. And I get—I shouldn’t make assumptions but, in my experience, the families I work with, they are in a survival state. Some of them have been through foster care. They have been involved with individuals who might not have had their best interest in mind. I’m pretty sure some of the families may have an inkling feeling of when someone is not being real and that’s something I keep in my mind.

Bauer said if he were to go through this, he would want someone to talk to where he felt they cared. He went on to say:

As if they saw my true importance. Like I am there with you. I’m not doing the work for you, but I’m there with you and helping you, I may not get it, but I’m there for you.

Bauer’s use of self is summarized in these words he shared during his interview:
It really has to do, and for me, this is something that I hold dear, it really has to do with that connection—just holding another person’s hand. And that’s something that I look at, going forward, that’s something that I want to continue doing.

**Birdie’s Individual Structural Description**

Birdie’s “how” of the phenomenon use of self provided insight about her strong faith and spiritual beliefs. The topic of spirituality was an unexpected emerging theme that was disconfirming in the data, meaning that out of the six interviewees, only she and one other person, Beth, made reference their spirituality. Birdie links her spirituality to her use of self in practice. She appeared sincerely interested and passionate about her work with diverse patients. She shared how she perceives herself as a tool for change agency in social work in this client interaction:

Like I worked — years ago with, a lot of Russian immigrant Jews? Who live in Jackson County? And, so I picked up some Russian words? Just a few, and so, in my half — years later in my hospice days, whenever I have a Russian, a client or patient who was of Russian descent? And who had immigrated from Russia, I would speak of few words of Rus— Russian? And they would so appreciate it! I mean, they were like, oh my God! Yeah, they were just so appreciative. I mean of that kind of effort.

A self-proclaimed natural caregiver, Birdie told me this comes very naturally to her. In closing, with a gentle voice and warm smile, she said these words:

I’m still on this journey of setting boundaries for myself, you know? Cause I think it that my biggest challenge is setting good boundaries for myself. Cause it’s easy for me to — I’m such a natural caregiver that I’m just constantly doing it.

**Sophie’s Individual Structural Description**

Sophie appeared by her responses to be very mindful of cultural differences and practices of her clients. She displayed how she uses self in practice through action of client advocacy. For example, when she worked with a Muslim family, she was respectful toward their death rituals and did not disturb the body or the family. In fact, her sensitivity seemed
apparent by her actions right after the death occurred when she recognized her schedule would need to be modified to accommodate the family appropriately:

Um hum… and our days are so busy that we do have to stop and say, we’re gonna be here a while and let the office know that I can’t go do this next visit in an hour. I’m gonna have to be here with the family.

Sophie seemed consciously aware of being sensitive to the differences in her clients and understanding that assuming what they needed was not appropriate. She spoke concisely and to the point, and mostly referred to the importance of understanding by relating with empathy to how someone else is feeling or thinking. She spoke about the need for having boundaries with clients, while trying to meet their need, saying:

and always working with, you know, my ethical boundaries? Or some boundaries with people—not… associating myself too much with people with similar situations… you know, keeping that professional boundary, knowing that this is their journey, and it’s not mine.

In regard to her own level of self-awareness, she replied:

It still tells me that I have a lot to learn. Because in the city we see some differences, but I’m not exposed to a lot, I’m not exposed to a lot of people that are Jewish and you know, Muslim families…you know, it’s infrequent that we see them in hospice care. So, yeah, and with the Mennonite community, ah, they’ll—it’s usually when they really have a desperate need that they’ll want me to come in, but typically they care for their own.

Sophie then made an observation about immigrants coming into this country and how their cultural tendencies appear to her:

So, I see that a lot with a lot of these, you know, immigrants coming into the country, that they tend to be…they tend to be very self-sufficient, so it’s just kinda like getting in there and learning more about it. I can read about it, but still having the experience. Yeah, I do have a lot to learn.

Another client advocacy situation was also shared by Sophie that shows her respectful concern toward her clients. This was a sensitive case where she was looking for a placement for a lady who was in the hospital. The woman had metastatic cancer and couldn’t go home
because her husband couldn’t take care of her. After meeting with the Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA), Sophie noticed there “wasn’t any kind of family relationship” and the DPOA seemed really removed from the patient. Sophie felt something was going on and learned that the woman did not want to return home because her husband had been abusive to her in the past. She tells how this situation unfolded:

So we started talking about plans for her, you know, discharge planning and her Durable Power of Attorney (DPOA) mentioned her husband and that he couldn’t take care of her. He goes, “But I’d think it’d be great if you two could be together someplace like assisted living or some type of community where she could be in the nursing home and he could be in an apartment and visit her” and she was very adamant and said, “No! No!” And at first I thought she was joking cause it was so—it just seemed so out of place, Her quietness. And he was just like, “No, you’re okay. It’s fine.” And he was not even taking into consideration what she was saying.

Sophie continued to talk about how that served as a “red flag” to her and she noticed that the DPOA was speaking privately to the hospital social worker about her client outside in the hallway. She took that opportunity to speak with the patient freely, telling her, “I need to hear you, what’s happening and what do you want?” The client told her about the physical abuse she had incurred over many years and that she did not want to be with her husband again. Sophie comforted her client, saying, “I’m going to advocate for you, and you’re not going to be with him.” She proceeded to do just that, directly confronting the social worker and the DPOA (who felt it wasn’t a problem). “No, it is a problem,” Sophie declared, and studied the literature to find out what she could about the woman’s cultural background. She discovered the woman’s religious standing was Jehovah’s Witness. Sophie stated:

I was reading about it after I left the hospital that day because she still wasn’t ready to go home. And just learning about how they view, you know, relationships, it’s very patriarchal, and I thought, “Yeah, this is part of it and this is a norm for them” and maybe they felt she was out of place and he felt that it was the right thing to do as her husband to hit her.
The next day she went back to the DPOA to tell him that she seemed to have more clarity about the situation at hand. Beth’s use of self directed her to learn more about her client’s cultural background and feels that was able to help her better understand and inform her thinking on this client. She said, “You know, I didn’t say I understand, but I have a slight understanding of what it’s like to be Jehovah’s, but I never tell people I do, because I’m not.” Then she stated:

And I go, BUT, her safety is more important than that and we have to do what is in her best interest. And if he wants to visit her, it has to be because she wants that. And so, he was pretty upset with me, really upset and ah…but it was the right thing to do. And we had, we had her placed in a nursing home where she didn’t go back home and over the couple of weeks that she was alive she disclosed a lot of information about it was ongoing and a lot of people had abused her. So, you know, she got to spend her last few weeks in peace, in a really nice nursing home.

Sophie expended a great amount of time and energy in this situation to ensure that the patient was safe and that her wishes were honored. Had she not shown this type of vigilance to advocate for this woman, the result could have been disastrous. Although Sophie did not talk a great deal about how to be a culturally responsive social worker, she did share true stories that exemplified how culturally responsive service delivery is carried out in her own practice with diverse clients. She viewed her actions as trying not only to understand the client’s position, but also remembering as a social worker, her duty to protect. She then made these final remarks related to using her self as a tool for change agency in this situation:

trying to understand it and also remembering, you know, what your duty is to protect and those—you know your license and what your code of ethics, so yeah, it was kind of tricky, but it’s like, no I cannot. Good conscious just allowed this to happen.

**Beth’s Individual Structural Description**

Beth’s compassionate nature was reflected throughout our interview. She explained how she uses her self with diverse populations she works with in urban settings. She uses her
sense of humor, her life experiences, and her listening skills to work effectively with her clients. She believes that listening and talking with her clients is a way to help make them aware as she seeks to relate and understand other cultures. Beth’s reflections on helping diverse others was apparent. She expressed her desire to be respectful, which was in part, how she uses self in her practice.

Beth also uses different theoretical approaches to meet the client “where they are at” and sees using self as a tool for change agency by recognizing that people have their own motivations for their behaviors and actions. Growing up poor, in a predominantly white town, Beth says that most of her childhood friends are white. She sees this as an advantage to relating and understanding the white culture more completely. She states how in this way:

I was very smart and so most of my classes were with my white friends and ah, I definitely—I’m very thankful that I went through that because it helped me learn their culture. So ah, in learning their culture, you know, there’s certain things such as, we all listen to country music. And just this past weekend, I was on one of the units, you know, and talking to some of the nurses that were white and we started talking about country music and they said, “Beth, we didn’t know you knew country music!” I was telling them artists and we were singing songs and it was like, you know, that right there helped bond us even more, so I’m able to relate to a lot of people

Beth acknowledges that this relational position with others helps her stay conscious of others.

She stated,

the world doesn’t just revolve… just around me; although I would love for it to, ah, I realize that it does not and just being aware of, you know, learning to be respectful of people, learning to hear people, learning…you know…everyone is different and everyone experience is different.

This positionality also helps Beth stay grounded in the profession and she told me that it’s been eight years for her as a social worker and she’s “not burnt out yet.” Additionally, Beth uses her self in her practice as an educator to help people know that it’s okay to grieve. She
has compassion for others in this regard because of her own experience of losing her grandfather at an early age. She points out:

It’s okay to seek professional help. It’s okay to go talk to someone. Because being able to go talk to someone can be the difference of you getting past the anger and the denial of not understanding why this happened and being able to go on and fulfill a happy life or you holding on to that and 10 years later it manifests in ah, kidney failure, or high blood pressure or you know, some form of cancer or you going out there and being a prostitute or engaging in drug abuse, whatever the case may be, because a lot of time when you talk to people, it goes back to something that has happened in their past.

