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School Standpoint': Understanding Effects of Personal Experiences within School-Based Social Work Practice

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

‘SCHOOL STANDPOINT’:

UNDERSTANDING EFFECTS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
WITHIN SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIAL WORK

BY

EMILY J. SHAYMAN

CHICAGO, IL

DECEMBER 2018

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It is amazing how many people helped to publish this paper. First and foremost, I want to thank the 15 social workers who spent their free time talking and collaborating with the research team, and whose words formed the conclusions of this study. These women not only gave their own time and energy in hopes of adding to the knowledgebase of the social work profession, but continue put forth their fullest efforts as social workers every single day.

I've been told that writing a dissertation can be a lonely process. But, my fiancé, Nic, supported me more than he (or anyone) can imagine - in fact, he could probably have defended this dissertation for me! Nic, you are not only the love of my life, but also the accomplice to my career. I know you've been awaiting graduation with more anticipation than me... As were my parents and my brother - my favorite family members whose patience and encouragement influenced me to even begin this journey. Mom, dad, Corey - thank you for being the enthusiasts of this project.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, phenomenological study used Standpoint Theory combined with Positionality theories as a lens to understand the data and an analytical tool to determine how school-based social workers consider their general ‘sense of self’ within their professional decisions and practice approaches. Findings included three main themes that emerged from the data regarding participants’ overall ‘sense of self’ within school-based social work practices: social structure, personal identity, and professional role. Participants described these influences in fluid, flexible, and dynamic ways, and as having both positive and negative impact on their professional practices. These three components of school-based social work practice came together to form a conceptual term and accompanying model (‘School Standpoint’ Model). The findings in this study have implications for: advancing pre-service training for social workers in schools, improving current practice approaches through use of cultural humility, and show necessity to enhance educational policy in relation to school-based social workers’ job roles and responsibilities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Social work within the school setting first began as an intervention to support students whose backgrounds and/or personal lives created potential barriers for success in public education¹. Since the inception of the school social work² profession, school-based social workers³ have offered connections and resources between the school and the community/home environment (Allen-Meares, 2013; Constable, 1978; Costin, 1978). While legislative processes and societal changes have shaped the ever changing role of social workers in the school setting (Allen-Meares, 2013; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat, Kelly, & Constable, 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Raines, 2008), current social work professionals in schools largely continue to support individual students who carry additional barriers to their educational success (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013; Constable et al., 1996; Dupper, Rocha, Jackson, & Lodato, 2014; Frey et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). These current barriers are rooted in socio-cultural and/or situational characteristics that can vary among students, such as homelessness, language barriers, family crises, etc. (Joseph, Slovak, Broussard, & Webster, 2012; Paik & Walberg, 2007; Reardon & Galindo, 2009; Shaffer, 2006; Teasley, 2005; Teasley, Gourdine, & Canfield, 2010). Each of these characteristics may create conflicting socio-cultural

¹ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *education* for purposes of this study

² See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *school social work[er]* for purposes of this study

³ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *school-based social work[er]* for purposes of this study

needs between home and school.

All social workers are trained in relation to justice-oriented values and set to work within a multitude of settings. While some social workers practice in a one-to-one therapeutic setting, others work in hospitals and schools, or within advocacy/political organizations. Dupper et al. (2014) argue that “The training of school social workers in ecological systems theory, child development, and cultural diversity makes them particularly well equipped to engage in those environmentally focused tasks that address the structural and social barriers to learning, especially for vulnerable groups of students” (p. 71). They explain the discrepancy between the “broad-based training of school social workers and the tasks they most frequently perform” (p. 75), meaning that general MSW (Master of Social Work) training may not always suffice for more specific tasks they are required to execute during a work day. Social work professionals claim that their unique training related to cross-cultural needs and multi-systems theory allows them a unique perspective that will advance the individuals and groups with whom they work (Franklin et al., 2009).

Social workers employed within host settings⁴ may experience additional barriers to practice and may potentially keep them from implementing best practice models; public schools, for example, create such barriers to ideal practice (Berzin & O’Connor, 2010; The Center for Workforce Studies, 2016). Research and current literature explains some of these barriers: conflicting demands between professionals in a host setting, varying training approaches, and/or resource allocation are just some of the constraints that can cause conflict (Kelly et al., 2016).

⁴ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *host setting*

Yet, there is more than these systemic needs, however, that influence current professional decisions and practices. Postmodern theories and accompanying research has shown that individual practitioner choices stem from their personal reasons and perceptions as well, which can keep some social work practitioners from implementing best and/or ideal practice (Cross, 1998; Fong & Furuto, 2001; Krentzman & Townsend, 2008; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010). Standpoint Theory philosophizes that every individual understands the environment around her based on personal identities and previous experiences (Harding, 1992; 1998). It takes into account the notion that practitioners come from various personal and professional experiences. It then provides a framework for understanding how these past experiences may shape current perceptions and decisions (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009). In addition to accounting for the past, Standpoint Theory provides an explanation as well as an approach to understanding different perceptions and/or realities that clients (i.e. students and families) and their service providers (i.e. school-based social workers) may experience (Krentzman & Townsend, 2008; Pawlowski, 2006; Waite & Calamaro, 2009). Standpoint Theory explains how personal perspectives are created through lived social and political experiences (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; Pawlowski, 2006; Smith, 1987; Swigonski, 1994). Theories regarding individuals' *positionality*⁵ compliment Standpoint Theory by expanding its framework to further explain how the surrounding social structure includes extensive characteristics that can manifest within one's understanding of both their own reality and others' realities (Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; Kezar,

⁵ See Appendix B for definition and description of *positionality* for purposes of this study; this term will also be further defined and described throughout the writing of this paper

2002; Kezar & Lester, 2010).

Current research has examined reasons and implications surrounding demographic and/or situational disparities that school-based social workers and their students may face; practitioners often come from different backgrounds than the students with whom they work (Kelly et al., 2016; Teasley, Canifield, Archuleta, Crutchfield, & Chavis, 2012). In the United States, school social workers are about 90% female and about 80% white or of European American descent (Kelly et al., 2016; Shaffer, 2006). Literature surrounding the notion of therapeutic relationships leading to positive client feedback suggests that this mismatch between school providers and the students they serve could create misperceptions, misunderstanding and/or miscommunication (Nash, 1999; Saunders, Haskins, & Vasquez, 2015; Teasley, 2005; Teasley, Archuleta, & Miller, 2014; Tufekcioglu & Muran, 2015). Positionality research also exemplifies the potential danger of mismatched identities (Anyon, 1981; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Zamudio, Bridgeman, Russell, & Rios, 2009).

This study creates further understanding as to how and why social-based workers choose specific approaches and techniques in order to service their students. Using Standpoint Theory with an additional emphasis on Positionality, this study addresses the intersection(s) between ideal professional practices, systematic barriers/needs, and personal characteristics and identity of school-based social workers within the American education system. This study's use of Standpoint Theory allowed for a specific lens towards identifying which *standpoints*,⁶ or, components of personal identity, were part of the decision-making process for school-based social work practitioners. It found common personal characteristics described to be pertinent to

⁶ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *standpoint(s)* for purposes of this study; this term will also be defined and described throughout the writing of this paper

professional practices for social workers in school settings. Understanding these nuances can help to move the field of school social work forward by identifying how to provide best practice techniques within schools while remaining in accordance with values and needs of both the social work profession and the educational setting.

Background and Significance

While attempting to align with the changing education system and also adhering to the general social work framework, school social workers continue to support students whose socio-cultural circumstances negatively affect their ability to succeed in school while simultaneously developing the profession (Allen-Meares, 2013; Dupper et al., 2014; Frey et al., 2013; Kelly, 2008; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Raines, 2008). Historical patterns of the school social work field show that school-based social workers were first considered caseworkers or visiting teachers who provided families with community connections and resources (Allen-Meares, 2013; Broom & Trowbridge, 1926), but based on changing needs of society, the role of school social workers then expanded its scope to include provision of mental health services to students (Allen-Meares, 2013; Constable, 1978; Costin, 1978; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Raines, 2008). Therefore, school social workers currently use both micro and macro practice⁷ approaches along with case management approaches to support students in need (Agregta, 2006; Constable, 2008, 2016; Franklin, Kim, & Tripodi, 2009; Kelly et al., 2016; Kelly, Raines, Stone, & Frey, 2010; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2012; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). Due to school policy as well as pertinent local, state, and/or federal legislation, these varying tasks associated with the wide-ranging needs of the job create a vagueness that has

⁷ See Appendix B for definition and description of the terms *micro* and *macro practice*

burdened the growth of the school-based social work profession.

Societal trends, which create an inequitable achievement gap within the education system, continue to exasperate school teachers and school-based social workers. The population of Latino, Black, and Asian students continues to grow, changing the racial/ethnic makeup of the public education setting in the United States (Paik & Walberg, 2007; Flores, 2017). As Williams' (2014) analysis shows, "Most (approximately 76%) of the students in America's central city schools are African American or Latino" (p. 132). Yet while research shows that urban school social workers interact largely with students and families of color (McKay-Jackson & Massat, 2016), due to legal mandates and/or district policies, the nature of the work continues to address individual student needs and/or students within Special Education programming (Boland-Prom & Alvarez, 2013; Kelly et al., 2010; 2016). Williams' (2014), however, calls on social workers to continuously work towards diminishing the inequitable social situations that cause the existing achievement gap (p. 133). In order for school-based social workers to address the marked inequity and large achievement gaps between white students and students of color in the American education system (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Jeynes, 2014; Paik & Walberg, 2007; Rowley & Wright, 2011), the field must work towards diminishing systemic barriers in order to advance its purpose and specific job functions within the school setting.

