A CRITICAL EXPLORATION INTO PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION
IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

A review of the literature on professional socialization in social work indicates that social work education produces inconsistent results in terms of assisting students to acquire values of the profession presented to them within their course of study, and in forming a professional social work identity. Values have been considered central to developing social work professionals. However, historic schisms and conflict within the profession surrounding its primary practice methods used to actualize its mission and goals, often characterized as a micro-macro practice debate, have led to divisions in the profession with respect to accepted identities and ambiguity about what social work values should be held in esteem. Social work values are prioritized differently and tend to cluster differently around various theoretical and practice methods. Thus, there is a range of value orientations presented to students by the profession. It is also argued that there is a field of internal and external influences on personal change and the socialization of students. Factors internal to students that they bring to their education, and factors external to students within the profession and in the teaching and practice environments where students learn make socialization challenging and problematic. Transformative adult learning theory, as conceptualized by Jack Mezirow, is presented as a theory to demonstrate the difficulty of transforming values in general, and a possible method to assist in socialization, if all messages from the profession surrounding values and identity were clear and unified. A review of the major reasons, motivations and personal histories that bring students to social work is undertaken. Social work education, specifically field education located within the context of a hostile neoliberal socio-economic and political climate and its effect on the socialization of students is critiqued. Non-concious and unconscious psychological processes of students in
learning and change have been overlooked within the study of professional socialization in social work. This omission is salient to this discussion. Suggestions for future research are discussed.
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“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

To all the people who want to become social workers, who believe that there can be a more just world, are willing to examine their values and personal histories, embrace self-change and have the courage to learn to think and feel critically, in order to make that just world a reality.

Remember to breathe.

Namaste
Chapter 1 Introduction

Within programs of professional education in general, there is a strong expectation that the aspirants to the profession will be changed or transformed into full functioning professionals through their course of study (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Professional education is not only concerned with teaching the theory and technical skills required for practice, but also with exposing students to a profession’s values, beliefs and accepted modes of behavior (Merton, Reader, & Kendall, 1957). Aspiring professionals will be asked to adopt a new set of professional values (Bragg, 1976), and to integrate a professional identity into their personal identity (Kole & de Ruyter, 2009) through a process of professional socialization.

Just as in the general study of professional socialization, the study of the acquisition of social work values has played a major role in how socialization has been examined, conceptualized and measured for the past fifty years in social work education (Barretti, 2004b), albeit, not at a level that one might expect for such an important topic to the profession. Interestingly, studies that delve into the socialization of social work students have shown that students do not acquire all the values that are offered to them in their education on a consistent basis (D’Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, & Edwards, 2004; Osteen, 2011; Varley, 1963, 1968). Successfully facilitating students to adopt a professional identity in social work has also been shown to be a difficult endeavour for social work education, since students do not always self-identify with the profession after their academic experiences are complete (Bogo, Michalski, Raphael & Roberts, 1995; Loseke & Cahill, 1986). There is a need to understand why professional education in social work produces such mixed results in socializing students to the profession.
In social work, the socialization of students to the profession has been, somewhat inexplicably, an underdeveloped area of study. First, the focus on values and constructs that measure values indirectly, such as attitudes, has been critiqued as doing a disservice to the development of knowledge and theories of professional socialization in social work (Barretti, 2004a, 2000b; Miller, 2010). Barretti (2004b) asserts that an emphasis on “single variables oversimplify the explanation of a process that is more varied, sophisticated, and permeable to a number of intersecting influences” (p. 276). According to Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011), the study of professional socialization in social work also lacks balance in that there is a small amount of research that takes into account the students’ perspective. Lastly, the study of professional socialization in social work has primarily been the study of conscious motivations and consciously perceived change in students’ professional development. Attempts to explain non-conscious and unconscious processes that might influence socialization to the profession are sorely lacking (Costello, 2005; Vincent, 1996).

This thesis explores some of the major obstacles that confront social work students and educators in assisting students in acquiring values associated with the profession and a professional identity. In doing this, the thesis brings together literature showing that these obstacles are both “internal” and “external” to students entering the profession. It thus serves as a ‘reality check’ for the profession that poses some important questions about the prospects or capacity of the profession’s socialization processes in relation to these internal and external barriers.

The main themes I will explore are as follows:

There are a number of influencing factors, internal and external to students, which inhibit the internalization of new values and a possible new identity by students:
(1) The fact that students come already value laden to their education and with motivations that may even lay outside of their conscious awareness;

(2) The confusion about what the appropriate values and professional identities are within the profession. These are contested in the sense that the profession is in conflict over how to actualize its mission of helping people and that value priorities differ and then tend to cluster differently around various and sometime competing forms of practice. Thus, there exist a range of value orientations: configurations of value priorities and clusters of values that are presented to students; and

(3) That even if the profession had a consensus on value orientations, it would be difficult to pass these on because we may not all be employing suitable teaching techniques, such as transformative learning theory, that take into account the difficult and emotional nature of changing an individual’s identity, and their closely held value and general belief systems.

These arguments will unfold in the following way: The overarching issue of professional socialization is introduced in Chapter 2 and is examined from a historical perspective. Starting with the assumption that social work is a profession where its aspirants must be socialized to a values orientation and an identity consistent with the profession, this chapter outlines major milestones in the development of the profession, professional education in social work, and the study of socialization in terms of values acquisition. Even though there currently exists sets of value orientations put forth by national and international professional associations in social work (Canadian Association of Social Workers-Association Canadienne des travailleuses et travailleurs sociaux [CASW-ACTS], 2005; International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work [IFSW & IASSW], 2004; National
Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008), and official ethical statements regarding the profession’s particular interest in “the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and/or living in poverty” (CASW-ACTS, 2005, p. 3; ), the idea of a unifying set of values agreed upon and supported by all those in the profession in practice is closely questioned. The history of social work in North America and England presents a profession that has been divided between two overarching approaches to the practice of social work (Haynes & White, 1999). Practice frameworks that have been organized along lines of social activism and facilitating change at a broader societal level have often been associated with the idea of macro practice and social justice (Payne, 2005), while facilitating individual therapeutic change within existing socio-political and economic structures has been tied to the idea of micro practice and values that focus attention on the individual (Lundy, 2004). Thus, within social work education, it has also been argued that:

...two values of Personal Caring and Social Justice have existed historically throughout social work education but that they do not co-exist in a strong, creative form. They appear to be in conflict, with Social Justice as the oppositional value base struggling to gain acceptance and visibility (Lynn, 1999, p. 947, italics in original).

These major professional divisions are also internally divided by various theoretical viewpoints and methods that tend to prioritize values differently. These values orientations cluster themselves in different ways in practice. It is argued here that consequently values are problematic for the professional socialization of social workers. The profession often acts as if its defining messages surrounding values are unified through its professional regulating bodies and educational associations. However, there are various discourses and even disputes about the
primary mission of the profession and what social work itself is supposed to be, as well as the principle values that should be adhered to (Payne, 2005; Specht & Courtney, 1994). It is within this professional context of continuous debate between various groups and subgroups within the profession around basic values that social work students are being educated and acculturated.

Furthermore, it will be argued that educators within a professional context do not control all the aspects of learning for their students. After all, university students are not children (Dale, 2010) and pedagogical principles can only go so far to inform the teaching practices of adults (Beverley & Worsley, 2007). Adult education theory principles, as epitomized by the work of Knowles (1980, 1990) and transformative education theory, as conceptualized by Mezirow (1981, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2006), are presented here as useful for understanding what is required to assist students in the acquisition of new professional values and the formation of professional identities. The work of both theorists acknowledges that learners possess an abundance of life experience and prior learning that influences their learning in the present (Knowles 1980, 1990; Mezirow, 1991, 1995, 2000). Transformative adult learning theory argues that learners may undergo a process of transformation in their learning when they begin to critically question their prior learning and frames of reference with which they view the world, and use to make new meaning and create understanding (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Mezirow’s (1991, 2006) theory also suggests that processes outside of conscious awareness are at work in the internalization of meaning perspectives that are implicitly assimilated from the larger socializing culture, or in the creation of learning blocks that have developed out of experiences of emotional trauma in childhood. These theories offer us a glimpse at some of the potential stumbling blocks that could present themselves in attempting to change the meaning perspectives and frames of reference that students bring to their education. Transformative adult learning theory also outlines some of
the conditions under which a learning transformation can take place and presents possible threads of inquiry that could be useful in bringing to light factors that may be necessary for some students to potentially address in order to adopt a new value set or an identity.

Chapter 2 raises the idea, taken from the adult education theories above, and previous theoretical work on professional socialization, that a person’s primary socialization plays a significant role in their professional socialization (Miller, 2010; Sherlock & Morris, 1967). How students already view the world, and the experiential and other processes by which their view of the world is acquired and internalized, may have a profound impact on their willingness to adopt new values and create a new professional identity. It is also noted here that in the study of professional socialization in social work, there is a curious absence of how both unconscious and non-conscious processes may influence a student’s socialization. This is extremely relevant, since students may not be entirely aware of the reasons why they come to social work as a profession and why they may be resistant or perhaps willing to accept any new set of social work values. Granted, there is some work in this area of study, but it still remains an underdeveloped area of research in professional socialization in social work education. Chapter 2 concludes that there are significant influences on the socialization of students in social work education that make any values acquisition and professional identity development a complex enterprise. These influences can be conceived of as a field of internal and external factors. Internal factors would be aspects internal to the student, in terms of primary socialization, personal beliefs, motivations and histories that the student brings to their education. External factors would be influences within the profession and in educational settings. Examples of these external features could be issues such as a conflicted professional vision, an ambiguous set of values and potential
identities attached to specific levels (micro-macro) and methods of practice, and educational environments that may present messages that do not support the profession of social work.

Chapter 3 examines the internal side of this field of influences on socialization, focusing on what is known about why students choose to become social workers and what they bring to their education in terms of motivations, values and personal history. It is suggested that the prior socialized values, beliefs and meaning perspectives may create considerable barriers to successful socialization in social work education. A primary driver, often found in the literature, for students coming to the profession is a conscious desire to help people (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997; Enoch, 1989; Hackett, Kuronen, Matthies, & Kresal, 2003; Limb & Organista, 2006; O’Connor, Dagleish, & Khan, 1984; Pins, 1963). But there also may be unconscious motivations for choosing social work, since some students have been shown to have personal histories of trauma or disadvantage, more than students from other disciplines (Black, Jeffreys, & Hartley, 1993; Rompf & Royse, 1994; Russel, Gill, Coyne, & Woody, 1993). As an example, I discuss important academic work into the exploration of why certain workers in occupational realms that reflect the social justice principles of social work are able to do and thrive in their work (Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez, Mayo, & Miller, 2006). Returning to transformative adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), the thesis asks whether students are able or encouraged, in their professional education, to reflect upon and question their underlying meaning perspectives in order to re-evaluate them and potentially become open to embrace a new value orientation or set of values.

Chapter 4 explores an integral piece of the field of socialization influences that is external to students of social work. The acquisition of values and identity formation is viewed within what is considered by some to be the signature pedagogy of social work education: field
education and practice learning (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008). Social work is a profession deeply embedded in its contexts, in that the practice of social work is profoundly affected by the contexts of time, place, and socio-political milieus for example (Hopps, 2000; Healy, 2005). Thus, in modern times, the socialization of students within their field education cannot be separated from the neoliberal socio-political and economic world in which it currently exists. For example, there has been and continues to be an assault on social work and the reform or social justice aspirations and identity to which some in the profession of social work subscribe. Students being socialized into the profession must negotiate their socialization within the sometimes overpowering orbit of these powerful economic, social and political forces. The implications of these external influences on any values acquisition and the identity formation of social work students are discussed.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, the findings of the three chapters are summarized, and areas for future work are recommended. A context is suggested for the relevance of this work in terms of the understanding of the complex field of internal and external influences on the socialization of offered values and the formation of professional identities in social work education.¹

1.1 A Personal Note

Before turning to the topic of professional socialization and the associated discussion of how values inform socialization in the profession, I would like to state where my own

¹This work was originally written as a series of three theoretical papers that could be considered stand-alone manuscripts, interrelated, but distinct. Consequently, there is some repetition among chapters, particularly in the presentation of the importance of values acquisition in socialization in social work education, transformative learning theory in the work of Mezirow (1991), and the treatment of how social work as a profession is conflicted about how to actualize its helping mission either through micro-work with the individual or macro-work to change the structures of society.
professional values are situated. As a child of a social worker, I was socialized to ideas that align themselves with features of social work’s historical concern to enhance the wellbeing of people and address social problems such as oppression and poverty (NASW, 2008) long before I came to the profession. At various times in professional practice, my value priorities have changed and clustered differently depending upon the social work positions I have held, the mandate of agencies that I have worked with, or the personal dilemmas of the clients whom I have worked for. For example, values of social justice, competence and service have taken priority in work to develop the capacity of a not-for-profit agency, whereas values of dignity and the worth of a person and professional competence have acted as the primary influence in my past social work as a substance use therapist more, while the importance of human relationships to foster change has remained an overarching value theme throughout my brief professional career, regardless of practice focus or theoretical influences. I have a strong affinity toward the ideas of social justice and service to humanity, and believe that competence is one of the best ways to ensure integrity in social work professional practice.

This exploration was undertaken as a way for me to gain some understanding around why so many people, who have been educated as professional social workers, do not appear to identify with the profession and demonstrate such a wide range of different value priorities and value clusters in the practice of social work. In the following pages, I will acknowledge the multiple value priorities that cluster themselves differently around various theoretical and practice orientations, but I will not privilege one cluster of value priorities over others. Examples will be provided to demonstrate how individual values could be prioritized differently and how multiple value clusters can be held within the social work profession. As I have stated above, I contend that different value configurations or orientations across the profession creates value
ambiguity for students and that this is one of many problematic influences on the socialization of aspirants to the social work profession.
2.1 Background

As unscientific as simple straw polls can be, making an inquiry of people at a social gathering of helping professionals can be a very revealing exercise. The experience can become intellectually intimidating and push personal boundaries, especially if the query touches upon the ideas of what one does, one’s identity and professional values. When I have posed the question “What do you do?” to professionals who are engaged in social welfare and have social work degrees, I have always wondered why more people have not simply stated: “social work” or self identified as: “a social worker”.

Perhaps to answer “social work” to the question: “what do you do?” is too nebulous a reply. Social work is a diverse field of practice that has many different views of the tasks that social workers engage in (Gibelman, 2004). Of course, some respond with pride that they are “social workers”. This group appears to embrace the title wholeheartedly, but more often than not, the answers that are offered to my question are more descriptions of associations with a specific group of people, the location of where one works, the agency that a person works for, or a professional title other than “social worker”. I have repeatedly heard the statements: “I am a therapist;” “I work with children and families;” “I work at the hospital;” “I work for this obscure not-for-profit, or that well-known public or private agency.” Students have been found to not identify with the title of social worker even when engaged in social work field placements; some using specific organizational job titles to describe who they are and what they do (Loseke & Cahill, 1986), much like the professionals I have encountered in my casual conversations. The answers that I have been given are usually just descriptions of what people do and rarely there is any mention of the profession of social work itself.
However, for those who actually speak about being a “social worker”, there are strong associations for, and sometimes very strong emotions around certain practices or value orientations that they believe social work should or could be. Even though these are all anecdotal observations, it is striking that some professionals possess a significant sense of duty and attachment to certain value priorities or to a specific method of practice, such as psycho-therapy. From my perspective, this is just as memorable as the weak or non-existent sense of connection with the profession that some professionals display.

The question is: What happens in social work education to create some professionals who appear not to want to be associated with the title of ‘social worker’ or represent only certain clusters of value priorities and not others, in the range of value orientations presented to students? Social work is a profession that claims to hold its values as paramount to its practices and ethics (CASW-ACTS, 2005; IFSW & IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008), but what are students and professionals really being asked to acquire and become? Is the educational process effective in social work to be able to transform students and socialize them to the profession? What are the barriers to this process?

Values within social work are thought to be a driving force in how the profession articulates and prioritizes practice (Banks, 2012; Reamer, 2006), and in the ethical standards that are provided to the profession by both national and international governing bodies (CASW-ACTS, 2005; IFSW & IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008). The acquisition of social work values has been used as the primary measure of socialization to the profession within academic studies since the early 1960s (Barretti, 2004b). However it is revealing to learn that after their education, students do not consistently reflect values associated with social work that have been presented to them in their course of study (D’Aprix, Dunlap, Abel, & Edwards, 2004; Osteen, 2011).
Additionally, studies of educational change and development in social work show that social work education has had little impact on the development of ethical judgment or ethical decision-making skills in students from the beginning to the end of their studies (Landau, 1999). Social work education has not been able to convince some students to be open to learning new information on societal oppression (Van Soest, 1996), nor has it completely been able to foster in students a desire or an affinity for work with oppressed populations (Bogo, Michalski, Raphael, & Roberts, 1995), or even been able to assist in the development of a professional identity (Loseke & Cahill, 1986). We need to begin to understand why this is the case.

Teaching an accepted set of social work values and a professional identity that is unique to social work is problematic since this assumes that there exists a shared and unified set of values, that weighs each value equally across the various practice and theoretical orientations of the profession, or that there is an agreed upon professional identity to be transferred and taught. This is exceptionally difficult when there are still ongoing discourses as to what social work is thought to be, or should be (Payne, 2005). Could it be the case that social work students in their education are being offered a value set that is confusing and complex because it is contested and has multiple priorities and configurations or orientations?

In undertaking an exploration into the education process and socialization of social workers to professional values and identity, I will examine the nature of this educational change process, and bring to light some of the possible barriers to socializing the aspiring student to any of the possible value priority orientations, and identities offered to them. It appears that there are significant difficulties in educating for these objectives. The major contribution of this work is that it provides an opportunity for both the profession and educators to consider the complex nature of socializing professionals to a new set of values, or to some uniform idealized identity
specific to social work. This work examines if social work education can actually be expected to change people into the professionals that the profession aspires them to become, as reflected in its ethical codes and value statements (CASW-ACTS, 2005; IFSW & IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008).

Two questions relevant to the discussion of socialization are: 1) How is the general process of professional socialization in professional education programs characterized, and 2) Is this process really an experience akin to metamorphosis (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001)? The idea of facilitating transformations in personal awareness and learning to create social change has long been thought of as an achievable possibility within adult education (Freire, 2000). Programs of higher education are in themselves learning environments that can:

...challenge individuals to move beyond their comfort zone of the known, of self and others; thus these learners may enter higher education experiencing discrepancies in beliefs, attitudes, and understanding, and engaging in a new social environment with provocative values, ideas, and power dynamics (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012, p. 389).

If social work education is attempting to teach and socialize students to a new set of professional values and identities (CSWE, 2008; Levy, 1973; Pumphrey, 1959) that act as a foundation for theory and practice, guiding problem solving and decision making (Sullivan, Steinhouse & Gelfand, 2000; Vigilante, 1974), then students should undergo some degree of change in their education, or at the very least, skim the surface of their awareness of their values, or the personal view of who they are and what they believe.

Some social work educators have already suggested the use of transformational learning theories and practices as a means to foster critical thinking and move students towards social
change as well as personal transformation (Anastas, 2010; Jones, 2009). The work of adult educator theorist Jack Mezirow (1981, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2006) will be interwoven throughout this examination. Transformative adult learning theory will be used to show how the process of socialization in a professional education program is not a straightforward process when it involves adopting new beliefs and changing meaning perspectives that have been developed through prior socialization, and are the personal lenses with which students view the world and any new learning.

There are a number of assumptions and background ideas that have to be presented before addressing the topic of professional socialization. In Part 1 of this chapter, the following will lay the foundation for unfolding what has been studied within this topic area in social work:

1. The assumption that social work is a profession, but that it is a conflicted profession certainly not unlike other professions. From its early beginnings social work has had two main practice interests to achieve the same overarching goals of alleviating personal suffering, addressing social problems and increasing psychosocial health. Social work has been generally polarized between a focus on individual change or on efforts to bring about broad societal change. For some social workers, values are prioritized and then configured differently depending on their theoretical and practice orientations and the level at which these are articulated and implemented. Any social work claim to hold a unified set of values that are weighted equally in practice is contested, and this profoundly affects what is offered to students in terms of particular configurations of values, or value orientations, and professional identities.
2. Theories of adult education and adult transformative learning based on the work of Knowles (1980, 1990) and transformative learning theorist Mezirow (1981, 1991, 2000, 2006) will be offered as a standard with which we can judge what is done currently to teach a new value set to students and to show how difficult transforming values can be, even if the new value set is clear and uncontested.

3. How professional socialization has been conceptualized and some early examinations of socialization in related professions such as medicine and nursing.

4. A brief history of the development of socialization in the profession, and early studies of values acquisition in social work.

Part 2 of this chapter will present much of the research that has been conducted in professional socialization in social work and explore how transformative adult learning theory, as viewed through the work of Mezirow (1981, 1991, 2000, 2006), could be used to inform the process of socialization. Throughout this part of the review, the challenges of educating to change values and identities will be clarified. The final discussion of this chapter will recap the guiding questions from above, but also discuss some of the major barriers to values socialization and identity development, and address what further study should be undertaken that may inform what may be occurring in the process of values socialization in social work.

2.2 A Profession in Development and Conflict

The study of socialization to the profession of social work first begs the questions: Is social work a profession? Is there really a need to socialize students to a set of social work values and an identity? Is there a unified set of values and identity that all in the profession agree on that should be internalized by students? There is merit in addressing these questions at this juncture.
If social work was not considered a profession, an examination of professional socialization and this discussion would be academic.

Social work has long strived to develop, and has attained the attributes of a profession that were outlined more than fifty years ago by Greenwood (1957): a body of theory, authority, sanction by the community, codes of ethics and a distinct culture. Presently social work possesses many of the traditional features of other professions such as medicine and law: a code of ethics, government and legislative sanction around forms of work, schools of social work entrenched within well-established university systems, academic journals with which to promote advances in theoretical practice and research, provincial regulatory bodies and national professional associations, an international professional federation and an international association for schools of social work. Even if the obvious day to day characteristics of the profession are ignored, social work has acted and continues to act as if it is a profession.

Despite its general recognition as a profession, social work could be considered a profession in a precarious position due to its reliance on government for a major part of its practice funding and practice environments, as well as its contested ability to compete with other professional groups in providing private services, such as psychotherapy (Abbott, 1988a). All professions are dependent on government for the legal legitimation of their professional mandate, ceding to the profession the right to have jurisdiction over a certain type of work, which then becomes inaccessible to anyone else (Abbott, 1988a). However, in the case of social work there is less opportunity for social work professionals to work in market for-profit environments where clients are willing and able to pay for the services offered by these professionals. Without government and the provision of state funding for social services, at least within the Canadian context (Schmidt, Westhuses, LaFrance, & Knowles, 2001), the majority of
social work would most likely have to be funded by charitable organizations and not-for-profit agencies, harking back to a time of friendly visitors and settlement houses (Lubove, 1965).

While social work may be considered a marginalized profession by some (Richan & Mendelsohn, 1973), the socialization of students to a professional identity and values is a necessity. From its early beginnings, social work has always been a pursuit concerned with values and ethics. It has been suggested that “one of the profession’s principal attributes—which ultimately distinguishes it from other helping professions—is its persistent embrace of values” (Reamer, 1993, p. 39). The claim is that aspiring social workers must be socialized to the beliefs that would demonstrate their association with the profession. There are also suggestions that a profession must act as if it is unified internally around fundamental values and identities for external public consumption so that it can gain legitimacy to claim its jurisdiction of practice (Abbott, 1988a). For clarity, Banks (2012) provides this definition of social work values:

The term ‘social work values’ refers to a range of beliefs about what is regarded as worthy or valuable in a social work context – general beliefs about the nature of the good society, general principles about how to achieve this through actions, and the desirable qualities or character traits of professional practitioners. (p.8)

However, social work is a profession that struggles with how its primary purpose to help alleviate human suffering is actualized and implemented. The other related struggle revolves around how social workers reflect on and reconcile their professional efforts in practice between an emphasis on personal caring of the individual and social justice (Lynn, 1999). Payne’s (2007) discussion of discourses in the profession on the nature of social work argues that social work is constructed by various perspectives from therapeutic helping visions of the profession, to social
order views of social work and transformational-emancipatory ideas of an overarching purpose of the profession. Each perspective, according to Payne (2007), has its own corresponding practice theories and ideologies that contribute to supporting each view and to shaping the practice of social work in certain ways. Depending on the perspective of social work that one supports, different values may be considered more of a priority than others and then cluster around practice or theory in different ways, in effect making certain value configurations or orientations more or less important for professional socialization. For example, using Payne’s (2007) conceptualization of discourses, the value of social justice aligns more easily with transformational-emancipatory ideas of social work as found in feminist and anti-oppressive practices, while humanistic and psychodynamic approaches to practice primarily focus on individual change processes and values that support self-determination and client change within accepted societal structures. The competing views of the primary method of social work engagement and the myriad theories of social work practice that cluster value priorities differently, are just some of the factors that suggest questioning the existence of a unified set of social work values that are agreed upon, prioritize those values equally, and then attach to a clear professional identity into which students can be socialized.

There exist a number of ethical codes and value statements that offer sets of social work values (CASW-ACTS, 2005; IFSW & IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008). However, it could be argued that a unified set of values and a corresponding identity as envisioned in these documents is more aspirational than real. For instance, even though the codes of ethics of various professional social work governing bodies proclaim social justice and social change to be primary organizing values for the profession (CASW-ACTS, 2005; IFSW & IASSW, 2004; NASW, 2008), these could be considered an orientation within the profession that exists on a
continuum of levels of commitment from strong to non-existent (Marsh, 2005). How the particular value of social justice informs social work and manifests in practice is complex and contested, and there is a lack of unified acceptance by many in the profession concerning the modes of practice and identities that should guide practice and education (Barker, 1991; Segal-Engelchin & Kaufman, 2008; Specht, 1991; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Reamer (2006) notes that values in the social work profession have often changed historically as the social and economic context has shifted and the profession has evolved. It is safe to say that differing value orientations have always existed within the profession over its history. This discussion of values in social work will be revisited, after we touch upon the adult education perspectives that inform this enquiry.

