

# Worldview Diagnostic Scale: Educational Instrument for Enhanced Pedagogy on Religion and Spirituality in Social Work Education

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## Abstract

The academic literature has identified the urgent need for training competency-based social workers on issues of religion and spirituality. The academic institutions, however, have not responded to this need with curricula inclusion and classroom pedagogy on the subject. This study offers a concrete methodology that attempts to bridge the identified gap. The introduced Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) is a classroom instrument for enhanced pedagogy for teaching on religion and spirituality in social work education.

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

## 1. Introduction

The academic discourse on spirituality and religion in social work education attests to the fact that graduate social work curricula lack sufficient training on how to approach and include spirituality and religion in classroom pedagogy (Husain & Sherr, 2015; Hunt, 2014; Chamiec-Case, 2013; Coholic, 2012; Buckey, 2012; Senreich, 2013; Roberts-Lewis 2011; Canda & Furman, 2010; Crisp, 2010; Nagai, 2010; Sanger, 2010; Sheridan, 2009; Hodge & Derezotes, 2008; Henery, 2003). This fact has created an increased demand on the academic institutions to train spiritually competent social workers. This study offers a concrete methodology that attempts to bridge the identified gap in social work education. It introduces a classroom instrument, Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS,) for enhanced pedagogy on teaching on religion and spirituality in social work education.

## 2. Social Work Curriculum Development on Religion and Spirituality

Efforts to design theoretical and practical frameworks for curricula that include spirituality and religion in social work education have been recognized as insufficient (Groen, Coholic & Graham, 2012; Stirling et al. 2010). Scholarly work in this field is recent, offering original pedagogic strategies that are pioneering a new path of scholastic discussions. A review of these academic publications on curriculum development led to their classification into three categories:

1. Cognizant approach – publications calling for building students' expertise on spiritual matters through expanding their fundamental knowledge of diverse religious/spiritual practices and populations (Hunt, 2014; Mulder, 2014; Groen, 2012; Todd, 2012; Hodge & Limb, 2010; Sanger, 2010; Moss, 2005);
2. Generative approach – publications based on psychoanalytical theoretical framework that employs phenomenological and anthropological approaches to understanding human spirituality and religion (Liechty, 2013; Streng, Lloyd, & Allen 1973; Cannon, 1996).
3. Transformative approach - publications calling for a transformative effect on students themselves through promoting spiritual development and spiritual maturity (Clarke, 2012; Vokey, 2012).

The *cognizant approach* moves from instructional transmission to internalization of knowledge by providing the necessary conceptual framework within the classroom setting for solving real-life spiritual issues. This curriculum orientation is designed to prepare students for the inclusion of spirituality in bio-psycho-social assessment (Hunt, 2014; Groen, 2012; Senreich, 2013; Todd, 2012; Jim énez & Holland, 2004).

Out of the intersection of spirituality and religion in social work practice, Sanger (2010) developed four-quadrant framework (competent social work, religiously competent social work, spiritually based social work, and religiously

based social work) to be applied in social work curricula (p. 92). Moss (2005) advocated for PCSS analysis (personal, cultural, structural, and spiritual dimensions analysis) as a theoretical framework for social workers' education because the approach is "familiar territory to those who have been exploring the significance of implicit religion for an educational curriculum" (p. 51). Predominant goal of these methodologies is geared towards training students to recognize potential conflicts between their faith traditions and the tenets of the social work professions as stated in the NASW's *Code of Ethics* (2008) as they administer bio-psychosocial-spiritual assessment.

The *generative approach* proceeds from deep conviction in the loyalty of the social work profession to secularization. It advocates that social work education and practice should cultivate religious neutrality rather than giving special attention to particular forms of religious or spiritual expressions. This position is articulated by Becker's (1971) psychoanalytical theory of generative death anxiety and Streng, Lloyd, & Allen' (1973) schematic analysis of eight *Ways of Being Religious* patterns, which Cannon (1996) later revised with the intention of interpreting diverse religious experiences. This approach recognizes that religious and spiritual commitments are normal, "ontologically rooted and precious fruit of the human psychological and emotional nature" (Liechty, 2013, p. 130). And yet, these are seen as socially constructed concepts that serve as compensatory mechanisms against fear of death.

To simplify this phenomenon, Streng, Lloyd, & Allen (1973) developed a comprehensive classification of existing religious experiences. The classification clusters all known religious beliefs and practices into eight patterns that correspond to an existing worldview and culture. These archetypal structures (ways of being religious) then become a matrix easily applied to contemporary expression of diverse practices. The use of this matrix bypasses the recognition of a particular religion or spirituality; it rather recognizes that "the spectrum of ways of being religious will be present in some degree within all religions, just as any religion will encompass people of all styles or personality" (Liechty, 2013, p. 135).

Faithful to the commitment of secularization, this approach goes to the extremes in avoiding the mention of major world religions and instead uses descriptive terms to associate eight specific religious beliefs and behaviors with each one of them presented as a distinctive worldview. For example, the religious tenets of *Personal Experience of the Holy* archetype are recognizable monotheistic; *Daily Living That Expresses the Cosmic Law*, polytheistic; *Spiritual Freedom Through Discipline*, Buddhist; *Social and Economic Justice as an Ultimate Concern*, secular humanistic; and *New Life Through Technocracy*, materialistic/atheistic. This new form of structured spirituality has an important implication for social work education: while generative approach takes into consideration contemporary societal, cultural and religious pluralism, the omission of major world religions may cause confusion in field application when used with real client populations. It is probably for this reason that the generative approach has not been popular as pedagogical approach and so far has remained contained to the theoretical realm.