Beth’s dream is to go further than her current social work role. Her ultimate goal is to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. She shared her reason for wanting to move in this direction in her professional career:

I’m not stopping here as a Master’s level social worker. My goal is to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. I want to combine my social work skills with a medical component. That way I can treat the whole person. You know what I’m saying? Ah, I’ll be able to understand you know, why when someone’s liver function is off, how it can affect them mentally. And then I’ll understand, and then I’ll understand mentally you know, when people are depressed it is harder for them to heal, you know? I want to be able to understand that. I want to understand how the medication interacts with people and affects their mental status. And I want to do preventative care. I’m really…I think that that is a very big factor in helping our population because if we go in and educate people so that they are aware of the fact, there are certain illnesses that we can prevent, you know.

Mary Ann’s Individual Structural Description

The phenomenon, use of self, was not a term Mary Ann was familiar with. She candidly admitted she “had to look that up!” She noted that it has been a while since she has been in an academic setting. Her self-disclosure to me allowed me to see her willingness to trust. Mary Ann stated that she uses self by being authentic with her clients and by using her personal experiences along with what she learned in social work to better serve her clients. She stated:
So to me, the use of self means using my identity and what I’ve learned in social work, combining the two to serve the client. Okay, I guess I just try to be authentic with clients because clients are smart and they know when you don’t trust them, when you don’t believe them, when you don’t want to help them. And so, just kind of using my personal experience, when I’ve been on the receiving end of services, using what I’ve learned in school, but more so, using what I’ve learned in living and living with other people. You know, we all bring something unique to the table and again, I have to be mindful of what I’m bringing and what I’m not bringing and why.

Mary Ann also told me that she is invested in being aware of herself, of her identity, and what she brings to her work. She feels that it is helpful to do this because she is able to catch when she is falling into prejudice or bias. She mentions also that she is very aware that she might not be considering the whole picture, but just her own picture of them. In using self in her practice, Mary Ann often uses the strengths perspective theoretical framework. She says that this particular perspective really allows her to try to meet people “where they are at.” That seemed to be an important part of Mary Ann’s perspective. She spoke of use of self in practice by seeking to understand the experiences that diverse groups of clients bring to the work. She explains:

So being mindful of how each have an impact on their life experience. And then again, so knowing that my view of what their experience is like as a black woman or as a Latino guy man, like knowing that based on how their experience is, I don’t know it all, just because I know they are Latino or Black.

Mary Ann stated that she is still learning a lot and credits her social work profession for being a major catalyst in who she is and the direction she is headed.

I’m still learning a lot and had I not taken social work, I don’t think I’d be where I am today, in terms of like, who I am as a person. I feel like it provided me a lot of exposure to, just, life that I needed.

Even at the end of our conversation, the how of Mary Ann’s use of self was primarily focused toward the clients she serves. She ended our interview with these closing words in
retrospect: “I mean, it’s been a good challenge for me though to really think about what am I using the clients and what am I bringing to my meetings with clients.”

**Leo’s Individual Structural Description**

Leo possesses a calm and self-confidence presence. In regard to his own level of self-awareness, Leo paid attention to his feelings and what his reactions are. He stated that he uses his breathing as a way to come back to himself and sometimes says to himself silently:

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Okay, what is going on and how do I respond to this person in this situation or circumstance? And most of the time, I’m not in conflict with a student, I can just respond therapeutically, but there are times when a kid has touched one of my buttons or something. Or he or she has been so defiant or so rebellious that I lose my focus.
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He then gave an example of how he does this when he experiences those kinds of triggers.

He talked about an incident with an African-American student where he works:

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I don’t know what she’s been through, but there are times when she gets so oppositional and defiant. In this situation she wouldn’t follow all of my directions. I then said, you’re going to the office. So she followed me to the office and that’s where I left her. I did not get hooked into a power struggle and did not get caught up into having to have control.
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Leo’s interview revealed some very interesting variables. He talked with great fervor about working with teens, particularly African-American kids at school. Leo placed much emphasis on being knowledgeable about client differences, showing a significant relational value to what he considers important, and how it was reflected in his language, conversation, and actions.

Another structural feature about Leo is his thoughts about parents not being perfect people. This seems to be coming from, in part, his own experience with his parents as a child. Leo spoke about having lots of patience, and given his work with teenagers, this seems to be
one of the helping traits of Leo’s use of self. He expounded on how he interacts with his students:

I divide the groups by grade and gender. Sometimes I’ve had groups of all African-American girls and sometimes I will ask them how it is for them to have a white male group leader. I feel like I have a good rapport and relationship with African-American kids and most of them have no complaints about that.

Leo told me that he really loves working with black kids. He said he likes working with white kids too, but if he worked in an all-white school or very predominant one, it “wouldn’t be as rich” for him. Leo believes that working with clients is helping them understand themselves to deal with their feelings in ways that are not harmful to them, helping them to understand their past so they can make movement in the present and their future to live more effectively and in a healthier way.

Participants’ Individual Textural/Structural Descriptions

This final set of descriptions constituted a combination of the textural (what) and the structural (how) to formulate an overall construct of each study participant’s key reflections of the phenomenon use of self, and the implicit and explicit meanings that surfaced in all of their individual cases. These descriptions also provide additional support to the primary themes identified in this study: (client-centered advocacy, social work preparedness, and culturally responsive social worker) and will be synthesized as a collective discourse in the group composite report that follows this section.

Bauer’s Individual Textural/Structural Description

Bauer is a Haitian American male who is between the ages of 20 to 39. He is a child therapist and social worker who has been in urban practice for six years. Bauer is often mistaken for an African-American due to his dark skin, medium build, and facial features;
however, it bothers him that people sometimes assume he is black. From his interview, three key areas of reflection occurred. Bauer felt it critical that clients see a worker’s genuineness in the helping process. He spoke passionately about his work with urban families. He shared his thoughts about on helping them:

Ah…to be in the moment and completely, ah, to listen to the families you’re working with? Cause there’s been times where I work with families and they have been so bombarded by the system, and here’s this other person who represents what they, in a sense loathe or are afraid of? So when you’re working with them and… I think is more… Of helping them to decrease their anxiety, so for you to be there showing eye contact, listening to their words… the basics of social work interaction.

Bauer considers the basics of social work interaction, such as showing eye contact and listening to a client’s words, significant factors to consider. He also mentioned the importance of treating clients with dignity and respect. Bauer emphasized the critical need to be genuine:

Ah, to be genuine, to be real with them, or open doors allowing them to know that you are more than just this person that works with this agency, you are human just like they are. Um, that one, so being genuine and being empathetic. Ah… To know that — to allow them to feel that you may not know what’s going through — what’s going on with them. They’re the experts of their own experience.

Empathy, listening, and being genuine were all traits that Bauer felt were most important in social work practice with diverse populations. He considers himself in this regard:

I am very conscious. Ah, I think I need to be. I view it as being a disservice to the families I work with, if I’m not. Ah, as far as in—I never want to come across not being authentic to the families I work with because they can feel it. And I get—I should not make assumptions but, in my experience, the families I work with, they are in a survival state. Some of them have been through foster care. They have been involved with individuals who might not have had their best interest in mind. I’m pretty sure some of the families may have an inkling feeling of when someone is not being real and that’s something I keep in my mind.

He continued to share his discourse on being self-aware and genuinely caring toward his clients:

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If I… if I went through this, how would I want someone to talk where I felt as if they cared, and if they saw my important—my true importance. Like I am there with you. I’m not doing the work for you, but I’m there with you and helping you, I may not get it, but I’m there for you, so…

Bauer passionately spoke of the importance of cultural research and acquisition of accurate “knowing.” He talked about the times in his career that he come across workers who think that they know more than the families they serve. He went on to say they have automatically taken the family and put them into this “helpless box”:

They, they cannot do things on their own. So they’re focusing more on how weak they are compared to the strengths. And that—I’m not saying that this is all the time, but that hinders things when the strands are not focused more and just, all we need to throw numerous resources onto them, but what if they don’t want that? What if they (he chuckles)…What if it’s stuff they do not want?

Bauer warns that making assumptions, assuming that you already know about that culture, putting them into a little box, and not focusing on their strengths are all hindrances to culturally responsive social work. Bauer seemed to really stress his perceptions about assumptions, dispersing them implicitly and explicitly throughout the interview process. The first word that came from Bauer’s mouth as a characteristic that might hinder or impede culturally responsive care was simply, “Assumptions.” Jokingly he said to me, “I hope I’m not tainting your research here.”