2.3 Adult and Transformative Learning

Professional education is, for the most part, the education of adults, or at least the education of those emerging into adulthood (Arnett, 2007). In Canada, 65% of university and college students in 2007 were between the ages of 17 to 24 (Dale, 2010). Certain assumptions about adult learning should be considered when examining professional education in general. The concept of andragogy (Knowles, 1980; Knowles & Associates, 1984), or the theoretical underpinnings of teaching adults, is germane here since the educational process in social work does not reflect strict pedagogical principles where instructors determine all aspects of learning for dependent students (Beverley & Worsley, 2007). Knowles (1980) initially presented four theoretical assumptions about adult learners:

1. As individuals mature, the person’s self-concept shifts from a dependent personality toward that of a self-directed person;
2. Adults collect life experiences that become valuable resources for learning;

3. An adult’s readiness to learn becomes oriented toward the developmental tasks of their social roles;

4. The time perspective of an adult learner moves toward immediate application of knowledge, away from a postponed application of knowledge and toward a performance focus from a subject focus (pp. 44-45).

In later work, Knowles (1990) added two more assumptions to his foundational list:

5. External motivations, such as monetary compensation, can be potent. However adults are more motivated to learn by internal factors such as self-esteem and quality of life;

6. Adults have a need to know why they need to learn something, before they place any effort into the process of learning (pp. 57-63).

Andragogy is not a learning theory to be applied independently of pedagogy (the art and science of teaching children), but is presented as another set of assumptions about learners that would complement pedagogical concepts. It was suggested that andragogy and pedagogy should be considered as two ends of a spectrum, where an assumption may have contextual application somewhere between the two extremes (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1990) characterized pedagogy as an ideology, whereas andragogy was essentially just a model with an alternative set of assumptions that also included pedagogical assumptions. The two ideas that Knowles (1980, 1990) puts forth around how an adult’s past life experience influences current learning and that people are driven to learn by motivations such as achieving a good quality of life are most relevant for this inquiry into social work education.
The work of Mezirow (1981, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2006), and his transformation theory of adult learning, is also extremely relevant for social work education and professional socialization. Within this body of theoretical work, learning is conceptualized as a process of making meaning of one’s experience within the framework of previous experience and personal understanding. All learning has the potential to create a situation where a person can become “critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). Mezirow (2000) argued that learning can become transformative when students:

...transform...taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 7-8).

In Mezirow’s (1990) conceptualization, meaning schemes are “habitual, implicit rules for interpreting;” while meaning perspectives are “higher order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” (p. 2). Meaning perspectives can “involve criteria for making value judgments and for belief systems” (Mezirow, 1990, pp. 2-3).

The initial theoretical ideas around transformative learning developed out of observations on the process of adult learning and perspective changes as seen in college and university re-entry programs specifically targeted for women returning to school in the 1970s (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). For example, in the educational programs studied, students displayed major attitudinal and belief shifts, both at individual and group levels, about the role and place of

Transformative adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) draws together ideas in psychology and philosophy around making meaning, domains of learning, educative social justice empowerment practices, and processes of individual change in both adult education and psychotherapy. Mezirow (1991, 2000) was influenced by thinkers such as psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990, 1996) who explored how people made personal sense of their world and adult educators such as Paulo Freire (2000) who theorized the possibility of radical social change through the educational process of conscientization.

The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas (1970, 1971) also played a major role in the development of Mezirow’s (1981, 1991) work. Mezirow (1981) adapted Habermas’ (1971) ideas around knowledge interests in the social sciences, specifically the theoretical concepts of technical cognitive interest, practical interest, and the emancipatory interest of knowledge development in social science, interpreting and developing them into a critical theory of adult learning. Bohman (1999) explains that Habermas’ idea of “emancipatory interest of critically oriented science aims at liberating human beings from relations of force, unconscious constraints and dependence on hypostatized powers” (p. 57). Mezirow (1981) saw the Habermasian ideal of emancipatory action that developed out of the emancipatory interest of knowledge, as similar to his own idea of perspective transformation that was central to his later theory of transformative adult learning.

According to Mezirow (1981), Habermas’ three cognitive interest areas related to domains of learning that people engaged in to learn about work, language and power. The instrumental learning domain was tied to the technical cognitive interest and dealt with rational and physical
processes that are designed to control and manipulate the environment. The communicative learning domain was related to the practical interest area and surrounded learning that involved communicating meaning and understanding language, as well as affective, ethical, and moral processes. Emancipatory learning arose out of the emancipatory interest and is concerned with critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) extended the idea of critical reflection in emancipatory learning to not only involve the self, as Habermas had envisioned, but also that of the two previous domains of learning: instrumental and communicative. This idea of critical reflection in emancipatory learning is central to Mezirow’s (1991) idea of transformative learning since:

Emancipatory learning often is transformative. In emancipatory learning, the learner is presented with an alternative way of interpreting feelings and patterns of action; the old meaning scheme or perspective is negated and is either replaced or reorganized to incorporate new insights. (p. 88).

The psychotherapeutic work of psychiatrist Roger Gould informed Mezirow’s (1981, 1991) ideas of adult education as well. Gould (As cited in Mezirow, 1991) contended that psychological premises and parental prohibitions learned consciously and unconsciously in childhood could become a block to productive functioning in adulthood. In order to overcome compensatory behaviours that encourage dysfunction or inhibit a more responsive way of being, it was believed that learners could be assisted to discover and identify the possible blocks and distortions in psychological premises, to essentially change their meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

The focus of Mezirow’s (2000) theory of transformative learning is on learning to “negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we
have uncritically assimilated from others-to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers” (p. 8). This theoretical perspective aligns with the development of a critically reflective professional as depicted in the writings of such authors as Schön (1987), and in current social work education theory (Anastas, 2010). The need to develop critically reflective and evaluative skills is currently outlined in social work educational policies from regulatory bodies both in the United States (CSWE, 2008) and Canada (Canadian Association for Social Work Education - Association Canadienne pour La Formation en Travail Social [CASWE-ACFTS], 2009).

Transformative learning suggests a personal and meaningful deconstruction of the foundational knowledge base of a person’s world and their understanding of being, i.e., what is considered true and acceptable within their social sphere. It is essentially the prior socialization of a person that is being questioned, potentially revised, or replaced entirely in a transformative learning approach. Mezirow’s work has been already suggested as a useful analytic framework for social work educators who wish to assist students to engage in personal and individual change (Jones, 2009). Before examining how the socialization of social workers has evolved within the profession and its study, the importance of socialization and identity in general should be discussed.

2.4 Socialization and Identity.

From a social-constructionist perspective, reality is formed through social interaction; thus society exists as both an objective and a subjective reality for the individual (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The internalization of reality occurs through socialization, which Berger and Luckmann (1966) define as “...the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into
the objective world of a society or a sector of it” (p. 130). Socialization is also conceptualized as a process where individuals are “assisted” in becoming part of a social group (Grusec & Hastings, 2007, p. 1). “Assist” may be the most appropriate description of how a group or culture acts to socialize an individual, since the individual can correctly be viewed as an active participant in the socialization process (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). Within any path of socialization, there exists some individual agency in that a person is able to choose to some extent what to acquire from the more experienced members of the group or society that the person is being socialized to.

Socialization has primarily been considered to take place mainly within the family and immediate social context, in childhood and adolescence. However, socialization processes continue on into what can be termed “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2007, p. 208): a period that is defined roughly between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. In Western culture, emerging adulthood has become a period in which important self-exploration processes can be experienced. Value sets and beliefs are still developing during this period, partly due to the development of post-secondary education and the cultural value placed upon individualization. The ability of individuals to play a significant role in choosing their own life directions, within the choices provided by their lived social contexts, and enter into new contexts of socialization of their own volition has increased substantially. Emerging adulthood is where new roles are being acquired and interpersonal relational skills are increasing (Arnett, 2007).

Socialization processes are thought to “include all those whereby culture is transmitted from each generation to the next, including training for specific roles in specific occupations” (Maccoby, 2007, p. 13). Professional socialization is the learning of a new social role where the aspirant seeks to “selectively acquire the values and attitudes, the interests, skills, and
knowledge-in short, the culture-current in the groups of which they are, or seek to become, a member” (Merton, Reader, & Kendall, 1957, p. 287). Within a profession and more importantly in professional education, socialization processes facilitate “the acquisition of the specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, norms, and interests of the profession that the individual wishes to practice. The end product of successful professional socialization is professional identity” (Bragg, 1976, p. 6).

Work on identity studies has examined how individuals create their own personal identities and how the membership within social groups can influence identity formation (Wetherell, 2010). In this context, the profession of social work could be viewed as an occupational group. Identity formation has been shown to be complex and can be shaped by a variety of processes. Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011) have proposed an integrative view of the subject, and contend that:

...identity is simultaneously a personal, relational, and collective phenomenon; it is stable in some ways and fluid in others; and identity is formed and revised throughout the lifespan of individuals and the histories of social groups and categories, through an interplay of processes of self-discovery, personal construction, and social construction, some of which are relatively deliberate and explicit, whereas others are more automatic and implicit (p. 8.).

Professional identities have been theorized to be crucial aspects of personal identity, and it is suggested that the ideals of a profession should be internalized within the individual’s identity for professionalization to occur (Kole & de Ruyter, 2009). Throughout the early work in the professional socialization in the health care fields of medicine (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss,
the formation of a professional self-image and a professional identity was a central part of the discussion around professional socialization processes.

For this present discussion of professional socialization in social work, the conceptualization of personal identity developed by Lawler (2008), but extended by Trede, Macklin, and Bridges (2012) to encompass a professional identity will be used as a guide. Three aspects of identity are used to provide a general definition of professional identity:

First...one starts to develop knowledge, sets of skills, ways of being and values that approach being identical to those held by other members of the profession one is part of. Second, in doing so one becomes different, and perhaps significantly so, to those others who are not part of one’s profession. Third, one identifies oneself with one’s profession. That is, a person identifies him or herself as a member of that category of people that make up the profession (Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2012, p. 380).

Since personal identity is thought to develop and change across a lifetime, then professional education, such as an undergraduate or a master’s degree in social work, could either be a foundational building experience for professional identity and self, or an opportunity to change aspects of one’s identity. From the point of view of transformative learning theory and adult education, professional education in social work could be considered an opportunity to consciously reflect upon and examine what informs one’s beliefs, values, points of view and meaning perspectives, while exploring a newly desired professional role. There is also the possibility that students come to their formal education with little inclination to reflect upon their personal identities or motivations and just want to become a professional to gain access to
economic opportunities. They may have little understanding of how professional education will affect their identity, or how their choices reflect aspects of their already formed personal identity. In order to gain a sense of what has been and currently is important in the socialization of social workers, we will now turn to examine the roots of the profession, and what is thought to make a social worker a social worker.

2.5 Setting a Historical Context: Socialization in a Developing and Contested Profession

Within North American social work, it was just slightly less than a century ago that Abraham Flexner presented his famous paper “Is Social Work a Profession?” at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1915 (Flexner, 1915/2001). Flexner had experience in assisting the medical profession in the United States improve their education systems thus helping them to advance their own professionalization process and status (Austin, 1983). In his conference address, Flexner (1915/2001) argued that social work encompassed too vast a group of associated occupations and knowledge base, and that the creation of a specific body of functional knowledge to be transferred through education would not be realistic or perhaps possible. He viewed the work of social work as one of the mediation of services of other professionals, to help those in need of assistance in order to alleviate their suffering and troubles. However, the social worker had no specific techniques or interventions that were uniquely their own to offer to clients (Flexner, 1915/2001). Thus, according to Flexner, social work had not reached the point where it could be considered a profession.

This critique of the group of occupations striving to become the social work profession propelled social workers at the time to work to address the issues that had been raised at the 1915 conference for the next two decades (Austin, 1983). The main task was to rectify the supposed
deficits in the structure and character of their profession, which included articulating a method of practice that was unique and could be transferred easily within an academic setting, along with the creation of professional organizations (Flexner, 1915/2001).

Up until this point in time in the United States, social work had primarily two main streams of practice focus. Altruistic charity workers usually supported by religious groups and benevolent societies had started to organize themselves in the late 1870s into Charity Organization Societies [COS], modelled after similar organizations in Great Britain (Lubove, 1965; Weiss, 2003). The COS movement’s primary focus was directed toward encouraging personal responsibility of those suffering and in need, to engage in change work to alleviate their situations of poverty or moral deprivation, through “friendly visiting.” This practice was the basis for social work case work where volunteer workers would engage in direct one-to-one intervention work with individuals and families to suggest courses of action or determine eligibility for financial assistance (Lubove, 1965). “Scientific philanthropy” emphasized efficiency, organization and administration in order to investigate, educate or coordinate services for those deemed in need and worthy of service and assistance (Haynes & White, 1999).

The other primary area of social work practice, social reform and community development, was represented by another imported initiative from the United Kingdom. The Settlement House Movement [SHM] took root in the United States in the late 1880s, and encouraged groups of volunteers with beliefs in social reform to move into poverty stricken neighbourhoods in urban areas to live and work side by side with residents. There they began to organize social action and community development projects. SHM organizers believed in the existence of structural societal determinants of poverty, where individuals were not entirely responsible or in control of the economic situations in which they often found themselves (Abramovitz, 1998). Even to this
day in social work circles, the social justice, community organization and social change ethic is synonymous with the SHM and settlement leaders such as Jane Addams (Abramovitz, 1998; Weiss, 2003), while concern with facilitating individual change through social casework or personal therapy has been associated with the COS and COS leaders such as Mary Richmond (Popple & Reid, 1999; Weiss, 2003). There is an argument to be made that the roots of professional fragmentation in social work originate with the union of these two opposed practice movements that became the social work profession (Haynes & White, 1999).

The articulation of the principles of social casework in Richmond’s (1917) work Social Diagnosis (Austin, 1983) and the move to embrace psychiatrically informed social casework in the 1920s (Ehrenreich, 1985) provided the profession with concrete practice methods that were transferable and teachable. This is what social work occupations at the time perceived was required to become a profession. Movement towards a unique social work knowledge base grounded in science, not intuition, instinct and morality, assisted social workers in creating “the image of the technically proficient caseworker, sympathetic but professionally objective in client relations” (Lubove, 1965, p. 122). This acceptance of the knowledge base of psychiatry, that emphasized a medical model and a focus on individual change, pushed more social and societal change orientations to the background in the profession. The definitive shift away from the emphasis on sociological explanations for social ills brought more professional status (Abramovitz, 1998). However, this also possibly contributed to the roots of a loss of autonomy as a profession, since it subjugated social work to psychiatry and other psychological methods (Abbott, 1988a). The value of social justice and the practices of social reform, as represented by the settlement movement in the United States, found themselves at a disadvantage in the developing education system for social workers, since agencies that practiced individual
casework provided more opportunities for field learning and vocational placements for schools of social work and their students than settlement house work (Lubove, 1965).

By the 1930s in America, the professionalization project in social work was well established and had developed an educational system and fostered the growth of professional associations. Even though early education programs did not consciously promote socialization to the profession and concentrated mainly on the transfer of quantifiable practice skills and knowledge, the academic training of social workers provided the primary vehicle for professional socialization. The Association of Professional Schools in the United States described education “as a socialization process which eliminated personal idiosyncrasies, prejudices, or habits detrimental to professional efficiency, replacing them with attributes compatible with the values of the fraternity” (Lubove, 1965, p. 152).

From the beginnings of the social work professionalization project in the early twentieth century, efforts to socialize new workers into the profession were primarily focused on the transmission of values within the profession. Of course, the values orientations that social work was developing at this time were a reflection of the struggles within social work in becoming a recognized profession. They reflected the ideas that Talcott Parsons, a prominent American functionalist sociologist, suggested about the profession in which there should be an emphasis on a technical clinical focus centered on the ideas of rationality, universalism, disinterestedness, and specificity of function (Lubove, 1965). The direction that social work values would take in this early period also reflected what was advocated by the practice of psychoanalysis at the time. This would have far reaching consequences for values orientations in social work education. Describing the impact on social work education in the United Kingdom (UK), Lynn (1999) argues that:
In adopting the tenets of psychoanalysis, UK educators set social work on a trajectory that laid the foundations for dependency on an American model of practice, consolidated social work education’s position within the dominant ideology of Personal Caring, and marginalized theories associated with Social Justice. Although social work education originally contained two perspectives—individual help and working for social change—the acceptance of psychoanalytic theory weighted the profession towards the notion of therapy and demoted its potential for contributing to social change and reform (pp. 944-945).

The focus on socializing students to values in new social work professional education programs in the early twentieth century was in line with the history of the profession up to that point in time. Social work as a profession had been built on value systems, more than technical theory and skills, as seen in its early evangelical Christian religious roots in Charity Organization Societies in England and the United States (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Klein, 1968) and the influences from the Social Gospel movement in North America (Schmidt, 2008). Within the Canadian context, social welfare had developed under the auspices of the Catholic church and religious orders in Quebec, while in English speaking Canada public social work and social movements were promoted and supported by Christian religious leaders, political reformers, and journalists with strong Christian views in the early 1900s (Bellamy & Irving, 2001; Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). And while the profession has moved towards more secular values over the course of the twentieth century (Vanderwoerd, 2011), an emphasis on the transmission values in social work education has remained, along with the need to develop conscious awareness of those values and their implementation in professional practices (Perlman, 1976).
By the late 1950s there was a push to clarify how far social work had come as a profession and even a stronger emphasis on the promotion of values. Greenwood (1957) proposed that all professions possessed five definitive aspects: “(1) systematic theory, (2) authority, (3) community sanction, (4) ethical codes, and (5) a culture” (p. 45). Under the umbrella of ethical codes and professional culture, values still played a major role in defining the profession. Within the professionalization project of social work, culture was very important since it was thought to be “the attribute that most effectively differentiates the professions from other occupations” (Greenwood, 1957, p. 52). The focus on value acquisition and the transmission of a professional culture may well have been the most appropriate focus for the profession during the first half of the twentieth century since it provided the profession with something tangible to hold on to that could differentiate social work from other helping professions.

Values and beliefs continued to be an essential focus in American social work thought and education into the latter part of the 1950s. In 1957, Biestek (1957) outlined what he believed to be the main principles of the casework relationship in social work. Of his seven principles, three concerned practice suggestions: the use of the theory of individualization, the purposeful expression of feelings, and controlled emotional involvement with clients. But three principles concerned values: acceptance of the client, non-judgment in practice, and a belief in client self-determination. The last principle concerned ethical practice in the principle of confidentiality (Biestek, 1957). Even though these values were oriented toward individual change, there was clearly a move toward a more client centered set of values that demonstrated greater care and respect, and less of a paternalistic view of the client-social worker relationship.

In 1958, a sub-committee of the National Association of Social Workers’ Commission on Practice, chaired by Harriet Bartlett (Brieland, 1977), developed and published a working
definition of social work practice (Bartlett, 1958). Within this document, values were one branch of a five-point program thought to be integral to the theoretical practice of any profession, which also included purpose, sanction, knowledge and method. The work was an attempt to explain how these parts interacted to form the practice of social work, and how this configuration of professional traits was unique from other helping professions. The purpose of the profession was primarily believed to be one of helping people to understand and resolve problems that stemmed from conflicts between the individual and the environment. As well, assisting individuals, groups, and communities to attain their full potential within society was an important purpose of social work. Sanction referred to the authority and power that social workers had to pursue their work that grew out of a social responsibility to provide services that met basic requirements for people to thrive in a society. The sources of authority and power were considered to emerge out of government, voluntary agencies that had committed to providing services to improve individual and community welfare, and the social work profession that set standards to inform practice and requirements for a social work education. Knowledge in Barlett’s (1958) conceptualization developed out of a need to understand human behavior and included areas such as human development, communication processes, relationships, an understanding of culture, as well as societal constructs such as government and professional concepts such as awareness of self. Method was primarily considered to be the use of self in relationship with others in order to change the individual’s situation in their environment and the social environment’s impact on the individual. This working definition provided a broad theoretical foundation for the profession and led to the development of generalist social work practice, at least within the Canadian context (Leslie & Cassano, 2003).
The next year *The Teaching of Values and Ethics in Social Work Education* by Muriel Pumphrey (1959) was published. That same year the Council on Social Work Education released their curriculum study that outlined essential values for social work practice (Boehm, 1959). This particular work presented values that encompassed a primary belief in the right to self-fulfillment and to socially provided opportunities to meet basic needs across “physical, psychological, economic, cultural, aesthetic, and spiritual realms” (Boehm, 1959, p. 43). When further discussing values and ethics in social work education, Boehm (1959) noted:

> The practice of social work is based not only on knowledge but also on attitudes, both are reflected in the activities of social workers. Values underlie their choice of alternatives. The social worker’s attitudes bespeak the professional values and ethical commitments to which he adheres. Values and ethics, therefore, also need to be learned. They usually are learned pervasively throughout the curriculum rather than explicitly (p. 81).

Within the curriculum study’s essential values, there was little attention given to ideas of the pursuit of social transformation or social justice, but more emphasis on the individual’s rights to meet their own needs in ways to support or enrich society or to question how social resources were distributed (Boehm, 1959).

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, social movements in the United States, such as the Civil Rights movement and the women’s movement, in addition to growing concerns around the issue of poverty, and a change in political policy by the Democratic Party prompted government action to address social inequality (Abramovitz, 1998). A focus on anti-discrimination became a social advocacy issue for social work. These societal changes were reflected in more opportunity
for people to enter the profession who may not have had this chance in the past due to structural inequities based on race, gender or sexual-orientation (Austin, 2000). In this period, social work in North America underwent a shift away from an emphasis on individual and small group psychological practice toward more social reform community based practice (Lundy, 2004). However, this was short lived as economic globalization and a shift toward neo-liberal conservative government policy in the late 1970s and 1980s signalled the beginning of attacks on the welfare state (Abramovitz, 1998; Morris, 2000). The neo-liberal move toward conservative economic policy continues to present day and has had deleterious effects on social rights and human service work especially in non-profit organizations (Hansenfeld & Garrow, 2012).

Currently within the North American context, Canadian and American social work education professional bodies both state that values are an important part of social work education. The Canadian Association of Social Work Education - Association Canadienne pour La Formation en Travail Social [CASWE-ACFTS] (2012), in the curriculum guidelines of their accreditation standards state that a part of the core learning objectives for students is to “adhere to social work values and ethics in professional practices” (p. 9). In the United States, within the educational policy and accreditation standards of the CSWE (2008), there is an explicit expectation that “social workers serve as representatives of the profession, its mission and its core values” (p. 3). The NASW (2008) has stated that the core values essential to the mission of professional social work in the United States are: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Similarly in Canada, six values are held to be at the core of ethical conduct. These values include: respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons, the pursuit of social justice, service to humanity, integrity in
professional practice, confidentiality in professional practice, and competence in professional practice (CASW-ACTS, 2005).

Clearly, values have always been considered to play a primary role in defining the profession and in shaping its professional membership. However, even though many professional associations present sets of values that are believed to be representative of the profession as a whole, values are contested in the sense that values are prioritized differently by both individual and groups of social workers, and tend to cluster differently around various forms of theory and practice. For example, radical, structural and feminist approaches to social work theory and practice have always held a commitment to the value of social change for social justice as one of the defining elements of these types of social work theories and practice modalities (Fook, 2002). Mullaly (1997) makes his value priorities clear within a structural approach:

Do we not negate the respect we extend to clients in our interpersonal relationships with them if we accept a social order based on economic individualism with its inevitable consequences of poverty, homelessness, deprivation, and unemployment?...Social work must also be concerned with realizing a society that promotes social work values rather than one that negates or compromises them. It would seem that only a society founded on humanitarian and egalitarian ideals could accommodate these secondary values. Surely, an imperative for social work is to work towards the establishment of a social vision based on its own value position (p. 30).
Clinical social workers have always stressed the importance of human relationships and respecting the dignity and worth of the individual person in clinical social work practice (Goldstein, Mielhs, & Ringel, 2009). While the value of social justice is congruent with clinical and psychodynamic approaches, environmental factors as a root cause of individual problems are traditionally and operationally given less consideration, and a concern for social reform as a social work intervention is limited in most clinical work (Strean, 1979), given the specific mandates of the agencies within which these clinical activities occur. Certain values just may not be actualized in practice depending upon the particular theoretical or practice orientations and the way that the associated values are prioritized.

If values in social work are considered core to the practice and the professional make-up of a social worker, then what does the research in social work education tell us about how these values are acquired or internalized in the socialization and identity building process? Before examining the literature in social work, we will turn first to how other professions, namely medicine, began the organized study of professional socialization in North America.

2.6 Early Study of Professional Socialization and A Theory of Transformative Learning

In 1957, Merton, Reader, and Kendall produced a collection of sociological oriented introductory studies of professional socialization in medicine. These studies conformed to a structural-functionalist paradigm, where structures and factors considered independent of the person, such as culture and the roles of social groups in a society, are thought to influence people to behave and think in certain ways (Tepperman & Curtis, 2009). The essays and studies focused on what were then considered to be salient issues in medical education: the selection of students and academic performance of students; motivations of medical students and sources of stress or
support; career decisions and professional preferences of students; and the transmission and acquisition of medical norms and values (Merton et al., 1957). Even though skills training and knowledge acquisition was thought to be the main focus of medical education at that time, Merton et al. (1957) made it clear that the thrust of their work in *The Student Physician* was focussed on “attitude and value components of the physician’s role” (p. 42). One of the key observations that came out of this body of work was that student learning was not entirely governed by didactic processes. Learning was influenced to a great extent by the relational interactions that students would have with other students, patients, as well as the medical staff with whom they worked.