In doing so, social workers in school settings must also reflect on the needs of their own specialty. One of these needs relates to the demographics of the practitioners themselves; social workers, teachers, and other school personnel maintain generally white and female demographics (Herzik, 2015; Jeynes, 2014). While school-based social workers are meant to support students of color and those coming from oppressed groups (Abrams & Moio, 2009; DiFrank, 2008), there are various reasons that the demographics of these professionals do not match the racial/ethnic or

gender demographics of the clients they serve (Allen-Meares, 2013; Costin, 1969; Kelly et al., 2016). For example, people of color may not have access to the necessary education and/or career paths as compared to their white counterparts, who more consistently have accessibility to attain the necessary requirements to be a social worker or teacher (Anyon, 1981; Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). Literature shows that this demographic mismatch may cause confusion or struggles related to academic expectations and/or school climate, culture, etc. (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Ambers, 2012; Byrd-Blake & Olivieri, 2009). As Bustos-Flores (2001) contends, different racial identities may cause misunderstandings between students and teachers (or other school staff members), which could further escalate students' academic and/or behavioral struggles, and ultimately be one of the potential causes of the inequity seen throughout the school system in the United States. Other research shows that additionally, there can be discordance amongst staff members, as staff members coming from varying cultural backgrounds may not understand and/or agree with one another about the needs of the students and the school (Ambers, 2012; Bustos-Flores, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative that scholars and practitioners understand the significance of personal identity within the work they are doing. Standpoint Theory and Positionality account for one way to examine these personal nuances and characteristic traits that practitioners bring to their work.

Theory Application

Standpoint Theory asserts that personal experiences shape both behaviors and perception (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Harstock, 1983; Hawkesworth, 1999; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Swigonski, 1994). Definitions surrounding Standpoint Theory express that social experiences are shaped and understood via individual lenses based on one's *standpoint(s)* (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017;

Pawlowski, 2006). A *standpoint* refers to components of personal identity, such as the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other personal characteristics (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Pawlowski, 2006; Smith, 1987).

Patricia Hill Collins (and numerous other philosophers and theorists) have used Standpoint Theory to further philosophize the concept of Positionality (see, for example: Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Milner, 2007; Tarrant, 2014; etc.). Positionality theorists have concluded that *Positionality* refers to an individual's position, (or location, point, setting, etc.) within the complex social structure in which humans live (Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Milner, 2007). Compared to Standpoint Theory, the concept of Positionality encompasses a more expansive meaning of human characteristics while also recognizing that experiences are fluid and ever changing. Positionality allows for movement between the multiple identities a person can carry while positing that outward social changes affect such dynamics as well. It provides a conceptual framework to support understanding of unique roles, beliefs, or perceptions that individuals have (Haraway, 1988; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007). Scholars have noted the concept of Positionality as an 'addendum' to Standpoint Theory. Researchers, including this researcher for purposes of this study, use Positionality to gain knowledge about how aspects of identity can affect people's beliefs and actions (Kezar, 2002).

Zamudio et al. (2009), for example, wrote about Positionality as it relates to the creation of knowledge. They examined their own race, educational attainments, lived experiences, and political legislation, among other internal and external variables that have affected their personal lives directly, and therefore explain how their unique backgrounds simultaneously and inevitably affected their understanding of research outcomes. They wrote about the significance of

inequalities and inequities, explaining that social location is important to individual knowledge and thought processes. They wrote, “An uneven social location makes consciousness varied, developing over time in fits and starts. People often experience oppression and privilege simultaneously.” (p. 460). They further explained that it is important to understand one’s personal position within the environmental structure available.

Zamudio et al.’s (2009) research uncovered that personal experiences are important to note in reflections about personal and professional outcomes. Their research participants, who were Latino preservice teachers, spoke about games they played as children, books they read in school, and interests they had growing up. Participants provided anecdotal information about their backgrounds when asked about reasons for their current opinions and/or actions. For example, having a mother who was extremely sentimental, or reading a powerful book about social justice when in school led participants to take specific action(s) when placed in other situations. Milner (2007) said, “Dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen can surface in policies and practices and in varying contexts—in mostly White contexts, in largely homogeneous contexts, and in highly diverse settings” (p. 397). School faculty members including social workers, whether consciously or unconsciously, are also adept to adapting these dangerous behaviors related to the effects of personal reasoning and personal identity when working with other individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Salinas & Sullivan (2007) found that teachers’ racial and ethnic identities were a key component to the curricular and pedagogical choices they made when teaching about history. A multitude of other studies show that teacher identity and belief(s) can be large factor(s) in students’ perception and learning of academic materials (see, for example, Anyon, 1981; Bustos-Flores, 2001; Cornbleth, 2002; Quiocho & Rios, 2000). For example, Bustos-Flores (2001)

surveyed bilingual teachers and found that they can more easily understand the needs of their bilingual learners. Quioco & Rios (2000) similarly found that there is greater empathy for students when there is a shared cultural and/or social experience. Yet there is currently minimal research regarding school-based social workers' overall role and their practice approaches in relation to their personal identities, experiences, and positionality.

Standpoint Theory with an emphasis on Positionality provides a conceptual framework in which researchers can critically appraise behavior and social interactions based on individuals' *standpoints* (Hawkesworth, 1999; Swigonski, 1994). Standpoint Theory explains that individuals understand each other and the environment around them based on personal experiences (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017). Therefore, this study sought to understand school-based social workers' professional identities in relation to their personal identities, lived experiences, and other positions they perceived as relevant and/or important.

Standpoint Theory explains that all individuals understand their own situations and make decisions based on their personal and unique lived experiences. This means that whether school-based social workers are consciously and/or unconsciously performing their work based on their own self-understanding, they inevitably have perceptions based on these qualities (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Swigonski, 1994; Teasley et al., 2014). Making decisions while consciously considering one's personal Standpoint(s) and Positionality is a component of best practice, in that it requires personal reflection and understanding of possible biases (Saunders et al., 2015; Teasley, 2005). Social work practitioners have a mandate based on the

NASW⁸ Code of Ethics⁹ (NASW, 2008) that requires social workers to develop a strong self-awareness and understanding of their own backgrounds, identities, and opinions (Krentzman & Townsend, 2008; Mama, 2001; NASW, 2001; Witkin, 2012). Ideas stemming from Standpoint Theory show the significance of such self-reflection. Swigonski (1994) highlighted Harding's (1992; 1998; 2017) Standpoint epistemology by explaining it as 'critical consciousness,' which gives researchers the understanding that personal characteristics shape experiences and "knowledge of the world" (p. 159). This then ties back to an underlying value of professional social work practice that posits sensitivity to differences and open-mindedness towards others' experiences (Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman, 2016; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

While Standpoint Theory stems from feminist ideologies, it is not limited to gender-related experiences; it relates to all forms of culture. Theorists Sandra Harding and Nancy Harstock, along with other related philosophers of this theory, (i.e.: Patricia Hill Collins, Donna Haraway, etc.) further used the approach to denote the significant lived experiences of various groups of people, such as African American women, immigrant employees, etc. Standpoint Theory has roots in understanding lived experiences via groups of people, especially those groups experiencing marginalization (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009).

Standpoint Theory has been used as a research tool and as a lens to understanding in a plethora of research studies, including topics related to immigrant experiences, racial relations, and gender studies (see, for example, Kinefuchi & Orbe, 2008; Tarrant, 2014). This theory

⁸ See Appendix B for definition and description of NASW

⁹ See Appendix B for definition and description of the *NASW Code of Ethics*

correlates well with the Council on Social Work Education [CSWE]¹⁰ requirement that MSW students learn about cultural competence¹¹, which includes understanding personal biases and learning to self-reflect (CSWE, 2018b; Teasley, 2005). In other words, during their pre-service training, practitioners-to-be must learn to think about race, ethnicity, age, and other personal experiences that co-create their opinions and actions (Pawlowski, 2006). In the same way, the basis of Standpoint Theory posits and maintains that “the sciences are inextricably part of the social order that supports them” (Swigonski, 1994).

Additionally, the theory aligns well with the demographics of social workers employed in school settings. According to the 2008 and 2015 National School Social Work surveys (Kelly et al., 2016), the school social work profession is comprised of about 90% females. At its core, Standpoint Theory is rooted in feminist foundations. Proportional to the overall field of social work, this profession and subspecialty attracts and retains female professionals (Shaffer, 2006). Standpoint Theory provides a lens in which to understand and analyze data for specific personal characteristics, traits, and experiences (Harding, 1991; 1992; Hawkesworth, 1999; Swigonski, 1994). The longstanding history of caregiving fields attracting female workers may have a strong influence on role designation and formation for school-based social workers (Kahn, 2005). The use of Standpoint Theory as a lens throughout data analysis allowed this researcher to specifically focus on and extract the meaning of school-based social workers’ thoughts related to personal characteristics (i.e. gender, race, age, etc.), unique interests, and lived experiences in order to find themes and connections between personal identity and professional practices.