**Birdie’s Individual Textural/Structural Description**

Birdie is a Caucasian, non-Hispanic female who has been in social work since 1993. She is between the ages of 40 to 59. Birdie works full-time as a social worker for an insurance company and part time on some weekends for a local hospice organization. Birdie did not talk about her childhood or house where she grew up, but she did reference in the interview at one point that both of her parents were deceased. From the beginning moments
of our interview, Birdie interjected her thoughts, beliefs, and meanings of how important spirituality is to her life and work. When she described her own self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency, Birdie said this:

> Ah, you know, um… you know I’m very spiritual and so ah… And I know how important that is to many people and it’s important to allow people to ah… Express their spiritual beliefs and practices. And uh…and I just ah… honor that? And I, you know, would you share that, my own spiritual practices, with patients and families, and ah… It gives them permission to do what they need to do.

Birdie said that she believes that we all are children of God and that we are all here to love and serve each other, because we are all manifestations of God. She continued, “God is within me and in you and if I was showed disrespect to someone, I would be disrespecting God. So I take it very serious.” I could tell that spirituality was very important to Birdie because she asked me to “put that in there too,” referring to her spiritual beliefs. She again emphasized her views about spirituality in her personal life and how it impacts her professional demeanor in social work practice:

> Because I just want to look at that whole person. It is so important you know. We are more than just our physical bodies, you know? We’re spiritual... emotional... physical... beings and to be whole, we need to be aware of all that... just like all the people we work with—all the different diverse groups? We are all manifestations of God on earth. If I disrespect someone, I am disrespecting God. We are all this body of Christ here on earth. So we are all part of the same—you know we’re all part of the same—you know we’re like different parts of the body of Christ here on earth.

Birdie refers to spirituality as her “primary frame of reference.” She placed a great emphasis on being aware of cultural differences. She described characteristics of a culturally responsive social worker who is aware of differing worldviews.

> I think it’s important for social workers to be aware of the different groups— I think it’s important first of all to recognize the importance of being culturally aware of various ethnic groups and recognize the importance, but then also take it further than just being aware. Try to educate ourselves on all the different groups, age, and religion.
Birdie reemphasized how important it is to be self-aware. She feels that social workers need to have a “really good sense” of where they come from and what led them into social work including what their beliefs are, how their life experiences contribute to their decision to be a social worker, and to have a good understanding of their beliefs and their own cultural backgrounds. Birdie spoke considerably about educating one’s self and being responsible for one’s own learning. When asked to describe her professional preparedness to work with diverse populations in social work, Birdie replied:

I try to educate myself about, you know, different groups? So I try to educate myself on all the groups and be sensitive. I may not be an expert on all the different groups— I didn’t receive any cultural sensitivity training while I was in graduate school, and my workplace we’ve had some cultural sensitivity training.

Birdie told me that most of her education has been through her own experiences. I was somewhat surprised when she told me that she does not consider her MSW education and schooling to being the most important facet of her professional preparedness. Birdie spoke of the importance of respectful helping in her practice. She gave an example from her own experience of what she considers respectful helping with diverse clients. She talked about the time she and another white female nurse were being interviewed by a black family who were considering care for their sister. She says:

And the brother, um…he asked—I mean it was great…he asked, you know, cause the nurse and I were both Caucasian. And um, he asked…you know…since you’re a woman of…a white woman, now how, you know… And it was something about, you’ll know, it was something about the different. It was obvious about the difference in our race and he wanted to know how that would affect or if it would affect that, their relationship with the family. We—and when they ended up—by the end of the interview they loved us and the one that asked that very pointed question, he goes, Now come on! Give me some sugar!
Birdie shared that story with such loving undertones! I could see the sheer joy in her eyes of the love for her work and her clients. Birdie seemed very comfortable talking with me about the different experiences she has had with clients who were people of color.

**Sophie’s Individual Textural/Structural Description**

Sophie is a Hispanic female between the ages of 40 to 59. She currently works in hospice and home care and has been doing social work for 16 years. Sophie comes from a family tradition of civil rights workers and has a desire to follow her family tradition. Her grandfather was involved in the civil rights movement, and several other family members are social workers and public interest attorneys. Sophie states that becoming a social worker “just felt like a really good fit.” Growing up she attended all-white schools because her parents wanted her to have a better education. Sophie’s interview was noticeably different from all the others. She was the only one whom I met on an early weekday morning. Sophie’s quiet, calm demeanor was that of a seasoned professional. She answered all of the interview questions succinctly and to the point, yet she was very thorough in her responses. Sophie’s reflections centered on understanding diverse cultural practices. Sophie felt that if a social worker wants to be culturally responsive to diverse populations, it is important for them to be willing to listen and learn in order to better understand cultural differences. She also talked about the importance of being knowledgeable about the differences in cultures and not making assumptions about what is important to the family.

Sophie appeared by her responses to be very mindful of cultural differences and practices in her work. She displayed how she uses self through several stories about situations she has encountered with patients. For example, when she worked with a Muslim family, she was respectful toward their death rituals and did not disturb the body or the
family. In fact, her sensitivity seemed apparent by her actions right after the death occurred when she recognized her schedule would need to be changed to accommodate the family appropriately.

Another client advocacy situation that Sophie shared with me demonstrated her respectful concern toward her clients. This was a sensitive case where she was looking for placement for a lady who was in the hospital. The woman had metastatic cancer and could not go home because her husband was not able to take care of her. After meeting with the Durable Power of Attorney, Sophie noticed there was not any kind of family relationship and that he appeared removed from the patient. Sophie noticed something was wrong and began to inquire with the patient when she was alone.

So, I knew something was up, so when they left I spoke to the patient alone and I go, I need to hear you, what’s happening and what do you want? And she, she told me that he had abused her. He physically abused her over the years, and so she didn’t want to be around that anymore. And I understood, so I go, I’m gonna advocate for you and you’re not going to be with him.

Sophie did advocate for this patient, and although the Durable Power of Attorney was upset with her, she helped get the woman placed in a nursing home so she did not have to go back home, and for the next few weeks of her life she had peace and a really nice place.

For Sophie, her use of self involves being able to “put different hats on depending on which family I am meeting with.” She continued, “understanding, you know, what’s important for them, having an idea, not always assuming it, and having those resources available for them that would be meaningful.”

**Beth’s Individual Textural/Structural Description**

Beth is an African-American female social worker employed in a local urban-based hospital. She is between the ages of 20 and 39 and has been working in the profession for
nearly eight years. Beth grew up in a poor, rural predominantly white community. She is the youngest of five girls. Her grandfather was a very strong male figure in her life, and when he passed away, it was very difficult for her and her sisters. Beth’s interest in social work began with her sister, who was taking social work classes and who talked about a teacher that she loved dearly. At that time Beth had no idea of what real social work was about, criticizing her sister for taking a social work class and saying, “Ugh! Why you taken a social work class, you don’t want to take people children away from them!”

Around the same time her mom, who had worked at a factory for more than 16 years, experienced some challenges with her health due to exposure to the chemicals where she worked. Beth expressed her anger at seeing her mom have to take a voluntary displacement and getting nothing but a small package of maybe one month’s income for all the work and energy she had given to that company. With notable frustration in her voice, she stated, “Just to be… left with nothing. And it angered me. I was extremely angry and I didn’t understand why.” Beth decided to take the social work course that her sister had bragged about because she needed to change her minor again. She said:

I was like… I’m gonna take this social work class (chuckles). Let me see what they are talking about (laughs). You know…And I take the same teacher, and believe it or not, I don’t even remember her name, and I took her several times. But I tell you, that lady was awesome. She was phenomenal.

Beth credits her social work instructor and her mom’s situation to leading her into the profession. Beth shared her deep compassion to help others. Beth talked passionately about her work with diverse clients and stated that her number one top quality is compassion. She has a love for helping people and has worked with people who make seven-figure incomes to those who are literally homeless. She said, “At the end of the day, I show them all
compassion.” Having compassion for others continued to resurface throughout Beth’s interview as she talked about how compassion brings respect and integrity.

I think that if you are someone who is compassionate, a lot of time that will spill over to your professional role. Because when you have compassion for people, you can look at someone who society says is not worth it. But you can look at that person and say, “I see something in you and I want to help you”

Beth placed great emphasis on respect for cultural differences. Beth admitted that she was challenged by homophobia, stemming from her religious upbringing. She grew up reading the Bible and stated that she is a believer of God. She further declared that she believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and she believes what the Bible says.

And it was very hard when I came into the social work field because I was told that you have to, you have to accept homosexuality. I mean you have to, you have to, and that was something that I struggle with, because again, I respect them. And that’s why I go back to you may not respect everything someone does but you still yet respect that person as a human and I can honestly say you know that something I struggle with, you know like if I help this person does that mean I agree with their lifestyle? You know and so I had to learn how you know, you can help someone, but that doesn’t mean you agree with everything that they do. And I have worked with people who are homosexuals and they say, “I am who I am. I’m not changing for nobody.” It is what it is!

Beth acknowledges that this personal experience yet remains a struggle in her life even to this day. She works with a lot of people, including her coworkers, patients, and clients. “I help them and love them and treat them the same,” she proudly stated. However, she is quick to add that it doesn’t mean she agrees with how they live, but she still shows them respect.

She shared what one coworker said to her that aptly illustrates her efforts to be respectful toward different cultures unlike her own:

Beth, I respect you a lot because no matter who is around, you are still the same. You don’t make me feel like I’m dirty or anything, even though you don’t agree with my life, you still make me feel like a person.
Beth spoke about responsible use of personal life experiences. She stressed that your own biases or your own personal experience can definitely be a big hindrance of wanting to learn or keeping you from learning about someone else’s culture. She went on to give an example of what she meant and shared a story about a white student who came to work at the city jail where she was doing her practicum.