One of the critiques of *The Student Physician* (Merton et al., 1957) when it was released was that there was an omission of the tension and conflict that occurs within medical schools and education processes (Becker, 1958). Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961) also criticised Merton et al.’s (1957) work for its structural-functionalist foundations. In their own study into professional socialization in medicine, *Boys in White*, Becker et al. (1961) explained that they did not see the benefit in considering the idea that formal education solely provided the attitudes and values required in medical practice.

*Boys in White* took the form of a qualitative study of the development of medical students at the University of Kansas Medical School (Becker et al., 1961). Guided by a symbolic-interactionist foundation, where importance is placed upon shared meanings and a social group’s own definitions of their interactions (Tepperman, 2011), it was the students’ lived experience with instructors, peers, patients within the training ground of the classroom and the hospital that framed the study (Becker et al, 1961). Essentially, the study took the perspective of the students in all their activities of learning. In general, the findings in *Boys in White* stressed the emergence
of a unique student culture in which medical students were working to deal with their immediate learning situations with respect to their goal of becoming physicians. Medical education was found to have an influence in changing students’ behaviour through situations presented to shape thought and action rooted in highly developed organizational structures and the culture of medicine (Becker et al. 1961).

With respect to the socialization of professional values, Becker et al. (1961) found that students came to medical school with their own set of values, and that these values could be set aside for the professional values thought to be more appropriate to the situation at hand. However, in terms of professional socialization to a new set of values, the students’ past personal socialization experiences could be problematic. They explained:

> Values operate and influence behavior in situations in which they seem to be relevant. Where the relevance is not clear, the values are not used and other, more appropriate to the problems to be faced, are brought into play. But this does not mean that the original values are gone forever. Instead, these values may simply lie dormant, ready to be made use of as soon as an appropriate situation presents itself (Becker et al., 1961, p. 431).

Many of the educational experiences seen in the work of Becker et al. (1961) reflect a pedagogical assumption on the part of the medical school of the dependent role of the learner (Knowles, 1980) and the idea of the banking model of education (Brookfield, 1986). Within the banking model, “knowledge is seen as deposited by experts in the vaults that are learners’ unformed minds” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 294). Students in professional education programs, at least in medicine, in the early and mid-parts of the twentieth century appear to have never been asked to critically examine the personal values that they brought to medical school. It appears
that schools and educators just assumed that they would take on the values of a chosen profession without question, like empty containers being filled with water or sand.

Mezirow’s (1998) view of transformation in learning argues that critical reflection upon personal assumptions is central to adult learning. Critical reflection evolves out of discursive learning interactions the purpose of which is to understand “the meaning of what is being communicated—especially when intentions, values, moral issues, and feelings are involved” (Mezirow, 1998, p. 188). In professional education, where professional schools are attempting to instil a new value set in budding professionals, it would seem that critical reflection upon the values that one brings to their education would be a necessary step in either integrating new values or changing long held personal beliefs.

In an early symbolic-interactionist qualitative study of the education of nurses, Olesen & Whittaker (1968) concluded that it was not primarily in the classroom, that is, under the influence of instructors who follow a developed uniform curriculum, where professional socialization occurred. According to their research, it was in the common details of students’ interactions where students were developing new nursing identities and letting go of their old selves. It was in the mundane aspects of daily life as a student, in what they termed “the silent dialogue,” where the situations and interactions with others outside the formal classroom legitimized students’ developing identities. It was within the individuals’ internalization and integration of roles that students were influenced and formed into professionals (Olesen & Whittaker, 1968).

In creating a theory on how dental students progressed through their professional education, Sherlock and Morris (1967) posed that recruitment, socialization and professional outcomes were distinct phases in the development of a class of aspiring dentists. In their panel
study, they followed students from their pre-dental year through to their graduation and into the first year of practice over a period of seven years. Within the socialization phase, their work highlighted two important aspects. The organization of students themselves and the creation of a student subculture, in response to the socialization processes presented by their academic institution, were just as important in their professional socialization as the formal educational systems that were trying to affect them. The conceptualization of the evolution of the professional was broadened via the hypothesis that past historical factors affected the professional socialization of individuals and that professional socialization continued long after the experiences that took place in their formal education setting. Professional socialization was viewed in a holistic manner. Since the desired final result of professional socialization is a functioning professional status-role, Sherlock and Morris (1967) contended that the empirical study of specific outcomes such as norms, values, skills, self-concepts, or identities on their own only provided a limited view of professional development and socialization. It is only in the entire combination of these singular socialization outcomes, not just one of these facets, that creates the functioning professional. Their professional development framework acknowledged that professional development is a long term undertaking that has roots in the personal history of the student prior to academic and professional learning and in further possibilities for growth after their formal education ends (Sherlock & Morris, 1967).

It would appear that the personal history of the student lays an important foundation for learning and for professional learning in particular, confirming the andragogical assumption of the importance of prior life experiences to adult learning (Knowles, 1980). Within the framework of transformative adult learning theory, personal meaning perspectives not only involve moral norms and values but also include sociolinguistic habits of mind such as
ideologies, paradigms, secondary socialization, occupational or organizational cultures; as well as psychological scripts, emotional response patterns and dispositions (Mezirow, 2006). New learning within a program of professional education, or any educational pursuit for that matter, could be viewed as a “process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience as a guide to future action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 5).

Learning can be intentional or incidental and it is conceived that there can be learning that takes place outside of conscious awareness (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2006) has posed that “most transformative learning takes place outside of awareness,” where “intuition substitutes for critical reflection of assumptions” (p. 28). Within social work, the idea of the unconscious is not a foreign concept, especially with respect to clinical work (Goldstein, Miehls, & Ringel, 2009), but has been “often ignored” (Rasmussen & Salhani, 2010, p. 212) in social work practice and in social work theory. The significance of the unconscious in social work education has not been entirely overlooked. Some theorists see the examination of important personal processes such as emotional responses that tend to have unconscious aspects, as important to field education learning experiences (Maidment & Crisp, 2011), and others have examined the unconscious reasons that might influence why students come to social work (Vincent, 1996). However, with respect to professional socialization the exploration of unconscious processes in social work education remains a rich but under-explored area of study (Costello, 2005).

Of course, all learning within transformative learning theory is by no means considered transformational. Of the four types of learning that are considered within the instrumental and communicative areas of learning presented by Mezirow (1995), only the last two of the four areas listed below are considered to have any transformative impact:
a) Learning within meaning schemes – adding or integrating ideas in an already existing scheme.

b) Learning a set of beliefs, attitudes or knowledge that is a new meaning scheme.

c) Learning to transform a meaning scheme “through critical reflection on the content or process of problem solving, rational discourse and action” (p.50).


If there is an expectation in professional education that students take on values associated with a profession, students themselves may be somewhat challenged to accept a new set of values depending on their previously held meaning perspectives and beliefs. What if students are not receptive to new points of view? This has serious implications for professional socialization and could mean that the profession has taken students’ intentions for granted, assuming that students are simply empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge and values. Next, in order to see how values have shaped the understanding of professional socialization in social work, the study of socialization in social work education from its beginnings to present day will be explored.

2.6.1 Early Work in the Study of Values Socialization in Social Work

Following on the heels of Pumphrey’s (1959) contribution to the Boehm curriculum study on values and ethics in social work education, Varley (1963) compared the value orientations of a group of beginning social work students with a group of graduating students. It was theorized that students who had completed their professional program would have higher scores on scales of social work values than students beginning their education. Her social work values questionnaire (SWQ) held that equal rights, a service orientation, psychodynamic-mindedness (acceptance of psycho-social beliefs in human development), and universalism (a belief in
professionalism, objectivity, and the use of formal approaches when dealing with clients) were essential to the socialization of social workers (Varley, 1963). Each value was measured on Likert-type scales. The surprising finding was that there was little to no difference in the responses of the two groups. In fact, if students had more experience with social work, in terms of work experience or relationships with professional social workers in the field, their value scores were lower. However, age was found to be an important factor in socialization, since younger students had made the most positive change in terms of values acquisition, while older students made only modest changes in their value orientations (Varley, 1963).

Within the theoretical realm, a year later Costin (1964) published work on the importance of certain values for social work education. Taking value orientations that had been developed by Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey (as cited in Costin, 1964) in their Study of Values Scale, Costin collected responses of academic and non-academic practicing social workers who had ranked the importance of certain values in terms of perceived educational salience. The values in question were concerned with certain personality orientations toward theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious commitments and beliefs. The professional social workers’ rankings were compared with those of students. Students’ ranking of values differed from those that professional social workers felt were important for social work education. Social workers ranked social, theoretical and economic values as the most important, whereas students only consistently ranked social values as one of the top values to acquire. Both theoretical and economic values were scored low in importance by students. The study and its findings provided valuable insight into the direction that students would have to move toward in order to become more like the professionals they aspired to be (Costin, 1964).
Hayes and Varley (1965) used the Allport et al. *Study of Values Scale* to compare the value orientations of classes of beginning students, graduating social work students and experienced social workers. They found that there was a difference in value orientations along gender lines. Female students showed little difference in value scores between classes of beginning and graduating female students. Graduating female students did have a higher score in rating economic values as important. Male graduates scored higher in rating social and religious values as important, while scoring lower on theoretical and aesthetic values when compared with their male freshmen counterparts. The experienced social workers surveyed, regardless of their gender, had higher value scores for theoretical and aesthetic values than graduating students. Scores for experienced workers for religious, economic, social and political values were lower than graduate scores. Hayes and Varley’s (1965) data demonstrated that values could change significantly after graduation and that changes in students’ value orientations due to social work education appeared to be mixed within this study cohort.

Varley (1968) would continue to study changes in social work students’ values till the end of the 1960s using her SWQ instrument that she had created for her first study (Varley, 1963). Results still proved to be mixed with some values, such as equal rights, presenting changes in positive directions, while scores measuring value areas such as service, psychodynamic mindedness and universalism, decreased in her study populations by the end of their education (Varley, 1968).

The study of value acquisition would persist in weaving itself through the social work professional socialization literature into the 1980s. In the theoretical realm, writers continued to emphasize the importance of transferring values of the profession to students. Noble and King (1981) claimed that “one of the major organizing factors of social work education should be the
teaching of values and ethics, and this effort should be intensified” (p. 529). Perlman (1976) noted that “grappling with values is central to the emotional and thought changes that professional preparation involves” (p. 383), explaining that there was a need to develop awareness around values that direct the practice of social work. Pilsecker (1978) suggested that committing to the values of the profession was not only a duty of the profession, but also an idealistic test that could never be fully actualized.

In the empirical literature stream there were mixed results in terms of what values were important for social work, what values were acquired by students, and if any changes in values occurred over the course of a social work education (Abbott, 1988b; Enoch, 1989; Judah, 1976, 1979; Merdinger, 1982; Wodarski, Pippin, & Daniels, 1988). Educators’ perceptions of the acculturation of students to the culture of social work were also thought to be important. Judah (1976) found that instructors believed that the main location of acculturation was the field agency, while the most influential person in the acculturation process was the classroom instructor, with the field instructor coming a close second. Of interest in the responses was the acknowledgement that there were reciprocal aspects in the process of acculturation, with students influencing educators to some extent in helping them to understand students’ views of the world and learning new ideas and perspectives. A few years later, Judah (1979) replicated the studies of Varley (as cited in Judah, 1979), using the Varley SWQ and administering this questionnaire to a cohort of Master of Social Work [MSW], Bachelor of Social Work [BSW] students and their instructors at a school in an urban center in the eastern United States. Information was collected at the beginning of the MSW program and prior to graduation. Scores for the values of equal rights, service, psychodynamic mindedness and universalism remained relatively unchanged for the MSW students from the beginning to the end of their studies.
However consistent with Varley’s (1963) original findings, younger students below the age of 29 generally made more change than older students. When student scores were compared with campus and field instructors, MSW student scores aligned with field instructors and BSW student scores aligned with campus faculty. However, only MSW field instructors were included in the study. Judah (1979) posed that it was possible that the instructors from the field and the classroom may have offered differing value orientations and views of socialization to the profession. A wide range of values might actually have been demonstrated within the two similar but distinct social work groups: the academic and practice educators.

Value orientations of social work students have been compared with other undergraduate students in different academic areas of study. Merdinger (1982) compared social work students with psychology and economics majors using three values measures: The Wrightsman Philosophies of Human Nature Scale which measures beliefs in human nature; Anderson’s Public Dependency Scale which measures views toward people on public assistance, and Billingsley’s conflict scale which measures competing professional standards, such as “client needs versus professional standards” (Merdinger, 1982, p.14). She found that social work students held values similar to psychology majors and had significantly different views of the world compared to economics majors. Social work students scored significantly higher on the Anderson scales than the other two groups of students. Social work students also oriented themselves more with their profession over agency and community, or bureaucracy, when asked to choose between one or the other on the Billingsley Scale. Merdinger’s (1982) data indicated that the social work students in her cohort reflected values that had been clearly outlined in the social work curriculum. It was possible that some socialization had occurred through their course learning. However, the author did note that the student groups might have just reinforced value
stances that they might have developed on their own prior to selecting their majors through anticipatory socialization.

Abbott (1988b) developed her own Professional Opinion Scale (POS) specifically to study social workers’ opinions and behaviours, since these were thought to reflect the underlying personal values that motivate action and ideas. Even though her samples were small and not representative of a wide range of social work programs, she interpreted her results as support for social work education having a positive influence on professional socialization as it relates to values. Students were shown to gain value orientations that were closely aligned with their instructors on scales measuring “(1) respect for basic rights, (2) sense of social responsibility, (3) commitment to individual freedom, and (4) support of self-determination” (Abbott, 1988b, p. 25).

Enoch (1989) studied how the marginal nature of the social work profession in Israel, combined with low economic backgrounds of students created a marginal group within the university setting and how this influenced the acquisition of values at different stages of students’ education and professional development. It was hypothesized that students would adopt the values of the dominant group within the situations that they found themselves: at university they would accept the norms of the dominant academic culture rather than the school of social work to which they were a part; and after graduation they would accept the values of the professional subculture of social work within which they would be employed. It was found that measures of core social work values changed little over the course of the students’ education, while socialist attitudes of social work students declined over four years and became more in line with scores of the non-social work social science students, at the particular university studied (Enoch, 1989). Formal social work education appeared to have little impact on the students’
value orientations. Socializing factors such as a dominant group’s social influence played a major role in the values that were acquired and reflected by students or new graduates. After graduation, the researchers believed that these same students would become marginalized members of their own profession, since they lacked experience and were new to the agencies that employed them. Political attitudes of the group of newly graduated social workers were re-examined. It was noted that the new social workers, who had experienced a decline in socialist views in university as students, had returned to their original level of socialist support as measured by support for certain political parties. These particular political parties’ platforms reflected well-established values and attitudes held within the agencies in which the new workers were now employed. Enoch (1989) theorized that students and new social workers make “situational adjustments” in their values and beliefs in line with the dominant members of a reference group in order to ease feelings of discomfort and marginalization.

In a study designed to assess changes in traditional, on campus, full-time MSW students and non-traditional part-time or full time working students, Wodarski, Pippin, and Daniels (1988) measured changes in personality, values and helping skills. They found that only one of four measures, the Social Values Test, showed any positive change in values over the course of the students’ education, and only in the full time cohort. Other scores that measured value orientations just did not change significantly over time. The study also showed that perceptions of interpersonal and helping skills decreased in both student populations over the same period. In the populations studied, social work education did not have the intended socializing effects (Wodarski et al., 1988).

While the profession appears to articulate a clear set of values for socialization of students in the statements of social work associations and regulatory bodies, evidence of the teaching and
acquisition of these values by students is clearly mixed. There is no evidence indicating that students are easily socialized to sets of professional values within the range of social work values offered, or that a particular course of study has facilitated a strong adoption of values, at least within the groups that participated in the studies reviewed above. In part 2 of this chapter, the issue of changing students’ values will be revisited, focusing on how students’ personal preferences, attitudes, beliefs and motivations may align with their socialization to proffered configurations of professional values.
Chapter 2 Part II

2.7 Changing Students’ Values and Transformative Learning

In theory social work asks students to make a personal change, which for some students is significant. There is a tacit assumption in social work education that the values that students are asked to assimilate are clear, represent the entire profession and are universally applicable to their everyday professional work. Social work education also assumes that students will place some effort into examining what they believe and are willing to accept, much like the assumption in transformative adult learning in Mezirow’s (1991) theory that people will choose new perspectives over old ones:

Transformative learning involves an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based upon the new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one’s life (p. 161).

In order to create an awareness of the value orientations that students bring to their education, students must be willing to reflect upon their learning in relation to their current values, attitudes, beliefs and motivations. Reflection and reflective practices have long been considered necessary in the teaching of professionals (Schön, 1987) and in social work education in both the classroom (Anastas, 2010; Beverley & Worsley, 2007) and in field education (Bogo & Vayda, 1998). However, reflective practices take some effort and engaging in them can sometimes be difficult if the material to be considered is emotionally charged (Mezirow, 1991).
It is possible that adult students have been conditioned in their previous education experiences to be passive in the processing of information (Knowles, 1980) and not comfortable or practiced in engaging in deeply reflective processes. If this is true, then this could have a significant impact on how social work students think critically about what is offered to them in relation to their own beliefs and personal biases. Any disconnection between what is asked of them by the profession and what they personally believe may go unresolved, with the student either tacitly accepting the profession’s request to change or silently rejecting any new learning in terms of a new way to understand their world.

Turning now to other ways that have been used to measure professional socialization in social work, the literature in the study of attitudes and beliefs that sheds light on a person’s value orientations will be reviewed. Motivations and career preferences have also been used to study professional socialization. But is the study of change in individual attitudes, beliefs, motivations and career preferences just as problematic, and complex, as the study of the acquisition of social work values?

2.7.1 Students’ Attitudes and Beliefs

In the mid-1970s, the study of values as an outcome of social work education turned toward the study of attitudes and beliefs. This was only a small shift away from the direct study of values. Since certain attitudinal positions lend themselves to particular values, the measurement of attitudes still relates to assessing the value orientation of students. Sharwell (1974) examined how students’ attitudes on the topic of public dependency changed over the duration of a graduate social work program. It was hypothesized that graduate social work students would view public dependency more favourably than general undergraduate students.
Survey scores were also compared with those of social work educators, and measures were assessed again to determine if students’ orientations had changed over the course of their education. Graduate students were found to have more favourable views of public dependency, providing some evidence of the socializing effects of social work education (Sharwell, 1974).

Since Sharwell (1974), social work education has been shown to have mixed effects on influencing various attitude orientations on subjects such as poverty, economic success and human nature (Cryns, 1977); public assistance, professionalism, bureaucracy and client service (Merdinger, 1985); ethical judgment and decision making (Landau, 1999); humanistic attitudes (Moran, 1989); and attitudes concerning oppression (Van Soest, 1996).

Cryns’ (1977), most distressing finding was that social work graduate students scored lower on tests of positive attitudes of human nature than undergraduate social work students. As well, male students viewed individualistic explanations of economic success or failure more positively than explanations that were structural in nature that did not judge the individual for their economic woes (Cryns, 1977). Merdinger (1985) found that, in a BSW class from an Eastern American state college, students’ scores on the Wrightsman Philosophies of Human Nature Scale increased over a two-year period. This provided some evidence that exposure to the educational experience of academic and practical experience had some effect on reinforcing beliefs in human nature. Using Billingsley Subscales to measure commitment to the profession, clients, community and agency, it was shown that students increased in their scores with respect to commitment to profession and to clients over the course of two years, while an agency orientation decreased and community orientations remained constant (Merdinger, 1985). Moran (1989) found a positive relationship between humanistic attitudes in undergraduate social work students and the number of social work courses that those students had completed. It was shown
that attitudes specific to social justice and the number of social work courses completed did not produce any statistically significant relationship.

An unsettling finding in one study of attitude and belief acquisition is that some social work students could accept the view of a “just world,” even after being exposed to curriculum that exposed injustices, and provided information that critically questioned a “just world” orientation (Van Soest, 1996). This work has definite implications in terms of how students organize and integrate concrete evidence into new and old value and belief systems as they progress through their professional education. A question relevant to this thesis inspired by Van Soest’s (1996) work is: What prevents students from assimilating information that could expand their world view and develop critical thinking skills?

In social work education, students are provided opportunities to examine and question the social world and how its organization and structures can contribute to the problems of individuals and society. The possibility of resistance to new learning, such as Van Soest’s (1996) finding, is a significant issue in social work education. Viewed through a transformative learning framework, learning that might change one’s closely held beliefs about reality, or that shift meaning perspectives can be difficult. Mezirow (2000) explains:

Transformative learning, especially when it involves subjective reframing, is often an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional responses to the need to change (pp. 6-7).

In some circumstances in social work education, it might be easier to remain ignorant of the incongruency between underlying beliefs and personal frames of reference versus
professional beliefs and attitudes. For instance, Landau’s (1999) work on the development of ethical judgment and decision making in social work students showed no evidence that three years of social work education positively affected ethical judgment. Religiosity was the only variable that had a significant impact on the ethical judgment of students (Landau, 1999).

This finding lends some support to the idea that what students’ bring to their education or what they may develop outside of the social work classroom may be quite important in their professional socialization, and may have an impact on their professional practice. Changing to align with attitudes and beliefs of a profession on a theoretical level may make rational sense in an education environment. After all, students are coming to professional schools to become part of a profession, and part of an occupational social group with specific ways to approach work and practice. But very little movement to accept new ways of seeing the world may actually be taking place. We now turn to a review of how professional preferences, motivations, and career interests have been used to show students’ alignment with the range of proffered professional social work values.

2.7.2 Preferences, Motivations, and Career Directions

Two broad categories of studies emerged out of the 1980s that changed the variables with which to measure professional socialization and changes in students’ value orientations over the course of their education. Professional preferences and career interests, along with motivations and career goals began to be used to gauge the impact of social work education on the professional socialization of students. Preferences for various aspects of professional practice have been thought to be useful in assessing how individual value orientations become tangible and measurable in real life and professional practice. It was thought that preferences might
indicate if one of the historic social work mission’s of providing assistance to the disadvantaged and marginalized was valued by professionals or students (Bogo et al., 1995; Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2004).

Rubin, Johnson, and DeWeaver (1986) followed three groups of MSW students at three different colleges, from 1982 to 1984, surveying their professional aspirations at entry to their program and then just prior to graduation in the spring of 1984. They found that a majority of students at the beginning of their program were interested in psychotherapy and establishing a private practice within five years of graduation. Upon preparing for graduation the number of students hoping to practice privately fell from 85% to 52% of respondents. A significant portion of students had changed their response, from 30% to 17.9%, in terms of their interest in psychotherapy as opposed to an interest in working in social care. Client preferences of students were also examined. The students were provided with 16 categories of potential client groups, from individuals with mental health issues, people in poverty, to the elderly and neglected children as examples, and were asked to rate their preference for working with them. In all cases towards the end of their university careers before graduation, students’ preferences for working with all groups decreased. All client groups became less appealing to work with over the course of the MSW program for this particular group of students (Rubin, Johnson, & DeWeaver, 1986).

Other inquiries into professional preferences and student interests were conducted around the same time. Butler (1990) surveyed students on their client and service preferences and found that students were interested in working with disadvantaged populations, contradicting some findings from earlier work conducted by Rubin and Johnson (1984). Aviram and Katan (1991) found that social work students close to graduation and about to enter practice displayed preferences to work with client groups that had relatively high status. These students had little
interest in working with groups such as the aged, the developmentally disabled or in areas such as community organization or social planning. However, both Butler’s (1990) and Aviram and Katan’s (1991) work only provided a snapshot of student’s preferences and could not speak to how these preferences had been affected or had changed over the course of the students’ education.

It was not until Bogo et al. (1995) undertook a panel study of MSW students that practice interests were again examined in a way that would provide valuable information about the change effects of graduate school education on professional socialization. Students in their sample were surveyed at different points over the course of their studies to measure changes in their preferences and their self-identification as social workers. The two year MSW program at the Canadian university that was studied emphasized the socialization of students to a values orientation that made a commitment to social justice and work with disadvantaged and marginalized populations a professional priority. It was hypothesized that students’ preferences for these orientations to social work practice would increase and that there would be a decline in interest in private practice. Three cohorts of students were studied: group one had previous bachelor degrees and had entered the first year or foundational year of study; the second group was entering their second year of study, the MSW year of the program; and the third cohort had BSW degrees and were entering directly into the second year of study. Only marginal support was found for their hypothesis. Students who had entered the program with non-BSW degrees that were surveyed at the beginning and end of their first foundational year of study displayed the most change in terms of a preference to work with disadvantaged groups and in terms of their willingness to self-identify as a social worker. It was argued from the results of this study that “graduate education has only a limited impact in shaping students’ professional self-
identification and practice interests, especially among BSW graduates” (Bogo et al., 1995, p. 245).