The *transformative approach* is a paradigmatic shift in curricula design for integration of spirituality in social work education. The emphasis moved from training students for competency-based practice with clients towards leading students on a path of development of their own spiritual potential. The rationale behind this approach is based on the philosophy that actualization of students' spirituality in the classroom will result in developing professionals capable of influencing the global social consciousness in the responsibility to address "the existential malaise that is partly responsible for the ecological, economic, political and social breakdowns that are reaching crisis proportions across the globe" (Vokey, 2012, p. 97). While this approach recognizes students' spiritual development as a strength it does, however, offers only one path for such development. The blueprint for integration of spirituality in social work education is hinged on the tenets of well-known "westernized" Eastern philosophy of non-dual states of consciousness with an end goal of "... understanding human-Earth relationships" (Coates, 2012, p. 68 -69).

From a transformative perspective, the integration of spirituality in social work curricula is aimed to address contemporary environmental challenges via the path of "a personal embodied understanding of particular moral traditions... oriented towards the achievement of a transcendent end" (Vokey, 2012, pp. 111-112).

The works of Coates (2012) and Vokey (2012) envision a purposeful preparation of spiritually transformed social workers that are capable of influencing personal and collective global consciousness. This is an end goal that puts responsibility on the spiritually transformed social workers, charging them with the duties to be instrumental in the spiritual transformation of individuals and groups they serve.

While this approach calls for "shared standards and procedures" (p. 113) and for "shared curriculum framework" (p. 116) within existing religious and spiritual traditions (Vokey, 2012), the mere notion that dispensing knowledge and developing skills are geared towards formation of a particular type of spirituality is reminiscent to Plato's Republic stratified society. This transformative approach to education assigns priestly duties to social workers with the expectations to be agents of spiritual change on individual, communal and global levels.

Criticism of this approach calls for consideration of power inequality between students and instructor. Studies have identified the strong correlation between an educator's own worldview and the influence it plays in students' worldview development (Dewitt, Deckard, Berndt, Filakouridis, & Iverson, 2003; Fyock, 2008; Sherwood, 2000). Otters (2013), Northcut (2004) and Farley (2005) warn that this practice violates students' rights for self-determination and falls under the same clause for clients' protection under the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008). "When social work educators eschew reason in favor of authoritative pronouncements regarding what is right (or, more subtly, fail to elicit minority opinions), they are modeling the misuse of power that the profession so vigorously opposes in other contexts (Flaherty et al., 2013, p.69).

### 3. The Case for Worldview-as-Life-Disposition Pedagogy in Social Work Curriculum

Prior to describing the Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) instrument, I would like to present the rationale for choosing worldview-as-life-disposition approach for classroom pedagogy on spirituality and religion. In joining the academic discourse on religion and spirituality in social work education, I offer theoretical and practical contributions. I suggest an expanded theoretical framework for the conceptualization of religion and spirituality in academic curricula in which the term "worldview" substitutes for the terms of "religion," "spirituality" or "sacred". The argumentation of spirituality's appropriateness in field application is being held against the coercive nature of religion in the same settings. Practitioners' preferences overwhelmingly lean towards recognition of spirituality and avoidance of religion (Furman, Benson & Canda, 2011; Canda & Furman, 2010; Graff, 2007; Jiménez, & Holland, 2004). This tendency mirrors the presence of classroom dichotomous attitudes of secularism and religion. Argumentation rises, however, that the academic task for training competency-based social workers requires acquisition of foundational knowledge on the main tenets of the world's major religions and spiritual traditions (Todd, 2012, p. 128). The proposed Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS) instrument addresses this concern by approaching this issue from individual's worldview as their life disposition towards religion and spirituality. This approach recognizes the functional relationship between individual's worldview and individual's spiritual practices and religious beliefs. While concepts of "spirituality" and "religion" require affiliation to certain religious beliefs and practices, the "worldview" model acknowledges the absence of such in one's life disposition. Due to its overarching framework of reference, "worldview" approach incorporates equally spirituality, religion, atheism and agnosticism as independent, yet imm`anent parts of its conceptual frame.

Furthermore, the worldview model expands students' horizons by projecting religious/spiritual issues and integrates them into communal, social, economic and political settings. Mayhew & Bryant (2013) also used the term "worldview" and deemed it more appropriate for investigation of college students' political perspectives, social values, and religious inclinations.

The proposed worldview model is familiar to social work practice because it mirrors DSM-5 logic. Similarly, as DSM-5 diagnoses mental conditions on a continuum spectrum from health to pathology so does the worldview model construct life dispositions on a religious/nonreligious, spiritual/nonspiritual, conservative/liberal, left/right continuum in identifying individuals' perspectives on theological, political, economic and social issues (Fig.1). Dissimilar to DSM-5, though, the worldview model doesn't consider either extreme of the spectrum to be pathological. The ability to classify personal views on a broad scale is advantageous in capturing the cultural, political, and religious diversity in the classroom. Its continuum structure is inclusive of diverse opinions, beliefs and practices from the professional social work field.