I remind you that I had already been there a year, so you know, where in the inner-city, mostly people are minorities. I know a little something about that! (chuckles). I ain’t never been to jail, but I’m black, okay? (laughs)

She told me about their conversation about how they grew up. Beth grew up in a government project and the white student grew up in the suburbs. Beth expressed that she would not want to go back to the country, but she wanted to live in the suburbs. What happened next is best told in her own voice:

And here is this white girl who grew up in privilege tries to tell me, “I grew up in the suburbs and I will never want to do that! I think people that want to live in the suburbs, that’s just ridiculous!” I said, “how dare you say that though? You can’t say that about someone, just because I don’t want to go back to the projects and I prefer the suburbs don’t mean that I done forgot who I am!”

Beth said that this student was basing this only from her own mind frame, and it was stopping her from even trying to respect where she was coming from as someone who grew up in a poor community. Beth conveyed that this student thought she knew everything about minorities, and some of the black inmates were also infuriated by her perceptions, saying:

Y’all need to check her. She don’t know where I’m from. She can’t tell me — you know, so from her own personal experience she thought that she knew all of this stuff, but in reality it doesn’t matter what you think you may know? You didn’t grow up in the streets that I grew up in. You don’t know how it feels to be black and automatically have people look at you. You will never know. I don’t care you can speak Spanish. I don’t care you went to the soup kitchen every day, you will never know how it feels to have to stand in that line because you have to not because you want to.
Beth talked about being aware of how you listen and hear. She felt that listening is an important trait, and it is something that she had to learn to do. She said that when she was younger she had an issue with listening, however she learned to become a listener, especially when she got into the field of social work.

Because I realize that how can I help someone if I’m not listening to them. You know, not just hearing them, but listening to what they’re saying, what they need, what they want.

She added that when you’re respectful to people, you can listen to them and hear them, even if you don’t happen to agree with what they are saying or doing. She feels strongly that listening to them lets people know they are important. Beth described how she uses self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency. She says one characteristic that helps her is having a sense of humor:

I think my humor breaks down a lot of barriers when I go in and talk to clients, ah…and at the end of the day, people just want to feel good. And I can make you feel real good about yourself and that’s just who I am. I don’t front or fake it, I mean, is just part of who I am.

Beth uses self to hear people, to show compassion, and then she reiterates her point with these words: “Yeah. I think that ah, again, definitely listening and talking, you know, ah…definitely trying to help make people aware.”

Mary Ann’s Individual Textural/Structural Description

Mary Ann is a white female case manager who works with urban HIV clients. She is between the ages of 20 and 39 and has been a social worker for nearly six years. Mary Ann grew up in a white suburban neighborhood. It was in her college experience that she learned about white privilege and what it means to her and how it affects her work with clients. She became active in social justice work on the campus, which gave her additional exposure to
diversity. Mary Ann’s reflections centered on using life experience to help clients. These actions may include, but are not limited to sharing relevant personal information with clients. An example she shared was in regard to her own challenge with sobriety. In this sense, she explained that using her experience and knowing how difficult it is to be in recovery, she can “meet the client where they’re at.” She attributes much of what she has learned about actually doing social work to her own lived experiences:

There’s so much that they can teach you and so yes, they talked about boundaries, they talked about self-care, but until you are in social work and doing it, you have to figure out how to set those boundaries in a way that works for you.

Her college experience working at the center for social justice played a key role in gaining the experience to work with diverse populations. Although she’s in her mid- to late 20s, Mary Ann spoke candidly about her own story of substance abuse recovery and how that helps her to be especially sensitive to clients in that regard.

So to me, the use of self means using my identity and what I’ve learned in social work, combining the two to serve the client. Okay, I guess I just try to be authentic with clients because clients are smart and they know when you don’t trust them, when you don’t believe them, when you don’t want to help them. And so, just kind of using my personal experience, when I’ve been on the receiving end of services, using what I’ve learned in school, but more so, using what I’ve learned in living and living with other people. You know, we all bring something unique to the table and again, I have to be mindful of what I’m bringing and what I’m not bringing and why.

Mary Ann spoke about being open and willing to trust. She told me about a training that impacted her where she was told to “trust as if the speaker is wise, so when you are in a meeting with a client, truly believe in what they’re saying in their story and that they are the expert of their story.” She stated, “I think being passionate about working with clients’ needs to come from a place, again, of openness, of willingness.” Mary Ann expressed how she felt about cultural competency as a process:
It’s a lifelong journey and it put back the focus on the client and that they are the expert of their own life and we are there, to hold their hand, to trust and validate — so using that perspective is really important to me and I try to remember that in my work.

She feels that being knowledgeable about your own culture and background can help you meet a client “where they are at” and appreciate what they bring to the situation.

So, you know, having some idea of what different cultures experience in our society, where the data is historical racism, whether that is historical sexism, just, just having an idea of different “isms”… And what different communities are struggling with. So just being well informed—and open.

Mary Ann further shed light about her use of self in her practice with diverse populations:

I feel like I am very open to learning about what I still need to improve upon. I think I have the desire and passion to…to be, to use cultural humility… so, being mindful of people and their experiences and trusting the… You know, trusting the clients to make good decisions for themselves. And then I’m really there as a helper.

Mary Ann spoke about being mindful of differences. She stated that in a perfect world, you could just look at a person for who they are. She said cultural blindness, however, can hinder an interaction with a client. She described this as a social worker who does not really see the big picture of a client—who they are and what they bring to the table. She believes that being mindful and knowledgeable about different cultural backgrounds is important. Mary Ann told me that she is invested in being aware of herself, of her identity, and what she brings to her work. She consciously seeks to do this because she feels that it is helpful and can help her be able to catch when she is falling into prejudice or bias. Mary Ann states that she is really aware that she might not be considering the whole picture, but just her own picture of them. In using herself in her practice, she often uses the strengths perspective theoretical framework. She believes that this particular perspective really allows her to try to meet people as they are, and that is really important to her. Mary Ann works with different
ethnic cities and cultural groups, including Latinos, Blacks, and LGBTQ populations. She is also aware of how all of these identities intersect and stresses how being mindful of differences plays out in the service delivery she provides.

**Leo’s Individual Textural/Structural Description**

Leo is a white male 60+ years of age who has been in social work for over 21 years. He currently works in a middle school as a youth counselor. Leo’s childhood was not a happy one. His father was an alcoholic, and his parents had a “really horrible relationship” through his teenage years. He stated, “they seemed to hate each other and they couldn’t or wouldn’t talk with each other about simply being angry with each other.” Getting therapy in his 20s while he was an undergraduate in psychology helped him to better understand that both his parents had come from difficult childhood and how his own childhood had had such a profound effect on him.

In his interview, Leo reflected on his awareness and understanding of self through his past history and present experiences. Leo’s personal and professional experiences have contributed to his awareness and understanding of self. He talked about relating to his own experience with substances and how he believes that between the ages of 17 and 22 he was headed toward alcoholism like his father:

I didn’t think of it at the time, but looking back I can see my, my drinking behavior that I understand that some people would say that I was in the early stage of alcoholism, so I will tell kids my experience with substances. I will tell them something about my family history and I’m doing that to let them know that I had difficulties in these areas so that I want them to be aware that this can happen as they’re growing up.
Leo currently works predominantly with African-American teens. His personal awareness is reflected in his own words about using his self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency:

I think most of the time I don’t necessarily say anything, but it’s my awareness of myself, whatever my feelings are, my understanding of human process and human development and human emotional expression. I think it’s absolutely crucial for me to listen to students, to understand what they are saying, what they are feeling, and to verbally reflect that back to them so that they hear that I understand.

Leo’s responses also centered on understanding diverse cultural factors that make people different. Leo credits his personal experience of living and working with others to helping him appreciate differences. He attended an integrated high school during his junior and senior years, at which time had a student body of 50 percent white and 50 percent black.

We had some major racial conflicts and then white flight happened and most or many, many white families moved out and black families moved in, so we went from the, well integrated to a predominantly African-American school very quickly and so that was probably my first experience of being in a culturally diverse environment.

He went on to talk about his travels to New York when he was in his early 20s. He worked for a nongovernmental agency that provided soup lines and housing for people. Leo shared that this experience played a significant role in his professional preparedness to work with diverse populations:

And, so there was quite a diverse group of people coming through there, many with mental health issues and problems and so that just exposed to me to such a diverse group from society and from society that we don’t normally see…

Leo then shared his thoughts on what personal and professional characteristics are most significant for social workers to have in order for them to be culturally responsive:

Integrity, self-respect, respect for others and others’ differences, and healthy interpersonal boundaries are important. I think one has to have compassion and understanding that life is difficult and everyone had probably experienced trauma to some degree or other. Being culturally sensitive means awareness that someone
culturally different from myself might have some different perspectives are different beliefs and even if I don’t understand all those are know all of those, it’s important for me to be receptive and maybe inquisitive—if something comes up.

Leo thinks agencies should have required cultural diversity training in order to learn more about cultural factors that make people different.