From a motivational and career goal perspective, the work of O’Connor, Dalgleish and Khan (1984) added to the discussion around the impact of social work education on students, and how students changed over the course of their education in an Australian context. In comparing motivational accounts of first year BSW students, third year BSW students, and first year psychology students intending to pursue a psychology degree, it was found that third year BSW students were more likely to provide responses that stressed the intangible rewards of social work than first year BSW students. As well, more third year BSW students who were motivated to help others were also committed to try to affect social change, than first year BSW students. However, results from the research showed that there was an emergent group of students in both of the social work classes studied who were more concerned with the benefits that the occupation held for professionals. The research team concluded that even though there was a group of students who were motivated to embrace the orientation within the profession to help those more disadvantaged, there was a group of students more motivated by self-interest that was only “self-oriented” and preparing for professional practice (O’Connor et al., 1984, p. 239).

Reviewing the literature on preferences and motivations, there appears to be little evidence to show that all students consistently adopt preferences that reflect value orientations that prioritize social justice, or who are motivated to embrace practice with marginalized populations. It seems that the students themselves have their own ideas and views of what social work is, who they are, with whom they are willing to work, and why they are attracted to the profession. In these particular studies, the groups of student participants surveyed do not find their own attitudes and preferences to be problematic at all. Entering the profession without reflecting at
least some of the values that are associated with the range of values that the profession’s professional associations and regulating bodies suggest, for example specifically those orientations that support social justice, does not appear to be an issue that troubles some students.

Returning to a transformative learning perspective, Mezirow (2009) has suggested that learning deemed as transformative is also considered to be “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open, and emotionally able to change” (p. 22, italics in original). What if it is the case with social work students that their frames of reference and motivations are only problematic from the point of view of the profession?

To speculate: students may believe that their ability to function as a social work professional is not hindered by rejecting certain value priority clusters within the multiple value orientations that the profession proffers, or by possibly prioritizing the range of values offered to them on their own. Students might even pick and choose values, creating their own value priority cluster, rejecting some values according to their personal affinity to them or their perceived usefulness. Students may also not see their own values as problematic and believe that they will become professionals with their own preferences and motivations intact. What if there is no motivation on the part of social work students to change their beliefs, values or frames of reference and only have the desire to become a professional? What we do know is that the findings are clearly inconclusive on either side.

Professional socialization in social work has also been conceptualized in terms of identity, personal growth, and professional demands. The following section sheds some light on other studies of some change and development processes that could be viewed as transformative.
2.7.3 Other Studies of Change and Development – The Roots of Personal Transformation?

Research around the effects of professional socialization in social work has primarily taken the form of studies of the acquisition of values, attitudes, personal preferences, motivations and career aspirations. However a small group of studies conducted primarily in the 1980s, that include some qualitative work, has attempted to capture change processes in the areas of professional identity (Loseke & Cahill, 1986), personal growth (Pardeck & McCallister, 1991), professional constructs (O’Connor & Dalgleish, 1986), peer group socialization (Schreiber, 1989), and trans situational demands of professional socialization (Barbour, 1985). Each study sheds light on different processes that affect education, personal change and socialization processes and present mixed outcomes of the change potential of social work education.

Pardeck and McCallister (1991) used a pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental quantitative design survey to measure assertiveness, depression and self-concept to determine if social work education had an impact on personal growth. They indicated that their findings suggested that social work education at the bachelor’s level had “little or no effect on the personal growth and development of students” (Pardeck & McCallister, 1991, p. 385) as they measured it. Whereas Barbour (1985) presented findings in which all the participants in her study remaining at the end of their education had undergone some sort of personal change. The post-graduate students studied were observed and engaged in semi-structured interviews. They reported that they were faced with increasing demands to enact a social work role in situations outside of their studies and professional social work situations. In encounters with friends they were requested to provide emotional support or assistance with personal problems, and they would face criticism from other individuals upset with their role as a social worker supporting populations that their
critics had deemed undeserving. Barbour (1985) argued that “the presence of transsituational demands and the recognition of the existence of the demands by students testify to the fact that learning to be a social worker involved reorganization of the personal hierarchy” (p. 515) within students.

O’Connor and Dalgleish (1986) hypothesized that students in social work education would develop a more complex view of practice situations and utilize more abstract professional social work constructs as they progressed through their education. These researchers expected that students completing their program would demonstrate an understanding of social work that was similar to instructors and different from students beginning their education. In this study, students at the beginning, middle and end of their education were sampled on social work construct scales that measured such ideas as social change. These scales had been developed out of structured interviews with students. It was found that graduating students viewed social work as a way to create social change on a personal level, more than students at the beginning or the middle of their education. Graduating students also addressed questions and hypothetical situations with a greater number of professionally relevant viewpoints unique to social work, more than other students (O’Connor & Dalgleish, 1986).

Approaching social work education from a dramaturgical view, Loseke and Cahill (1986) found that individual experiences in their social work education, especially in field placements were too dissimilar to create a common social work identity for students, but that the development of a set of personal qualities or character type was important for the developing social worker. Simply portraying a role did not reinforce the underlying values that constructed a social work character such as a belief in the worth of persons, self-determination, equal rights or a positive view of humanity. Students believed it necessary that social workers should be sincere
and actually care about the people they are providing service to. The social work role necessitated a genuine level of value commitment. Students also reported that their academic learning did not assist them in creating a social work identity. Loseke and Cahill (1986) noted that when comparing social work education with law and medicine, social work students did not experience as many rituals of competence as other developing professional groups. Thus, they had “few opportunities to convince others and thereby themselves that they are being transformed into the types of persons occupational incumbents are expected to be” (Loseke & Cahill, 1986, p. 250).

Pre-dating the social work studies above, a nation-wide qualitative study was conducted in the United States in the 1970s that focussed on discovering the lived experience and the perceived changes in attitudes of women returning to higher education after a long absence (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). It was out of this work examining the factors that supported or hindered the success of these college re-entry programs developed for women (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978), that Mezirow’s (1991) theory of adult transformative learning was developed. Although, Mezirow (1991, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2009) has not examined the topic of professional socialization specifically, his work has dealt with change processes in adult learners within some type of educational or training setting.

Resulting from the initial study of female college re-entry students in the 1970s, the concept of personal meaning perspectives potentially transforming over the course of one’s education emerged out of the interviews and was thought to include processes around:

a) The creation of an empowered sense of self.

b) More critical understanding of how one’s social relationships and culture have shaped one’s beliefs and feelings, and

The changes that the women in this early study experienced were believed to follow a pattern of stages. This was described as:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169).

In Mezirow’s initial study cohort, the disorienting dilemma of the return to an academic school environment for adult female students led to an examination of gender stereotypes (Baumgartner, 2012), and raised their consciousness regarding the possibility for new roles and a new way of being within their lives (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning has often been related with profound life changes (Mezirow, 1991) and has been associated with occupational role transitions (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008). Research into facilitating transformative learning in higher education settings has shown that the learning environment plays a part in transformations
and that it is not just the characteristics of the learner or student that lead to change; and in many instances, transformative change does not occur since students do not examine their frames of reference or experience a dis orienting dilemma to ignite a self-examination process (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012).

Professional education in which students are asked to engage a new set of values might be considered a disorienting dilemma by some. This may depend on how historically influenced personal belief systems compare to the new value sets that they are asked or required to adopt. However, students may possibly not experience anything that would resemble a dilemma or an event that would suddenly spark a change in perspective. Turning to research in socialization to the profession of social work since the turn of this century, we shall see that some things have not changed in the search for greater understanding of this phenomenon of socialization to values and an identity in social work education.

2.7.4 Recent Work in Social Work Professional Socialization: The Last Ten Years

In a major literature review conducted just after the turn of the millennium, Barretti (2004b) demonstrated that little had been done to extend ideas of professional socialization in social work beyond study of the aspects of values and attitudes prior to her examination of the topic. Comparing empirical studies in the area of social work education with those found in nursing and medicine, she wrote:

The social work profession assumes that professional socialization is (1) comprised of known factors, while showing measurement inconsistency on what those factors are; (2) determined solely of knowledge/value acquisition or adherence; and (3) neat and unproblematic. What
researchers have excluded from the scope of their inquiries limits the effectiveness of social work educators in preparing their students for the profession. (Barretti, 2004b, p. 276).

Barretti (2004a) also contributed to the body of knowledge on professional socialization with a qualitative inquiry that took a phenomenological approach to the research. Most salient to this current discussion were the themes of unofficial, unintentional learning within a course of social work education, and the presence of an all-encompassing influence of faculty and field instructor interactions that emerged out of Barretti’s (2004a) data. If these observations can be confirmed in other studies, then educators already have powerful, albeit seemingly underutilized, tools at their disposal to socialize students to values endorsed by that particular school of social work, and corresponding professional identifications.

Other qualitative researchers studying the “goodness of fit” between the purpose of social work education and the goals and aspirations of social work students entering full time graduate studies in the United States found that there was little congruency between the values of the profession and those of the schools of social work studied, with the espoused values and hopes of this group of new students (D’Aprix et al., 2004). D’Aprix et al. (2004) re-examined the question: “Can values be taught?” (p. 270) and their research findings suggested that value acquisition or change is difficult to influence, reinforcing previous work discussed above (Cryns, 1977; Judah, 1979; Varley, 1963, 1968).

Various social work values orientations may be assumed to be part of the fabric of schools of social work, but the corresponding values may not be demonstrated in the everyday interactions between some students and faculty. Daniel (2007) explored how socialization processes in a graduate social work program were experienced by minority students using
critical race theory. In this qualitative study, it was concluded that the minority students interviewed had marginalizing experiences within their educational process. Thus, it is entirely possible that certain students could have educational experiences that would hinder professional socialization processes, such as a value transfer. Daniel’s (2007) work concentrated on the experience of African American and Latino students in an American school of social work, but this finding has implications for students in other countries as well, who have been primarily socialized in families and communities that represent non-dominant cultural backgrounds or minority racial groups.

Examining the socialization and growth of students from a developmental perspective might be helpful in assessing change in aspects of social work professional learning and practice, such as motivation, skills, use of self, experience, knowledge and values. Instructors and students at an Israeli school of social work self-reported perceived traits and qualities that they believed they brought to their education and work at different points in time over the course of a three year period (Mosek & Ben-Oz, 2011). Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011) found that students began their studies with a great deal of motivation and associated social work values, but that these waned over time and that the students would focus more on their learned skills and knowledge base in practice. By the end of their third year of study, the students were unsure of their knowledge and value base, while having more confidence in practice skills and the ‘use of self” as learned in their studies. They reported that their findings suggested “that the firm value base that draws students to the profession was somewhat eroded during the socialization process” (Mosek & Ben-Oz, 2011, p. 102). Touching on professional identity, Mosek and Ben-Oz (2011) also reported that “in reflective conversations…students acknowledge that the (social work) degree is only a first step on their professional journey. Most of them, in time, will continue their
education and work to establish their professional identity” (p. 106). At least some students understand that the process of professional development continues long after programs of study are complete.

Revisiting student motivations, aspirations and professional preferences, Wilson and McCrystal (2007), in their study of motivations and career aspirations of MSW students in Northern Ireland, concluded that professional socialization during classroom and field learning “could be very significant for career choices and aspirations” (p. 50) after graduation. Still within the realm of professional preferences, Weiss, Gal, and Cnaan (2004) studied if social work education influenced preferences with respect to population groups served, sectors of employment, and types of practice in two Israeli schools of social work and one school in the United States. They found that some preferences for work with certain populations declined over the course of the students’ education, but the more important finding was that it seemed that the academic process did not contribute to any significant change in the preferences of the students. Weiss et al. (2004) noted that their study participants arrived at the schools with preferences that did not reflect social justice values proffered by some in the profession. There was a limited desire to provide services to marginalized or underprivileged groups of society. The programs of social work education in question did not appear to affect these particular practice preferences and were seen to only “marginally instil in students a commitment to populations that suffer from severe disadvantage” (Weiss et al., 2004, p. 28).

Osteen (2011) demonstrated that, in a group of MSW students, identity integration in social work education is a difficult process to navigate, often fraught with value conflicts that have impacts on learning. Students engaged in semi-structured interviews that used each core value from the NASW’s 2008 Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) as prompts for discussion. This list
of values not only included value orientations around service and social justice but also those around integrity and competence in practice. Even though the sample was small, it was clear that the process of education had varying results in the socialization of students according to their accounts. Osteen (2011) concluded that:

Obtaining the MSW does not mean that a student will choose to identify as a social worker. Similarly, obtaining the MSW does not mean that a student supports and promotes the values of the profession in his or her practice (p. 442).

More recently, Shlomo, Levy, & Itzhaky (2012) showed that systems of resources within social work students’ academic and practice spheres interact to assist in professional identity development. Personal values and a student’s satisfaction with their supervision in field placements were found to influence professional identity. In this work, a significant positive correlation was found between personal values, which were considered an environmental resource, and a student’s professional identity. An interactive effect on professional identity was also found: if a student’s social values were strong, their professional identity would be more developed only when satisfaction with their fieldwork supervision was low. Social values were not significant for the development of professional identity when students were satisfied with the practice supervision they received. The explanation for the finding on the influence of personal values on professional identity was based on the work of Bogo (2010), in that a strong awareness of personal values allows a student to comprehend better the reasons for professional action, and this facilitates an integration of both professional and personal values in their professional identity (Shlomo, Levy, & Itzhaky, 2012).
In all of the above work, there still exists the theme of values or constructs such as preferences that are related to values. In the development of a theoretical model of professional socialization in social work education, Miller (2010) suggested that social work education was just one factor in socialization to the profession. Borrowing from medical and nursing literature on the socialization of students, this model depicts the socialization process as a lifelong journey of learning that begins well before formal education in classrooms and field placements, and continues throughout one’s practice career. Miller (2010) pointed out that in social work education there is an assumption that the socialization of students will just occur on its own through educational processes, but when education and training processes have been more closely considered, this just does not appear to be happening.

Miller’s (2010) work is comparable to the earlier work of Sherlock and Morris (1967) on the socialization of dental students reported above. However, Sherlock and Morris’ (1967) work was more comprehensive in that they operationalized individual aspects of each of the phases of their theory on professional development in order to use them as variables for quantitative measurement and comparison. Their conceptualization of professional socialization developed out of both theory and observational data that they had collected in the first three years of a mixed method longitudinal study that had been planned to continue for seven years. Further study of the same cohort that helped them develop their model, found that as students progressed through their education they became more cynical and that their level of professional ethics decreased. This change in students’ attitudes occurred after beginning their clinical rotations, which were stressful and frustrating at times. Morris and Sherlock (1971) suggested that, “problematic experiences tend to disillusions the students and to set them on a path leading away from ethical professionalization and toward a more narrow, pragmatic, and non-altruistic view of
their professional career” (p. 298). Could it be that social work students experience something similar when they begin their practical work in field education?

2.8 Discussion

Within the development of North American social work education, the transfer of values and professional attitudes came to be seen as an important part of the professional socialization and acculturation of social workers. Historically, values acquisition, or a derivative construct such as professional attitudes and preferences pointing to values and beliefs, has been the main way professional socialization has been conceptualized and measured in social work research (Barretti, 2004b). Value orientations that are held today in North American social work have changed substantially since the early twentieth century and focus generally on four areas of social work practice: the rights and needs of the individual, professional responsibilities, and the role of social justice. But from the beginnings of the profession at the turn of the twentieth century there has been a fragmentation of the two practice solitudes, the micro and the macro (each of which is further internally splintered by differing theoretical frameworks, practice methods and priorities), both seeking to address social ills and help people, but emphasizing different value priorities and value priority clusters. The Charity Organization Societies and the Settlement House Movement did work together to become the profession of social work. However, the practice strategies that they embodied, micro-individual practice and macro-social development practice (Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 1998), and the respective value priority clusters that epitomize each practice endeavour surrounding values that support individual personal caring and social justice, have often not co-existed in a mutually constructive way (Lynn, 1999). This has created a situation where the values orientations and identity of the
profession are ambiguous, since the profession has not been able to put the debate over its focus on individual or social change to rest, or to develop a way to cohesively unite social workers, who practice in a variety of settings and within different theoretical and practice frameworks.

In terms of the study of professional socialization in general, early research into professional socialization conducted in the 1950s and 1960s in North America showed that socialization processes in health care professions were not always controlled by educational systems or professional bodies. The students themselves, at least medical and nursing students, played a more active role in their own socialization than previously thought, and came to schools with developing value systems, which some were willing to set aside at least temporarily while they adopted the beliefs and norms of their chosen profession. In social work, studies dating back to the 1960s have repeatedly shown mixed results as to whether social work education facilitates the acquisition of the various social work value orientations and beliefs presented to students. Some studies show little change (Cryns, 1977; Enoch, 1989; Varley, 1963, 1968; Wodarski et al., 1988), while others provide some evidence that social work education does instil new values in students (Merdinger, 1985; Moran, 1989). There is just not the breadth of evidence to show that education processes can make students adopt a new set of values, at least not in social work education (D’Aprix et al., 2004).

Social work education is also expected to create some sort of professional identity. However, researchers have stated bluntly that social work education, at least at the graduate level, “has only a limited impact in shaping professional self-identification” (Bogo et al., 1995, p 245). Students themselves have declared that academic education in social work does not help in creating a social work professional identity (Loseke & Cahill, 1986), and it appears that completing a course of education alone does not mean graduates will identify as social workers
(Osteen, 2011). It might be the case that the profession is either not presenting its aspirants with an identity that is easily acquired, or that there is something that blocks or makes the creation of a professional identity problematic.

It has been suggested that professional socialization should be viewed as a process that begins long before formal professional education and continues after graduation (Miller, 2010; Morris & Sherlock, 1971). What precedes a student’s education may be critically important. This is echoed in principles of andragogy (Knowles, 1980) and transformative adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Social work education appears to treat students as if they are blank slates ready to accept anything presented to them in their education. But anecdotally and intuitively, educators know that students have been socialized by their families and the society surrounding them. Students come to their social work education with identities that are in various stages of formation or reformation, and possess value and belief systems that may be at odds with the range of value orientations proffered to them by schools of social work and the profession.

Could social work education be viewed as a process of transformation? For some students it could very well be an experience that changes them immensely. They may leave their education with not only a professional designation, but also with a different way of viewing the world and their role in it. In social work education it appears that it is believed that a set of beliefs can be just learned or acquired without addressing previously held frames of reference. It has been theorized in medical education, that new professional beliefs can be held in conjunction with old beliefs for a period of time and then discarded when a person believes them to be of little use (Becker et al., 1961). Perhaps this is also true for the experience of social work students within their education, reinforcing the idea in transformational adult learning that not all learning is transformational (Mezirow, 1995).
Mezirow’s (1991, 1995, 2000) theory of transformative learning was derived from a study involving a group of students who belonged to a marginalized population. Women in the 1970s were becoming more aware of how society’s prescribed gender roles and patriarchy placed constraints on how they entered into the world. Returning to school later in life acted as a disorienting dilemma, a spark that initiated a process of transformation (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). Social work students may never experience a conscious reason to question their underlying value systems within their education, even where they are arriving at schools of social work with pre-existing value sets that do not even modestly align with the various values of the profession (Weiss et al., 2004), or how those values are prioritized.

In all of the work on professional socialization there is also a conspicuous absence of a discussion of both non-conscious and unconscious processes in students’ lives that might influence learning, motivations and personal action. The phrase ‘non-conscious processes’ is used here to mean processes outside of conscious awareness, where information is accepted and integrated, and action can take place implicitly within the students’ mind and body (from information regarding internal bodily processes that sustain life, to an awareness of others’ behavior in various social interactions, to the processes of implicit memory that allow people to engage in repetitive tasks without conscious thought). A great deal of daily life is processed non-consciously (Hassin, Uleman, & Bargh, 2005; Uleman, 2005). The phrase ‘unconscious processes’ is used here to refer to internal psychological processes that repress self-awareness, usually to minimize emotional discomfort, and that these processes have the potential to direct behaviour without the actor ever consciously knowing why (Westen, 1998).

To attempt to examine the influence of non-conscious and unconscious processes on social work students in their values acquisition is not an outlandish proposition. Social work, especially
clinical social work, borrows from psychology and psychodynamic principles to inform professionals about what they might bring unconsciously to therapeutic relationships in order to provide more insight into individual client’s problems (Goldstein, Miehls, & Ringel, 2009). The effect of unconscious processes is not neglected in Mezirow’s (1991) adult learning model, while the idea of collective unconsciousness from a Jungian perspective has been explored in other transformative learning theorists work such as Boyd and Myer’s (1988) theory of transformative education. Other transformative learning theorists strongly believe that even though lives are constituted by both conscious and unconscious factors, it is the “unconscious aspects of our lives that are the most influential in our decision making and actions” (Dirkx & Smith, 2009, p. 59). This too might be the case in the work to socialize students to the profession of social work. This should not be neglected or overlooked.

2.9 Professional Socialization in Social Work Education: Observations and Theories

Viewing professional socialization primarily in terms of values acquisition provides a rather narrow view of social work. Examining only one aspect of professional education and socialization does not provide a comprehensive picture of how students become well functioning professionals. However, value orientations in social work, as ambiguous and contested as they may be in theory and practice, have played a huge role in the history of the profession and they still define the profession and inform practice. It is obvious that while some students embrace specific configurations of social work values and a personal identity of a social worker depending on their specific theoretical orientation and practice method, others do not seem to acquire any of the possible associated values or identities that their education presents to them. From a transformational adult learning perspective, some students may not be open to
reassessing their personal meaning systems to shift towards new value orientations that would align them with any one of the range of value configurations that are found in the profession. Other students may be outwardly adopting some social work values as a new meaning scheme separate from their closely held belief systems in order to placate the educators that act as gatekeepers, so that they can receive a professional designation to gain employment.

Returning to the anecdote at the beginning of this piece, the phenomenon of the social worker who does not self-identify with the profession but may be invested in certain values or modes of practice sheds some light on a conundrum in social work and social work education. We can speculate that perhaps those educated as social workers do not acknowledge that they are social workers because their view of the profession does not fit with who they believe themselves to be. It is unclear whether this is tied to the tasks that they are engaged in, or some other facet of their identity and belief systems that might have been formed before they arrived to their professional education or has developed outside of the social work classroom. Perhaps self-identification as a social worker is not necessary to show that you have internalized at least some of the values in the range of value clusters and orientations that the profession broadly endorses, and that the title does not truly capture the essential essence of what being a social worker means to an individual. We really need research using a more complex model that may capture students’ degree of commitment to specific value clusters.

Essentially, the issues of values socialization and identity formation can also be viewed as existing within a field of influences on socialization that are external and internal to students in social work. In one part of this field are factors within the individual student, which either facilitate or inhibit the potential acquisition of new values and identities. These may include non-conscious and unconscious motivating processes, as well as the effects of prior socialization that
occurs within the student’s family of origin, cultural community, social class, and so on. The other part of this theoretical field is comprised of what students are exposed to externally in academic and practice environments that foster and guide their development as professionals. The ongoing conflict in the profession about what the profession should or could be, and the fragmented value sets that this presents to students are examples of major external influences on the socialization of students.

To develop a better understanding of the internal influences within the student, what students bring to their education should be examined more closely. Motivations, both conscious and unconscious, as well as the frames of reference that students already possess must be considered. In particular, the early socialization of students and their cultural background might shed more light on what is needed to assist the profession in helping social work students accept and reflect any social work values and aims offered to them in their education. Inquiries should be made to increase understanding with respect to what is presently known about students’ personal history, motivations and aspirations in choosing the profession of social work.

On the external side of this theoretical field, the study of values socialization in social work requires an evaluation of what messages social work education presents to its students about what the profession believes itself to be, the importance of social work values for professional development, and the agencies within which these messages are offered. Are the values and identity offered to students unified across educational and practice domains? Is the profession clear about what it is and what it hopes to be? If professional socialization is a life-long venture and the practice of social work is greatly affected by the context it operates within, what happens to students and practicing social workers within neoliberal socio-political and economic environments that are hostile toward certain aspects of its mission?
Like the age-old discussion about whether social work is about work with individuals or about societal change, this is not an all or nothing proposition. Professional socialization to new values and a social work identity is, as we have seen, a complex issue. Perhaps, if we examine why students decide to become social workers, their motivations and what they think social work is, balanced by what the profession believes itself to be and what it presents to students, then it may be possible to have a better understanding of the conditions necessary to facilitate a transformation or an identity shift that is aligned more directly with what the profession proffers.
3.1 Background

Value orientations, professional attitudes and beliefs have long been considered an integral part of the social work profession (Pilsecker, 1978; Reamer, 2006), and apparently a significant part of the socialization process in social work education (Barretti, 2004b). These constructs are predicted to directly impact how students, as professionals, frame how they understand and manage the problems that they address in practice (Han & Chow, 2010). There has been a strong expectation that students select and clarify their values in order to practice social work according to the precepts of social work (Perlman, 1976). This ideal may be very difficult to accomplish given the differential weighting of values, and tenuous coexistence of certain value orientations in different theoretical and practice traditions (Lynn, 1999). The successful inculcation of professional values into a student’s developing professional identity appears to be a difficult goal to realize. This phenomenon highlights the perplexing question of how students are socialized in their education process, and the reasons why professional education may consistently fail to facilitate change.

If the process of socialization to social work is influenced by a field of external and internal change influences, what students bring to their education in terms of beliefs, values, personal history, or a developing identity represents aspects of the internal side of this spectrum. These aspects are gained through previous socialization, which encompasses the early social environment of the student, i.e., class, race, geographical factors, educational, economic, religious, and familial factors and speaks to the internal formation of the person as a socialized member of society. The external side of this spectrum includes what students are exposed to specifically in their professional educational process: intra-professional conflicts and the impacts
of these conflicts on the range and priorities of value orientations, the potential range of identities of social work; the practical experiences that the profession offers to them in academic and field education; and of course, the strong influences of prevailing ideologies and the nature of work settings.