There is a recognized diversity among professional practitioners, which naturally mirrors the diversity of client populations (King & Trimble, 2013; Graham & Shier, 2009; Nielsen, Johnson, & Ellis, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997). There is also a tendency, however, for professionals to adhere to their own spirituality when choosing the application of spiritual interventions and technique with clients, as research has shown (Crisp, 2010; Sheridan, 2009; Walker, Gorsuch & Tan, 2005; Mattison, Jayaratne & Croxton, 2000). This fact may place the therapeutic relationship in unequal power dynamics that favor the service provider (Vargas & Wilson 2011; Blow, Sprenkle, & Davis, 2007). The examining function of WDS, therefore, becomes an invaluable source for ethical practice. Finally, when utilizing the instrument, students and practitioners would not only be able to identify their own worldviews but the worldviews of their clients.

This wealth of information is made available as a pedagogical tool to be used for the benefit of all students within the classroom structure. The nonintrusive manner of assessment is geared towards privacy protection and yet it allows for comparison of nominal scores between groups and individuals. The non-judgmental nature of the worldview scale invites discussion on diverse positions, opinions, beliefs, and practices, which naturally mirrors the social work field with its diverse client populations, and it is in full compliance with the expectations set by NASW *Code of*

*Ethics* (2008).

#### 4. Existing Instrumentation

Various instruments have been developed to measure diverse aspects of social workers' integration of clients' religion and spirituality in practice. These include: The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Practice Scale (RRSP) (Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 1992; Sheridan & Hemert, 1999); the Religion and Prayer in Practice Scale (RPPS) (Mattison, Jayaratne, & Croxton, 2000); the Spiritually Derived Intervention Checklist (SDIC) (Canda & Furman, 2010); Spiritual Lifemap, Spiritual Ecomap, Spiritual Genogram, and Spiritual Ecogram (Hodge, 2003); Spiritual Assessment and Ethnographic Interviewing (Roberts-Lewis, 2011). These are diagnostic instruments for evaluation of practitioner's practices and have yet to find their place and recognition within the classroom pedagogy on spirituality and religion.

Worldview instruments for classroom use have been developed and implemented at Christian educational institutions (Morales, 2014; Schultz & Swezey, 2013; Wood, 2009). The emphasis, however, is on worldview education mainly included as an apologetic tool, with the purpose of Christian identity formation.

Based on Sire's (2004) definition of worldview, Schultz and Swezey (2013) developed the Biblical Life Outlook Scale, derived from Three-Dimensional Worldview Survey-Form C (3DWS-Form C), which included three components comprising a person's worldview: propositions, behaviors, and heart-orientation. Naugle (2011), Sire (2004), Wood (2009) and Bryant (2008) considered these dimensions necessary for holistic worldview evaluation. It was not until the year 2013, however, when Morales (2013) investigated this test's validity for practical application. The 3DWS-Form C does not claim to measure any type of faith orientation. The 76-item survey only measures three hypothesized dimensions of a person's worldview. Propositional items measure comprehensive understandings of worldview with topics of history, hermeneutics, morality, and theology. Behavioral component evaluates respondents' behaviors in the church, and the heart-orientation items examined respondents' attitudes, feelings, and preferences specified by frequency values and a few levels of agreement response type (very rarely, rarely, occasionally, frequently, very frequently).









#### 5. Worldview Diagnostic Scale (WDS)

The *structure* of the WDS is build after Martin's (2006) philosophical, four-components framework that refers to the ontological, epistemological, axiological and teleological perspectives of a worldview. In order to reflect the particularity of the social work field, this study included two additional components to the WDS configuration. The final design of the WDS structure contains five subscales, which form the scope of the instrument—the five worldview dimensions, Theological, Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological, and Deontological.

The *content* of the proposed WDS is modeled after the existing PEERS (Politics, Economics, Education, Religion, and Social Issues) test developed by Nehemiah Institute, Inc. (2012). WDS instrument, however, is significantly condensed and adapted to the specificity of the social work field. PEERS's battery test is designed to identify participants' primary worldview in the political, economic, educational, religious and social areas of life as indicated by its acronym. WDS instrument contains 24 questions that are randomly assigned to each worldview dimension. These address a spectrum of issues from theological (religion and spirituality), societal, and economical perspectives. The text of each question under each worldview category addresses issues from direct social work micro and macro practice. Further, WDS' five dimensions form the two-tiers of the instrument designed to capture participants' worldviews on Human Nature (Theological, Ontological and Epistemological dimensions) and Social Justice (Axiological and Deontological dimensions). This is an intentional instrumental adaptation that purposefully transforms the WDS instrument to a relevant tool for specifically measuring the worldviews of social work professionals.

Worldview identification also follows the logic set by PEERS test where nominal scores reflect ratings and classify respondents in one of the four worldview categories: Biblical Theism, Moderate Christian, Secular Humanism, or Socialism. WDS instrument adopts this scale with modification of the last item to *Material Naturalism (Atheism)*. The change reflects the prospect to capture some participants who may identify themselves as theologically conservative but socially liberal.

Table 2. Worldview Index Scale

<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
							
<b>Biblical Theism</b>	<b>Moderate Christian</b>		<b>Secular Humanism</b>		<b>Material Naturalism</b>		
<b>0 – 1</b>	<b>1 – 3</b>		<b>3 – 5</b>		<b>5 – 7</b>		

An individual with *Biblical Theism* worldview holds the authority of the Scriptures high as a guide for reasoning on ethical, moral and legal issues. Truth is seen as absolute for all ages for all time. God’ sovereignty over all areas of life is unquestionable. The reality and the power of God and devil, the biblical blessings and curses are unequivocally recognized. Heaven and hell are real dimensions. The current social ills are contributed to the fallen nature of human beings caused by separation from God. Thus, political and civil governance should be limited to providing the necessary structures for prosperous communal life. The welfare of the disabled, elderly and the poor is seen as communal responsibility. The approach calls for shared resources to help the poor and the needy.