I think these trainings are more beneficial for those people who are really open to paying attention to the material, who are invested in learning and being open to new information. If somebody says, “I’m just going to get through this and do this because it’s required,” Are they really taking the information into their hearts? I think social workers are called to be open to cultural diversity and to engage that in their mind and work.

To Leo, helping clients and students to develop more understanding about themselves was very important. Leo believes that working with clients is helping them understand themselves to deal with their feelings in ways that are not harmful to them. He believes that helping them understand their past can help to make movement in the present and the future, living more effectively and in a healthier way. One thing he warns against that could hinder this developing process is rigidity. Leo thinks rigidity inhibits responsible service delivery.

Leo thinks there are times when he believes it is his professional responsibility to inform clients that certain behaviors or actions are unhealthy or possibly harmful and that he would not recommend it. However, he states, “there is the right to self-determination balanced with the social worker’s duty to warn in case of harm to self or others.”

He then described how he perceives a culturally responsive social worker to be:

Someone... who primarily is aware of self, of ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation…ah… Perhaps even political biases…ah… also aware of one’s own self, ah, emotionally, where they have come from, one’s family history.
Leo stated that he believes “all of us have emotional issues—reactions in our lives, that all of us have experienced trauma.” Additionally, he gives his rationale for this belief, saying, “No parents are perfect people, I mean, we’re human beings.” Leo continued in his explanation:

and my perception is that we have a lot to learn about how to be good parents. None of us received all of the good parenting and love that we needed, so our lives are a path for each of us to develop more love, caring, compassion and understanding for ourselves. Then we social workers become better able to help others, our clients to love themselves better and take better care of themselves in their lives

**Group Composite Report: The Synthesis of Meanings and Essences**

This report constitutes the synthesis of meanings for the essence of the phenomenon use of self as revealed through the eyes and voices of all six participants in this study. Their collective perspectives have been thoroughly and thoughtfully connected through their shared meanings of the phenomenon. Invariant patterns and themes emerged throughout the research participants’ descriptions that linked the phenomenon, use of self. These descriptive meanings were integrated to provide a unified essence. All six individual textural, structural, and textural/structural descriptions were used to search for the essence of the meanings of the phenomenon for the group. However, I identified common themes across the six cases (see Table 5) using the textural and structural descriptions; it was not necessary to include the third textural/structural descriptions since they are combined descriptions of the textural description and structural description. It was useful to examine the third description to confirm findings in the first two. Three overarching themes emerged from the examination of themes and interpretive codes identified in the textural and structural descriptions. These were:

1. **Client-centered advocacy**: Helping (21); Family/Clients (57)
2. **Social Work Preparedness**: Experience (23); Education (20)
3. **Culturally responsive social worker**: Culture (9); Diversity (43)

The themes and interpretative codes were derived from the combined enumerative and thematic coding books developed for each of the six participants from their completed interview transcriptions.

**Group Composite Theme 1: Client-centered Advocacy**

Client-centered advocacy was clearly an important theme to all of the participants. *

*Client-centered* focuses on providing care based upon the client’s needs and wishes. *Advocacy* is helping the clients meet those desired needs by standing in representation of social justice and equity on their behalf. Each participant expressed how they valued their clients by being willing to listen, to hear, and to learn from them regarding their needs in the therapeutic relationship. Sophie especially emphasized her belief that these traits were essential to better understand diverse cultural practices.

During her interview, Sophie shared an incident she experienced while working with a Muslim family who had just lost a loved one. Normally, the agency guidelines impose a time restriction on helping families, but Sophie, who had come to learn more about Muslim death practices, understood that she needed to give the family time alone with the body. Sophie talked about how their days as hospice social workers are so busy, yet the need to meet this client’s religious practice required more than the hour of time normally allotted. She said, “I’m gonna’ have to be here with the family.” She called her agency to explain that in order to meet her client’s needs, she would not be able to do so in an hour’s timeframe. Sophie felt that having a commitment to advocacy was important in client-centered social work practice.
Leo, a white youth counselor, works primarily with African-American teens. He talked about how much he enjoyed his practice work with this population. Leo’s own personal life experiences seemed to be the catalyst for his positionality. For example, he talked about attending a diverse high school that was about 50 percent white and 50 percent African American while growing up in the Midwestern region of the United States. He witnessed the shift in his community when “white flight” happened, opening his eyes to diversity. Leo also attributes his *client-centered advocacy* approach to the personal and professional life experiences working around different people who were unlike himself. Leo stated that his own childhood had a profound effect on him as he talked about his father’s alcoholism and his parents “horrible relationship” throughout his teenage years. This particular experience in his life seems to be a major catalyst in his compassion and understanding toward the young people he works with in his urban practice.

Beth’s urban practice with diverse populations took on an entirely different approach than Leo’s. She holds strong religious beliefs that she admits made it very hard when she first came into the social work profession. She grew up reading the Bible and unashamedly talked about her belief in what the Bible says. One of her challenges was reconciling her personal beliefs about homosexuality based upon her understanding of the Bible’s interpretation. Beth fervently expressed her struggle in “having to accept homosexuality” in her urban practice, but found her own way to become congruent with this challenge by seeing it from a broader perspective. She said, “I respect them. You may not respect everything someone does, but you still can respect that person as a human. I can help this person without having to personally agree with their lifestyle.” Beth views client-centered advocacy as having compassion for people, especially
those who society says is not worth it. She chooses to look at that person and say, “I see something in you and I want to help you.”

Advocating for clients is an ethical expectation and one of the key roles in professional social work. In client-centered social work practice, the client’s voice is encouraged to be heard. Hodge (2005) maintains that “therapeutic goals are co-constructed and consumers’ strengths, as opposed to deficits, are understood to be central to the clinical process” (p. 78). Williams (2006) proposes that the purpose of concern to social work practitioners is “engaging clients sufficiently to begin work that will result in effective helping” (p. 217). To do so requires cultural competence that opens the door to relational trust between the client and the social worker. This constructivist perspective contends that hierarchical relationships that emphasize privilege status of practitioners is deconstructed in favor of a more egalitarian alliance in which clients are considered experts on their own circumstances (Hodge, 2005). Heydt and Sherman (2005) emphasize how the conscious use of self can affect the development of an effective helping relationship. Social workers need to be mindful of this concept because whether they realize it or not, they are using themselves in their practice as agents of change. All of the participants reflected their own personal awareness of self as a prerequisite to meeting the client’s needs through advocacy.

Group Composite Theme 2: Social Work Preparedness

All of the participants appeared to recognize that having the necessary knowledge and experience to work with diverse clients was a critical theme in this study. Possessing relevant knowledge consists of being able to use one’s own personal life experiences, along with what they have come to know through education and other external sources of learning. For example,
Mary Ann, a white social worker in her late 20s, spoke candidly about her own struggle with substance abuse and noted that with the HIV population in her practice, it is a very “prevalent issue.” Although she is in recovery, she doesn’t openly reveal that to her clients; however, she acknowledges that this personal experience helps her to be “more gentle and supportive” in her urban practice. Another important consideration about knowledge and experience for Mary Ann was having an idea about historical racism, sexism, and all of the different “isms” in society. She also stated that it is important “to just be knowledgeable” about what is going on with people in their lives and what these different communities are struggling with or facing. Mary Ann felt that what she has learned in life and living with other people has been especially helpful to her in work. She said, “Using my personal experience, when I’ve been on the receiving end of services, and what I’ve learned in school” has also been drawn upon in her practice. Overall, Mary Ann considered that these factors, along with being well-informed and open, are critical to providing culturally responsive service delivery.

The participants collectively communicated the message that having experiential and educational knowledge contributes to how they use self effectively in their urban practices. Lum (2004) states, “culturally diverse knowledge encompasses the complete range of information, awareness, and understanding regarding the multicultural experience” (p. 87). Social workers’ acquisition of knowledge related to cultural diversity can help them become more culturally responsive in their practice. The Cultural Competency Standards state: “Social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients” (NASW, 2006, p. 21). Reflective practices entails being able to self-examine and assess one’s own positionality and how knowledge is acquired and constructed. Banks and Banks (2004) note that one’s schooling
and one’s societal curriculum normally have a tremendous influence on what is learned about ourselves and others. These two sources that play an essential role to learn language, acquire culture, obtain knowledge, develop beliefs, internalize attitudes, and establish patterns of behavior (p. 211). Thus, the social worker’s knowledge base is a critical consideration. What knowledge is known and how that knowledge is applied can be a key factor in how service delivery is provided. All of the participants viewed the theme, Social Work Preparedness, as being extremely significant in working with diverse clients in their urban practice settings.