In reviewing what has been published in the social work literature on the topic of professional socialization for the past fifty years, it appears that little attention has been paid to influences on socialization that are internal to students: the students’ formation prior to their education, and how these pre-existing elements influences their professional learning journey. Within recent theoretical conceptualizations of professional socialization in social work, the foundation for the socialization process in formal education is thought to be the prior socialization that students have experienced developmentally (Miller, 2010). Even today, in some circles, students in higher education are thought to be and treated theoretically or practically as empty vessels (Brookfield, 1986). It is theorized here that these personal aspects of social work students’ lives have major implications as to whether and how students embrace the profession, as it is offered to them through their social work education.

This paper seeks to explore what is presently known about why people choose to enter the profession of social work: their personal and professional motivations, and what they bring to their education in terms of their personal histories and values. By revisiting the information already present in the academic literature, social work education might employ this to develop new ways of approaching the socialization of its students. Though, once again, it should be noted that the profession itself has been divided in what it considers to be its guiding values and what identities are critical to be transferred to students. The debates around whether to focus practice energy on individuals, through various forms of micro practice, or on the plethora of societal
transformation or macro practice perspectives (Payne, 2005, 2007), and the claims that social workers have lost their will to work with the most marginalized and compromised within society (Specht & Courtney, 1994) are ongoing within the profession (Abramovitz, 1993; Bardill, 1993). The conflict regarding what the primary focus of attention should be in how the profession of social work actualizes its mission of helping people, may have created an ambiguous socialization context, presenting messages that might not support the development of a fully socialized professional. The overarching practice focused conflict leads to situations where values are organized and prioritized differently by various groups within the profession. In turn, these differing value priorities cluster themselves differently around various forms of theory and practice creating a range of value orientations or configurations supported by, and used to justify practice by different individuals and groups of social work professionals. It is suggested here, that this may create a climate for value ambiguity to thrive and negatively influence professional socialization. I might speculate here on a future professional project: Does this situation call for a values clarification process by the profession as a whole?

In addition, the idea of the influence of personal unconscious processes in students’ motivations and development as social workers has been rather neglected in the study of professional socialization (Costello, 2005; Vincent, 1996). It may be beneficial to consider the possibility that some of the choices, beliefs and actions of students that affect their socialization are guided by processes that are under little conscious control of both educators and students. From a transformative adult learning paradigm, if the habits of mind and meaning perspectives that can direct attention and learning (Mezirow, 1991) find their roots outside of our conscious awareness, then social work education may have to reconsider how the socialization of students is approached and actually executed in educational settings. Before delving into the academic
literature around what students bring to their formal social work education, a discussion of the guiding theoretical considerations that I am suggesting be used to consider this topic would be helpful.

3.2 Guiding Theoretical Considerations

Early studies in professional socialization conducted in medicine found that educators were concerned little with what students brought to or expected of the educational process (Becker et al., 1961). But students come to all professions including social work with expectations, motivations and a willingness to learn based on their specific personal life histories and with ideas about the nature of the profession and what it stands for, garnered from their life experience. In the education of medical students it has been shown that, as was discussed above, that some students would only temporarily embrace the profession’s values as a means to enter the profession, until a more appropriate time and situation presented itself for their original values to return to a place of dominance (Becker et al., 1961). Even in a high status profession such as medicine, professional education does not appear to have an all-encompassing power to create lasting change in the beliefs and values of those who enter a profession, and medicine certainly appears to have a much clearer conception of its value base and professional identity (Abbott, 1988a).

Thus, a theoretical platform that considers not only the process of change due to professional socialization, but also the importance and depth of what individuals bring to their education and are asked to change is important to this examination. Mezirow’s (1981, 1991, 1995, 2006) theory of transformative adult learning, and Knowles’ (1980, 1990) theory of adult learning (andragogy), provide a place to start such an inquiry. Social work education generally
caters to the education of adults and could be considered a process necessitating significant learning and personal change. Knowles’ (1980) primary andragogical assumption that is relevant for this examination is that an adult’s previous life experiences are valuable resources for new learning, and that these experiences are central to any discussion of the education of adults. In social work, it has been suggested that life experiences are important for career choices and are “a neglected form of knowledge in social work education and practice” (Christie & Weeks, 1998, p. 55). Prior life experiences shape how people view the world, their place in it, and how they interact with others.

Values and beliefs can be deeply ingrained ways of viewing the world and can act as part of the foundation of how daily experience is explained, organized, assigned meaning and guide action. Mezirow’s (1990) model of transformative adult learning holds that a person’s meaning perspectives are integral to learning since these form the basic “structure of assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience during the process of interpretation” (p. 2). The meaning perspectives that inform a person’s understanding of the world and their actions in it are shaped by their socio-economic and cultural context, as well as the family environment within which one is raised. These are fundamental personal influences that have deep roots which take hold long before a professional education:

Culture itself can be understood as a set of meaning perspectives which, together with idiosyncratic perspectives of our parents or primary care givers, constitute the universe of meaning perspectives to which we are exposed and from which we learn our perspectives through assimilation (Mezirow, 1995, p. 44).
The process of perspective transformation through critical reflection of the premises or pre-suppositions that define one’s meaning perspectives is the foundation for transformative learning within Mezirow’s (1978, 1991, 1995, 2006) conceptualization of adult learning and change. Transformative learning, according to Mezirow (2006) is defined as:

...the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Such frames are better because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (p. 26).

Mezirow (1991) has argued that an adult could have distorted assumptions, formed prior to the development of critical thinking skills, about their subjective world that shape their meaning perspectives and impact their learning. Distortions could be created through a number of paths: Epistemically (through the use and creation of knowledge), linguistically (through language), and psychodynamically (through prohibitions and simple rules learned in childhood).

Mezirow (1991) was also drawn to the work of South American educator, Paulo Freire, and his process of conscientization. Freire (2000) explained that in order to oppose social oppression and cultivate new ways of viewing the world, oppressed learners would have to be exposed to a dialogical education where social norms, ideologies, and political and economic structures that supported oppression could be questioned and a new consciousness developed. Since “the oppressed internalize the values of their oppressors” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 136), learning must reflect upon the distorted premises that learners cling to in order to create the possibility for personal change. Transformation was not confined to the realm of personal
learning in Freire’s work, it was meant to be a process where the dominant and oppressive social structures of society could be changed by those learners (Mezirow, 1991), echoing a significant philosophical underpinning of critical social work theories, such as radical empowerment practices (Fook, 2002).

In terms of psychodynamic premise distortions, Mezirow (1981) argued that these distortions evolve from two primary sources: internalized cultural assumptions and unresolved dilemmas that occur in childhood. It was theorized that rules for behaviour learned under stressful emotional circumstances from primary caregivers could “become frozen in place long after the episode is forgotten and continue to monitor feelings and control ways of interacting with others throughout adulthood” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 139). Drawing on the psychiatric work of Gould (As cited in Mezirow, 1991; Gould, 1989), it was suggested that learners must be provided opportunities to understand the depth and meaning of their psychic blocks or defenses in order to be able to critically reflect upon their learning and take greater risks toward transformation (Mezirow, 1991). Other theorists have since extended Mezirow’s (1981, 1991) mainly rational prescription of the self-exploration of personal material that may exist outside of conscious awareness, to include Jungian views of a collective unconscious that influences psychic and rational life (Boyd & Myers, 1988). This has also included how non-rational emotional processes and feelings are represented by conscious symbols that present themselves in learning (Dirkx, 1997; Mezirow, 2009).

The idea that mental life includes aspects outside of consciousness, that people are not explicitly aware of, is not as contested in scientific circles as it once was in the time of Freud. Various studies on thought, feelings, emotions and motivations have demonstrated that there is evidence for unconscious processes and memory, unconscious emotional processes and affect,
and unconscious attitudes and defensive processes (Westen, 1999). If attitudes and stereotypes have implicit or unconscious modes of operation (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), then people carry more complex views of the world than are explicitly known or understood by them, which could influence their underlying meaning perspectives. Similarly, motivations may not be totally controlled by conscious thought alone.

Identity formation is inextricably intertwined within the socialization of any professional and is acknowledged to have conscious and unconscious influences. Identities change over a lifetime, through “processes of self-discovery, personal construction, and social construction, some of which are relatively deliberate and explicit, whereas others are more automatic and implicit” (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 8.). Since the 1950s, work in identity studies has either focused on the ways in which the individual participates in the formation of their own personal identity or how membership in a social group or category shapes identity, i.e., the role of patterned social relations (Wetherell, 2010). If identity can be formed and revised throughout a lifetime in conscious, explicit ways, or unconscious, implicit ways, then an educative process

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2 In this continued exploration into the socialization to the values and identity of social work, the phrases ‘non-conscious processes’ and ‘unconscious processes’ will be used, as was suggested in Chapter 2 of this work. ‘Unconscious processes’ or ‘unconscious’ will be used here when discussing psychic processes that preserve certain affective or motivating information outside of conscious awareness for a defensive reason, usually to minimize emotional discomfort, and that these processes can influence actions (Westen, 1998). It is assumed here that unconscious processes participate in the creation, maintenance, and protection of meaning perspectives thought to be a result of childhood trauma as conceptualized by Mezirow (1991). The phrase ‘non-conscious processes’ or the word ‘non-conscious’ will be used with reference to structures and processes that exist outside of explicit consciousness where information can be acquired (Uleman, Blader & Todorov, 2005) and action may be influenced (Bargh, 2005), but where information or the experience does not have to be emotionally defended against (Westen, 1998). These terms will be used with the awareness that individual students in any given social context, depending on their previous socialization, life history and psychic capacity may experience conscious and non-conscious material differently. What one student may find emotionally charged and must be defended against and held within their unconscious, may just be benign material for another, possibly experienced and assimilated consciously or by non-conscious processes.
such as an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work could be viewed as an opportunity to add to or re-conceptualize one’s identity, or at least have an influence on its development. Kole and de Ruyter (2009) theorize that professional identities are important aspects of personal identities, and that professional ideals must be internalized within one’s personal identity for a professional identity to form.

An opportunity to examine and change one’s view and substance of self could be usefully viewed as a transformative process. Transformative learning has acknowledged that change to self-concepts can be a process that is demanding. Mezirow (1995) argues that “a reassessment of one’s self-concept, as is often the case in perspective transformation, is threatening, emotionally charged, and extremely difficult” (p. 48). If this experience is similar in the education and development of social work professionals, with some students possibly not up to the challenge, then it is reasonable to assume that some will not embrace the process entirely or even consider what the profession offers to them in terms of a new identity or a new way of viewing the world, even if the new identity is consistent and widely accepted in the profession.

The ideas that previously formed identities can influence the formation of a new identity, that there are conscious, non-conscious and unconscious processes involved in identity formation, and that new professional identity formation can be a difficult process, is not entirely lost on social work researchers. In her ethnographic study of the professional socialization of a group of law and social work students at one American University, Costello (2005) found that the integration of a professional identity with the identities that students bring with them to their education could be a relatively smooth process when personal identities were consonant, or aligned, with the roles that were offered to students. It was when the personal identities that students held were in conflict or dissonant with the expected roles of the profession that identity
dissonance would occur. For Costello (2005), identities are comprised of conscious and non-conscious parts, ideologies and worldviews, much like Mezirow’s (1991) concept of “frames of reference.” Costello (2005) explains:

…each of an individual’s multiple identities is composed of a variety of conscious and nonconscious elements, such as ideologies, postures and tastes. A proposed professional role also contains components such as worldviews and emotional orientations that must be incorporated for the individual to acquire a new professional identity. If a substantial number of the professional role components are in conflict with components of the individual’s personal identity, she will experience identity dissonance as she attempts to incorporate and integrate her new identity (p. 26).

The above passage describes negative identity dissonance, but some students would experience positive identity dissonance. Those who experienced positive identity dissonance would still find identity integration to be a painful experience, but it would be empowering on some level because they would be adopting a new identity that was valued more than their current personal identities. An example of this would be students from minority or marginalized groups who were joining a profession that offered them higher social status (Costello, 2005).

As we can see, the frames of reference, layers of identity, conscious, non-conscious and unconscious processes that students may possess and experience, all could have an impact on socialization in social work, in the acquisition of social work values and the formation of a professional identity. Students are not blank slates, and their complex developmental histories, I would argue, influences their professional socialization profoundly. Next, what is currently known about what social work students bring to their education in terms of motivations, the
reasons that they state as to why they choose the profession, and how these histories and motivations may be problematic for their professional socialization will be explored.

3.3 Why do Students Choose Social Work?

Students bring their own motivations to the profession and their education. Personal motivations are thought to offer the human factors such as compassion, empathy and commitment that can aid in doing social work (Lishman, 1998). As well, the choice of an occupation is determined by a whole host of factors, such as the social and economic context that the student finds themselves in, the tangible career rewards of the occupation, the social status associated with the job or profession, the availability in terms of educational achievement, life chances or economic circumstances and the character and personality traits of the individual (Taietz, Ellenbogen, & Ramsey, 1958). Choosing social work as an occupation is believed to be a developmental process where students must first become aware of the profession, consider the possibility of a career within the profession, and then develop an interest in a primary method of practice within social work, before making an application to a school of social work (Pins, 1963). Biggerstaff (2000) has conceptualized the road to social work as a multi-dimensional process that includes influences such as personal and family experiences, a desire to be a therapist or attraction to some other part of the range of work within the profession, the characteristics and prestige of the profession, and the values of the profession, which include its social change orientation and a service motive.

Of particular interest here are the perceived psychosocial motivations that the individual states led them to social work. Understanding these reasons is very important for educators and employers (Christie & Kruk, 1998). However, conscious agency may only provide a partial story
of what students bring to their social work education. Unconscious aspects of a person’s psychic world may play a role in why students choose to enter the profession (Vincent, 1996), and in the creation and defence of the belief systems and values that have shaped their views of certain client populations (Wahler, 2012) prior to coming to their professional education. Non-conscious influences on identity could also have the potential to make adopting a new identity problematic, especially if there is a conflict between the non-conscious patterns of an individual, and aspects within currents of thought in the socializing profession and its representatives (Costello, 2005).

Turning now to the reasons that students state that they come to social work, it will become clear that students possess very similar motivations that lead them to enter the profession, but that differing social backgrounds may influence how and which values are acquired or if a professional identity is embraced for some students.

An examination of the research into why people come to study social work has shown that there are a relatively small number of general reasons for choosing the profession and some common themes that run through the backgrounds of those wanting to be social workers. Some of the common reasons and traits of those pursuing a social work education have been grouped below:

1) A tendency toward altruism in a desire to help others (Csikai & Rozensky, 1997; Enoch, 1988; Hackett et al., 2003; Limb & Organista, 2006; O’Connor et al., 1984; Pins, 1963; Stevens et al., 2010);

2) A desire to work with people (Hanson & McCullagh, 1995; Marsh, 1988);

3) A high incidence of a history of personal trauma (Black et al., 1993; Hoggett et al., 2006; Rompf & Royse, 1994; Russel et al., 1993; Sellers & Hunter, 2005);
4) Career focussed motivations such as specific practice preferences (Abell & McDonell, 1990; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Perry, 2009);

5) Other extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, such as religious and spiritual beliefs (Hirsbrunner, Loeffler, & Rompf, 2012).

It has also been shown that minority students and those of ethnic backgrounds, other than students who are Caucasian and of Western European descent within English speaking and Western world environments, have slightly different conscious motivations for coming to social work. They may report altruistic motives that are specifically tied to empowering or helping their community of origin, and a personal history of difference as reasons for choosing the profession (Daniel, 2011; Limb & Organista, 2006; Warde, 2009). The following sections will expand upon the common themes that bring students to the social work profession and professional education.

3.3.1 Altruism and A Desire to Help Others.

Altruism has long been considered a trait displayed among professional social workers and the charitable non-paid volunteers that preceded them (Lubove, 1965). In the late 1950s, the Council on Social Work Education in the United States sponsored the research of Arnulf Pins (1963) to study factors that influenced career choices in social work. The reasons stated for choosing social work as a career by the class of 1960 across North American schools of social work were overwhelmingly focussed on two issues: 1762 participants out of 2931 reported that social work “makes an important contribution to individuals and society” and 1686 students reported that they “enjoy work with people,” while only 18 respondents felt that by choosing social work would they gain any sort of “social status and prestige” (Pins, 1963, p. 87).
There is something about social work students that is different from other groups of students. The desire to help others is profound. Comparisons of motivations have been made between social work students and students in other helping professions. When compared to psychology students, students surveyed had a strong “desire to help” and that this was something they hoped to achieve by entering their chosen profession (O’Connor et al., 1984). However, in this particular study, O’Connor et al. (1984) concluded that the group of social work students studied, which included students who had already begun the socialization process, was split between some who demonstrated altruistic concerns, and another group that was also focussed on the rewards and benefits that social work provides the professional.

The theme of altruism can also play itself out in different ways. Social work students have demonstrated that they not only want to engage in work where they help people, but some also want the opportunity to do work that has some social importance. When social work students were compared with students from different disciplines in an Israeli university, they scored higher on this trait. However, only 30% of the social work students in this study overall indicated that this was important to them (Enoch, 1988). This lends some evidence for a distinction between an individual-focused altruism and a socially-focused altruism that some students may possess independently of the other.

Across different cultures, this yearning to help people appears to be consistent. In a study of student motivations in four schools of social work in four different European countries, the United Kingdom, Slovenia, Germany, and Finland, it was found that the main motivating factor for a majority of students in all countries to enter social work was “a want to help people” (Hackett et al., 2003). The second and third motivating factors to enter social work that students cited, in various orders, were aspirations to help people “overcome discrimination” and the
“personal life experiences I have had in my life”, (Hackett et al, 2003, p. 170). In those samples studied, first year students appeared to have a solid idea of the work and responsibilities of social work within their respective countries, and already had begun to build a foundation for their professional identity (Hackett et al., 2003).

The need to help remains a stable motivating factor when comparing the views of MSW students from different cultural and racial groups within the United States as well. Limb and Organista (2006) found that career motivations on entry to one MSW program strongly supported altruistic beliefs. When assessing the statement, “through social work I will be able to make an important contribution” (Limb & Organista, 2006, p. 280) American Indian, Caucasian, and other students of colour all had mean scores of 4.66 or higher on a five point Likert-type scale, where 5 was the highest rating. Other motivations that were quite important for all the students entering their MSW degree pointed to personal career issues. All students’ mean scores, in rating the personal importance of statements evaluating the “occupational versatility of a social work degree” and “a desire to increase their potential for serving disadvantaged populations,” were quite high. This score was over 4.27 for students entering their social work program. It is interesting to note that upon leaving their programs, all students’ level of altruistic motivation fell slightly (Limb & Organista, 2006).

In the United Kingdom, motivations to train in social work were studied via an online survey and focus group interviews over three academic years from 2004 to 2006, and altruistic and personal career themes continued to present themselves (Stevens et al., 2010). “Helping individuals to improve the quality of their own lives” (Stevens et al., 2010, p. 23) was the primary response chosen as the main motivation for choosing to study social work, well ahead of a want to address societal inequity or injustice. However, addressing societal inequity was the
fourth most chosen reason for study in social work. The second and third reasons for choosing to enter the profession were a desire for “interesting, stimulating work” and a “personal ability to get on with people” (Stevens et al., 2010, p. 23).

3.3.2 The Desire to Work With People

There is something about working with people on a face-to-face basis that attracts individuals to social work. Marsh (1988) studied the factors that preceded the choice of academic study in social work or business, by asking students to answer an open-ended question about why participants had chosen their academic major. Social work students indicated that they wanted to work with people, help others and build a better understanding of themselves. When the helping responses were broken down, it was found that students’ altruism had two major motivations: people either wanted to help those less fortunate, or indicated an aspiration to help people because of difficult experiences that they had undergone themselves (Marsh, 1988).

This particular motivation for choosing social work as a career has also been shown to be relatively stable over an extended period of time. From the early 1980s to the early 1990s, at one school of social work in the United States, classes of bachelor of social work students were surveyed in their initial year of study, each year for ten years with respect to their career choice motivations (Hanson & McCullagh, 1995). Every year, the top three factors consistently rated as most important for students’ career choice were: 1) working with people, 2) contributing to individuals, and 3) contributing to society. It was also found that students entering social work were motivated by both a service to others orientation, as demonstrated by the above factors, and a job self-interest orientation characterized by such issues as better job opportunities, salaries and
working conditions. Hanson and McCullagh (1995) noted that “at least for social work majors, self-interest is not necessarily incompatible with an interest in others” (p. 35).

3.3.3 A History of Personal Trauma

It has been hypothesized that problems within the family of origin of individuals and the emotional and psychological issues that follow can predispose those individuals to pursue work in the helping professions (Maeder, 1989). In social work, the study of painful personal histories as a motivator for choosing to enter the profession has been examined in various ways. Early life events have been compared between undergraduate and graduate social work students and non-social work students (Rompf & Royse, 1994), between masters-level business students and master of social work students (Black et al., 1993), between MSW students and students in counselling, business and education (Russel et al., 1993), and MSW students have been surveyed for their perception of how their family history has influenced their choice of career and practice area of specialization (Sellers & Hunter, 2005).

Certain cohorts of social work students report significantly higher levels of personal abuse and family dysfunction than student groups from different disciplines (Black et al., 1993; Rompf & Royse, 1994; Russel et al., 1993). In the study conducted by Rompf and Royse (1994), 71% of social work students surveyed reported experiencing at least one or more traumatic life events as rated on a list of seven life events while growing up, which included: unhappily married parents, alcoholism or drug addiction, emotional problems, or child abuse or neglect. The rate of reported child abuse or neglect for social work students was 17%, which was over twice the percentage of reported abuse for the comparison cohort of English students at 8% (Rompf & Royse, 1994). In Black, Jeffreys, and Hartley’s (1993) work, social work students experienced four times the
reported level of alcohol abuse in their family of origin, 55%, as compared with 13% in the business student comparison sample. Reports of physical, sexual and emotional abuse were significantly higher in the sample of social work students compared to the business student control group (Black et al., 1993). Russel, Gill, Coyne, and Woody (1993) found high levels of family dysfunction in a cohort of social work students, especially when compared with other student groups in counselling, education and business. Drug abuse and the experience of violence were especially high. The social work students would also report high levels of experienced sexual abuse compared with the other student controls: 31% of the social work student sample (Russel et al., 1993).

A history of family dysfunction and a relatively high incidence of personal experiences of abuse appear to be quite common amongst social work students. In terms of its effect on career choice, Rompf and Royse (1994) queried their survey respondents immediately after asking about their childhood experiences, asking if they felt that their experiences influenced their choice of career or occupation. They found that 39% of social work students responded “yes” to the question, while only 14% of the English students agreed that their experiences had influenced their choice of study (Rompf & Royse, 1994). Another study of social work graduate students assessed, if the type and incidence of family issues impacted, whether students viewed their career choice as influenced by their family history. Sixty-nine percent of the 126 students surveyed reported a history of family trauma and just over half of this group of students, 53.5%, stated that this history had influenced their career choice (Sellers & Hunter, 2005).

Lackie (1982, 1983) has put forth a compelling argument as to why those with family histories of dysfunction and people who have suffered personal trauma are drawn to social work as a profession. After studying the family histories of 1,577 social workers (Lackie, 1982), it was
found that the majority of those in the study, over 66%, (Lackie, 1983) would occupy positions of excessive emotional responsibility and caretaking roles within their families of origin. The idea was presented that some children, especially first-born members of families, undergo a “parentification” process where life situations within the family shift adult responsibilities and caretaking roles onto the child. On the flip side, children, particularly the youngest in a family, were hypothesized to be at risk of “infantilization” where excessive care of the child socializes them to act in ways that are thought to be dependent and self-involved. Lackie (1983) theorized that, “one’s choice of social work as a career may be an attempt to deal with an earlier imbalance of parentification/infantilization” (p. 315). Professional caretaking in social work allows the parentified child to care take and attempt to fix situations that could never have been changed within their own past life, and provides the infantilized child with the “opportunity to shed the role of insufficiency” (Lackie, 1983, p. 315). It should be noted that Black et al. (1993) found, in their study of psychosocial trauma in social work students, that the majority of the students in their study cohort were either the eldest of their gender or the youngest child in their families.

However, it has been shown in a cohort of long time practicing social workers that there are not higher levels of childhood maltreatment when compared with a non-social worker professional control group (Olson & Royse, 2006). Within the work of Olson and Royse (2006), the majority of the social workers surveyed all entered the profession prior to 1980, while all students who participated in the studies cited above, who had disclosed histories of trauma and family dysfunction, were all just entering their education process after 1989 (Black et al., 1993; Rompf & Royse, 1994; Russel et al., 1993; Sellers & Hunter, 2005). It is entirely possible that life adversity may influence individuals to choose to study social work, but they might not remain in the profession or choose to practice after completing their studies. Another possibility
is that with the expansion of social work and professional education from primarily a middle
class pursuit to include those from broader socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, the general
life histories of students have changed.

Personal trauma histories have been thought to have unconscious influences on life
choices. Vincent (1996) has studied how early traumatic experiences create unconscious
motivations for choosing social work as a profession. Influenced by work in object relations and
attachment theory, Vincent hypothesized that when there are unmet needs in childhood, or
significant separations from caregivers in childhood, individuals might unconsciously try to help
others in order to “satisfy” their own psycho-social needs. She found, in the group of social work
students that she studied, that 42% of the cohort had experienced separations of a year or more
from one or both parents in childhood. From this study’s data it was concluded that students
might have unconscious motivations operating in their choice of a profession, if they have a
personal history of loss and early separation with caregivers in childhood (Vincent, 1996).