*Moderate Christian* worldview represents a selective compromise with some of the biblical laws and principles. These are individuals who according to Nehemiah Institute description are ‘one foot in the Kingdom and one foot in the world.’ They spouse the beliefs that while God oversees issues of the soul and eternal life people must control and be proactive with temporal issues. In social work field individuals’ positions on certain social issues may delineate along party line. Approval of massive governmental involvement in income redistribution, for example, is seen as appropriate for the establishment of social and economic justice. This understanding removes the responsibility from the individual, the family and the immediate community (as described in the Bible) and places it on the government.

*Secular Humanistic* worldview places human beings in the center of attention. Belonging to particular faith tradition is seen as necessary only as a socially constructed for addressing the human condition of existential anxiety. Identification as being “spiritual” but not “religious” is the overarching tendency for the holders of this worldview. A social action is deemed justifiable by the greater good it contributes to a larger portion of society. Individualism is abhorred as the greatest treat to global survival and is counteracted by strong political governance. Control over all assets (tools of productions) and redistribution of wealth are entrusted to elected leaders who justify decision-making process on the principle of greater good for all. Ecological rights are considered primary and prerequisite to human rights. Individualism and sovereignty of nations is subjected to the global governance.

The *Material Naturalism (Atheism)* as worldview is a further expansion of the secular humanistic worldview. Rejection of the notion that God exists is coupled with beliefs of origination of life due to a cosmic chance.

The above-described four worldviews with their five dimensional organization are further imbedded in a two-tier structure: the questions in tier one of WDS explore beliefs concerning the human nature; the questions in tier two of WDS address issues of social justice (Table 1).

5.1 Tier One of WDS: Human Nature

Tier One of the instrument clusters the Theological, Ontological and Epistemological dimensions under the study of human nature. Questions are purposefully chosen to account for the diversity of theoretical frameworks for study and understanding of human nature (Table 1).

Table 1. Tiers I and II of the worldview diagnostic scale instrument

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

The *Theological Dimension* is fundamental to a worldview due to its intrinsic value positions on God, world, and life. Four questions within this dimension address two aspects of a belief system, God and human life. Question 14 is cosmological in nature. Answer to this question involves belief about the origin and the destiny of all that exists, with extreme polarity between views on divine origin and guidance vs. views on random chance of creation. Questions 18, 22 and 27 refer to the theological doctrines of the origin of humankind. The spectrum of responses to these questions falls between the beliefs of divine creation represented on the scale as *Biblical Theism* to natural emergence of life forms within biological evolution and natural selection, represented on the scale by *Naturalism* as a worldview position.

The *Ontological Dimension* explores participants' positions on the essence of human life, development and existence. Martin (2006) identifies two significant worldviews associated with this dimension: 1) supernatural ontology associated with the biblical creationist view of humanity and 2) natural ontology acknowledging the Enlightenment position of a self-propelled and naturalistic force responsible for the creation of life. The four questions under this section were constructed with the intent to incorporate the above views into the direct clinical social work practice. Moving away from theologically dogmatic statements, the instrument asks participants to identify their belief on issues of health and illness, especially as they apply to the mental health field. Fear of death (Q19) is associated with Freud's psychoanalytic understanding of religious practice as existential anxiety as fear of death (Beck, 2012) and Becker's (1971) theory of generative death anxiety of "immortality striving" (Liechty, 2013, p. 126). This view explains religious beliefs and practices as socially constructed to function as defense mechanisms against the reality of human mortality. Without this mechanism the existential anxiety becomes destructively neurotic, pathological and dysfunctional. The opposite view represents the biblical understanding of anxiety and fear about unsettling life issues as lack of peace. Positions on mental, emotional and physical healing are contrasted with a statement on the role on repentance (Q16) and holiness attainment (Q29). Deeper exploration of this dimension addresses the issue of the state of illness as a reflection of the spiritual state of an individual (Q28). These concepts are intrinsic to social work professionals since their primary moral obligation is to work towards enhanced human life. Answers, leaning either towards the supernatural or naturalistic positions, represent not only the diversity of professional opinion but also mirror the diversity of client populations whom these professionals serve.

The *Epistemological Dimension* also addresses the issue of human nature but from a different aspect. Epistemology as a branch of philosophy studies the processes through which knowledge or truth is obtained. According to Martin's (2006) classification, knowledge could be obtained through revelation, reason, and intuition (p. 20). WDS makes these three options available to all respondents, capturing diversity of beliefs and practices from wide spectrum of the scale. Biblical revelational epistemology refers to God's self-disclosure through His written word, the Bible. Knowledge is also attainable through inquiry from the Holy Spirit of God. Conceptualization of this worldview in social work practice accounts for the guidance of the Spirit in seeking wisdom for intervention on behalf of client (Hook, Worthington, Ripley & Davis, 2011).

The second position holds the view that the human cognitive capacity has the greatest chances of arriving at adequate knowledge. Because these thoughts are autonomous they are believed to have precedence in using the human rational capacity for solving life problems. The cognitive-behavior approach in social work practice is derived from this worldview position.