¹⁰ See Appendix B for definition and description of CSWE

¹¹ See Appendix B for definition and description of *cultural competence*

Furthermore, the findings from the 2008 National School Social Work Survey (Kelly et al., 2016) showed that school social workers desire to work at a macro level, yet they are often restricted to working with individual and/or small groups of students (Kelly et al., 2010a). These findings evidence the fact that various environmental, legislative, organizational, and/or other ecosystemic needs create barriers to school-based social work practice (Cawood, 2010; Kelly et al., 2010b; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Phillippo & Stone, 2011; Sabatino, Alvarez, & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011; Teasley et al., 2012). Without first fully understanding current practitioner perspectives of the needs and nuances of their clients and reasons for their current approaches, systemic change to address these barriers would be limited (Fong & Furuto, 2001; Teasley, 2005). Therefore, school-based social work practitioners must continue to learn and grow in conjunction with changing racial/ethnic and other varying populations within the school system (Allen-Meares, 2013; Joseph et al., 2012). This study examined how school-based social workers think about and analyze their current professional practices while considering their own overall Positionality.

My Standpoints

As a current and future qualitative researcher, and throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I have experienced the meaning and importance of being consciously open and reflexive with those around me - including with research participants, colleagues, and personal friends and family. I therefore want this paper to begin with an open and honest self statement in order to provide you, the reader, with insight regarding my own *standpoints*, my own overall Positionality. I hope and believe that knowing vital information about me will additionally help you to better understand this research project.

I will start with my professional standpoints...

For most of the time I was working on this dissertation, I was also employed as a full-time school social worker at an elementary school in a northern suburb of Chicago. Since beginning as a school social worker, I have worked in four different school districts. I consider myself early in this career, in year six - though I have worked with children in various capacities since getting my first job at age twelve. It has been insightful to concurrently work towards strengthening the profession of school social work as both a practitioner and researcher. These two positions do not always (or usually) align in daily professional life. When seeing the effects that inefficiency and/or bureaucratic workplace conditions can leave on students, I feel frustrated. I worked to share research findings in my role as a school social worker, only to end up feeling incompetent or impractical when receiving negative responses. I wanted to carry a library of research findings in my pocket at all times. At the same time, after speaking with colleagues both from the research and practitioner groups, I remain hopeful and optimistic. I believe that there is a world full of professionals seeking methods to better support the children in our schools, which as you will read, was clearly evidenced by the words of the wonderful participants of this study.

I want to note my more personal standpoints as well...

I recognize that my personal understandings and perceptions of the world and research around me are present in the findings within this project, and will continue to emerge throughout future research as well - this is regardless of the conscious attempts and methods I use to subdue the effect of these innate and learned biases.

I am a white female - and know that I recognize the significance of this overwhelming demographic as a reason for need of this research project, as you will better understand after

further reading. I am Jewish. I am young as a professional - in my young 30's. I grew up in a northern suburb of Chicago. I never utilized school social work services as a student in k-12 public education, though looking back, I wish I had the knowledge to get to know these professionals!

As I publish this writing for fellow academics who can and will attempt to understand my own standpoints along with my professional conundrum - knowingly, from their own standpoints and positions as well - I am eager to keep going, which is how I am where I am right now. As a current and future qualitative researcher, I share these details with you in order to support your own understanding of my words to come. I feel that you need to know my standpoints, feelings, and biases right now, as we enter the world of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Part One: School-based social work in the past

The profession of social workers within the school setting developed in tandem with the overall social work field (Allen-Meares, 2013; Constable et al., 1996). Because of the parallel development, it is important to understand the history of the whole field in order to gain insight regarding the status of the current school-based social work profession (Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). Part one of this literature review focuses on the history of the profession, and how it grew to attain current day practices. It discusses the influences that societal and legislative changes have had on the orientation and approaches within the social work profession. This section then introduces the dichotomous (macro vs. micro) practices that social workers, including school-based social workers, experience within their professional fields.

Historical Patterns

The school social work sub-specialty has grown and developed alongside the rest of the social work profession. Accordingly, influences from the general social work profession overlay the development of the subsequent school social work subspecialty. These influences stemmed from changing socio-cultural and economic needs within society. During industrialization throughout the United States, students demonstrated various new struggles related to socioeconomic status or cultural misunderstandings. As migration flow increased throughout the United States, immigrant children and their families more frequently and consistently enrolled in

the American school (Allen-Meares, 1994; Constable, Flynn, & McDonald, 1996; Costin, 1969).

The concept of school social work emerged between 1906 and 1907 via civic organizations and other private agencies that worked to support students in difficult situations (Abbott & Breckinridge, 1917; Allen-Meares, 2013; Costin, 1969). The changing student population and varying cultural norms set a precedent for the passage of ‘compulsory student attendance’ legislation by 1918 (Stone, 2015). Then, immigrant students who had previously stayed home due to inadequate resources or lack of educational knowledge began to attend local schools (Stone, 2015). Therefore, as Franklin, Gerlach, and Chanmugam (2012) explained, schools struggled to meet the new needs and demands that immigrant and minority students presented (p. 83). In order to respond to these changing needs, several school districts implemented the ‘visiting teacher program’ circa 1913 (Broom & Trowbridge, 1926; McCullagh, 2002). Due to urbanization, the timing of these laws and changing contexts aligned with the development of the general social work profession (Franklin, Gerlach, & Chanmugam, 2012). Phillippo and Blosser (2013) asserted that, “Public schools at the turn of the 20th century faced near-impossible demands, and school social work emerged as one attempt to innovate in response to these demands” (p. 22). School districts sought out social workers due to their knowledge about various cultures and their abilities to build and maintain connections.

This development came at an inconsistent time for the overall field of social work, which was a time of adjustment and unsure growth. Psychoanalysis and therapeutic settings were gaining popularity across the United States (Payne, 2005, p. 79), and therefore the definition and functions of school social workers shifted to gain a more clinical focus along with the rest of the general social work field (Allen-Meares, 2013; Kelly, 2008; Raines, 2008). As professional

clinical models emerged, so did the case for these therapeutic services to be offered within the school setting (Allen-Meares, 1994). Teachers and school administrators¹ turned to ‘visiting teachers’ to provide insight and solutions while working with immigrant students and other students who were demonstrating difficult needs (Allen-Meares, 2013; Costin, 1978; McCullagh, 2002; Shaffer, 2006). Around this same time, society further acknowledged mental health needs and services within the United States, which included the recognition that students each have individual differences and needs (Allen-Meares, 2013; Costin, 1978; McCullagh, 2002). School social workers were therefore finding themselves as practitioners within the split dichotomy of macro practice (providing casework services for families in need to access education) and micro practice (providing clinical services to students in the school setting), and thus a clear definition of their role within the school setting significantly diminished.

However, despite the early generalist macro-focus framework for social work services that focused on the needs of all students and their families, school-based social workers then implemented services with a clinical focus due to changing legislation and educational policy in schools (Dupper et al., 2014; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013). The passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act [EHA] in 1975, for example, created an expectation that all students identified as having a disability could receive specialized support (Palley, 2008); schools needed specialists to support students with disabilities, and school-based social workers were already providing clinical services (Allen-Meares, 2013). The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990, which was a second version to the original EHA legislation, further solidified social workers’ clinical roles within the school setting (Allen-Meares, 2013).

¹ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *[school] administrator* for purposes of this study

Shift to clinical focus

Within the field of social work, and as compared to other helping professions such as counselors or psychologists, social work practitioners' use and understanding of justice-oriented values are intended to mark their unique approach to therapeutic practices (Payne, 2005). Social workers adhere to the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, which is meant to ensure equitable and empowering practices (NASW, 2008). The NASW Code of Ethics was initially a brief document that outlined what would be considered as ethically acceptable or unacceptable behavior(s) of professional social workers. It has since become the most visible document for social workers that outlines the key components of practice, and has become a document to reflect significant societal cultural changes and the social work mission (Reamer, 2013). The key values and ethics in the current Code of Ethics reflect: service, social justice, worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2008; Reamer, 2013).

However, despite these written documents that attest to the theoretical justice-oriented approach to the profession, many social work scholars continue to cite a need to reformulate theory, education, and practice approaches in order to engage social justice as part of daily professional practices (Finn & Jacobson, 2003; Mullaly, 2007 as cited in Salas, Sen & Segal, 2010, p. 93). Ruth, Velasquez, Marshall, and Ziperstein (2015) argued that the social work profession lacks a strong base of macro practice work despite its foundation that included preventative, equitable ideologies. They wrote, "The social work profession has consistently articulated a commitment to prevention and macro well-being, while paradoxically leaning heavily toward individually oriented solutions that focus on diagnosis and treatment." They wrote that preventative practices have become "minority practices" within the social work field

(p. 127). They further make an explicit call for urgent action from the profession's leadership in regards to the need for preventative work. Literature examining current school-based social work practices shows multiple factors that parallel this overall problematic dichotomy in the social work field (Constable, 1978; Constable et al., 1996; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015; Salas et al., 2010).