In researching the identities and life histories of community development and welfare
workers and their strong commitment to welfare and social justice, Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez,
Mayo, and Miller (2006) suggest that there exist “psychical roots of public commitments” (p.
689) in some dedicated welfare professionals. These researchers take a psycho-social approach
to their research, influenced by many relational psychodynamic theorists and the idea of
reparation as developed by Klein and Riviere (as cited in Hoggett, et al., 2006). It is argued that
both conscious and unconscious self-identifications, influenced by painful experiences usually
from childhood, can lead to patterns of life choices that attempt to repair early negative
experiences or relational wounds (Hoggett, et al., 2006). According to Hoggett, et al. (2006),
“our life histories both constrain us and resource us” (p. 692). They can be a source of capacity
to make the necessary commitments to working in community development and public social service, either in paid or unpaid positions (Hoggett, et al., 2006; Hoggett, Mayo, & Miller, 2009; Mayo, Hoggett & Miller, 2007). Community development work is strongly aligned with one of the historic missions of social work, in that the communities worked with and for are usually marginalized, disadvantaged, and economically challenged. Mayo, Hoggett and Miller (2007) note that it is very important to be aware that there are emotional investments to this type of work and suggest that it is important for “professionals to be reflexively aware of these emotional roots themselves through their training and continuing professional development” (p. 140).

Unconscious motivations of and influences on individuals choosing social work as a profession are not widely addressed in education programs. However, a consideration of these factors might be very important in adding to the discussion of the socialization of students to professional values, and an identity within the profession. There could be explanations as to why students might not be embracing their socialization to the profession that may encompass both non-conscious and unconscious elements. But perhaps other conscious motivations, in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, may have a greater influence on socialization.

3.3.4 A Specific Choice of Practice: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

Rewards can also come in material forms for social workers. In an editorial written in the late 1980s, Land (1987) bemoaned the effect that clinical licensing was having on the profession in the United States, citing the trend that students were choosing to study social work in order to enter private practice with a profit motive in mind. It was suggested that “altruism and political commitment may be devolving into secondary motivations, taking a backseat to psychotherapy
for profit” (Land, 1987, p. 75), although many clinicians devote a portion of their practice to pro-
bono work with those who would otherwise not be able to afford psychotherapy. This position
has also been taken by others who have raised the spectre of social workers turning their back on
providing service to the poor and the marginalized (Specht, 1991; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Abell and McDonell (1990) found that enhancing career opportunities played a major role
for social work students in making the decision to pursue their MSW degrees. Having the
possibility of greater influence and autonomy in their future employment, the increased potential
for promotion and broader career options were very important for students. However, these same
students reported that they valued working with populations who were disadvantaged, and
expressed that they had chosen social work instead of other courses of study due to this aspect of
the profession (Abell & McDonell, 1990). Various studies have found that financial rewards, or
stable employment as a reason for choosing social work as a profession, although important,
score lower in comparison to other reasons generally surrounding a want to help others (Hackett
et al., 2003; Pins, 1963; Rubin & Johnson, 1984; Stevens et al., 2010).

Biggerstaff (2000) has noted that students’ desires to be therapists were motivating factors
for some to choose social work as a career, and there is some evidence for this. In work
conducted by Rubin and Johnson (1984), 51% of those surveyed did enter into their MSW
studies to perform a helping function and 68% of those students indicated that they wanted to
pursue work in counselling or psychotherapy. In the same study, the appeal of private practice
was high, while work with people who had physical disabilities, those who were involved in the
criminal justice system, or people who were “chronically mentally disabled discharged from
state hospitals” (Rubin & Johnson, 1984, p. 10) held very low appeal ratings for practice.
Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those who had undergraduate degrees in social
work rated psychotherapy orientations lower than work in areas of resource provision but still rated that being a counsellor had a high appeal for direct practice (Rubin & Johnson, 1984).

In Weiss, Gal, Cnann, and Maglajlic’s (2002) comparative study of social work students at four schools in three countries (Israel, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States), students arrived with ideas of the profession where individual casework was the most preferred, as opposed to work with groups, policy development or community organizing. The students from the American and Israeli schools generally did not want work with disadvantaged groups and preferred agencies that were not solely committed to targeted practice with marginalized populations, whereas British students were more willing to work with the mentally ill, the poor and substance use clients: all stigmatized groups. The majority of the students in the study entered school with the view that individual treatment methods such as casework were what defined the work of social work (Weiss, et al., 2002).

Perry (2009) studied changes in variables thought to have an impact on MSW students’ want to study clinical practice in all graduate social work programs in California from 1992 to 1998. Data was collected upon entry to MSW programs from 1992 to 1996 and upon exit from 1994 to 1998. The motivator that had the most significant impact on the preference for clinical practice studies throughout the students’ education was preparation for private practice. It does appear that in some cases, some students do aspire to be therapists and do not want to engage in work with those who cannot pay for services.

Following a career path based on an individual’s religious or spiritual belief system provides a strong intrinsic reward for some students entering social work. Recently, Hirsbrunner, Loeffler, and Rompf (2012) studied the effects of spirituality and religious beliefs upon career choices of students at a small Christian college and a large state university in a Mid-Southern
state in the United States. Of the 70 students surveyed, 57% reported that their spiritual and
religious beliefs were very important to their choice of career. Students were measured as to the
strength of their faith beliefs. Those assigned to a “high faith” group, 47.1% of students, were
more likely to indicate that their choice of career had spiritual influences. Students from the state
university viewed career as less of a spiritual calling than students at the Christian college, but
there still were students at the state university that valued their faith and how it related to
studying social work. An interesting finding was that students who were primarily motivated by
a spiritual calling for this work, were “significantly less likely to also report the following
motivations: opportunity for interpersonal interaction; desire to serve disadvantaged populations;
and influence of family and friends” (Hirsbrunner et al., 2012, p. 207). Those who reported
wanting to work for social justice were less likely to report entering social work “to make a
difference in others’ lives” or due to “negative events in their own past” (Hirsbrunner et al.,
2012, p. 207). Even if students enter social work on the basis of their spiritual beliefs, they are
not all guaranteed to embrace social work with the marginalized or oppressed populations.

3.3.5 Motivations May be Different for Some Who Are Different

For minorities and those from different cultures in North America, the choice and
motivation to enter social work is greatly influenced by altruistic tendencies, but has also been
shown to reflect a strong sense of community and a want to work with vulnerable and
disadvantaged client groups (Warde, 2009). Limb and Organista (2006) have studied how MSW
students’ views on the mission of social work, their preferences for practice, and their
motivations for choosing social work as a career changed from entering their program to
graduation. Special attention was given to the differences in responses between American Indian,
Caucasian and other students of colour. Upon entry to their programs, a majority of students in all three groups reported they believed that they would be able to make important contributions by becoming a social worker. Career issues such as occupational versatility and desires to increase promotion potential were also rated as high motivators among all students. With respect to a desire to serve disadvantaged populations on entry to their program, there was a difference between Caucasian students’ responses and students of colour or of American Indian heritage. All student groups ranked this motivation in the top four responses, but American Indian and students of colour ranked it third, whereas Caucasian students ranked it fourth. Regardless of ethnic background, students’ responses to the question measuring the importance of the job characteristic of helping “the most economically disadvantaged” (Limb & Organista, 2006, p. 288) changed from entrance to their program to graduation: the desire to serve people from this client group declined. However, a larger number of students viewed societal/institutional change at the end of their education as one of the primary goals of social work over a focus on individual adaptation. The focus on societal change was held in high regard by all three groups of students on entry to their MSW program, supported by 51.6% of Caucasian students, by 59% of students of colour, and by 61% of American Indian students. But all student scores on this measure increased to 64.3%, 69.9% and 71.0% respectively by graduation, providing some evidence for the impact of social work education to teach the importance of societal change to address social inequity (Limb & Organista, 2006).

Warde’s (2009) qualitative narrative exploration of male Hispanic and African-American BSW and MSW graduates into the influences on their career choices found that these students held altruistic beliefs long before they decided to enter into social work. Strong themes of wanting to give back to their communities of origin and histories of personal contact, both
positive and negative, with a social worker were uncovered. The student may have either been a client of, or had been mentored by a social worker. In some cases, the student had known a social worker who was a family friend or member of their immediate family. Students also perceived that they as men of colour brought different perspectives that were much needed in the profession (Warde, 2009).

Daniel’s (2011) work on the career motivations of social work students from racial/ethnic minorities in an urban center in the United States confirmed the themes of minority students’ interest in social justice surrounding the alleviation of poverty and a desire to give back to their communities. Within this particular cohort, it was found that the early impressions of social work in students were mostly formed by their personal life experiences with social workers, since over 66% of the students interviewed reported that they had grown up in poverty. Again, as found in the study by Warde (2009), minority students were influenced to enter social work by various types of mentors (Daniel, 2011). Friends and family were found in some cases to be a source of discouragement with respect to entering social work due to the negative perceptions of the profession within their community of origin and a lack of understanding of what social workers do. Daniel (2011) suggests that it is important for schools of social work to identify and develop the pre-existing strengths and motivations of students once they are recruited into their education programs. If social justice and developing their communities are important issues for minority students, then more must be done to prepare these students for this work. This has been a place where social work education has had “difficulty maintaining its focus” according to Daniel (2011, p. 906). This work may have touched on a very important point around the need to identify positive motivations and strengths in students early, in order to capitalize on this to help socialize them into the profession.
It is in the study of race, gender, and otherness that identity conflicts can be most apparent in the socialization to social work. These are the aspects of identity that students cannot hide and may cause difficulty in adopting any social work identity that is offered to them. In her study of how professional identities are developed in law and social welfare students at one American University: U.C. Berkeley, Costello (2005) used the concept of habitus to inform her work on how some students suffer identity dissonance in their experience of taking on a new professional identity. Habitus, a sociological concept elaborated upon by Pierre Bourdieu (1973, 1977), is a theoretical system of cultural dispositions and ways of being that structures individual and group practices, as well as the social reproduction of culture. Habitus is considered to be largely a product of social histories, but consists of taken for granted practices and aspects of daily life that are consciously forgotten, outside of explicit awareness, that shape an individual’s or group’s action to conform to what is considered normal within the social context that the subject is immersed (Bourdieu, 1977). Much of an individual’s view of how the world is organized could be considered to function at an implicit or non-conscious level. Their tastes for things as varied as food, style, or music, the individual’s physical embodied identity in expression, gesture, or bodily signs; and the emotional identity of an individual, and accepted social norms all could operate at the implicit level of habitus (Costello, 2005).

These structures have the potential to make adopting a new identity problematic, especially if there is a conflict between the habitus of the individual to be socialized and the habitus of the socializing profession and its representatives. Professional socialization would be all the more problematic if there were plural social work identities offered to students. The students that Costello (2005) found to be identity consonant in their pursuit to become a social worker, those
who had little trouble adopting the new identity of the profession, represented groups that had a habitus that was of a certain type. It was noted that:

The typical social welfare student’s habitus (like the typical social welfare student) was middle class, feminine, and Anglo in character. Social welfare students tended to be more empathically oriented and politically sensitive than were their professors, which meant that students who were atypically rational received more professorial approbation than did their normatively emotive peers...Thus men of all ethnicities and white women were both likely to enjoy identity consonance (Costello, 2005, p. 212).

Identity dissonance within the group of students studied was common for people who were different from what is considered to be normal in North American society. In her work, Costello (2005) concluded that those who had the easiest time adjusting to a new social work identity were of a certain profile: “Students who were upper-middle-class politically and religiously moderate heterosexual white males without children or disability did not experience identity dissonance at either of the schools” (p. 213). Even though social work deems inclusivity as important and tries to promote ideals around social justice, the profession can, at least in one academic environment, tacitly reproduce social inequity. This work showed that there was something in the non-conscious actions of faculty members and in the habitus of the school of social work studied which made socialization for some easier than for others (Costello, 2005).

This construct of habitus may be useful in re-examining how aspects of the identity of the social work profession that lie just outside of conscious awareness may affect the socialization of students. It is entirely possible that historic habits and conflicts within the profession surrounding
what people perceive social work should be, and conflicts within society around who is valued, play out in non-conscious and unconscious actions in schools of social work and in professional practice. The implicit workings of habitus may explain the profound effect of how the profession and educators portray themselves to developing professionals.

3.4 Social Work: A Conflicted Profession

The message that students are presented about what is valued by the profession, by voices within the profession itself, is conflicted. Social work in North America has been grappling with an identity conflict since its inception in the late 19th and early 20th century. There is no doubting the present mission of the profession with regard to a concern for the overall general welfare (CASW, 2005), and the enhancement of well-being and the want to “help meet the basic human needs of all people” (NASW, 2008, paragraph 5). However, it is in how social work actualizes its mission of helping people where there exists great conflict over what social work is considered to be and what values are actually valued in the profession. The focus on social change through macro forms of social work practice and the alleviation of personal difficulties through individual change work, or micro practice, has informed the debate on what social work is thought to be, what it should be and how it is best performed for well over a hundred years (Haynes, 1998). Defining what social work should be has been a polarizing exercise. There are arguments that social work has lost its commitment to social justice and social change, as suggested by those who regard a psychodynamic perspective as detrimental to social work and the people with whom it is practiced (Specht, 1991; Specht & Courtney, 1994). Some suggest that the profession has to consider putting more effort in the macro area of practice (Marsh, 2005), and in a renewed educational focus on social change methods (Abramovitz, 1993), while
others argue against this, pointing out that social change should be seen as just one area of practice within social work and not an all encompassing focus for the profession (Bardill, 1993). There have been demands that greater emphasis should be placed on teaching individual change methods and clinical skills in order to prepare students for private practice (Barker, 1991). However, there are those who have suggested acknowledging and accepting that both views in social work are required to see the entirety of problems and to practice more effectively (Payne, 2007; Staniforth, Fouché, & O’Brien, 2011).

Is there a need for social work educators to balance and meaningfully unite these two oppositions while developing and implementing creative practice solutions, in order to effectively socialize those who aspire to the profession? Making the situation even more complex is the diverse nature of practice situations that social work supports and educates for (Adams, Dominelli, & Payne, 1998; Gibelman, 2004; Goldstein, 1998). Social work is a profession where consensus about its definitions, aims and what it is perceived to be is elusive (Thompson, 2002), and it is a profession that has possessed an unclear and fragmented identity (Gibelman, 1999). This is problematic, since it has been shown in other disciplines, such as medicine, that educators can consciously and non-consciously display negative attitudes and perform behaviours at odds with the values of a profession within a hidden curriculum that students potentially model themselves upon (Stephenson, Adshead, & Higgs, 2006). Why would it be any different within the social work profession and schools of social work?

The fragmented identity debate is specifically problematic with respect to value orientations, since values tend to be prioritized differently depending upon what is considered to be the primary focus of change and helping: the structures of society or the individual. Different value priorities cluster themselves differently around the many forms of theory and practice that
exist in the profession. Thus, a broad range of value configurations or orientations are created that can be offered to students and newly graduated social workers. It is entirely possible that social work educators role model, either overtly or unwittingly, a host of value orientations that stem from a conflicted professional identity. To return to an idea presented earlier, it is very likely that the identity debate in social work exists on the level of habitus, at the very least, in many professionals who have already been socialized to the profession. This dualistic micro-macro practice thinking possibly non-consciously weaves its way throughout the collective of the entire profession, in meaning perspectives and dispositions that inform daily interactions between various groups, individuals and professional bodies. The polarized views between a focus on societal change and on improving the personal function of the individual, does not serve to unify the profession in any way, when greater unity is what may be necessary to move forward (Han & Chow, 2010), and by no means does it acknowledge that social work is a diverse (Reid, 1977) and somewhat confused profession, as we have seen.

3.5 How to Transform?

Viewed through the lens of transformative adult learning, students’ personal histories influence the meaning perspectives and the motivations that they bring to their social work education. It is through these meaning perspectives developed prior to their education that all new learning is filtered, interpreted, and new meanings made.

Within the context of professional socialization in social work education, values and beliefs within the profession of social work could be considered a more functional meaning perspective for the developing professional, assuming that a given value orientation was agreed upon by all in the profession. But how do educators and the profession encourage questioning
and critical reflection of the old beliefs and motivations that social work students may bring to their education and hold?

Key to Mezirow’s (1991, 1998) transformative learning theory is the idea of promoting critical reflection in students in order to question the assumptions upon which their beliefs and current meaning perspectives are based. It is through this personal questioning process that it is suggested that learners will adopt more functional frames of references, than ones that they are currently using to view the world. Mezirow (1998) has suggested that a frame of reference is more functional when it is “more inclusive, differentiating, critically reflective, open to other points of view, and integrative of experience” (p. 188). Many of these more functional frame of reference traits are in line with many values and practice ideals of social work.

Reflective practices have long been used in the practice of social work education (Beverley & Worsley, 2007) and in enhancing how professionals’ problem solve and improve processes in practice (Schön, 1987). It is common practice to teach students to reflect upon their experiences in social work education through discussion (Anastas, 2010), and the clarification and examination of personal values has been deemed a necessary part of becoming a social worker (Reamer, 2006). Reflective and autobiographical writing has been used often, as a way to explore values that are significant to social work students (Walmsley & Birkbeck, 2006). There have also been other methods that social work educators have used to enhance students’ learning experiences and explore value orientations such as role plays, case studies and practicum experiences (Black, Congress, & Strom-Gottfried, 2002). However, even though reflective practices have been used in social work education to examine students’ personal values, beliefs and how students view the world, these educational endeavours just do not appear compelling enough to have led a majority of students to entirely or partially change their personal value sets.
Social work students have a great deal to reflect upon. The personal topics available for reflection are a mix of the values that they bring to their education, personal developmental histories, motivations, goals and personal wants, and also the various value orientations within the profession that they are exposed to, not to mention social work theory and the techniques of practice. What the profession presents to its aspirants to consider, in terms of its own identity, is also somewhat confusing. It is not just a simple want to help and work with people that frames the professional discourse of what social work is. The discussion surrounding the profession’s identity includes historical and current ideas about societal change and addressing the greater social injustices that contribute to individual problems. For example, quite possibly for some students, changing society and working with marginalized populations could be too overwhelming to consider, or may not align with personal values or the motivations about becoming a professional, on either a conscious or unconscious level. These are weighty ideas to be reflecting upon and perhaps this is where the limitations of reflective practices in both social work education and in Mezirow’s (1991) conceptualization of transformative learning present themselves. Reflection in both realms is for the most part considered only in rational conscious terms. Many reflective educational practices only examine issues at a conscious level. Students are not generally asked to engage in methods designed to explore their unconscious motivations in social work education and this might be a lost opportunity to assist in the exploration of a process that could be transformational.
3.6 Discussion

Social work has always assumed, as with most other modern professions, that aspiring social workers have wanted to acquire the values and an identity associated with the profession and would do so willingly, without question. This may have been a realistic assumption at some point in the profession’s history, but currently this may be an overly optimistic proposition. The belief that students will embrace an entirely new set of values, even if there was professional agreement about what should be acquired, disregards some of the contextual factors that bring people to the profession. There is no doubt that those who want to do the work of social work want to help others and have altruistic tendencies. But students have their own reasons and motivations for choosing social work as a career path that ranges from wanting to work with people, to a desire to work in private practice as clinicians or therapists, to wanting to help people because of their own personal developmental histories that may have been impacted by trauma, struggle or otherness. Religion and spiritual beliefs may influence a person to choose social work as a profession, with some people believing that they are “called” to do this work.

Students want to help others and do the work of social work. They may even align with certain value orientations in the profession, but they may not embrace everything that is offered to or expected of them. We only have to look to the work of Limb and Organista (2006) to find that students deemed social work with poor and disadvantaged groups and the practice focus on societal change as important. However, when asked how important work with those who were economically disadvantaged was for their personal careers, most students did not deem it important. It seems apparent that as individuals, those who aspire to do social work each have their own ideas about how they want to help and whom they want to work with regardless of what the profession suggests to them. Social work asks students to adopt certain professional
ideals. But, the practical difficulty is that these ideals may not be transferred to students easily, nor may these be demonstrated to students, at a conscious and non-conscious level, at the level of habitus, by those professional educators and practitioners tasked with their socialization.

Even if there was congruency in terms of the demonstration of professional value orientations, ideals and actions in the profession and at all schools of social work, it has been suggested that “professionals do not simply adopt the professional ideals, but make them their own by selecting which of them they think are most important and by interpreting them in a personal way” (Kole & de Ruyter, 2009, p. 142). Since students have some agency within the socialization process, it appears that it is not entirely up to the profession as to what and how much students actually accept, given what they are offered in their education. The development of a social work professional really appears to be a co-creation. The personal identities and belief systems that have been formed by life experiences and social location prior to a student’s formal education affects how each student adjusts to acquiring a potentially new set of values and professional identity in their given learning environment.

Professional education could usefully be considered a transformative educational experience, given the complexity of the socialization expectations of the profession. Ostensibly, students enter their education as aspirants to the profession and leave as professionals. Within a transformative adult learning model, specifically a Mezierean model (1991, 2000), transformations in meaning perspectives tend to occur after some crisis of understanding occurs. Disorienting dilemmas sparked through critical reflection can lead to a questioning of underlying meaning perspectives. This can make room for new perspectives that may be more flexible and constructive for viewing and solving the issues at hand. Creating the conditions where students actually reflect upon their underlying beliefs, and then become open to accepting and then
adopting new points of view is essentially the key and challenge for both perspective transformations in transformative adult learning theory and professional socialization in social work.

When students are asked why they come to social work, most respond that they are here to help others and some report that it is because of difficult and personal life experiences that they have undergone. These statements may reveal the unconscious motivations that students need to explore. At the very least, this signifies a need for students to come to terms with their own personal experiences. More study concerning this is required. There is research being conducted on the psychodynamic basis of strong commitments and the capacity of community development workers to do their work, even when it is challenging and continued under difficult circumstances (Hoggett, et al., 2006; Hoggett, Mayo, & Miller, 2009; Mayo et al., 2007). This may be the opportunity needed in social work education to learn about why, for example, some students may be more willing to embrace the social justice values of the profession and commit to them even under difficult social and practice conditions.

Minority students’ tendency to want to give back to their communities and work with marginalized populations could be a source of hope and learning for social work education. Even though some may experience identity dissonance in their socialization process because they are giving up part of their identity, minority students’ dissonance is generally positive since they are more likely gaining opportunities for personal growth and some semblance of social status in a new professional identity. Some students are even able to take on aspects of social work identity prescribed by the profession, embracing values and some of the practice preferences that reflect a social justice orientation. But this may not be a function of their formal education. There appears to be something about their life experiences and their personal identities that align with
some historical roots of social work, just as the personal histories of some who have experienced trauma lead them to social work in order to help others.

The macro-micro practice, social-societal change versus individual change debate within the profession around what social work is, or should be, does little to guide students in their development of a complete professional identity and appropriate practice: it can also be divisive. This conflict may make professional socialization even more difficult than it has to be since it portrays polarized dualistic identities or at worse, a fragmented identity that values one practice orientation over another and privileges one configuration of values over another. There is a necessity to promote more constructive discussion around the value of different perspectives in social work instead of continuing to reinforce divisive viewpoints and debates. The identity debate in social work might then become more inclusive, rather than continuing to be the all or nothing proposition that it has been historically.

3.7 Internal Influencing Factors on Professional Socialization: Observations

The experiences and motivations that students bring to schools of social work tell us a great deal about the ‘raw material’ educators have to work with to socialize students to value orientations and potential identities within the profession. I would argue that the raw material, with which to grow and socialize professionals from, is not value free. There are many students who are already full of ideas about what social work is, why they want to practice, how they want to practice, and what they want to do as social workers.

In Education for Critical Consciousness, Paulo Freire (1974) explained that, “Responsibility cannot be acquired intellectually, but only through experience” (p.12). To ask people to take on values and parts of an identity when they may have no first-hand knowledge of
what that identity could mean may be overly optimistic. To understand at an intellectual level is one thing, but to understand on the level of experience, heart and feeling is quite another. For example, a student that may rationally understand the value of social justice may lack the desire or motivation to do anything about it or to internalize this professional value. Another student that wants to help people may only believe themself to be able to help one person at a time and not deal with larger structural issues that they might feel ill prepared to address.

The idea in transformative adult education, that major shifts in meaning perspectives can grow out of disorienting dilemmas, may be very useful for social work education and could be explored further with respect to socialization to social work value orientations, if educators and the profession were clear and agreed upon what students should be socialized into. If significant personal educative experiences could be facilitated in students, perhaps these opportunities might be used to provide insight into the visceral personal meaning of social justice, disadvantage or stigma, or the rational and emotional importance of integrity and competence for practice. Students might not have to come from minority populations or have personal histories of oppression or trauma to be open to consider adopting certain value orientations and identities of social work that some students find difficult to embrace. Also, it is possible that students are already experiencing some discomfort in their socialization process brought on by the learning events and new knowledge acquired at non-conscious and unconscious levels in their social work education. Non-conscious and unconscious psychic processes in learning and socialization should not be ignored in the process of change in becoming a social work professional. More academic study and research around this should be encouraged and promoted since knowledge around unconscious motivations, influences and processes could possibly shed light on how
students can be assisted to acquire value orientations and develop an identity that are congruent with the profession.

The influence on professional socialization in social work by what students bring to their education, in terms of their motivations, past developing identities and preferences is significant. However, this is only part of the story of socialization to the profession of social work. The profession through its social work educators and practice professionals also plays a significant role in socialization through the normatively based messages that are provided about what social work is, and ought to be, both explicitly and implicitly, perhaps even at the non-conscious level of habitus. The profession is still quite divided about what its focus of practice should be, and this has an impact on the ambiguity of what values in social work are actually valued and accepted. The messages are not agreed upon since values are prioritized and clustered differently around different theoretical and practice orientations. These are just other necessary parts of the story of social work that is offered to students in their socialization journey that must be addressed and openly discussed: part of a field of external influences on socialization in social work education.