The third epistemological possibility of intuitive knowledge asserts that humans know simply because they exist as part of the entire order within nature. The knowledge is simply given within and without the cosmos. Intuitive epistemology is derived through unity with the natural world and is based on pantheistic ontology. Practical conceptualizations of this approach are the therapeutic strategies built on the premises of a higher level of personal awareness through mindfulness practice.

Three clusters of questions conceptualize the epistemological dimension of human nature in social work practice: prayer (Q17, Q23), spiritual reality (Q24, Q26), and gender ordinance (Q30). The instrument allows for diversity of answers within a wide spectrum of the scale.

### 5.2 Tier Two of WDS: Social Justice

Respondents' views on the concept of social justice are reflected by Tier II questions, represented by the Axiological and Deontological dimensions. This is the value-based section of the instrument that explores participants' judgments of what is morally right and wrong. The questions in this section are designed to identify the internal valuing system that forms perceptions, decisions and actions, explaining why individuals do what they do.

The approach of contrasting two different ethical perspectives in WDS is modeled after Martin's (2006) classification of worldview dimensions, associating Axiological dimension with ultimate values of life being God, humans or matter. The modification applied to the WDS instrument is rather semantic than doctrinal: Martin's (2006) Moral dimension is referred in WDS instrument as Deontological dimension. The change gives the scale consistency and direction.

The names of the dimensions derive from two major branches of cognitive ethics theories that attempt to specify and justify moral rules and principles: relativist vs. universalist theories. Relativist theories include ethical subjectivism, cultural relativism, and divine command theories. Universalist theories include deontology, natural law ethics, utilitarianism (also called consequentialism), virtue ethics, and rights ethics. The two dimensions of WDS instrument,

Axiological and Deontological, delineate along relativist and universalist branches of cognitive ethics divide. While Axiology studies the nature, types, and criteria of values, Deontology has a stronger sense of the notion of moral obligation or the rules behind obligation.

The choice of these two ethical approaches in the WDS instrument was driven by their presence in the debate within the academic social work literature whether social work values are universal or culturally relevant. Their simultaneous inclusion recognizes the advocacy of a proportionist approach to social work ethics in the professional field (Lovat & Gray, 2008). Grey (2010), has captured the implications for social work, stating that “the principles-based approach of deontology has worked alongside teleological—consequentialist and utilitarian—approaches as social workers have sought to maximize the good and minimize harm while doing their duty and following their values, principles and codes” (p. 1795).

Axiology is concern about values (from Old Greek ‘axia’ meaning ‘value’ or ‘worth’) and as such provides ways to identify the internal valuing systems and their influence on an individual’s perceptions, decisions and actions. It delineates an action as right in terms of the good it contributes to an individual or society. Axiological approach to ethics denies ethical absolutes and it argues that abstract moral principles are useless. Good, just and right is determined by individuals themselves and are “relative to the situation at hand and the consequences of their decisions” (Lovat & Gray, 2008, p. 1102). A major tenet of axiological theory of ethics upholds the postmodern understanding that moral codes are expected to change as society changes (Danto, 2008).

Deontology differs from this approach by the nature of the choice of moral obligation to the right action that is grounded in eternally enduring moral codes. The meaning originates from the Greek word ‘deon’ which means “binding duty”. According to deontological ethics, moral structures are not fluid but rather permanently set. These are universal values that reflect absolute standards of morality established by external authority to which one must submit. In social work practice these reflect utilization of codes of ethics and professional standards as statements that determine professional behavior and practice. This approach subscribes to Kantian ethics with its appeal to natural law, human reason, respect and empathy for the other (Paquette et al., 2015). The deontological approach naturally subscribes to biblical ethics with divine revelation as a moral principle, judging an action whether or not it is commanded or forbidden by God.

Currently, there is an existing dialog in the academic literature concerning predominance of one ethical theory over another as it applies to social work practice. The discussion over the appropriate use of a specific approach reflects the continuous changes in welfare systems that shift with global economic trends, existing organizational rules, limited resources and time restrictions (Carey, 2013; Lovat & Gray, 2008). Further, it continues to voice a concern about codified social work ethic being out of touch with current pluralistic reality where the truth has multiple expressions (Bowles et al., 2006; Downie & Calman, 1994). The recommended changes are strongly related to the cultural, sexual and gender diversity of the current times, and broadening the scope of ethical consideration would satisfy the requirements set by *NASW Code of Ethics* (2008) for clients’ self-determination.

At the founding of social work as profession the practice adhered to the principle-based deontological ethics. Some studies equate the contemporary application of deontological ethics in social work with the neoliberalization of social services and market mechanisms care practices (Garrett, 2013). Respectively, axiological and teleological ethics are being deemed more adequate to a pluralistic society with diverse cultural and religious norms (Schreiber, Groenhout, & Brandsen, 2014; Keinemans & Kanne, 2013). The distinction, however, is that theoretical and moral judgments in everyday social work practice adhere to different ethical frameworks for moral reference (Bisman, 2014). Schwickert & Miller (2005) support the notion of considering both ethical theories as equitable since deontological approaches adhere to individual rights and axiological/teleological approaches adhere to communal interest.

The inclusion of two ethical dimensions increases the potential of the worldview tool to categorize the diverse spectrum of opinion as theistic, humanistic and materialistic. Their conceptualization in the social work field reflects the philosophical and political differences among them. The theistic ethics of question 3 would argue for the importance of preserving a person’s dignity when providing assistance as portrayed in the biblical story of Ruth. God’s mandate for providing for the poor voices clear concerns for preserving the dignity of a person by allowing the charity to be coupled with labor. This is a charity-based societal establishment that calls personal conscientious involvement and contributions for alleviation of the problem. Theistic biblical worldview is concern with fairness rather than equality.