This paradoxical shift to clinical focus occurred concurrently as discrepancies within the education system magnified, and needs of the society at the time multiplied. Despite individual students receiving stronger clinical services related to their educational disabilities, the system-wide initiatives that were meant to decrease inequities were no longer priorities for school social workers. While culturally competent practice remained mandatory for all social work practitioners, the implementation of these practices changed to fit clinical settings rather than fulfilling system-wide, educational needs. Though just one factor of the growing inequities, the school social work profession lost its first vision to prevent and manage the conflicting cultural demands in order to reduce these significant needs within American education.

In addition to fulfilling these mandated clinical services, school-based social workers have the training and knowledge to understand the environmental needs of a school (Brake & Livingston, 2016; Stone, 2015). School social work scholars are calling for a reform, one in which school-based social work practitioners should address inequities that are prevalent across the United States (McKay-Jackson & Massat, 2016; Sabatino et al., 2011). In fulfilling the roles of social workers in the school host settings, and negotiating the micro / macro practice dichotomy of the profession, school social workers continue to respond to the needs of the clients they serve while attempting to adhere to relevant legislation, local school policy, and the values of the social work profession (Alvarez et al., 2012; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Salas et al., 2010).

Part Two: School-based social work in the present

Part two summarizes the current status of social workers employed in school settings. It provides relevant information regarding circumstantial needs and influences towards their role formation. This part begins by describing what the school social work profession looks like as a whole and then furthers the explanation as to why there are conflicting demands placed upon social work practitioners within school settings.

Descriptives and demographics of the profession

A 2004 survey by the NASW Center for Workforce Studies showed that 6% of all licensed social workers practice within a school environment (Whitaker & Arrington, 2008). This number may be low due to the inconsistent licensing requirements that could allow these school-based social workers to practice without a social work license specifically, and therefore not a participant in the workforce survey (Altshuler & Webb, 2009; Boland-Prom & Alvarez, 2014). Sabatino et al. (2011) provide further evidence explaining that the total number of school-based social workers in the United States is unknown. There is no official count of the school social workers currently making up the profession. Furthermore, they say, “Without knowing the prevalence and need for school social work services in the United States, it is difficult to make the case for developing specialized school social work programs” (p. 119). Social workers in school settings may be employed by the school district directly or through external agencies contracting with school districts; this contextual inconsistency is one reason that various school-based practitioners may have different licensure requirements. Scholars of school social work research continue to define and pursue legitimization the profession while also attempting to understand the needs of the specific host context(s) (Allen-Meares, 2013; Constable et al., 1996; Kelly et al., 2010a; 2016; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo, Kelly, Shayman, & Frey, 2017;

Phillippo & Stone, 2011). Yet with legislative and systemic needs, social workers continue to work within school settings via an array of professional positions. This research project is meant to provide insight towards understanding individual practitioners' reasoning for their specific techniques and approaches, which takes into account their professional position as part of their overall identity.

While there are multiple surveys of school social workers around the nation that collect demographic information of the practitioners, the Second National School Work Survey in 2014 provides one of the (if not the) largest data sets of information about school social workers specifically, with n=3,769 survey participants from around the nation (Kelly et al., 2016). This survey allowed for practitioners with various licensure to participate so long as they identified as being a social work practitioner within a school setting. Demographics from this survey showed: 91.2% of practitioners are female, 82% self-identified as being white or of European American descent, 88.5% reported having an MSW while 72% reported being licensed as a clinical social worker, school social work specialist, or licensed member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers (Kelly et al., 2016). Previous survey results showed similar findings in that the majority of school-based social workers are white and female (Allen-Meares, 1994; Kelly et al., 2016).

The demographics of the school social work profession - largely white, female professionals working with students from minority cultures - do not parallel the demographics of the student body of the American education system, as students of color represent a growing percentage of the country's population. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) found that as of Fall 2014, about 50% of all students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were white. About 16% were Black/African-American, about 25% Hispanic, about 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and about 4% 'other' races/ethnicities and/or a combination of several

racess/ethnicities. They projected that by 2026, the percent of students of color would increase and the percent of white students would decrease to about 45%.

This demographic mismatch between social work practitioners and students is important to recognize when studying role formation and job tasks of school-based social workers (Brake & Livingston, 2016). Shaffer (2006) recognized that the racial, ethnic, and gender makeup of professional school-based social workers has maintained consistency throughout the growth of the subspecialty. He said, “School social work practitioners continue to be primarily white women whose pay and status reflect the present low regard for teachers” (Shaffer, 2006). However, the demographics of the student population are continuing to change, with students of color projected to become majority of the population within the next ten years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Theories such as Standpoint Theory and Positionality allow for a lens in which to interpret this trend, such as through the understanding of power differentials that white women may experience.

Current school-based social work demands

Despite the shift to a clinically dominant profession, school social work scholars have more recently called for a return of macro practice techniques for school-based social workers. Allen-Meares (2013) predicted that school social workers can be significant supporters of the “growing diversity” in student populations, including new immigrant groups. She stated, “Multicultural competency ... will challenge our public schools and consequently the profession. In response, school social workers will need to increase their knowledge to remain effective assessors, advisors, and advocates for these students” (p. 8). Therefore, despite the mismatched demographics between school-based social work practitioners and the students they serve, scholars believe that the justice-oriented approach of the field allows for strong skills in

strengthening an equitable educational environment.

The call for advancement of the field echoes the role of visiting teachers and first school-based social workers of the early 1900s. Literature shows that school-based social workers currently support academic and social growth through both micro and macro-practice services (Allen-Meares, Montgomery, & Kim, 2013; Constable et al., 1996; Kelly, 2008; Kelly et al., 2010; 2016; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo et al., 2017; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015). In providing such services, school-based social workers act as part of an interdisciplinary team, seeking to “provide services to school children and their families, but also continue to evaluate their roles, services, and consequently modify them to meet organizational, contextual, and contemporary needs” (Allen-Meares, 2013, pgs. 1-2); this is currently accomplished through direct clinical services as well as school-wide programming and community outreach (Kelly, 2008; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo et al., 2017; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015).

In order to remain part of this educational team, Dupper et al. (2014) argue that school-based social workers may be adapting their practices based on unique settings specifically (ie: each independent school building or school district). Their research findings showed that “organizational and systemic socio-cultural factors affect the types of interventions that school social workers perform” (p. 71). Other school social work scholars relay similar findings that the role formation and description varies among practitioners (Allen-Meares, 2013; Kelly et al., 2010a; 2016).

This role ambiguity lends to the wide range of services provided by school-based social workers (Richard & Villareal Sosa, 2014). While the 2008 National School Social Work Survey (Kelly et al., 2010) found that the specific tasks for school social workers in Illinois included

nine main different components (small groups, parent engagement, social skills intervention, improving school culture, prevention interventions, committee work, community engagement, teacher professional development, and data analysis), these areas are wide-ranging and cover many large domains of the social work field (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2013; Kelly et al., 2010a; 2016; Phillippo et al., 2017). Sherman (2016) argues that school social workers can and should commit to a leadership role within the school because of this wide array of possible social work services. Allen-Meares (2013) and Phillippo et al. (2017) note that the school social worker role changes based on societal, legislative and other outside factors affecting the school system and surrounding communities. Yet others say that school-based social work practitioners may continue to perform their role and job responsibilities based on the apparent needs and/or available, enabling resources (Agresta, 2006; Dupper, 2002; Teasley et al., 2010).

Current practitioners also face complicated demands while forming their professional identity. For example, as Sherman (2016) again contends, school social workers should work towards leadership roles so that these adaptations can become a part of system-wide change. In doing so, school social workers continue to learn about the necessary power and authority dynamics within their host environment of the school system. And, as Jarvis (2012) claimed, "... when viewed in the light of power relationships within an organization, distributed leadership can be seen less as a deliberate strategy by subject leaders... than as a pragmatic response to a situation in which their degree of control and influence is severely circumscribed" (p. 480); this statement illustrates the complexity of the demands of an organizational context such as a school building. For these reasons as well as others, research shows that school practitioners strive to achieve these practice approaches, but can be hindered due to varying systematic circumstances

(Phillippo et al., 2017). For example, additional external factors, such as being a host site and therefore maintaining educational and academic priorities rather than social emotional and/or justice-oriented priorities, school-based social workers may find themselves overwhelmed and/or misunderstood amongst the power dynamics and/or authoritative differentials within their work (Davies & Ellison, 2001; Jarvis, 2012).

Standpoint Theory and Positionality theories also provide a lens to further understand power differentials with others involved, such as the students and families who the white practitioners may service. Yet literature also shows the importance of the power dynamics at play within collegial interactions in a workplace, which can include intricate details and nuances that stem from a plethora of societal demands. Therefore, this racial demographic is also significant when thinking about the interpersonal dynamics of school colleagues and various staff members. One's identity plays a part of shaping personal perceptions, and it also plays a part in shaping others' perceptions. For example, Vélez-Rendón (2010) explained that the teachers' identities "may be tested against conditions that challenge and conflict with their backgrounds, skills, social memberships, use of language, beliefs, values, knowledge, attitudes, and so on" (p. 637). She additionally asserted that minority teachers can face greater difficulties while forming their professional identity "due to the marginal positions they occupy in society that determine to a great extent their access to quality teacher education... In addition, they may experience isolation and alienation in programs that are predominantly white" (p. 638). Vélez-Rendón (2010) found evidence regarding the implications of identity for white teachers as well, and stated that "while the typical white female teacher enjoys a majority status regarding race, ethnicity, and social class, she experiences great difficulty when assuming the role of an authority figure in the classroom and within the school culture largely because of gender and

age” (Cattani, 2002 as cited in Vélez-Rendón, 2010, p. 638). Overall, literature evidences that professional identity development requires employees to negotiate the demands of these inevitable challenges (Miller, 2009, p. 175).