**Group Composite Theme 3: Culturally Responsive Social Worker**

Culturally responsive social worker was emphasized by the all of the participants and clearly reflected their perspectives of how this theme was one of significance. The participants provided thick, rich descriptions of situations in their urban practices that revealed how this actualized in their work with culturally diverse populations. Bauer talked about the population he serves in his urban practice, which consists of individuals who live in poverty and many single-parent homes. He spoke of how many practitioners he has come across during his career who have made assumptions that are not always true when referring to this population of clients. He felt that assumptive thinking is a handicap for social workers and they need to remember that “people have the capability for growth, change and adaptation and people are more than their problems.” He said, “We basically take away a lot—their dignity, their self-worth, ah…things that make them who they are” when social workers forget that premise. He adds, “Culturally, we need to know more than what we think.” Bauer, who is Haitian American, also talked about his personal experience with assumptive thinking and how other people mistake him for African-American because of his skin color. “There is more to a person than the color they harbor,” Bauer continues, “Because someone could look at me and—again going back to my pet peeve,
be associating me with the African American culture and then start talking about Kwanza—
Haitians do not celebrate Kwanza!” He laughed after making that statement, but I could sense
that this really bothers him.

Culturally responsive social worker was also an important issue for Birdie. She
stressed the importance of social workers being aware of cultural differences, as well as the need
for them to be culturally aware of themselves. She highlighted the critical need to be culturally
sensitive to all of the different groups, including their sexual, religious and social preferences.
Birdie adamantly declared that this positionality “plays into the whole and in order for us to
really help people, I think we need to be respectful of those differences.”

Mary Ann expressed a similar opinion about being respectfully aware of cultural
diversity. She posed her thoughts as a question for social workers to ponder, when she said, “So,
what is their religion? What impact does that have? What has their racial background or sexual
orientation contributed to the experience?” Mary Ann felt strongly that culturally responsive
social workers need to be mindful of their own prejudices and biases when interacting with
diverse clients. Culturally responsive social worker from Mary Ann’s perspective requires the
worker’s prejudices and bias “be left at the door so that they can serve the client.”

Their collective responses aligned with the Cultural Competency Standards (NASW,
2001) that reads, “cultural competence in social work practice implies a heightened
consciousness of how clients experience their uniqueness and deal with their differences and
similarities within a larger social context” (p. 8). Thus, the composite group description provided
in this chapter echoes the sentiments of Dewane (2006), which says, “A hallmark of skilled
practice is when a social worker melds the professional self of what he or she knows (training,
knowledge, techniques) with the personal self of who he or she is (personality traits, belief systems and life experience)” (p. 544).

The National Association of Social Work Standard 2 on Cultural Competence states: “Social Workers shall develop an understanding of their own personal and cultural values and beliefs as a first step in appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people” (2006, p. 2). The participants all talked about their own perceptions related to having a conscious awareness of themselves. Effective social work practice involves contextual engagement with clients that operates from a co-constructed, respectful relationship. Building such interpersonal relations requires the social worker to value respect for human dignity and worth (Finn & Jacobson, 2003).

Collectively, the participants perceived the following specific traits as major contributors to being a culturally responsive social worker: integrity, interpersonal boundaries, listening, having compassion, being receptive, open, inquisitive, empathetic, understanding appropriate use of self-disclosure and experience, being passionate, willing to learn, appreciative, and accepting of differences. Bauer talked about the need for social workers to be genuine while listening to their clients. Genuine dialogue entails intent listening and communication “to craft spaces where participants can build a sense of safety, trust, and hope” (Finn & Jacobson, 2003, p. 197). Similar sentiments emerged from the participants’ voices when sharing their thoughts about the attributes most beneficial to social workers who seek to be respectfully aware of cultural differences in their practice settings.

Summary

The participants’ responses provided meaningful expressions that answered the research questions formulated for this study. Their responses offered rich, thick descriptions that further
expounded upon their own perceptions and meanings of how they view and use self in their practice with diverse populations situated in urban communities. Each of the three core themes (Client-centered advocacy, Social work preparedness, and culturally responsive social worker) reflected specific ways that the participants employed their personal and professional experiences in interacting with clients. Throughout the data analysis process, I continually looked at the research questions in relation to their responses transcribed from the interview to find implicit and explicit commonalities related to the use of self phenomenon, which I synthesized further in Chapter Five as the essence of the phenomenon continued to unfold.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five builds on the findings presented in the previous chapter that demonstrated the relevance of the use of self concept for culturally responsive change agency in social work practice and education through the participants’ voices in this research study. I have learned from the six participants’ descriptions their perceptions of culturally responsive social workers as they use themselves as change agents in practice. Additionally, Chapter Five includes recommendations for transformative change agency in social work education, practice, and human services administration and provides implications and recommendations for future research. Lastly, this chapter contains my own post-reflections about what I learned and how this process has helped me to become more committed to continual examination of how I use “self” in my own life and work.

Recommendations for Transformative Change Agency in Social Work Practice

Vetter (2012) views transformation as a process by which “practitioners re-define and re-position viewpoints and affiliations” (p. 29). Transformation must be supported by critical reflection. Mezirow (1990) states, “Reflections enable us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions of which our beliefs have been built” (p. 1). Effective social work change agency involves the restructuring of various systems, but this cannot take place without individuals with power and privilege to see themselves as instruments of co-constructed change. To initiate reform to systemic institutions of oppression, social workers must become political and utilize their
positions to interrupt, disrupt, and eradicate inequity and social injustices. Freire (1996) understood this and expressed his keen awareness for the need for societal change:

I never thought that life was predetermined or that the best thing to do was to accept obstacles as they appeared. On the contrary, even in my very early years I had begun to think that the world needed to be changed; that something wrong with the world could not and should not continue. (p. 13)

Change in life is inevitable; however, it can sometimes be challenging for some people to actually do. Yet, it is necessary, especially in light of the NASW Code of Ethics Standards that pertain to cultural competence and social diversity, which emphasizes the need for social workers to: understand culture… have a knowledge base of their clients’ cultures…and 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. (p. 9)

To enhance this professional commitment for social work cultural competence, I recommend the following strategies that can serve as a basis for use of self as a culturally responsive agent of change. The findings suggest that becoming a culturally responsive social worker connects to the social and political aspects of the world. I recommend the following five relevant actions for consideration in culturally responsive social work:

- To actively engage in continual self-reflexive dialogue to maintain awareness of one’s own level of being a culturally responsive social worker. To always be aware that social workers are connected to a broader community where they are constantly in interaction with others. Moustakas (1994) notes: “the other is within me and I within the other. My existence and the other’s existence are co-present in intentional communion. This community sense exists as possibilities in every human being” (p. 37)
• To facilitate social work preparedness through diversity trainings, workshops and educational opportunities that develop knowledge and skills. Anderson and Carter (2003) propose that social work educational programs and trainings should be preparing students and practitioners to promote inclusive, culturally responsive change agency.

• To seek out interactions to learn from other diverse cultures and groups who are different from one’s self in terms of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religion, disabilities, and other dissimilarities. Gay (2010) defines culture as “referring to a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others” (p. 9).

• To become actively involved in social work networks and engage with professional organizations that support the mission of social work as stated in the Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999). Networking with diverse professionals in the field can be helpful to learning more about other people’s cultures.

• To initiate a personal commitment to be a transformative change agent for client-centered advocacy and social justice. The NASW Code of Ethics (1999) states, “Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty and other forms of social injustice” (p. 1).

This research contributes not only to the literature, but provides strategies that social workers can use to effect positive change agency in their practice. I believe that social workers, human service professionals, and educators must be able to see themselves in the context of their own cultural background, beliefs, and values. To be able to examine and re-
examine one’s own cultural competence is the first step to confronting values and beliefs that hinder multicultural responsiveness toward different others. This initial step can then lead to a democratic and equitable positionality for all who are served by the profession of social work.

A democratic framework employs the rudiments of a person-centered process in providing equitable service and care. One of the major theorists found in the literature is John Dewey (1957), who believed that the cause of democratic freedom is the most complete measure of human potentialities. Although referenced mostly in education, Dewey’s writings lend credence to social work values that support democracy. For example, in his work, *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey provides declarations that social work educators and practitioners might consider in his five articles as reflected here: Article One: *What Education Is*; Article Two: *What the School Is*; Article Three: *The Subjectmatter of Education*; Article Four: *The Nature of Method*; and Article Five: *The School and Social Progress* (Flinders & Thorton, 2013, pp. 33-38).

Each of these declarations bears strong truths that every social work educator and helping professional needs to read, for they clearly provide a double-headed sword that both uncovers hidden agendas that need to be exposed and eliminated, while simultaneously revealing unconscious realities that need to be experienced in the educative process of life. Dewey proclaims:

> There is….no succession of studies in the ideal school curriculum. If education is life, all life has, from the outset, a scientific aspect, an aspect of art and culture, and an aspect of communication….The progress is not in the succession of studies, but in the development of new attitudes towards, and new interests in, experience. (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 37).
This applies to social workers and educators alike, as all human beings are inseparable from these relational factors. In fact, all people are comprised of multiple self-identities within societal life. We are born into a society that already exists, and we become socialized through shared cultural norms and behaviors in that society, predominantly by and through our experiences. Our individuality connects us to the self that engages in “dialectic and dialogic interaction” with society (Banks & Banks, 2004, p. 37).

The recommendations offered here can be instrumental in helping agencies and workers become more culturally responsive change agents within urban communities. Yes, it will require courage and commitment to be willing to do things differently, but transformative change agency demands a compelling stance to change the status quo. It seems worthy of consideration to employ the use of self concept as a foundational premise to support the continuing push for socially just educational, workplace and community settings. Social workers participating in this study communicated the message that having experiential and educational knowledge contribute to how they use self in their urban practice.