Humanistic ethical provision for the poor would be concerned with the establishment of legal and material equality between the subjects of the society. To this end, the laws of the land would require obtaining personal gains from some subjects of the society in order to distribute them for the benefit of others. Egalitarianism as moral philosophy



is the political and economic mechanism through which goods are allocated and distributed equally.

The materialistic position also embraces egalitarianism but from a different perspective. It views the differences within society as a result of the survival of the fittest. Individuals with higher skills have a natural advantage to produce and accumulate wealth. This material inequality would result in different development of the subjects from different segments of the society. Thus, transforming the social and economic environment under governmental leadership is seen as the answer to establishing equality.

## 6. Methodology

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

The data was collected from an online survey sent to 237 Azusa Pacific University (APU) MSW alumni in three waves via Google Forms between September and December of year 2014. The responses of 110 participants constituted 46.8 percent response rate. They formed a single data set utilized to examine the psychometric properties of the worldview instrument.

Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, Version 22.0. and JMP®, Version <12.1.0> programs. Exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction method, using a VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser normalization was applied for the study of instrument’s factor model. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to determine whether the WDS instrument produces reliable data in terms of internal consistency.

### 6.1 Instrumentation

Contributions to the development of Worldview Diagnostic Scale are given to Sire (2004) on definition of worldview concept and to Martin (2006) on dimensions of worldviews. A modified version of five dimensional worldviews is adapted specifically to the social work profession. The scoring is a coefficient adapted from Smithwick’s (Nehemiah Institute, Inc., 2003) scale in which answers are rated in one of the four identified worldview categories: Biblical Theism, Moderate Christian, Secular Humanism or Socialism.

Prior to computation of the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and exploratory factor loading analysis, the original questionnaire consisting of 30 items was reduced to 24 to reflect improvement of the instrument’s internal consistency. After elimination of outliers, the WDS comprised of a 24-item questionnaire developed in a two-tier structure (Table 1). Tier I delineates the items in two categories: human nature (12 items) and social justice (13 items) Tier II arranges all 24 items in five dimensions: Theological, Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological and Deontological. The design does not separate specific items into separate parts to outline the five dimensions of the instrument. Surveyed participants were not able to identify which items were attempting to measure specific factors.

For all items the following scoring scale was used: agree without reservations = 0, agree with reservations = 1, not completely agree = 2, more agree than disagree = 3, more disagree than agree = 4, not completely disagree = 5, disagree with some objections = 6, completely disagree = 7. The scores were calculated on a numerical scale for each factor within the five worldview dimensions. On the scale lower scores correspond to conservative and higher scores to liberal values. Items from question 15 to question 30 required reversed scoring. The nominal scale scores formed an index within each worldview dimension with a range from a maximum of 7 to a minimum of 0 (Table 2), classifying them into: (0-1) Biblical Theism, (1-3) Moderate Christian, (3-5) Secular Humanism and (5-7) *Material Naturalism (Atheism)*. The WDSI does not contain demographic and experience questions.

### 6.2 Worldview Diagnostic Scale Instrument – Reliability Testing Analysis

For all of the five worldview dimensions, an exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction method, using a VARIMAX rotation with Kaiser normalization, revealed one-dimensional or bi-dimensional factor models. A rotated factor loading of .3 indicated the factor loading was not salient; thus, 6 items were rejected. The factor loading indicates that out of 30 items 24 items belonged to either factor 1 (Social Justice – Theological, Ontological and Epistemological dimensions) or factor 2 (Human nature – Axiological and Deontological dimensions) (Figure 1). Six variables didn’t belong to either factor. Failure to affiliate with either of the two factors qualified them for exclusion from the instrument. After the exclusion of six items (Questions 2, 13, 15, 20, 21, 25), the data yielded satisfactory levels of Cronbach’s alpha of .802(M=5.6, SD=1.57), indicating that the instrument produces reliable data in terms of internal consistency.

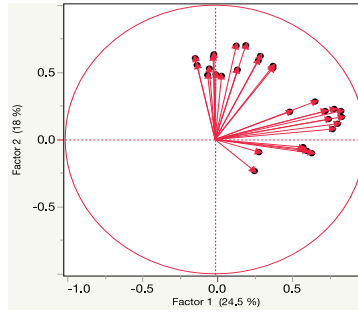


Figure 1. Loading plot display of two clusters of vectors pointing to different directions

Further exploration of the instrument’s reliability was computed on worldview dimensional subscale levels. Each of the five worldview dimensions underwent separate examination. An exploratory factor analysis aimed to identify the dimensionality of the instrument and the computation of Cronbach’s alpha showed its internal reliability. Any variables that failed to associate with the dominant factor were excluded. Cronbach’s alpha was computed prior to and after exclusion of identified variable(s) for display of improved internal consistency. The value of Cronbach’s alpha was judged according to George and Mallery’s (2003) scale: “ $\geq 0.9$  – Excellent,  $\geq 0.8$  – Good,  $\geq 0.7$  – Acceptable,  $\geq 0.6$  – Questionable,  $\geq 0.5$  – Poor, and  $\leq 0.5$  – Unacceptable” (p. 231).