School-based social work: Micro or Macro?

As previously stated, an analysis of current job tasks for social workers in school settings demonstrates a parallel dichotomy to the general social work micro-practice/macro-practice dilemma (Dupper et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2016; Salas et al., 2010). Dupper et al. (2014) explained that “Although school social workers may be trained in developing and implementing multisystem interventions and despite their commitment to providing these interventions, organizational and systemic barriers appear to restrict the work that they actually perform.” Results from Kelly et al.’s (2010) national survey of school social workers echoed their statement by demonstrating this dichotomy between macro practice and micro practice activities within the school setting. Results from the survey showed that practitioners spend the majority of their time (40.92%) responding to individual student needs, versus less time (16.4%) addressing school-wide activities, such as prevention activities and culturally competent programing to address inequities among students (Kelly et al., 2016, p. 21).

Berzin et al. (2011) additionally reiterated these statements:

“Facilitating school-wide or system-level supports is reportedly engaged in less frequently. Less frequent attention to the school-wide focus supports the individually-oriented, clinical roles often assigned to social workers in a school. By focusing on this primary clinical role, there is a missed opportunity for collaboration in which teachers and the broader school community could learn from the expertise of the school social worker” (p. 499).

Social work is built on ideologies surrounding socioeconomic and racial justice (Payne, 2005).

Bye, Shepard, Partridge, and Alvarez (2009) found that both school administrators and school-

based social workers “indicated that increasing school attendance and decreasing discipline problems were the most expected outcomes of school social work services” (p. 107), even though school social work literature overwhelmingly describes school-based social workers as clinically and individually focused (Allen-Meares, 2013; Dupper et al., 2014; Kelly, 2008; Kelly et al., 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Salas et al., 2010). This again shows the inconsistent expectations made of school-based social work professionals; ideal practice (i.e. increasing culturally competent environments) does not necessarily align with daily demands of the work. Furthermore, individual practitioner choices and decisions based on the available resources and/or barriers will affect practice outcomes (Kelly et al., 2010; Phillippo et al., 2017).

School-based social work: The host setting

The aforementioned demands of current social work practice within schools are further pronounced due to the nature of working within a *host setting* (Kelly, 2008). This section outlines the significance of social workers employed via a host setting. First, the concept of a *sub-specialization* within the social work profession denotes a specific area of focus and/or practice, with possible additional guidelines and practice norms on top of existing social work standards. Therefore, social work practice often occurs within a *host setting*, when services are specialized to specific needs and/or specific populations (Broom, Adams, & Tovey, 2009; DiFranks, 2008; Hand & Judkins, 1999; Kahn, 2005; Quest, Marco & Derst, 2009; Wenocur & Reisch, 1989; Whitaker & Arrington, 2008). ‘School social work’ is a sub-specialization within the overall field of social work, yet not all social workers employed in schools have completed training for this specific specialty; for this reason, there is a difference between a licensed

‘school social worker’² and a ‘school-based social worker.’³

Literature surrounding various *host setting* contexts provides similar findings related to the difficulties and barriers that social work practitioners may face. Currently, there are more social workers employed in *host* (non-social work) settings than in *non-host* (primarily social work) settings (DiFranks, 2008). Despite this major phenomena, the social work field continues to cite difficulties and/or dilemmas in implementing and/or maintaining strong practice standards within its sub-specializations (DiFranks, 2008; Kahn, 2005; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015; Whitaker & Arrington, 2008). Some of these barriers may include: working as an ‘ancillary service’, needing to understand professional goals of the other fields, remembering to align social work services to the primary needs of the host setting, etc. (Allen-Mearns, 1994; Bye et al., 2009; Olsen & Olsen, 1967). For school-based social workers, this may mean that due to conflicting demands of the school setting, they could struggle to provide best practices, such as culturally competent instruction or expectations, for example (Constable et al., 1996; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat et al., 2016). School social work’s *host* setting is in an academic public school; primary intentions of schools are not necessarily directly aligned or correlated to social work practices (Cawood, 2010). This therefore lends to the fact that others colleagues’ (ie: teachers, administrators, etc.) may form uncertain and/or incorrect perceptions regarding the work that social workers are doing within schools (Bye et al., 2009).

Despite the attempt to develop coherent and consistent approaches to school-based social

² A *school social worker* has specific training and/or credentials to work within a school setting. See Appendix B for more information about this term.

³ A *school-based social worker* is a social work professional who is employed to work within a school setting; this social worker may not have all required credentials of a *school social worker*. See Appendix B for more information about this term.

work (see, for example: NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice, 2012; Frey et al.'s National Practice Model of the School Social Work Association of America, 2013; etc.), there continue to remain impediments to understanding why school-based social workers make their specific choices and/or use varying approaches within school settings. This practice discordance exists for several reasons, including being due to effects from district or legislative policies and mandates (Constable et al., 1996; Franklin et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat et al., 2016; Palley, 2008); it also stems from the inevitable inconsistency and differences that individual practitioners maintain based on their personal goals/values (Tyson & Bulanda, 2010). The school setting generally employs professionals seeking to disseminate academic knowledge to students, which is not the primary goal of the social work practitioner (Cawood, 2010).

Part Three: Gaps in the literature

Schools across the United States utilize social work professionals in many capacities, based on local and national legislation and also unique organizational needs and structures (Allen-Meares, 2013; Kelly, 2008; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013; Phillippo et al., 2017). School-based social workers therefore experience role discontinuity due to the varying tasks and differing needs of individual host settings (Dupper et al., 2014; Shaffer, 2006). This role ambiguity has been defined and analyzed by surveys in recent years, and findings show that school-based social workers continue to practice with individuals and small groups of students despite attempts to contribute to systemic problems (Kelly et al., 2016). Some of these practice barriers are known and explained in current literature, which include: conflicting workplace demands, resource deprivation, varying training models, and more (Allen-Meares, 1994; Constable et al., 1996; Franklin et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo et al., 2017; Richard & Villarreal Sosa, 2014). However, there are more barriers that have not yet

been explained within the literature.

The literature does not comprehensively explain how unique practitioner positionality can influence professional practices. There is little information regarding how school-based social work practitioners consciously and/or unconsciously recognize, understand, and/or utilize their personal identity (and/or overall Positionality) when making professional practice choices. Teasley and colleagues (2010; 2012; 2014) have discussed the pertinence and significance of cultural competence within schools specifically, though the intent of Teasley's research is focused on enhancing cultural competence for school social work practitioners. Many scholars have studied characteristics of 'strong leaders' (see, for example: Birnbaum, 1992; Kezar, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Rast, Axtell, & McGlynn, 2015), which relates to factors underlying role formation and role identity. For example, Kezar (2002) showed that personal identity is significant to understanding leadership qualities, and analyzes how personal experiences as part of positionality create leadership characteristics in general. However, there is no study that depicts how personal experiences and/or positionality may affect professional practice choices made by school-based social workers.

Social work literature shows that the profession has both micro and macro practice approaches, also evidencing that the social work role in schools can be ambiguous at best. Scholars are calling for an advancement in the understanding and implementation of school-based social work functions and tasks within their professional host site(s). Studies show that systemic policies, workforce conditions, and conflicting practice demands by the host site cause a discordance in the professional role descriptions among school districts across the United States. The current body of literature lacks substantial evidence regarding barriers and support that the individual practitioner may experience and/or understand based on Positionality. There is

no research that gives a current understanding to practitioners' self-recognition within their professional practices as a school-based social worker.

The literature is also missing a strong theoretical base that can support these claims, which can be fulfilled with the use of Standpoint Theory and Positionality. That is, the literature lacks clarity regarding the conscious and/or unconscious use of individual positionality in relation to social workers in school settings specifically. Using Standpoint Theory, with the unique additional focus of Positionality, as a lens for this understanding, fulfills another missing theoretical aspect of school social work literature. These findings could help to move the school social work field forward in several ways, such as by enhancing an understanding towards how carry out best practices as a school-based social worker while maintaining alignment with personal values and understandings, as well as with host site (school setting) demands and professional social work values at the same time.

Research Questions

My overall research question is as follows:

How do school social workers describe their practice choices based on their personal 'standpoint(s)' (i.e. 'sense of self'⁴)?

There are four subsequent research questions to the overall question. These four questions (in no significant order) are as follows:

1. What personal *standpoints* (i.e. characteristics such as demographic characteristics, personal interests, or past experiences) do school social workers describe as influences on their decision making about school social work interventions?