**Future Implications for Social Work Practice: Spirituality and the Use of Self**

An unexpected moment in this study occurred when I discovered that one of the six participants considered her use of self from a spiritual perspective. Birdie, who is white, consistently referred to her spirituality during our interview. She even questioned at one point if I had “gotten that part in there,” referring to her comment on her use of self. This disconfirming event did arouse my thinking about spirituality and its place in many clients’ lived experiences. Patton (2002) states, “disconfirming cases are no less important” than confirmatory cases and are considered those that do not fit the emergent patterns in the study (p. 239). Only one other person, Beth, an African-American social worker, talked about her
faith and belief in God and Jesus Christ. None of the other participants made reference to their spiritual or religious beliefs. Both Beth and Birdie see their spirituality and faith in God as significant factors in who they are as individuals:

Birdie: Ah, you know, I’m very spiritual and so and I know how important that is to many people and it’s important to allow people to express their spiritual beliefs and practices. I just honored that.

Beth: I believe that God exists and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, you know. I grew up reading the Bible. I do believe what the Bible say. And it was very hard when I came into the social work field because I was told that you have to, you have to accept homosexuality. I mean, you have to, you have to, you have to… and that was something that I struggled with, because again, I respect them. And that’s why I go back to you may not respect everything someone does, but you still yet respect that person as a human being.

This element of spirituality emerged most strongly from Birdie, as she referenced this component of self as her primary source of guidance when working with diverse clients.

Koenig (2005) notes that recent study findings inform us that clients prefer clinicians who are sensitive to their spiritual, religious, or cultural perspectives in life. Land (2015) points out that there is a great amount of evidence supporting the importance of spirituality, religion, and faith in many clients’ lives (p. 4). Social workers may also rely upon their spirituality or religion; this awareness of self is critically important. Social workers are to be consciously mindful that clients may or may not share their beliefs and therefore, one’s faith status should not factor into the client relationship unless the inquiry comes from the client. Being sensitive to clients’ cultures or ways of being within their groups or populations are major considerations in social work practice. Diversity must be considered due to the vast multicultural client base for which service delivery is rendered. The research findings revealed multiple angles by which one could view the essence of the phenomenon use of self, including a spiritual self, which Birdie defined as the self she uses to promote effective
change agency in a respectful manner. The disconfirming data were uncovered in this study without any prompting, but its evident emergent presence is something I feel needs to be considered and studied as more and more clients are acknowledging some type of spiritual or religious affiliation. Social workers as professionals are not necessarily recognized for their beliefs about spirituality and how that plays out in their work with diverse clients. For example, statistically, African Americans are culturally acknowledged to hold strong spiritual and religious roots; approximately 83% are cited to do so by Pew Research (2016).

Additionally, they are less likely to seek mental health services. The element of spirituality thus is one that many cultural groups embrace. The reality is social work practitioners are human beings with real life experiences, just like their clients. How then do we keep biases from interfering with the beliefs and spiritual values of diverse clients who may hold views differing from those of the social work professional? How does one balance their own personal beliefs and values about spirituality so it does not interfere with the provision of client-centered service delivery?

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future considerations for next steps would be to investigate these questions more deeply. This study contributes to the literature on the notion of spirituality and how it may be a strong influencer in the lives of service providers who do not deny their active participation in faith systems in their work. More research is needed on social workers and their spiritual beliefs and how they might keep those beliefs from colliding with those of the clients they serve. This study contributes to the literature by interjecting the notion of spirituality as a critical factor that some practitioners do hold to their faith practices and beliefs in their work with diverse others. In the literature, social workers are not necessarily recognized for this
disconfirming data about spirituality that often focuses more on the clients’ beliefs and values. Studies reveal that some counselors, social workers, and other helping professionals are spiritually motivated in their personal lives and may have strong sentiments that can sometimes either impede or facilitate trusting relationships and client engagement. Therefore, implications for future research include learning more about diversity and differences from a social constructionist perspective, using a self-reflexive lens. In order to advance critical multiculturalism, educators, practitioners and students, may need to rely upon themselves rather than institutional policies to become more culturally competent in social work education and practice.

**My Post-reflections**

My personal and professional transformation toward critical social work practice emanates from my lived experiences, my spiritual grounding, and my academic learning. Each of these influences not only undergird my life practice and use of self, but serve as guides to my continuous personal and professional growth. The International Federation of Social Workers provides a global definition of the Social Work profession:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (2016, n.p.)

This definition closely mirrors my personal vision in principle, which is “to offer people inspiration and encouragement in every season of life common to humanity” through my writings, teaching, and counseling practices. Key words in the global definition above also echo my personal commitment to advocate for those who are the most vulnerable in our
society—the poor, frail elderly, and many people of color who often lack the resources to empower their everyday lives. The global definition of social work indirectly speaks to the institutionalized racism that blatantly exists in this country and throughout the world. But until structural changes take place at the root level in politics, business, government, and education, the social work profession will face severe challenges in actualizing the promotion of visible social justice.

In my role as a professional social work therapist and educator, I purposely seek to engage clients and students in the co-construction of meaningful goals that enhance their wellbeing. This positionality of thought did not occur by happenstance, but has come through transformational learning processes primarily gained in my higher education coursework. I see tremendous growth in my personal and professional self. Based on this, I believe that a paradigm shift needs to occur that takes the focus of becoming culturally competent from external knowledge about different others to an internal awakening about one’s own cultural self. Honoring and respecting the cultural dignity of diverse others is critical to being able to work cross-culturally in an ethical and professional manner. Cultural competency seeks to demonstrate respectful consideration to others in the context of their own culture.

Hidden biases and assumptions play a major role in stereotyping others who are different from ourselves. This applies not only to social workers, but also to other professions that yield power and authority over others. A truly democratic society will initiate a long-past-due shift from the traditional white male dominated frameworks of knowledge construction to a welcoming platform that gives space to multiple voices of others’ lived experiences. Therefore, I humbly share my personal and professional self in acknowledgement and acceptance of my own voice of legitimacy in this writing.
My own awareness of what constitutes racial disparagement has propelled me to seek intentional opportunities to educate others from a critical multicultural perspective. Paulo Freire states: “Teaching is a political act.” My transformation toward a critical approach to social work has become a part of my persona and consciousness. My decision to further my personal and professional growth is one that I make no apologies about, for I can see new horizons opening that will give opportunity to “speak truth to power” through my own voice. I also have come to realize that personal growth is not static, but is ongoing and filled with contradictions.

Moustakas (1994) explains that to be heuristic is to discover and hold onto our individuality through our own internal awareness and intuition. Further, he exhorts the message of “representing the truth of our own experience” (p. 13). My personal transformation to embrace my uniqueness and trust my authentic self certainly continues to empower me and contribute to my professional disposition as well. In closing, I quote from Moustakas (1956), an exhortation for all who read this work: “The self is constantly emerging in its own true experiences and is becoming with the transition of change and transformation” (p. 273).
APPENDIX A

NOTICE OF NEW APPROVAL

Principal Investigator: Onumona Ukpokodu
319 School of Education 615 E. 52nd Street
Kansas City, MO 64110

Protocol Number: 16-044
Protocol Title: The Use of Self as a Tool for Culturally Responsive Change Agency in Social Work Practice: A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study
Type of Review: Expedited Review

Date of Approval: 03/02/2016
Date of Expiration: 03/01/2017

Dear Dr. Ukpokodu,

The above referenced study, and your participation as a principal investigator, was reviewed and approved, under the applicable IRB regulations at 21 CFR 50 and 56 (IRB) or 45 CFR 46 (OHRP), by the UMKC IRB. You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application.

Your protocol was approved under Expedited Review Regulatory Criteria at 45 CFR 46.110 or 21 CFR 56.110 under Category #7 as follows:
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This approval includes the following documents:

Attachments
UMKC- IRB 16-044 APPENDIX A- Invitation Email- Gloria Anderson
UMKC – IRB Protocol ID 16-044 METHODOLOGY CHAPTER 3-Gloria Anderson Dissertation Proposal
UMKC – IRB Protocol ID 16-044 APPENDIX D-Pro Participant Assessment Letter-Gloria Anderson
UMKC – IRB 16-044 APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol-Gloria Anderson
UMKC – IRB 16-044 APPENDIX B- CONSENT FORM-Gloria Anderson

If a consent is being used in this research study you may find the stamped version in section 16 of your application.

The ability to conduct this study will expire on or before 03/01/2017 unless a request for continuing review is received and approved. If you intend to conduct this study, it is your responsibility to provide a Continuing Review Form prior to the expiration of approval.

This approval is issued under the University of Missouri - Kansas City's Federal Wide Assurance FWA000005427 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the Board's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

There are 5 stipulations of approval:
1) No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date. (PIs and sponsors are responsible for maintaining Continuing Review; 1st participation (2) All unanticipated serious adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
3) All protocol modifications must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk. This includes any change investigator.
4) All adverse events must be reported to the IRB.
5) All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.

Please contact the Research Compliance Office (email: umkrcmb@umkc.edu; phone: 816235-5927) if you have questions or require further information.