Any further investigation into the topic of professional socialization generally, and values acquisition and identity formation specifically, must examine what is presented to students within what has been deemed to be the signature pedagogy of social work education: the field education experience. It is hypothesized that within this educational area of practice, students and the profession are done a disservice. In the next part of this exploration, it will be shown that students are provided with little reason to change their values in certain practice environments. Social work has always been a contextual endeavour, and the current neoliberal socio-political climate that many social work agencies find themselves in profoundly informs the education and
socialization of students in practical fieldwork and their practice learning. It is suggested that it is in social work field education where some students choose to maintain their own personal values, or are taught another set of values that does not align with the range of stated values proffered by the profession. In the next chapter, we will explore the proposition that field education experiences could be a site where students learn not to identify with the profession and the title of social worker.
Chapter 4 Socializing for Change in Field Education within a Neoliberal Context

4.1 Background

This exploration was undertaken to try to understand a little more about why some social work professionals do not identify with the title of “social worker” (Bogo et al., 1995), or do not appear to display a sense of professional pride in what they had been educated to be (Reiter, 1980). This is not a particularly new or enlightening observation. Anecdotally, this seems to be a common observation among social workers about themselves. However, I wanted to understand how what seemed to be a straightforward process of becoming a social worker created many professionals who appeared to want to be something else. Delving into this topic has been enlightening. An initial review of the literature into professional socialization concentrated on what was already known about professional socialization, generally measured through the transfer of social work values to aspirants to the profession (Barretti, 2004b), under conditions in which these values are professionally contested. That first inquiry reviewed some of the historical background around the importance of values within the social work profession. It also showed that from the earliest empirical enquiries into professional socialization in social work (Varley, 1963; Hayes & Varley, 1965) that not all students acquired or aligned with various value orientations that have been proffered by the profession.

It is clear that there have been and still are significant challenges in the socialization of students as measured by values acquisition, aside from the issue of divergence of professional opinion about what these values are. The change from student to social worker is not a simple educational process. Social work education cannot always be counted on to influence the transfer of professional values (D’Aprix et al., 2004; Osteen, 2011), or create a desire in social workers
to work with the groups who have historically (and ideologically at least) been the main focus of social work: the marginalized and economically dispossessed (Weiss et al., 2004).

These findings pointed to the possibility that students come to their formal educations with previous socialization that may inhibit the acquisition of potentially new values and an identity. It also gave birth to a hypothesis around a metaphorical field of internal and external influences on students in the process of values acquisition and development of a professional identity in social work. The second inquiry into the socialization of social work students explored the internal, within the student, side of that field of influences. The possible effects on socialization outcomes by what students brought to their education were examined, since it has been theorized that all previous socialization and experience sets the foundation for new socialization within programs of professional education (Miller, 2010, Sherlock & Morris, 1967). Chapter three of this work reviewed what was already known about the motivations, values, life experiences, and views of the world that students carried with them into their education process that might hinder or help any acquisition of values or socialization processes.

In the final phase of this exploration into the professional socialization in social work, the influence of the signature pedagogy of social work: field education (CSWE, 2008) is examined. The current state of practicum learning is suggested to have negative effects on values acquisition and identity development of aspiring social work professionals. Indeed, I argue that this aspect of social work education introduces even more values and identity divergency into the education process. What is of specific concern is how practicum and agency cultures can influence how students and new practitioners view the profession’s range of values orientations, and the possible identities that are offered to them within the larger social, political and economic context of the world, which also offers another values/identity framework for students.
The question that closes this practical exploration into the socialization of social workers is: What other values and identities are proffered at the agency level for prospective social workers to choose from and how compelling to the students are these choices?

Before turning toward an examination of field education, a brief discussion should be undertaken regarding the construct that has been used as a measure of, and has acted as one of the defining themes of professional socialization in social work since the beginning of its formal study in the early 1960s: its values (Barretti, 2004b; Varley, 1963).

4.2 Values and the Aims of the Profession.

As was highlighted in previous chapters, social work values are the putative heart of social work and are in themselves, as we have seen, a weighty topic. Even though they have been critiqued as an overused construct to measure the socialization of social workers (Barretti, 2004b), values are claimed in the social work literature to be an overarching constant in the profession (Banks, 2012; Reamer, 1993). It has been argued that social work values are one of the main characteristics that set social work apart from other helping professions (Reamer, 2006). Given that values were considered to be a foundational part of the profession and of the professional identity of social workers, it is disconcerting to discover that the social work profession does not have substantive agreement on what these values are, and that a concern for various value orientations in the profession just does not appear to be at the forefront of many social work students’ minds. If values are ostensibly viewed as a measure of success of the professional socialization process within social work education, and that this process yields inconsistent and mixed results, in terms of creating social workers that reflect these apparently important aspects of the profession (Enoch, 1989; Judah, 1979; Landau, 1999; Varley, 1963,
1968; Wodarski et al., 1988), then what does this tell us about the state of social work values and their centrality in social work as a profession?

Even though a concern for the welfare of the impoverished and dispossessed are considered important to a significant portion of the profession, how the profession has tried to actualize this mission and provide service has been an area of debate since the beginnings of the social work project (Epple, 2007). Realistically, these aspects of social work practice are only a small part of the totality of what social workers do, but they preoccupy the discussion surrounding the profession’s defining focus to help people in need. Social work values are especially contested in terms of how they are prioritized and actualized. According to some authors, work with client groups affected by poverty, and efforts toward social justice are considered to be more demonstrative of social work values than other work, such as a focus on providing services to individuals, especially psycho-therapeutic work for people who can afford to pay for it (Specht & Courtney, 1994). This has been a part of the micro-macro practice debate that has been ongoing since the beginnings of social work, in terms of who and what to focus professional attention upon (Haynes, 1998). The dualism in the debate over practice focus is seen as unhelpful by other theorists, who contend that the whole of social work comprises both micro and macro perspectives that are interconnected in creating well-being for individuals, groups and the broader society (Hugman, 2009). It is curious that, even though the range of social work encompasses a vast spectrum, from social policy, to community development, to the welfare of children and families, to psychotherapy, all the possible tasks and client groups in social work are not seen as equally legitimate by all social workers. This can lead to differences in how values are prioritized by different groups within the profession. Value priority differences also cluster themselves around different forms of practice and theory, creating a host of value
configurations and orientations, making the acquisition of values problematic for students and new social workers since there is ambiguity about what to socialize themselves to and adopt.

If different views of social work are competing at any given time within both academic environments and workplace settings, how does this affect students in terms of their overall socialization? If social work educators, both at schools of social work and in the field, are not clearly aligned in terms of what social work ‘really is’ in terms of a primary practice focus, then does this mean in practice that students may be provided license to create their own view of what should be valued in practice? Developing professionals might even decide to pick and choose what they believe is ‘best’ in their own conceptualization of what social work is for their own identity, creating some hybrid of values with what they have brought to their education and what speaks to them from the voices they respect within their educational and professional encounters.

Social work educators seem to face a Herculean task of taking heterogeneous groups of already heavily socialized individuals with somewhat homogeneous reasons and motivations for entering social work and then educating them to become functioning and competent social work professionals. However, not everything can be explained by only looking at what students bring to the equation of professional socialization. What has been neglected up until now in this inquiry is an examination of what students are exposed to and how messages about their profession are delivered to them as they progress in their developing professional roles. Although the educative process in the classroom provides social work students with many tools and the theoretical knowledge that build the skills to do the work of social work, the practical field components or agency practicum placements in social work education are often considered the most significant learning experiences by students (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). Any further discussion of professional socialization should include an exploration into what we know
through research and other observations about what occurs in field education experiences and the context within which field education is embedded.

4.3 Field Education: A Signature Pedagogy

According to the American Council on Social Work Education, field education is “the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students” (CSWE, 2008, p. 8). However, even though field education has been suggested as the signature pedagogy of social work education, the CSWE has not provided any pedagogical standards for the teaching and learning processes in field education (Wayne, Bogo & Raskin, 2010). But field education, also known as practicum and field work in North American settings, practice or workplace learning in the United Kingdom (UK), and field learning in Australia, makes a lasting impact on students and graduates as social work professionals (Bogo, 2010; Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Lager & Cooke Robbins, 2004). Educational workplace experiences are where theory and abstract skills are put into practice and students are exposed to seasoned professionals engaged in making complex evaluations and decisions, who act as role models for developing social workers (Bogo, 2012). Students in these situations are supposed to be learning to think like professionals and are finding where values and ethical orientations within the profession fit into the real demands of daily practice (Bogo, 2010).

Social work field experiences are located in a vast array of agency environments and reflect the diversity of practices within social work itself. Examples of practice range from work in child protection, anti-poverty work, work in health care, individual and group psychotherapy, to community organizing (Gibelman, 2004). The clientele that social work serves represent very diverse populations spanning various socio-economic, racial and religious life experiences.
The diversity of practice possibilities and practice experiences mirrors the diversity of students’ educational and professional aspirations, and life experiences, which is another positive aspect of field education. However, the diversity of the students’ skills, needs, and placements also makes the creation of meaningful standardized measures of proficiency of learning in field education difficult (Bogo, Raskin, & Wayne, 2002, as cited in Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2006). This does not even take into account ways to ensure the acquisition of a range of values that are professionally agreed upon to socialize a developing social worker. This same diversity in field experiences might also pose a problem in terms of development of a professional identity. It has been argued that field experiences may be too dissimilar to contribute to a common social work experience that could positively inform a social work identity (Loseke & Cahill, 1986). One might also argue that if the underlying professional values are only pragmatically or opportunistically employed in these diverse settings, then a full range of the possible social work values orientations may not be explored for students, even if there was professional agreement on the acceptable range of ideals and value priorities.

Field agencies may also have varying levels of commitment to the education and training of students. In their study of social work agencies that provided field placements for a major Canadian university, Bogo and Globerman (1999) categorized the types of organizations by the relationship these agencies had to a university and their commitment to learning and education. There were three categories in a spectrum, where one side represented “teaching centers,” that had very defined commitments to the education of professionals, well-organized relationships with the university and dedicated educational coordinators. On the other side of the spectrum were agencies where a lone social worker would volunteer to supervise a student, and participation in field education would fluctuate from year to year. This group was aptly named
“lone ranger agencies”. A middle category was comprised of agencies that had semiformal relationships with the university with one point of contact, and would have more than one social worker providing field experiences. This middle group of agencies would also have a fluctuating commitment to providing educational experiences from year to year (Bogo & Globerman, 1999).

In agencies that identify themselves as teaching centers, most often university teaching hospital settings, the commitment to educating groups such as nurses and physicians is quite strong, whereas this commitment might be weaker for other health care professionals, including developing social work students (Bogo, 2010).

Not all social work students will have access to well-established and organized learning situations, such as hospitals, for their field experiences. Students from other professional disciplines, such as medicine, are fortunate to be immersed at the center of a structured environment where the staff, instructors, patients, allied health professionals and the public have well-defined modes of behavior and will interact with all of these groups in socially prescribed ways that help to socialize and reinforce professional identities (Becker et al., 1961). Both nursing and medical students will observe how role models in their chosen profession perform their jobs, but more importantly how they treat others and how they are treated in their professional roles in a highly organized setting where their professions are considered central to the tasks of doing business (Becker et al., 1961; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968).

In comparison, agencies that provide learning experiences for social workers will vary in their organizational goals and their commitment to the education of social workers (Bogo & Vayda, 1998), and may reflect a wide range of views of the purpose of social work, whether transformational, therapeutic to social-order orientations (Payne, 2005; 2007). The field education experience has the potential to be invaluable in that it can introduce students to a wide
range of roles, tasks, and practice environments (Drolet, Clark, & Allen, 2012). While at the same time, practice agencies may only provide narrow learning opportunities that emphasize micro service practice with very specific service user groups, at the expense of experiences that would extend practice understanding in areas that promote social justice values and activities that are considered to be macro practice in nature (Poulin, Silver, & Kauffman, 2006). Agencies may be under resourced or just too overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of the work before them (Reisch & Jarman-Rohde, 2000), to actively promote certain methods of practice whether micro or macro or certain value orientations in any uniform or meaningful way.

In each different learning environment, practice skills are most likely taught with a broad range of expertise and focus with a view that, one assumes, emphasizes the specific needs, role and raison d’être of that unique agency or practice area. Students are exposed to the specific culture of the individual agency and practice area (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). Attitudinally, each field placement will naturally provide a different interpretation as to the role of social work and how students will observe their profession being represented and treated by clients, allied professionals and the public. As much as students are learning and becoming aware of the profession of social work and what this means to their personal identities, students have to contend with the agency socialization processes of being a new employee in an unique organizational environment (Wanberg, 2012). This adds another dimension to how developing social workers either do or do not align with any values, roles and identities associated with social work that may exist in opposition to the formal and informal values of the organizations that they are working for (Harris, 2003, 2005). Thus, students are introduced to a new element of value diversity in their practical training. There is a possibility that students and social workers may explicitly or implicitly align more with an agency itself, the tasks they are charged with, or
the status of other professionals in those agencies, rather than the profession that they are educated to be a part of. Before dealing with the influence of field education experiences on the professional socialization of students, we should note some of the major contextual factors that frame the profession and structure the organization of work in the social services.

4.3.1 Field Education and Social Work: A Contextual Endeavour

As was noted in previous chapters, social work has been considered a contextually conditioned profession, having to be acutely aware of its place in society and the public’s awareness of it (Hopps, 2000). Just as context and social environment influence many of the issues in the lives of individuals and groups, these conditions have a profound effect on the practice of social work and how social work is practically organized (Healy, 2005). Harris (2003) asserts that “the forces constructing social work lie outside of social work itself: social work is shaped by the societal context from which it emerges” (p. 3). Thus in the case of social work, the relationship between a profession and its work mandate, or its jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988a), is primarily controlled by governments, organizations, groups, and generally, people outside of the profession. Traditionally, the major influence on the social work profession has been government in the post-World War II era in most western English speaking nations. Social work’s historical social assignment has been the control of dependency of the marginalized and dispossessed within modern Western nations (Atherton, 1969), and so the practice of social work relies heavily on public funding (Fook, 2002). Since the world has become more interdependent and more politically and economically conservative, the profession has been under great stress to practice in ways that align with larger dominant social and political changes.
The move to embrace neo-classical economic theory as represented by writers such as Milton Friedman (1982) has fundamentally changed how governments and capitalist societies view how all forms of the ‘social wage’ should be funded, organized and how the overall care of its citizens is provided (McDonald, Harris, & Wintersteen, 2003). The development and maintenance of the free market, governments’ prioritization of the concerns of private business above state funded social welfare, and the belief in the freedom and right of the individual to make decisions and choices about their life direction and personal welfare without interference by government are some of the hallmarks of neo-classical economic ideology (Friedman, 1982) that influence and act as a base for neoliberalism. With the dismantling of national economic boundaries, and growing socioeconomic and technological interdependence between nation states, the capitalist form of globalization has become a new force in the provision of social welfare. More and more services are provided through privatized or marketized delivery methods which position economic management and the acquisition of profit as influential drivers of care and practice (Harris, 2005).

The commercialization and privatization of services, as a means to address the ‘rising costs’ of social services and health care, and to reduce taxes for the wealthiest sectors of society in the United States, has meant a significant change in how services are provided by both for-profit and non-profit agencies. For-profit companies have, as their core driver, the interests of their shareholders and the creation of a maximum return on investment through the production of services. Thus, services in for-profit organizations are provided with these motives in mind (Gibelman & Demone, 2002). What is offered to the health or social service consumer may not reflect what the actual human need may be: it may only be what is deemed cost-effective by the service provider. In response to for-profit companies gaining market share and placing pressure
on the non-profit sector, non-profit agencies have had to adopt management strategies and business models that promote their ability to compete with for-profit service providers to remain operational and relevant to their missions of service (Gibelman & Demone, 2002). Organizations dedicated to human service have re-organized, downsized and ‘modernized,’ that is, have been forced to behave as if they were either privatized or functioning in a market economy. Social work education has also suffered as well. The ability to provide field learning experiences and the commitment to social work education has changed in many agency environments. Fewer staff resources in social service agencies and a concern for budget restraint has meant that there is less time to mentor and instruct students, and fewer field placements available to provide for students’ professional development (Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, & Strom, 1997; Lager & Cooke Robbins, 2004).

In the English speaking countries of the Western world, the focus of governments on cost reduction and the introduction of for-profit service in health and social services has meant the use of conservative fiscal methods such as managed care. The provision of health and social services overseen and managed by managers and accountants who are professionally trained to ensure that costs are balanced with access to service and care, has changed the nature of work within social service and health care settings. Skills and experience in team and inter-disciplinary practice, short-term treatment methods, case management and program evaluation are now required areas of practice and knowledge (Berkman, 1996). Moves in the Australian socio-political context to reform the provision of social services have seen program changes that emphasize policies that reflect neoliberal values of individualism and personal responsibility, resulting in values conflicts between social workers and their government employer, and an
overall loss of autonomy and discretion in treatment decisions in practice (McDonald & Chenoweth, 2009).

In the experience of social workers in the United Kingdom, the move away from autonomous work in an effort to rationalize resources has meant an embrace of care management models that promote interdisciplinary teamwork. The professional identity of social workers has been affected by these changes in that “social work’s identity is being fused with that of other occupational groups in multi-disciplinary teams.” (McDonald, et al., 2003, p. 203). McDonald, et al. (2003), observed that:

...the nature of social work has been changed radically by regime changes in which social workers’ commitment and allegiance is not to a professional project, nor even to a corps or local government social workers, but to a multi-disciplinary team geared to delivering central government’s objectives (p. 203).

This change in the nature of work for social workers in managed care settings creates fewer opportunities for them to act as autonomous professionals, subjects them to increased supervision and management by external sources, has forced an increased awareness of the financial costs of using resources to provide service, and has exposed social work students to additional ethical dilemmas due to managed care practices (Strom-Gottfried & Corcoran, 1998).

In Canada, managed care has not been as prevalent due to greater involvement in the social welfare field by government, and resistance by the public to the more radical versions of neoliberal modernization and dismantling of the welfare state. However, the same issues of cost efficiency and governments’ neoliberal focus on economic rationalization have entered into the provision of health care and restructured organizational systems in service delivery systems,
such as hospitals, affecting social work in these settings and consequently impacting field education (Globerman & Bogo, 2002). The operational structure of hospitals in Canada once reflected hierarchical structures where a department of social work would manage social workers’ involvement in teamwork. In the past, a director of social work would normally supervise social workers and students in their social work field education placements. As hospital structures have changed and moved toward programmatic organizations, where program managers handle the coordination of specific programs and operational functions, more and more social workers find themselves managed by professionals from other disciplines. These same social workers may not even have working relationships with other social workers or opportunities for mentoring specific to social work (Levin, Herbert, & Nutter, 1997). This has meant that lone social workers have had “to struggle on their own to maintain their professional identity and roles” and that support for field education has diminished (Globerman & Bogo, 2002, p. 13). Still within a Canadian context, a study of hospital social workers found that as hospitals have moved toward programmatic organizational structures, in response to calls for economic efficiency, social workers have felt disempowered and have reported that they have “limited authority, power, and time to make professional and career development decisions involving continuing education and student education” (Globerman, White, & McDonald, 2002, p. 280). Social workers in New Zealand have also been shown to experience marginalization in institutional health settings that have undergone organizational change (Beddoe, 2011).

Organizational change, also known as the reengineering of hospitals, during the 1990s in the United States created situations where departments of social work had less influence in the hospital setting and in health care decisions. Supervision for social workers by social workers decreased, and value conflicts increased due to trans-disciplinary approaches to care and practice
(Reisch, 2012). Twenty years after the hospital reengineering project in the United States, a large number of hospital social workers are supervised by professionals outside of social work, and engage primarily in discharge planning and the acquisition of resources for patients leaving the hospital. Social workers in American hospitals now spend less time engaging in activities surrounding counselling or crisis intervention (Judd & Sheffield, 2010). On the whole, social work in English speaking countries finds itself in an unenviable position in terms of relatively low professional status, diminished power and autonomy in some health agency environments, and growing job uncertainty within conservative political and economic social contexts.

4.3.2 Field Education and Professional Socialization

The social and political reality that has developed as neoliberal economic agendas have played out over the last 30 years, beginning with the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher coming to power in the United Kingdom (Payne, 2007), and the Reagan administration in the United States (Abramovitz, 1998), has meant a virtual assault on the foundations of social work in practice settings. The examples within health care provided above are just representative of one genre of social work practice. However, social work within the context of neoliberalism has meant that the entire project of social care and social welfare has been under siege. Consequently, those who participate in the field education process and the role modelling of social work values and professional identities for students and new practitioners have been under great pressure to find ways to thrive in these new work situations. The agency culture and work organization may be a source of possible conflict for students, since they must successfully navigate the expectations of work environments and learn the rules of the agency (Barlow & Hall, 2007). In this context, field experiences are from the students’ point of view an emotional
and demanding one (Litvack, Bogo, & Mishna, 2010), so acquiring a set of new professional values and forming an identity congruent with social work may be a great deal to ask of students. Also, learning in field education is not just limited to the agency or the work and skills of social work. It is also about the integration of personal knowledge and how students can “still maintain their personal identities within a profession that is not purely technical, but rather guided by value-based thinking that requires adopting certain tenets that may be contrary to what they believe” (Barlow & Hall, 2007, p. 410).

Students require guidance in this self-discovery process. In their practice learning, professional socialization and the development of a professional identity, students have been shown to be influenced greatly by the role models of their instructors, both within the classroom (Barretti, 2004a), and in the field interactions and experiences that they are exposed to in the agency setting (Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006; Miehls, Everett, Segal, & du Bois, 2013). It is unfortunate that in the era of limited resources for field education at universities, that the selection of field instructors is not given the time that is probably required to find willing candidates who are both qualified and able to teach a student practice skills with some proficiency (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2006).

The field experience is not a straightforward proposition where students are taught skills, then go practice, are evaluated and given feedback to become more proficient in what they are training to do and then become professionals. Students are taught skills and provided opportunities to practice (Drolet, et al., 2012), but in many agencies especially in health care settings they usually observe the work and interactions of many different professionals (Globerman & Bogo, 2002) and have a working mentor relationship with a field instructor (Fox, 1999), the quality of which can be a source of stress or support (Litvack, et al., 2010) since it is a
power laden construct for good or ill (Miehls, et al., 2013). They do all this in environments that may not value the work of social work or are trying to change the nature of the work to fit a certain ideological view of the world (Harris, 2003; McDonald, et al., 2003). And, at the same time students are navigating personal change about who they are, who they want to be and who they are becoming (Barlow & Hall, 2007). Let us not forget too, that the situations that social work deals with are not straightforward problems. Social work deals with the potential and the mess of human relationships, as well as the problematic outcomes of socio-economic dynamics.

The academic experience that usually precedes field education tries to prepare students for practice (Anastas, 2010), but may actually provide students with practice theories that are just not valued in many agency settings. Students are introduced to a number of perspectives that are considered to be essential to understanding social work and very useful in common practice situations. It is relatively easy for students to see the value of theories such as ecological systems theory (Germain & Gitterman, 1980), the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1996, 2006), person-in-environment perspectives (Saleebey, 1992), or ideas borrowed from other disciplines, such as social learning theories (Bandura, 1977) and developmental theories, like attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) for practice situations that are for the most part focussed on the care, well-being and development of an individual client.

There are also a whole host of other social work theories which are, arguably, a part of the essence of the social work curriculum in many schools of social work, at least within the Canadian context, that are representative of social work values such as social justice. Discussion of theories such as structural social work (Mullaly, 2010), anti-oppressive theory (Dominelli, 2002), anti-racist (Dominelli, 2008) and Aboriginal social work (Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009) are commonplace in many Canadian university social work classrooms. The academic
classroom may be the place where macro theories and transformative concepts of social work (Payne, 2007) and related values such as social justice are introduced, reinforced and suggested as part of a social work identity. However, in field environments, where individual students meet individual role models, both in their instructors and their clients, they may do unrelated forms of social work. For instance, to sustain interest in ideas and theories that support social justice in the transition to environments outside the university where they are not as valued may be very difficult. It may be a significant shock to students’ cognitive systems and to their developing professional identities, for them to take the theories that epitomize social justice value orientations of the profession into the field, when they may not have a clear understanding of how to use these ideas and concepts in a significant number of work settings (Baines, 2007). This may be especially difficult when the agency context, may not be warm to these concepts, and model different values that are counter to what students have studied in the classroom (Agliias, 2010). It is already difficult for some students to make the transition from classroom to field learning and practice. It has been shown that it can be challenging for students to take the skills that they have learned in the classroom and create the working links with the realities that they find in field placements or their first working experiences (Le Maistre & Paré, 2004).

All of the potential learning from the theories taught in social work classrooms to practice work in the field, requires some deep reflection in practice. Within professional practice across disciplines, it has been theorized that reflection is a necessary process and tool to develop and engage in, in order to improve and develop professionally (Schön, 1987). As we have seen, transformative adult learning theory, developed by Mezirow (1991, 1995), poses that reflective practices are essential to creating transformations in personal meaning perspectives and thus learning, since it is these perspectives that all learning is filtered through.
The context of field education, i.e., the individual learning environments and the greater society within which field education takes place, can present major external influences on students’ abilities to reflect on what they are learning, or experiencing, especially in terms of values. For instance, the change in general societal views, especially in the United States, away from “a sense of community responsibility for responding to social needs” (McDonald, et al., 2003, p. 202) means that the nature of how people respond to social care and social problems and their tolerance for these issues is limited. Harris (2003) argues that “the culture of capitalism has colonized the public sector” (p. 5). This means that social work and the way social workers practice and are valued has changed and is still changing. It also means that within front line agencies, social work is being reframed, reengineered and redefined. Some agencies, in order to survive, have reconfigured themselves to practice in ways that are more in line with the neoliberal imposed cost-conscious context. According to some social work theorists, this has meant a change in the very nature of social work practice:

Neoliberal social work not only challenges those who wish to employ more collective, structural approaches but also undermines the value base and the practice base of traditional social work. The domination of social work by budgets, the commodification of every aspect of the social work task, negates basic social work values, such as the respect for people (Ferguson & Lavalette, 2006, p. 313).