⁴ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term '*sense of self*' for purposes of this study

2. What do school social workers tell us about the ways in which personal characteristics influence their understanding of their professional roles and responsibilities?
3. How do school social workers describe their use of personal interests and knowledge in their professional practice?
4. What do school social workers voice about the ways in which their personal feelings guide their professional tasks?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: APPROACH, DESIGN, AND ANALYSIS

Methods

This study aimed to understand when, how, and why school-based social workers use their own *Standpoints* and *Positionality* (ie: demographics, personal characteristics, previous experiences, understanding of social power/social capital, etc.), within their professional practices. In doing so, this study used a qualitative dataset, including 33 semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 different social workers working within school settings. As the researcher, I attempted to capture the authentic, lived experiences of these social workers by interpreting their voices and perspectives through the use of a phenomenological approach and a theoretical lens; I utilized both Standpoint Theory and accompanying claims of Positionality as theoretical concepts during analysis.

The purpose of this research was to gather a stronger understanding of the nuances related to professional decision-making that can contribute to the knowledge base of school social work. I hope that the new understandings and knowledge from this study can be disseminated for educational and training purposes, for knowledge leading to improvement of larger organizational contexts, and for policy-making purposes within broader state and/or federal legislation. In this chapter, I will explain the research approach(es), methodology, and analysis of this research project. This chapter discusses the ways in which I, as the researcher, used rigorous data-gathering and analytic approaches; I will also discuss the methodological

limitations encountered throughout the research process.

Approaches

Epistemological approach: Phenomenology

The concept of ‘phenomenology’ asserts that each individual person experiences the world uniquely, and as such, each individual behaves differently from others even when within the same situational context(s) (Bevan, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Witkin, 2012). For example, I as the principal researcher for this specific study, in conjunction with the rest of the research team, naturally experienced dual roles and complex relationships. Therefore, the approach for this project needed to consider the external nuances and environmental impact as well as possible explicit and implicit personal biases of the researcher(s). This study required an approach that considers external influences and allows for a flexible process; the phenomenological approach allowed me to capture external influences and remain flexible.

Phenomenology is the “focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.24). Therefore, the phenomenological approach allowed me to consider the subjectivity and various experiences of participants in order to guide me towards possible understanding (Bevan, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Witkin, 2012). Phenomenology also posits that experiences are ‘shared experiences,’ therefore allowing me to analyze data in a way that could better generalize to a group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Padgett, 2008). Within this study specifically, ‘shared experiences’¹ were found both within connections amongst the participants as well as

¹ Some ‘shared experiences’ between participants and the researcher included, but is not limited to: working as school-based social workers, identifying as female, living in or near Chicago, etc.

within the relationship of the researcher (me) and the participant(s). Phenomenology allowed me to consider the findings in relation to school-based social workers and in relation to a somewhat more general extent of professionalism.

Because this study sought to understand how school-based social workers perform their work and make decisions, a phenomenological approach allowed for the verbalized experiences, thoughts, and opinions to capture the ongoing work of social workers within school settings. Phenomenological epistemology was a natural approach for the purposes of this study because it allowed both the participants and this researcher (me) to define and understand our own roles and experiences throughout the research journey.

While professional social work literature has a plethora of information stemming from phenomenological approaches, the sub-set of literature specifically about school social workers (and, school-based social workers) does not include extensive research using a phenomenological approach; phenomenology is somewhat rare in the literature about social work in schools. For example, after reviewing the existing literature about the role of school social workers, I found that the information has been mostly derived from quantitative studies, mainly using survey approaches; some of the research comes from systematic reviews of existent papers, which focused on interventions. There is also relevant information related to historical trends of the progression. However, while scholars have previously investigated the job tasks and responsibilities of social workers in schools using these approaches, the literature does not discuss their professional performance in relation to their perceived, subjective *standpoint* or *positionality*. This study, by using a phenomenological approach, allowed me to analyze the data in order to seek further understanding of practitioners' subjective experiences within various school settings, thereby enhancing an understanding of professional identities and more general

workforce development for school-based social work.

This study helped to fill a gap in the literature because of its in-depth approach, stemming from qualitative analysis of subjective experiences, rather than descriptive or correlated statistics coming from general surveys. The approach for this study was meant to enhance understanding of in-depth reasons behind existing survey responses and other quantitative findings (see, for example, Kelly et al., 2016). It was meant to create a stronger understanding of the professional field of school social workers by discovering patterns that emerged from multiple individual subjective experiences.

Theoretical approach: Standpoint Theory and Positionality

Within the wider scope of the phenomenological approach, I used more specific theoretical constructs as a lens to examine the data. Standpoint Theory and the accompanying concepts of Positionality were chosen as both the lens for understanding the data as well as for use as a more specific analytic tool (Hawkesworth, 1999). Standpoint Theory posits that individuals experience situations uniquely based on their personal characteristics and social standings (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Haraway, 1988; Harstock, 1983; Swigonski, 1994; Tarrant, 2014). Positionality, a sub-component, became a significant addition to the literature as various scholars explained their philosophies and research findings about it (see, for example, Acevedo et al., 2015; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007; Zamudio et al., 2009) and others to the more general Standpoint Theory; positionality explains that identity may be fluid and dynamic, depending upon one's location in the social structure and current events within society. Together, Standpoint Theory and Positionality allowed for the participants' voices to be analyzed with purpose and meaning, while still honoring the authenticity of their thoughts, perspectives, and explanations.

In addition to providing a lens towards analysis of participants' personal anecdotes and statements via Positionality, Hawkesworth (1999) claims that Standpoint Theory can be purposefully used as an analytical tool. She says that one's *standpoint* carries both demographic details as well as the historically relevant perspectives. The multiple criticisms, interpretations, adaptations, and modifications to the theories (Haraway, 1988; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002) have given Standpoint Theory and Positionality a legitimate body of literature on which their use has grounded implications and meaning, creating a sufficient 'heuristic device' (Bevan, 2014) to inform data and guide exploration of knowledge (Hawkesworth, 1999).

Furthermore, additional conceptions such as 'situation knowledge', 'subjective knowledge', and 'strong objectivity' provide a form of analysis that accounts for multiple experiences (Acevedo et al., 2015; Bevan, 2014; Haraway, 1988; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010; Witkin, 2012) or multiple *standpoints* (Harstock, 1983; Hawkesworth, 1999; Orbe, 1997; Swigonski, 1994; Tarrant, 2014), as was necessary and useful for the purposes of this study. As Orbe (1997) explained, "[Standpoint Theory] challenges researchers to inquire about various groups and cultures different from their own, in purposeful and relevant ways" (p. 27). As such, the theory allowed the experiences, thoughts, and opinions of these social workers to be grounded in multiple realities, and based on numerous factors, such as personal and professional characteristics, beliefs, interests, and other defining variables.

Standpoint Theory provided a strong approach to analyzing this data, as the concepts are "attuned to problems pertaining to objectivity masked by traditional social science methods" (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 136). As a postpositive, constructivist stance, Standpoint Theory is open to multiple realities; it contends that 'plurality' is a standard characteristic across all humans (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 136). Furthermore, this theory takes a non-objective stance to

understanding others. The research team worked together throughout the data collection process to ensure as much scientific rigor as possible. This researcher also used scientific techniques such as reflexivity and bracketing, and member-checking as a means to put aside personal biases to the best possible extent.

In order to uphold this study to rigorous standards, I used Standpoint Theory, along with Positionality more specifically, because they offered a clear lens with which to read and interpret the data. The literature regarding these concepts posits that there are boundaries between error and truth and/or *standpoint* and ideology (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 151). Therefore, while analyzing and attempting to understand the realities of both the field of social work as well as the field of education, Standpoint Theory “accredits evidence, structures perception, and provides the rhetorical force for particular arguments, and in so doing, help us to assess the comparative merits of competing claims” (Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 151). In adhering to the scholarly concepts of these theories, I made sure to consider the thoughts and opinions of participants as distinct and unique, yet also in relation to thematic needs and opinions of the emergent findings overall.

For purposes of this study specifically, Standpoint Theory and the expanded tenets of Positionality were used both as a lens to analyze the interview data and as an analytical tool to actively assess towards stronger understanding how social workers within school settings may have been thinking about, reflecting, and/or practicing with self-awareness. During analysis, references that related to personal experiences, personal group memberships, personal interests, as well as experiences or feelings related to power and authority were noted. Through Standpoint Theory and Positionality, I attempted to determine patterns, trends, and broader emerging concepts related clearer role identity of the participants (Zenobia, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Because existing research shows that the school social work profession is varied, with

inconsistency among roles and responsibilities (Agresta, 2006; Allen-Meares, 2013; Frey et al., 2013; Kelly, 2008; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat et al., 2016; Phillippo et al., 2017; Phillippo & Blosser, 2013), findings from this study can be used in order to create a more unified approach to educating future school social workers as well as moving towards stronger overall professionalization of the field. Standpoint Theory and the encompassing concept of Positionality led me to examine the ever-changing, dynamic culture(s) that participants experienced within their respective school settings. I attempted to better understand these participants by embracing the multiple realities and structural influences; I also adhered to the notion that I as the researcher, along with each practitioner within this study, brought a unique identity, individual social location, and different perceptions to the data overall.