For examination of the construct validity of the *Theological Dimension* subscale (Table 3), we used exploratory factor analysis to determine its factor structure. Q14 (God is distant and not involved in human life and history) was identified as a reversed phrase item and therefore a numerical reversal of the scale was applied prior to conducting reliability analysis. The third item, Q21 (Good relationship with one’s parents is a foundation of a prosperous and healthy life) was detected as a different factor and therefore this item was excluded from analysis. The theological dimension as a composite variable was computed from four equally weighted, standardized items: Q14 (God is distant and not involved in human life and history), Q18 (God created humans in His own image), Q22 (Life begins at conception), and Q27 (Death is not the end of human existence).

The composite variable ranged from 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (Agree without reservation) with a Cronbach’s alpha of .812 ( $M=1.37$ ,  $SD=1.57$ ). Cronbach’s alpha prior to the extraction of the unaffiliated variable Q21 was .720. Due to the procedure, the Theological Dimension subscale’s internal consistency improved from  $\geq 0.7$  – Acceptable to  $\geq 0.8$  – Good.

Table 3. Theological dimension factor loading

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
14. God is distant and not involved in human life and history	.658	-.537
18. God created humans in his own image	.922	.039
21. Good relationship with one's parents is foundational for a prosperous and healthy life	.128	.923
22. Life begins at conception	.849	.129
27. Death is not the end of human existence	.759	.118

The computation of the six *Ontological Dimension* subscale (Table 4) variables revealed a 2-factor model with two clusters oriented differently (Table 4). Q15 (Humans are free and fully capable to shape their own destiny) and Q20 (Healing depends on client’s willpower (own strength) to make changes in his/her life) formed a different factor. In order to improve the internal consistency of the test, these two items were removed from the instrument.

Table 4. Ontological dimension factor loading

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
15. Humans are free and fully capable to shape their own destiny	-.129	.871
16. Recognition of wrongdoing (repentance) is the first step towards mental, emotional and physical healing	.787	.190
19. Existential fear of death is lack of peace (uncertainly in one's eternal destiny)	.843	.023
20. Healing depends on client's willpower (own strength) to make changes in his/her life	.259	.667
28. The human spirit, like the mind and the body, is prone to illness	.636	.413
29. Attaining god's holiness brings mental, physical, and spiritual healing	.797	-.076

Further, the Ontological Dimension variable was computed from four equally weighted, standardized items: Q16 (Recognition of wrongdoing (repentance) is the first step towards healing), Q19 (Existential fear of death is a lack of peace (uncertainty in one's eternal destiny), Q28 (The human spirit, like the mind and the body, is prone to illness), and Q 29 (Attaining God's holiness brings mental, physical and spiritual healing), Q22 (Life begins at conception), and Q27 (Death is not the end of human existence). The composite variable ranged from 0 (Completely disagree) to 7 (Agree without reservation) with a Cronbach's alpha of .701 prior to extraction of Q15 and Q20 to .790 (M=2.12, SD = 1.48) which improved the subtest's internal consistency from being  $\geq 0.7$  – Acceptable to  $\geq 0.8$  – Good.

The *Epistemological Dimension* subscale (Table 5) yielded one-factor composed from five variables: Q17 (Seeking the guidance of Holy Spirit is crucial for successful counseling/therapy), Q23 (Prayer should be part of the therapeutic process for healing), Q24 (Biblical curses and blessings are in effect today), Q26 (Demonic possession should be considered in diagnostic assessment), Q30 (Gender roles are divinely assigned). All five variables clustered around one factor, which signifies satisfactory internal consistency. The composite variable ranged from 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (Agree without reservation) with a Cronbach's alpha of .872 (M=2.12, SD=1.48).

Table 5. Epistemological dimension factor loading

Variable	Factor 1
17. Seeking the guidance of the holy spirit is crucial for successful counseling/therapy	.871
23. Prayer should be part of the therapeutic process for healing	.849
24. Biblical curses and blessings are in effect today	.884
26. Demonic possession should be considered in mental health Diagnostic assessment	.668
30. Gender roles are divinely assigned	.800

The *Axiological Dimension* subscale (Table 6) contained nine variables: Q2 (Human beings are capable of building heaven on earth), Q3 (The biblical mandate to help the poor should be replaced by government welfare), Q 5 (Welfare state is the answer to poverty), Q6 (Strong private property rights policy creates unjust society), Q7 (Governmental redistribution of wealth is a just practice), Q8 (The global society [UN] can completely eradicate world poverty), Q9 (The government is responsible for the general wellbeing of all citizens), Q10 (World Bank should unconditionally forgive the debt of poor nations), Q11 (When one person becomes rich, another person automatically becomes poor). Exploratory factor analysis revealed two-dimensional plotting with question 2 alone forming the second factor. Removal of question 2 became necessary for the desirable increase of the Axiological Dimension's internal consistency as a reliable instrument. The remaining eight variables clustered around one factor. The composite variable ranged from 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (Agree without reservation) with a Cronbach's

alpha of .831 (M=2.40, SD=1.17)

Table 6. Axiological dimension factor loading

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
2. Human beings are capable of building heaven on earth government welfare	-.014	.846
3. The biblical mandate to help the poor should be replaced by government welfare	.378	.699
5. Welfare state is the answer to poverty	.340	.739
6. Strong private property rights policy creates unjust society	.805	.195
7. Governmental redistribution of wealth is a just practice	.695	.230
8. The global society can completely eradicate world poverty	.260	.587
9. The government is responsible for the general wellbeing of all citizens	.709	.062
10. World bank should unconditionally forgive the debt of poor nations	.640	.281
11. When one person becomes rich another person automatically becomes poor	.593	.379