Social work students are very aware of the expectations that they will face in their field placements, and report anxiety around the need to quickly understand agency workings and their lack of skills and experience to provide the assistance that they will be charged with as interns (Gelman, 2004). There is also an acknowledgement on the part of students of the need to fit into
and be accepted by the organization in order to do your job well (Agllias, 2010) as dictated by the expectations of the organization. Thus, there is the very real potential for new graduates to become acculturated primarily to the agencies in which they find their first employment. This could be problematic for social work identity development if agency cultures and related practices do not reflect value orientations that are even close to matching those suggested by educators within the social work profession. Students might just unconsciously accept the status quo in an effort to fit in and do their job. Agllias (2010) suggests that in their development as professionals, new social work graduates must contend with their personal and professional needs in practice:

It seems then, that new graduates need to balance their ideals about “good social work” with their personal needs for acceptance and survival. Expressed another way, fitting into the workplace requires a compromise between their ideals and the realities of the practice context (p. 351).

It has been argued by social workers concerned with social justice, that “...as individuals, we have our own capacity to respond – that is, to accept – or to resist, or question, what we are presented with” (Carniol, 2010, p. 36). But students looking to complete professional programs are acutely aware of the need to be accepted in their field education contexts, so they may not be comfortable to raise issues that may induce conflict with those who are supervising (Miehls, et al., 2013), and perhaps grading them.

Students and new practitioners are faced with an adjust-challenge dilemma (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012) in their field education and new work situations. Does a person work to fit into the agency setting or do they challenge the status quo? Do social work students and new social
workers use all the theory, skills and values that academic social work settings have offered to them around social justice and battling structural inequalities? If some do choose to challenge the system, many do not. These social workers appear to settle into professional careers that may only reflect the title of social worker and not any of the range of value orientations that the profession may proffer as being essential to the work of social work. In terms of the student field experience, students may choose not to resist any negative messages about the profession that they witness and not give any conscious energy to questioning the status quo. The motivation to successfully pass the practicum portion of their professional education could be stronger than notions of openly adopting any social work value orientation or engaging in any explicit resistance to oppressive work or agency policies.

4.4 Discussion

The development of a professional social work identity for an individual may be more contextually driven than anything that has to do with what the profession or what educators have in mind for their students, or even what aspirants to social work believe they will embody in practice. Taking a page from ecological systems theory (Payne, 2005), students and social work professionals are in constant interaction with their work and field environments. These environments exert significant pressures on students and social workers to inform them of what is considered acceptable behavior, what is important to the agency and the principle agents of the work environment, and what is rewarded and valued. In navigating their field education and first work experiences, social work students and new professionals are not only exposed to what they have been taught in the social work classroom and what is theoretically prescribed to them by the profession, but also what they experience and witness in terms of what is role modelled
explicitly and implicitly in professional practice. Thus the fieldwork setting, as discussed above, potentially introduces another entire set of value priorities, value orientations, and identity choices for students.

Something that has not been well explored in the field education literature is the possibility that much learning and professional socialization takes place in non-conscious, implicit ways, especially in how students and new practitioners observe role models and their actions in practice environments. The idea that non-conscious and unconscious processes influence cognition, affect and motivation is no longer outside the realm of realistic or scientific possibilities (Westen, 1999). There is a growing evidence-based literature on how self-regulation, motivation, relational engagement, theories of mind and cognitive processing all depend upon implicit or non-conscious processes (Hassin, Uleman, & Bargh, 2005; Uleman, 2005). To revisit concepts that were introduced in Chapter 3, there is every possibility that the habitus of many socializing agents (Bourdieu, 1973; Costello, 2005) and field practice agencies that are influenced by a neo-liberal paradigm, could very well present messages and a toxic environment in which social work is not celebrated for what it can bring to organizations. It has also been argued that students “adopt and adapt the compatible and favourable qualities of the field instructor into their own behavior with clients and others” (Fox, 1999, pp. 66-67). But is this a totally conscious exercise, or are students’ practice skills and professional identities being formed by some non-conscious and unconscious processes and motivations as well?

Given the many situations in practice and new work experiences where many social work students and new professionals may observe an assault on their profession, could it be that some social work students are being influenced both explicitly and implicitly to rethink and question their developing loyalty to the profession? When students and new social workers see other
professional groups managing social workers, when they experience decreased professional autonomy, and they witness continuous change in the provision of social welfare by neoliberal governments, they see a profession that is weak, fragmented and undervalued. Is it any wonder that students may be slow or unwilling to acquire any new set of values aligned with social work or to self-identify as a social worker? What would an aspiring professional choose as the safe and secure alternative in terms of career and work: loyalty to a professional ideal and identity that might be ambiguous and not valued by an organization or potential employer, or acquiescence to an employer’s values and identification with a specific mode of practice?

Miller’s (2010) model of the socialization of social workers theorized that professional socialization and professional identity development encompassed a long process of learning that begins well before formal education in the social setting of origin of the student, and continues throughout their career, possibly for a lifetime. In this model, it is argued that social work education is just one small part of a larger socialization process. Just as formal education processes may play a limited part in professional socialization, a professional social work identity and the range of value orientations within the profession appear to be perceived by students as just minor elements of doing the work of social work. Adopting any new set of values and identifying with the profession may just be considered as a few insignificant discussion points in the background of their education, overshadowed by a long list of more pressing concerns for the student of social work or the newly graduated practitioner. From the academic social work literature, it is obvious that there is a wide range of what students may acquire in their education. In terms of external influences that affect the socialization process, there are some significant issues that present themselves in social work field education that may act as barriers to change or an acquisition of value orientations that align themselves with the
profession. Overall, social work education appears to have a limited effect in convincing students to accept any new set of values representative of significant aspects of the profession, develop positive attitudes toward helping work that has been associated with populations that the profession has historically served: the poor, the dispossessed and the marginalized, and to even self-identify as a social worker with some modicum of pride.

4.5 External Influencing Factors on Professional Socialization: Observations

The trend toward more conservative and neoliberal values throughout the world has permeated all aspects of everyday life affecting all individuals and groups. The belief in rugged individualism, a concern for material wealth and an acceptance of an individual-first consumption culture has made an impact on everyone. Some researchers have suggested that personal well-being can be measured by the satisfaction of subjective and objective needs, where subjective needs are psychological in nature such as dignity, a sense of control, emotional support and self-determination, and objective needs surround access to, or the acquisition of economic and physical resources (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). If this is the case, I would argue that students are more concerned with other subjective and objective needs rather than the development of a professional identity of a social worker or reflecting any values orientation of the profession offered to them. This just does not appear to be foremost on the minds of most students or new social workers.

Students and social workers are human. They want to feel good about themselves, have a sense of accomplishment and belonging, a want to feel loved, and to be able to financially provide for themselves and their loved ones. Becoming a professional may have more to do with economic gain than anything else. Altruism may play a part in drawing a person to social work and nurturing aspirations of being a social worker, but it may not remain a guiding force
throughout one’s professional development. Personal needs and wants may just be more primary. The need to pay bills and the want to have a certain level of material wealth and financial stability may have always been a major reason for entering the profession, equally as important as a want to help others and a want to work with people.

What we are really talking about here, is how students coming to social work have a specific view of how the profession is going to fit into their lives and how this view may be at odds with how the profession naively still assumes that aspirants to the profession are going to embrace values associated with social work and a new professional identity with a whole heart. We have seen how value ambiguity and value diversity might inhibit the process of values acquisition. Students may have quietly accepted what was offered to them at one point in the profession, when universities and schools of social work were more concerned with ensuring that those who entered the profession believed in the goals of the profession and were fit to practice, more than with managing costs and defending against, or courting, the neoliberal infiltration of higher education contexts (Newson & Buchbinder, 1988). With students viewed as consumers by universities and students viewing themselves as consumers of courses in order to acquire degrees (Lager & Cooke Robbins, 2004), how much of a student’s well-being is tied to acquiring any altruistic values orientation of the social work profession or self-identifying as a social worker? Becoming a professional usually means entering an occupation that has some autonomy, prestige and access to potential economic resources. Within a neoliberal educational and practice environment there is little outward benefit in adopting any social work values or in self-identifying with a profession that does not create economic wealth, no matter how beneficial the work is that it is engaged in.
Students are exposed to a great deal in their academic education: theories of human
development, sociological explanations for human behavior, a range of practice theories that are
supposed to help guide practice, and various value orientations that align with different
theoretical social work perspectives and occupations within the profession. In universities, social
work topics are surely taught with great enthusiasm, but are most likely met with a varying range
of receptivity and understanding. Social work education takes its cues from what occurs within
the profession. Since the inception of modern social work, the profession has debated the main
focus of professional practice and has always been concerned with two seemingly disparate
activities that have the same end goals: the alleviation of social ills and an end to personal
suffering (Hugman, 2009). This dichotomy of practice, this macro-micro debate, has been a
polarizing energy-draining dispute and continues to be in some circles (Specht & Courtney,
1994).

Field education is considered by students to be where they are exposed to the most
important learning experiences within their education (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). It is also
touted as the “signature pedagogy” (CSWE, 2008). However, social work researchers have
argued that the diversity of field education experiences do not contribute to a shared common
experience for students that could foster the development of a unique social work identity
(Loseke & Cahill, 1986). Combine this with a host of learning environments that may not value
what social work teaches students in terms of values or theoretical frameworks and then present
these messages to students in explicit and implicit ways, and a perfect storm in professional
socialization is created. Students’ socialization process may be influenced more by what they are
tasked to do, what they witness as being expected in their practice environments, and what is
respected by those professionals who are supervising and mentoring them, whether they are
social workers or not. They will cherish voices and ideas outside of the profession more than what the social work profession can offer to them in terms of any vision of a professional identity or social work values, whether that vision is unified, conflicted or ambiguous.

The diversity of work in the profession may be its greatest strength and weakness in terms of where social workers practice, who social work serves, how practice is conceived, and the people who are attracted to the profession. The role models already in the profession are as diverse as all other aspects of social work. The professional identity and images that individual social workers and social work educators have internalized and claimed varies greatly along many continuums of ideologies, practice focus and formal theoretical discourses from conservative to radical, social justice to social control, individual to societal, or even secular to religious. In their education and work, students and newly graduated social workers are exposed to a range of professional value and identity discourses as to what is perceived to be the main focus of social work and the significant value orientations that support this. Although the majority of social work educators in both academic communities and field agencies work hard to encourage their students to learn and grow, in terms of a conscious emphasis on values acquisition and professional identity development, I hypothesize that it is a situation where in many circumstances the blind are leading the blind. Many practicing social workers and educators most likely model the places of practice where they themselves feel most comfortable in their own identities and personal values. They may not consider the larger profession, best practices, other theoretical points of view, or even if their own values align with the profession or not. If this hypothesis even carries an ounce of truth, it is troubling since the influence of educators and field instructors as role models for students has been shown to be quite significant (Barretti, 2004a; Mielhs et al., 2013).
If the profession as a whole does not become clearer on what it considers important for its greater identity and future direction, if it does not undertake some sort of values clarification process itself, how will students choose a path that is in line with the larger profession? What would they choose? Would they choose what is comfortable and already known, perhaps from their own past experience and personal set of beliefs? Or would they embrace something that is unclear? If the profession cannot agree on what is considered important, in terms of values and focus, or even agree to concede that different points of view can be beneficial for all of social work, then developing social workers will most likely continue to choose what is comfortable and in line with their own values, regardless of the profession’s best intentions.

The profession of social work must work to strengthen to unify its values and identity and become very clear about where the profession could go into the future. If social workers cannot become clear about who they are, unify the value orientations that they purport to embody and defend, and as a profession assert some influence over their everyday work, then the profession may be limiting itself in terms of its capacity and ability to address the concerns of those it serves. Constant and rapid change in organizations and agencies has meant that social workers must possess a wide range of relevant skills that allow them to perform in ethically fluid and complex policy and organizational work environments or some way of quickly developing these new skills. The demands are great. Social workers must contribute effectively in interdisciplinary teams, embrace evidence influenced practice, and be able to “maintain a strong identity to contend with the potential encroachment of other professions” on their mandated work and work processes (Mirabito, 2012, p 250). New ways of social work practice must be developed in order to break free from the dependence on historical funders of service, such as government and charitable special interest groups who control funding and dictate the parameters of practice in
the current neoliberal socio-political-economic paradigm. It is within a different more holistic vision of practice that social work education might be able to provide an educational experience that would not be at odds with the various value orientations within the profession. Students might then find the role modeling that they require in field education placements to have the choice to adopt a reinvigorated values orientation for the profession and integrate micro and macro practice interests into a professional identity that they could be proud of and that serves as a solid base for professional life and the project that is social work.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

The idea for this exploration began as a response to an observation at a social gathering and other formal and informal events, about the tendency of some social work professionals to not self-identify as social workers, but as members of some other professional group, with their job description or with the organization for which they worked. It was also observed that these professionals demonstrated strong and varied opinions about what social work was to them and the values that they believed the profession to embody. In delving into the social work literature for clues as to why social workers might not identify with their chosen profession, the greater issue of the difficulty of socializing students to professional values that are offered to them in their education and the development of a social work identity emerged. It soon became clear that students do not consistently acquire values that are associated with the profession or form a new professional identity unique to social work in their social work education. The question posed was: What is preventing this transfer or incomplete socialization process in social work?

Professional socialization is a complex issue. It crosses boundaries of psychological processes, personal motivations and questions of agency; systems of belief; socio-political systems and economic structures; and also organizational structures, culture, the organization of professions and professional work processes. In addition, there exist internal and external influences that act as barriers to socializing students to the profession of social work. This is a multifaceted group of influences with clearly complex interactions. Influences on socialization internal to students include such aspects as the individual’s personal history, their goals, conscious and unconscious motivations, personal meaning structures and beliefs. Factors external to students that could influence socialization may include aspects such as the history and
the internal conflicts and divisions within the social work profession around identity and mission, the beliefs and culture of the larger society, the academic and field education components of social work education, and the current socio-economic and political climate that affects how social work is practiced.

Professional education can be thought of as a process of significant life change: novices with relatively low levels of practical skill and knowledge are being trained and provided with a new value orientation and way of thinking that aligns with the specific profession, they become committed professional members. They are expected to become professionals who are able to do the tasks of the profession, while supporting the professional legitimation of the profession in society. In some ways, as I have argued, professional socialization can usefully be considered as a transformative process in that this idea captures the complexity of the enterprise. However, this change into a professional social worker assumes that the value sets and the identity that the profession wants students to acquire are clearly formulated and accepted by all those responsible for its transmission. The messages that educators present about social work values, identity and practice, have to be clear and easily understood by those being socialized to the profession.

There has been a conflict within the profession since its inception, between a focus on therapeutic change and personal care of the individual and family embodied historically by the Charity Organization Societies, and a practice focus on societal change and social action represented by the Settlement House Movement. The threads of these conflicted visions of social work act as a foundational web for the present state of the profession and for the diversity found in practice environments, methods of social work practice, and the theoretical rationale for this profession’s existence. The debate that has been waged over micro-macro practices has led to differences in value priorities that tend to cluster differently around various theoretical and
practice methods. This has contributed, in my view, to a range of value configurations or orientations and has left the profession with fragmented identities, conflicted values, and students with blurred choices about what to acquire in their education.

Clarifying the messages surrounding the range of values and professional identities that are acceptable in social work education is one of the most important tasks facing the profession as a whole. The disparate views within the profession about what ‘social work’ is and the beliefs that certain areas of practice reflect the profession more correctly than another, do little to assist in building new professionals who can stand united in the professional project that is social work. The profession must, at some point, work to come to some clearer understanding around its values, identity and its direction. The co-existing value orientations that social work students are exposed to by the profession, in their education and in their own personal lives leaves them in a somewhat ambiguous position. When students are confronted by the social, economic and political forces that hold the work and the recipients of social work in contempt, what happens to them? Do they choose to align themselves with values and identities associated with social work or those offered by other professions? Do they retreat into their own personal values and the identity that they arrived to their education with, or do they attempt to reconcile all of the offerings and messages presented to them? Any agreed upon position needs to be stated clearly for both students and professionals, and not refracted through a theoretical position, such as radical, anti-oppressive, feminist, or clinical social work practices, as is currently the case.

I do not know how an effective values clarification project would be embarked upon within the profession in Canada. Not only is there the task of coming to some consensus regarding the acceptable range of values for the profession, but also the question of examining how these values would configure themselves around actual forms of work and inform practice.
The present socio-economic-political reality of many current practice environments might not encourage social workers to suggest or embrace a new and dynamic range of values that would find professional consensus, when it could call into question how the profession relates to, or supports the dominant paradigms within neoliberal societal and work contexts. As well, a clarification of values may require more of an emotional commitment to the work, the clients social work serves and the profession than some social workers may be willing or able to give. There may be benefits to practicing within ambiguity that some professionals may be unwilling to let go of. However, this should not scare practicing social workers and educators from at least becoming more aware of, or more honest about the disjunctions in the profession and the difficulties of socializing students to it.

Even if the messages around professional values and identity were uniform and easily understood within social work, the process of educating to allow students to examine material from new perspectives and transform a person’s underlying way of viewing the world would not be effortless. It is clear that students are not blank slates or empty vessels when they arrive at schools of social work. This should not come as a surprise to social work educators or the profession. Students as adults already possess a whole host of conscious, non-conscious and unconsciously held meaning perspectives and values that they carry with them into their education. From the explorations above, transformative adult learning theory, through the work of Mezirow (1991, 1995, 2000, 2006), shows the effort that is required to change underlying beliefs. If the profession of social work could agree to a coherent message about values and professional identity then transformational adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) might be used to inform how social work education could work with material that students bring to their
education. The critical examination of underlying personal meaning perspectives may be a necessary step in changing closely held beliefs in order to transform a person’s learning.

Critical self-examination and guidance that can border on psychodynamic therapy may be what is required in order to become aware of habits, thought patterns or any beliefs that may be one of the necessary conditions for new learning (Mezirow, 1990, 1998) and to acquire new values or develop a professional identity. The social work classroom and even the agency environment are not generally places where a deep examination of one’s views of the world and personal psychic material is considered appropriate, when perhaps it should be. This is what may be needed to change value sets, and to create professionals with a clear sense of who they are, and who have more health and capacity to bring to the work they are tasked to do.

There are of course limits to engaging in rational processes of self-perception and self-reflection. Students may not be entirely aware on a conscious level as to why they have even chosen social work as a profession. There has not been an overwhelming academic interest in exploring how implicit non-conscious and unconscious processes may affect how students of social work may acquire, accept or defend against certain social work values or what is asked of them by educators to become professionals. This is definitely a gap in the social work research literature that requires some exploration. Rational reflective practices in themselves, may be too cognitive and limited in nature whether they are suggested by transformative adult learning educators (Mezirow, 1991, 1998), or within the professional development arena generally (Schön, 1987), to assist students to capture the essence of what they may have to deal with in terms of their personal learning around becoming a professional. Quite possibly, there is much that students may bring to their educations at an unconscious level that would potentially inhibit socialization to a new set of values or a new way of viewing the world. The prospect of having to
address unconscious material in students’ educational and socialization experience is daunting. However, it has been shown that social work education both in the classroom and in the field can be a highly emotional experience (Barlow & Hall, 2007; Litvack et al., 2010), and this should be acknowledged and explored more in professional socialization and development, since the use of emotions in social work education is an underdeveloped pedagogical resource (Chung, 2010; Ikebuchi & Rasmussen, 2014). To be fair, the above suggestions should not only be considered for students or new developing professionals alone. Social work educators must consider being open to examining the role that they play in the confusion of socialization. Educators should not be given a ‘free pass’ in this professional socialization conundrum. It is entirely possible that educators, implicitly and in some cases explicitly, offer value orientations to students that prioritize values along their own personal professional preferences and not an objective view of the profession as a whole. Continuous critical self-reflection may be necessary for all involved, from social work student to educator to practice professional in order to understand one’s personal conscious and unconscious influences on the socialization equation in social work education.

Social work educators could also pursue tracks of research that would involve exploring non-conscious and unconscious processes and uncover new methods of teaching and developing professionals (Hoggett, et al., 2009). Hoggett et al. (2009), take a psyche-social approach to their research that values the idea of unconscious processes and the relationship between internal psychical processes and the social world. This work might be used to inform social work education as to what to look for in potential students who are willing to embrace values associated with the profession and populations that social work has deemed important in the past. If certain life experiences and cultural backgrounds appear to lend themselves to shaping
values and motivations in line with social justice and community development, could this knowledge be used to create more awareness and possibility for both the social work profession and potential social workers? This may be an avenue of research and practical application worth pursuing. I am not suggesting that only specific groups of people be courted or accepted into the profession. However, if groups of potential students are predisposed to certain value orientations that are difficult to cultivate in people, then the opportunity should not be missed for educators to develop methods of teaching or professional recruitment that can reinforce or enhance these points of view.

Within the current climate of neoliberalism, there is a need for social work to ensure that it defines itself on its own terms and not primarily from viewpoints outside of the profession. Current professional practices such as managerialism, or inter-disciplinary practice overshadow social work and relegate its values to drivers such as economic cost or the sensibilities of other professions. Work must be done to address how field educational experiences are being shaped by the ideology of neoliberalism, and influenced by professional values and role models that lie outside of the social work profession. It is suggested that schools of social work find innovative ways to prepare students to enter field education experiences in agencies that might not respect the range of value orientations in social work or role model vastly different professional identities. The profession also must find ways to become stronger so as to positively influence how social workers are viewed by those who fund, operate and manage agencies and even by social workers themselves. It is my suggestion that social workers, both as individuals and as a group, have to be assisted to learn to accept that they chose social work and to become more self-accepting of this project, warts and all.
There is another possibility that could change some of the external influences on the socialization to values and a social work professional identity. If social work developed new, different practice models that could thrive within the present socio-economic-political atmosphere without depending on traditional funding sources, such as government or special interest groups, then perhaps social work education could develop field education environments where there is a possibility of practicing and learning in a way that respects social work’s range of values orientations. Within such a practice environment, the macro-micro practice debate might then be conceived of as just a quiet engaging discussion where both sides are valued. This might be a dream, but perhaps it is what is needed to allow students the opportunity to examine their meaning perspectives and to transform into social workers who want to practice in line with a holistic view of the profession where values are not prioritized within some intra-professional hierarchy but are respected and granted equal weight and importance.

The limits of this thesis is that it touches on a very broad range of influences on the socialization of social work students and truly only skims the surface of the literature and research into the topics of socialization, value development, adult learning, non-conscious and unconscious motivation and defence processes, competing value orientations, neoliberal influences on education processes and professional practice, and personal motivations in a post-modern world. This thesis attempts to bring together many ideas. There is much that must be studied and expanded upon to build social workers who are not only technically skilled, but also are actually willing to do all that social work and the possible range of values orientations in the profession suggests, from personal change work with individuals to work in community development, to work with the most disadvantaged and also the most privileged. There is much that has not been explored.
The contribution of this work is that it provides an opportunity for both the profession and educators to reflect on the very complex nature of socializing developing professionals to new value orientations, or to possible identifications specific to social work. It is a call for the profession to re-examine how conflict in the profession produces mixed and ambiguous messages around values and identity. It also questions if social work education, as it is structured and practiced presently, can it actually change people: to transform them into the professionals that the profession aspires them to become.

In the twenty-first century, helping professions face more challenges than ever in terms of ethics, service delivery and the emergence of global social and economic problems that have impacts within local communities very close to home (Polack, 2004). Social work is now a profession that crosses international boundaries and currently is at a place where it is required to strengthen itself, in order to become a “global player” in the serious affairs of the world (Dominelli & Hackett, 2012). Greater knowledge about the socialization of social workers to values and the formation of a professional identity is valuable for improving educational and professional practices that could create strong and competent professionals who are willing to proudly proclaim what they stand for and identify as social workers. This is an area of study that begs for more work and research.

Even if the profession as a whole does not invest any energy into understanding or improving this endeavour, somehow students should be convinced to examine more closely why they are coming to the profession, what social work means to them, and if they really want to be here on terms that are other than their own. Social work is not simply the actions of helping someone to cross the street, telling people what they should do to improve their life situation, or the ability to place a band-aid on troubled social conditions as a temporary fix in order to ‘help
people’ and feel good about what we do as professionals. Social work is a complicated and challenging pursuit – it takes a thoughtful critical understanding of the root causes of social issues and personal problems, a knowledge of the current influences on the potentialities and limits on practice, honest evaluative reflection of an individual’s capacity to help others in a respectful and effective way, and a willingness to continue to learn about practice and oneself in order to develop as a professional. The acquisition of a social work identity is a co-created process, by both the student, the profession through its educators, and by society. The influences on professional socialization in social work are already significant and powerful, and, in my opinion, have been underestimated. The profession and its educators owe it to students and themselves to be as prepared as possible for the future professionals who may face even greater challenges to do the work of social work and to self-identify as social workers in a more interdependent, economically conservative, and uncertain world.
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