Data and design

Background information

This study used qualitative data collected from individual, semi-structured interviews with members of The School Social Work Professional Learning Community Project (PLC)², collected through the 2015-16 school year. This PLC was created and implemented for school-based mental health practitioners³ for two main purposes: one, to create a space for these practitioners to collaborate and learn from one another, and second, to investigate various components related to job performance of school-based mental health clinicians. The PLC leadership team (the PLC leaders⁴) included six professionals and scholars within the field of

² See Appendix B for definition and description of the *Professional Learning Community (PLC)*

³ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *school-based mental health practitioner*

⁴ For purposes of this study, *PLC leaders* refers to the researchers and implementers of the 2015-16 PLC Project. See Appendix B for more information.

mental health, based out of Loyola University of Chicago, Northeastern Illinois University, and Lurie Children's Hospital. These professionals (including myself) worked together to plan for and implement the PLC meetings while concurrently collecting data via individual interviews with PLC participants throughout the school year.

The 2015-16 PLC cohort⁵ met together a total of 10 times. The first meeting was an in-person orientation to the project and also included various administrative processes, such as gathering contact information and receiving informed consent from those agreeing to participate in the research component of the PLC. All other PLC sessions took place via an online meeting room platform (Adobe Connect). The nine online PLC sessions included various formats: direct instruction from PLC leaders (i.e. lectures about collecting data, the meaning of evidence-based practice, how to use self-care, etc.), group share-outs (i.e. current projects and needs of PLC members, etc.), PLC participant⁶ presentations (i.e. participants presenting on topics they know well, such as trauma-informed practice, executive functioning lessons, etc.), and time for open questions. During the online PLC meeting sessions, PLC participants were encouraged to share thoughts and participate in the chat room by asking questions and/or adding thoughts.

In addition to the PLC whole-group sessions, all participants were also assigned to a 'mentor group.' These groups ranged from 2-4 PLC participants and facilitated by one PLC leader. Mentor groups met in person and/or online (at the individual group's discretion), and used each other as resources for their professional practices. The PLC leader assigned to each

⁵ For the purposes of this study, *PLC cohort* refers to both research participants and researchers as the whole group collaboratively. See Appendix B for more information.

⁶ For the purposes of this study, *PLC participants* refers to the research subjects; members of the team not including the leaders/researchers. See Appendix B for more information.

mentor group offered additional resources and acted as the intermediary between the mentor group and the general PLC cohort. PLC participants were continuously welcomed and encouraged to provide feedback and insight regarding their experiences as part of the cohort group, either online and/or during mentor group meetings. While PLC leaders ultimately planned for PLC sessions by generating potential ideas and planning specific presentations, the PLC participants provided thematic suggestions and posed questions to which PLC leaders could respond.

Interview protocol and data

During the initial formulation and creation of the concept, the PLC leaders discussed the dual purposes of this PLC: first, to provide an open space for current professional school-based mental health practitioners to learn from one another, and second, the investigative research process. In order to answer the proposed research questions for this study, I used the data collected by the PLC leaders through semi-structured interviews with the PLC participants during the 2015-16 school year.

The main objective of the interview protocol during this research project was to seek participants' feedback and responses related to the PLC itself. Therefore, the interview protocol heavily focused on other concepts from the broader study, regarding professional learning rather than concepts specifically related to Standpoint Theory and/or Positionality. For example, some topics posed within the interview protocols included, but were not limited to: practitioners' use of evidence-based processes, feelings related to stress and self-efficacy, relationships with teachers, etc. However, the protocol included questions specifically related to this research study as well. These specific questions in the semi-structured interview protocol directly prompted

about personal qualities and characteristics⁷. The remaining content within the interview protocol did not explicitly pertain to Standpoint Theory or specifically related ideas.

Secondary data analysis

Due to the various research intentions of the dataset, this specific research study used the dataset as though it were a *secondary data analysis*. Secondary data analysis “is analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose” (Smith et al., 2011). Long-Sutehall, Sque, and Addington-Hall (2010) also explain that existing data sets can be useful and pertinent for use in additional studies by completing secondary analysis.

A positive, different factor of this specific study as a secondary analysis is that I was personally a researcher on the team and was involved and part of the entire process. Literature generally shows that a significant limitation of secondary analysis relates to the masked and/or unknown background of the data (Smith et al., 2011; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010); because I was part of the process, I had knowledge of all developments within the research process, which allowed for stronger analysis, and therefore understanding of the findings. Therefore, while these data were collected for various purposes and analyzed in a way similar to secondary data analysis, a benefit to the analysis of this data is that I, as the researcher, personally partook in the initial data collection process.

Initial participant recruitment and sample

After gaining human subjects research approval, PLC leaders began the recruitment process via Quota and Snowball Sampling methods. The recruitment process focused on the PLC intentions related to professional learning, seeking professionals who wished to grow

⁷ See Appendix C for the complete interview protocols

professionally through this group. For research purposes, PLC leaders determined that at least seven PLC participants were required in order to have a sufficient group of participants for effective professional collaboration as well as fully saturated data. Participants were recruited by using various professional connections. PLC leader Dr. Michael Kelly, announced the opportunity to join the PLC during a professional conference for school-based mental health practitioners; all attendees of the conference were welcome to join. After the conference, a follow-up invitation email was sent to all practitioners who were part of the listserv for the conference. Snowball Sampling was then implemented, as PLC leaders encouraged potential participants to invite their friends and colleagues who could also benefit from the PLC experience.

Originally, 20 people expressed interest in attending the first PLC session/orientation in order to learn more about the project as a whole. By the time the PLC leaders completed the first round of interviews, there were 16 participants in the PLC. After the first round of interviews, participation continued to decrease by attrition, for a total of 12 continuous participants⁸ at the end of the year-long PLC. Attrition may have occurred due to unforeseen time commitment and/or schedule changes on participants' behalves. Participants were not asked and did not verbalize a reason for terminating their participation in the PLC.

For the purposes of this paper, the final sample included 15 social workers who were working within school settings in various capacities and positions. One PLC participant was eliminated from the sample for this specific study because she is a school counselor rather than a

⁸ For the purposes of this study, '*continuous participants*' refers to those who attended the majority of PLC sessions and participated in all three interviews for research purposes throughout the 2016-16 school year; other participants may have participated in the majority of PLC sessions but only completed 1-2 interviews and/or stopped participating mid-way through the year. See Appendix B for more information.

social worker. The interview protocol did not require that interviewers specifically ask about the participants' personal demographics (age, race, etc.), and therefore some conversations led way to these characteristics being disclosed, while others did not. Table 1 shows the existent demographic and identifying information extracted from the dataset regarding the complete sample after all interviews were coded and analyzed (*see Table 1 below*).

Table 1: Description of sample, including participant and worksite identifiers

<i>Attributes / Variables</i>	<i>Number of participants (N = 15)</i>
<u>Participant Race</u>	(n=15)
African American	5
Caucasian	4
Indian American	1
Not identified	5
<u>Participant Gender</u>	(n=15)
Female	15
Male	0
Not identified	0
<u>Participant professional role/title</u>	(n=15)
School social worker	11
Dean of Social Emotional Supports	1
Social worker employed through school-based health center	1
School social worker employed through special education cooperative	1
Not identified	1
<u>Participant employment (FTE)</u>	(n=15)
Full-time	15
Part-time	0
<u>Participant school/work setting</u>	(n=15)
Public school	8
Charter school	4
Private school	0
“Other” (ie: therapeutic or alternative school)	2

Not identified	1
<u>Participant Worksite Grade levels</u>	(n=17)*
Elementary (kdg thru 5)	9
Elementary & Middle (kdg thru 8)	1
Early Childhood, Elementary, & Middle (pre-kdg thru 8)	1
Junior High School (6 thru 8)	1
High School (9 thru 12)	3
Not identified	2
<u>Geographic location of school/work site (state)</u>	(n=15)
Illinois	14
- <i>Within city limits of Chicago</i>	6
- <i>Suburbs of Chicago</i>	4
- <i>Not identified more specifically than state of Illinois</i>	4
Georgia	1

*Note: n=17 because one participant stated that she works in three total school buildings; all other participants worked in one building.

Initial data collection

Prior to starting within the PLC cohort, each PLC participant chose to give informed consent to PLC leaders to be a research participant; they signed consent agreeing to participate in 1-3 interviews with a PLC leader and agreeing that PLC leaders could record each online PLC session. These interviews included questions related to their job tasks and functions, feelings of professional self-efficacy, stress levels, personal qualities and characteristics, among other topics as well. Interviews were conducted by one of the five PLC leaders. Leaders were randomly assigned to the participants they interviewed, though as one attempt to limit possible bias and/or conflict of interest, it was ensured that the interviewer could not be the same person as the mentor group leader.

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with the first interviews generally lasting longer than the second and third interviews; this was most likely due to the nature of being asked

the questions for the first time. The first round of interviews were completed during October thru November 2015, the second round of interviews were completed during December 2015 thru January 2016, and the third round of interviews were completed at the end of the academic school year or during the following summer, in May thru July 2016. Researchers attempted to interview each participant three total times, but some participants agreed to only one or two interviews; all completed interviews (of social workers) for this project were included in the final dataset, regardless of whether the participant completed one, two, or all three interviews.