In the computation of the *Deontological Dimension* subscale's exploratory factor analysis, four variables formed one-dimensional scale: Q1 (Moral values should change as society becomes more progressive), Q4 (People can build a just society without Judeo-Christian values), Q12 (The Ten Commandments are outdated norms of living), Q13 (Environmental rights are primary to human rights) (Table 7). Two variables, Q13 (Environmental rights are primary to human rights) and Q25 (Client's self-determination should not be encouraged when it violates biblical values) stood outside the otherwise homogeneous cluster, forming the second factor. Their exclusion from the final computation increased the internal reliability of the instrument, upping the nominal value of Cronbach's alpha from .727 to .804 (M=1.97, SD=1.71), which improved the subtest's internal consistency from being  $\geq 0.7$  – Acceptable to  $\geq 0.8$  – Good. The composite variable ranged from 0 (completely disagree) to 7 (Agree without reservation).

Table 7. Deontological dimension factor loading

Variable	Factor 1
1. Moral values must change as society becomes more progressive	.838
4. People can build just society without Judeo-Christian values	.843
12. The ten commandments are outdated norms of living	.819
13. Environmental rights are primary to human rights	.437
25. Client's self determination should not be encouraged when it violates biblical values	.529

## 7. Practical Implications for Social Work Education and Practice

The statistical analysis of the proposed Worldview Diagnostic Scale Instrument showed that the tool's reliability satisfies the standard expectations for field implementation. For the entire instrument the data yielded satisfactory levels of Cronbach's alpha of .802 (M=5.6, SD=1.57), indicating that the instrument produces reliable data in terms of internal consistency. Respectively, the five dimensional subscales also yielded acceptable levels of Cronbach's alpha of .812 (M=1.37, SD=1.57) for Theological Dimension; .790 (M=2.12, SD = 1.48) for Ontological Dimension; .872 (M=2.12, SD=1.48) for Epistemological Dimension; .831 (M=2.40, SD=1.17) for Axiological Dimension; .804 (M=1.97, SD=1.71) for Deontological Dimension.

Four of the worldview dimensions yielded a strong value of Cronbach's alpha and judged according to George and Mallery' (2003) scale scored "≥0.8 – Good" with only Ontological worldview dimension scoring "≥0.7 – Acceptable". These levels of Cronbach's alpha are acknowledged in the academic literature as very reliable for research implementation and data analysis.

The implementation of worldview instrument early in social work education accomplishes four major pedagogical tasks:

1. **Assist students in identifying their own philosophical, political, and religious life dispositions (worldviews).** The simplistic structure of the instrument allows for informal in-class use. The scale is universal with very clear instructions for items requiring reversed scoring. Students will be able within a few minutes to identify their worldviews. A quick polling of students' worldviews prior to using the WDSI for self-scoring is highly recommended. A post-self-scoring discussion will address possible discrepancies between students' perceptions and WDSI's actual scores. The tool allows for an extended discussion and reflection on individual views, beliefs and practices.
2. **Include students whose life disposition and philosophy is non-religious in nature (e.g., atheists and agnostics).** The instrument's resemblance with DSM-5's philosophical foundation allows for a wide variety of views and opinion along the conservative vs. liberal spectrum on issues of culture, religion, culture, economics, policies and politics. Unlike DSM-5, however, there is no consideration for pathology. Worldviews at both ends of the scale are recognized as legitimate and healthy life dispositions. This feature of the instrument captures the classroom worldview exhibition, which is very much likely to reflect the broad societal exhibition. This is an intentionally built characteristic of the instrument that accounts for its non-judgmental stance towards any worldview expressed.
3. **Increase students' knowledge of the existing major worldviews in the USA and globally for enhanced competency-based social work practice with a diverse client population.** The reflection on the results from personal worldview scores when coupled with lecturing on the major religious and spiritual practices from around the globe may serve as a good pedagogical strategy for training competency-based social workers on spiritual and religious issues.
4. **Eliminate what Otters (2013) voiced as a concern for unethical practices due to students' and educators' power differences within the classroom dynamics.** While a noble goal of the social work profession is achievement of a desirable change in individuals and the community, the final determinant for this change is centered on clients' free will in choosing the scope and direction of this change. Purposeful formation of a desired outcome is a clear violation of NASW Code of Ethics principles for self-determination. Social work education programs situated within religiously oriented educational institutions have an exemplary practice, successfully training professionals as abiding in NASW Code of Ethics service providers.

Finally, since the criteria for inclusion of the instrument's questions were based on their relevance to the US population, the instrument may be considered applicable to diverse client population. The American spiritual landscape currently has two distinctive characteristics: first, almost everyone (93 percent) still believes in God or a higher power (Chaves, 2011); and second, these beliefs are as diverse as the groups that exhibit them (Cooperman, Smith & Ritchey, 2015; Neshama-Bannister, 2015; Gerson, et al. 2000). Since the WDSI was designed to reflect this diversity in a non-judgmental manner, it is judged suitable for implementation not only with students within a classroom setting but also with diverse client populations as a part of bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment. This is a highly desirable pedagogical strength of the instrument that bridges classroom theory instruction with direct practice implementation.

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