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Thank you,
Shannon Mccaul
UMKC IRB
APPENDIX B

EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN URBAN SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Social Work Practitioners,

My name is Gloria Anderson, and I would like to request your participation in my qualitative dissertation study exploring social workers’ perceptions of their *use of self* in their urban practice working with diverse populations. Specifically, I am interested in giving voice to your personal and professional knowledge and experiences in this area.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be terminated at any point if so desired. All responses will be de-identified for anonymity. In order to participate in this study, you (a) must hold a MSW degree, (b) have worked or is currently working in an urban-based setting, and (c) have at least five (5) years of experience as a social worker. I am seeking a diverse participant group of five to seven MSWs from varying ethnicities, gender and ages.

This research project has been approved by the UMKC Institutional Review Board (IRB-ID #16-044) and is supervised by Dr. Ukpokodu, Full Professor in Curriculum & Instruction at UMKC. If you have any questions related to this study, please feel free to contact me at andersongl@umkc.edu or my advisor, Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu at ukpododu@umkc.edu. You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant.

If you or someone you know is interested in participating in this study please contact me directly at: andersongl@umkc.edu no later than March 15, 2016 for more specific details. Thank you in advance for sharing this invitational email with other social work professionals you know. Your assistance is welcomed and appreciated!

Sincerely,

Gloria T. Anderson, LMSW
APPENDIX C

PRE-PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

Dear __________________________________

Thank you for your willingness to be a participant in the dissertation study regarding social workers’ use of self conducted by social worker Gloria Anderson, a doctoral candidate at UMKC, School of Education. A small number of studies have been done on the use of self concept, but to date no studies have been located in the literature that specifically address how social workers’ perceptions of use of self as change agents might help or hinder culturally responsive service delivery with diverse, urban populations.

I’m excited to explore this new terrain with five to seven MSW social workers that have at least five years’ experience working with diverse clients in urban communities. Thank you for your response of interest to be a potential participant in this important research effort.

I realize that your time is extremely valuable and being mindful to that end, this next step will help to ensure that the research project going forward is most expedient and efficient for you, as a possible participant and me, as the researcher.

In order to continue in the participation selection process, your honest responses to the following three (3) questions are necessary. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at: andersongl@umkc.edu or (913) 433-3877. Please return your completed, confidential responses directly to me at my email address noted above by March 14, 2016. If selected, you will be notified by March 21, 2016.

Thank you again for your interest and your time. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about this research topic on the use of self in social work practice.

**************************************************************************

Please provide your responses to the following questions. Your input is valuable. Thank you in advance for taking time to complete this next step in the research project on “the use of self.”

1) What is your understanding of the use of self as a tool for change agency in social work practice?
2) How would you describe your use of self as a tool for change agency in your social work practice?
3) How would you personally define (in your own words) the following terms as related to professional social work?
   a) Self-Awareness:
   b) Cultural Skills:
   c) Cultural Knowledge:
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Interview Logistics: Face Sheet*

**Demographics:**

- **Pseudonym Name:** ________________________________________________
- **Gender:** M or F or Other: _____________________
- **Age Range:**
  - 20-39 ______
  - 40-59 ______
  - 60 + ______
- **Ethnicity:** ______________________________________
- **Date:** ____________________ **Time:** _________________________

**Opening Script:**

*Introduction:*

Thank you for taking time to meet with me to confidentially interview you for my dissertation research study. My topic is on the use of self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency in social work practice. I want to better understand how social workers describe themselves in their practice with diverse populations working in urban settings. I’ll be asking you seven primary questions that have no right or wrong responses, but are designed to learn more about how you perceive this topic through your own lens and from your own perspective. It will take about 45 minutes to an hour. I am planning to record our session for accurate transcription and will also be taking a few handwritten notes. Once I transcribe the interview, I will give you a copy to review for accuracy. Again, this is completely voluntary and confidential. At the end of our interview, I would like to have you complete a brief 10-question values and beliefs worksheet. There are no wrong or right answers and it will take about 5 minutes. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to get your thoughts about use of self in urban social work practice. Do you have any questions before we get started?

**Interview Questions:**

1) **What is your current role or position in the field of social work?**

   a) How long have you been a social worker?

   b) What led you into the social work profession?

2) **How would you describe a “culturally responsive” social worker?**
a) What personal and professional characteristics do you think are most significant for social workers to possess in order to be culturally responsive, particularly when working with diverse clients?

b) What personal or professional characteristics do you think might hinder or impede culturally responsive service delivery?

c) What characteristics or traits do you feel you have that help to facilitate culturally responsive service delivery?

3) What does this say to you in regards to your own level of self-awareness?

4) What might be some challenges that can possibly hinder culturally responsive change agency when social workers are not self-aware?

5) How would you, as a social work practitioner, describe how you use self as a tool for culturally responsive change agency?

   a) Could you please give an example?

6) How would you describe your professional preparedness to work with diverse populations?

   a) What specific skills and training do you attribute to preparing you for professional social work practice?

   b) Any particular theoretical frameworks that you prefer to work from in your practice?

7) Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself, your life and/or your work?

   a) How has talking to me like this been for you?
Conclusion:
Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with me. I appreciate you for taking time today to do this confidential interview and I will let you know when the transcription is completed so that you can review and edit, if you desire.

************************************************************************

Probes:
• Go Deeper: “Can you tell me more about…?”
• Go back: “Earlier you mentioned __________, please tell me….”
• Clarify: “And were you homeless when you were arrested?”
• Steer: “That’s very interesting, but can we return to…?”
• Contrast: “How would you compare your experiences in foster care with living with your adoptive family?”

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APPENDIX E

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

The Use of Self as a Tool for Culturally Responsive Change Agency in Social Work Practice: A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study

Researcher: Gloria T. Anderson, LMSW, I-PhD Doctoral Candidate
Advisor: Omiunota Ukpokodu, Ph.D. (Doctoral Committee Chair)

Request to Participate
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Gloria Anderson is conducting this qualitative study. In order to participate in this study, you (a) must hold a MSW degree, (b) have worked or is currently working in an urban-based setting, and (c) have at least five (5) years’ experience as a social worker.

Background & Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore social workers’ perceptions of their use of self in their urban-based practice with diverse populations. Use of self is a concept that portrays the idea of the social worker as the ‘instrument’ to promote change in client systems (Heydt & Sherman, 2005, p. 25).

Procedures
Gloria Anderson will conduct this study by using semi-structured interview questions and self-report survey documents. Study participation involves: (a) providing brief information about your demographic characteristics, (b) participating in the interview process, and (c) answering a series of self-report survey documents. The interview consists of seven (7) primary questions and will last approximately one hour. The questions will explore your view of the use of self in working with diverse populations in urban settings. The interview will be audio-recorded in order to capture all of your input. No names and identifying information will be reported. Additionally, any tapes and notes from the interviews will be kept in a locked, secure location. Based on the instruments used, the estimated time for total participation is approximately 2 hours.

Risks and Inconveniences
The risks for participation are considered minimal. Potential loss of confidentiality is a potential risk. The risks of taking part in this research study are not expected to be more than the risks present in one’s daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to participate in this study.

Benefits
There are no benefits to you for taking part in this study. Other social work professionals who work with diverse populations may benefit in the future from the information you
provide through your voluntary responses. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so at any time.

**Fees and Expenses**
There is no monetary cost to you for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality**
While we will do our best to keep the information you share confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe, research and protecting human subjects. All responses collected will be de-identified for anonymity so that participants cannot be directly identified. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the research results.

**Contacts for Questions about the Study**
You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant. You may contact the researchers, Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu at ukpokoduo@umkc.edu or Gloria Anderson at andersongl@umkc.edu, if you have any questions about this study.

**Voluntary Participation**
Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect you in any way. Your input is considered valuable, and I believe that other social workers, and most importantly, the vulnerable populations whom we serve, can benefit from this study.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by contacting Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu at ukpokoduo@umkc.edu or Gloria Anderson at andersongl@umkc.edu.

Thank you for your time and assistance in this study. Please provide the following information to help ensure a diverse sample of participants:

1) Your Ethnicity ____________________________
2) Your Gender: ___________________________
3) Your Age Range: 20-39 40-59 60+

By signing below, you are consenting to be part of this research.

Date: ____________________________

________________________________________

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VITA

Gloria Thomas Anderson was born as Gloria Jean Adger on May 5, 1955 in Shreveport, Louisiana. She was educated in local public schools and graduated from Central Senior High School in Kansas City, Missouri. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from Dallas Baptist University in 1981. After raising her family, she went back to college at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as a nontraditional student in 2004, where she earned her Master’s degree in Social Work, completing the program with a 3.94 GPA. Licensed in the states of Missouri and Kansas, Ms. Anderson worked as a clinical instructor, assistant to the field director, and Title IV-E program coordinator at the University’s School of Social Work for seven years.

In 2012, she began working fulltime toward her Interdisciplinary PhD (I-PhD) in Curriculum and Instruction, with a co-discipline in Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations in Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has received several awards, including the School of Graduate Studies Minority Doctoral Student Fellowship in 2013 and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management Honor Recipient in 2016, based on her leadership and volunteerism both on campus and in the community.

Upon completion of her degree requirements, Ms. Anderson plans to continue her career as a university-level educator in social work along with pursuing related research interests.