Interviews took place at a location decided by the participant. Many interviews were conducted at the participant's school of employment; others met at local coffee shops, libraries, etc. Two participants were interviewed via phone; this was because one participant lived out-of-state and the other requested a phone interview due to her personal time constraints. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded. Interviewers used an interview protocol to guide their conversations, though went 'off-script' as needed, based on participant feedback and interest in specific areas of the conversation. All interviews were transcribed by this researcher and/or by paid transcribers. In order to protect the identity and preserve confidentiality, all interviews were given an identification number and personal information was retracted from the transcript. All transcription was completed prior to this researcher reading through the data. All transcribed interviews were uploaded into the qualitative software package NVivo 11 Pro.

The final data set included: three total interviews from six different participants, two total interviews from five different participants, and one total interview from four different participants. The four participants who interviewed just one time decided to terminate their participation with PLC prior to the second round of interviews. In all, this study included data

from 32 total interviews and 15 total participants⁹.

Analysis

Research approach: Existentialist-Informed Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

As previously explained, I used a phenomenological approach and method throughout the research process. Due to the various external nuances of this study's research process (ie: this study being a 'secondary data analysis' though I was included in all stages of the investigation, I was a practicing school social worker, etc.) it was necessary for me to closely examine which phenomenological tools and specific approach to use during analysis in order to ensure that findings emerged with the strongest scientific rigor possible.

While phenomenological analysis has several approaches from which to choose, I decided that the *Existentialist-Informed Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach* was best for the purposes of this data analysis. Compared to other phenomenological approaches, the Existentialist-Informed Hermeneutic approach was most applicable to this specific research design and analysis because it allowed for a stronger role of the researcher in understanding the data (Schwandt, 2015). This means that I, as the researcher, could use contextual knowledge so long as I did so with scientific rigor and remain open and honest regarding the biases experienced; this approach was appropriate and applicable for the analysis phase of this study (Finlay, 2011; Willig & Billin, 2012).

Existentialism brings forth the concept that both the researchers and the subject(s) of the study have influences on one another, and that "inquirers were part of the phenomenon they seek to understand" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 103). The hermeneutic approach signifies the importance of

⁹ See Appendix A for additional details regarding the sample and data (participant demographics and descriptions)

the nuances related to the interpretation of meaning (Baert, 2005; Schwandt, 2015). Allowing for contextual knowledge while exploring the data by interpreting participants' meaning allowed me as the researcher to include my own experiences and biases openly, yet thoughtfully and carefully.

I also used ideas and partial concepts stemming from *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* which coincides with the existentialist and hermeneutic approaches (Baert, 2005). Willig and Billin (2012) wrote that "Indeed, all forms of interpretive phenomenology take the view that interpretation is both desirable and inevitable; desirable because it serves to amplify the meanings contained in accounts of experience, and inevitable because understanding of an account cannot take place without us making some preliminary assumptions about its meaning" (p. 117). Willig and Billin (2012) further explained that people understand their own realities based on their own experiences, and that people make sense of others' experiences also based on their own affairs (p. 196). This is translatable to the experiences of social workers employed in a school who interact with not only their clients, but also other staff members and the community, which is why I aimed to understand the reasoning behind practice decisions as related to personal experiences and practitioners' 'sense of self.' Therefore, the chosen Hermeneutic interpretation included basic components of this Interpretive approach within the phenomenological analysis.

Coding

The use of a phenomenological approach led to a qualitative iterative analysis in order for me to find the best results possible while adhering to rigorous research standards. An *iterative analysis* is one in which I could use current literature, existing knowledge, and continuous reflection in order to bring these connections to the data (Tracy, 2012, p. 184). As per the stipulations of rigorous qualitative analysis, I ensured that the coding process was

phenomenological in nature, and allowed for themes to emerge based on participants' statements rather than finding themes based on the leading questions or prior conceptual knowledge. At the same time, as per Tracy (2012), due to the iterative approach, it is important to note that I spoke with various other researchers and professionals about possible emerging themes, ideas, and reflections throughout the coding and analysis process.

First-round coding

I began data analysis through the use of 'open coding', also known as first-level coding, or initial coding, etc. (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2012). Because all of the interviews had been completed about two years prior, the open coding process was completed after all data had been collected. Moustakas (1994) explained that open-coding is meant to reduce complexity by breaking the data into smaller parts in order to label them. She said that the researcher seeks to label and categorize the general trends found previously, while also extracting significant quotes and phrases to more deeply analyze during latter rounds of coding; I followed this process while completing the first round of open-coding.

After open-coding about half of the transcripts, I recognized that I was encountering an excess of information due to the more general nature of the content within the interview protocol and various questions posed to the research participants. I also recognized that this extra content was leading me astray from the themes specific to Standpoint Theory and Positionality. Glaser (2016) explained that this is a typical conundrum for researchers. While he was speaking about Grounded Theory approach specifically, Glaser (2016) noted the need for thematic, open coding, and also stated a caveat to the dangers of open coding. He wrote:

The goal of generating a [Grounded Theory] is to generate an emergent set of concepts... To achieve this goal, the researcher begins his research with open coding, that is coding all his data in every possible way. The consequence of this

open coding is a multitude of descriptions for possible concepts that often do not fit in the emerging theory. Thus in this case the researcher ends up with many irrelevant descriptions for concepts that do not apply... It is hard to stop. Confusion easily sets in (p. 108).

It should be noted that due to the lack of interview questions specifically structured to fit the notion of Standpoint Theory and Positionality, this study does not specifically adhere to the Grounded Theory approach. However, it should also be noted that my approach to data analysis, in that I sought to allow for themes and concepts to emerge from the data itself, is aligned to the process used within Grounded Theory research, though this study is more iterative, reflective and cyclical in nature.

In following Glaser's advice, I then further structured and slightly refined the first-round coding process in order to code only text that was relevant to aspects of Standpoint Theory and Positionality. In adherence to the phenomenological nature of the study, the coding remained flexible in that the themes were general and emergent, but certain text from the transcriptions was set aside due to its irrelevance to Standpoint Theory and/or Positionality.

At the end of the first round of coding, I found several general themes related to Standpoint Theory and Positionality, which included, but was not limited to: information pertaining to practitioner and/or group demographics, personal characteristics, participants' previous personal and professional history, opinions and beliefs about how to do her job, statements about frustrations regarding self and/or colleagues, statements about relating to other people around her, inferences/anecdotes relating to cultural humility¹⁰ and/or cultural competence, and other statements that provided insight into perspectives and opinions of the practitioner, either due to personal reasons and/or based on professional knowledge.

¹⁰ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *cultural humility*

Axial coding

Finlay (2011) explained that analysis requires more than a descriptive re-statement of the interview data; revealing the meaning of the data comes through the coding process. Therefore, I then embarked on the second round of more selective coding - axial coding. As I continued to analyze the data through the coding process, I made sure to maintain the phenomenological lens in order to capture the most authentic findings from this data.

Axial coding is the process in which the researcher analyzes the relevant text, the first-round codes themselves, by looking for correlations, relationships, differences, thematic patterns, etc. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015). For the purposes of this study, an in-depth coding process allowed me to “see the familiar in a new light; gain distance from their own as well as their participants’ taken-for-granted assumptions; and to focus further data collection” (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013, p. 156). Tracy (2012) describes this as a hierarchical process in which the researcher is “systematically grouping together various codes under a hierarchical ‘umbrella’ category that makes conceptual sense” (p. 195). This process is meant to create data that is more analytic and less descriptive (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2012).

Through constant comparison techniques, I syphoned data into various categories in order to see potential concepts emerge. For example, during axial coding, I looked for possible patterns in relation to whether a question was explicitly prompted and/or whether the participant made the statement naturally, based on personal intentions and need to make the statement. Another avenue involved looking for concepts related to Standpoint Theory and Positionality through analysis of the descriptions of the social structure within the school setting, a concept that had significantly emerged during the first round of coding. Various other first-round coding themes were further defined in order to more clearly understanding and interpret the meaning of the text.

Throughout this process, I consistently developed and maintained a detailed codebook. A codebook is meant to describe each code the researcher uses to a categorizable, definable, object extent (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2012). The codebook for this study included 14 codes, with additional sub-codes for eight of the codes¹¹. This codebook was then provided to a colleague external to this study in order to determine the specificity and clarity by having her use it in order to reach inter-rater reliability.

Rigor and trustworthiness

The scope, aims, and general topic of this research were pertinent and related to me as the researcher. Therefore, I learned that as the researcher, I needed to better recognize my biases and determine the extent to which and/or how these biases may have affected the data collection and/or analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Padgett 2008; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is different from quantitative research in that there are recognized bias(es) that create input and/or effects from the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Padgett 2008; Patton, 2015). Qualitative studies often include material and topics that are likely emotionally pertinent to the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tufford & Newman, 2012). Qualitative scholars therefore caution that because of this connection and because “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis... biases can have an impact on the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). Throughout the research process, I have been aware of and acknowledged strong feelings and related experiences that could have under laid the questions posed during data collection interviews and/or interpretation of meanings during analysis of the data.

For this proposed study, I continuously attempted to recognize any and all biases related

¹¹ See Appendix E for the complete codebook, which includes codes and corresponding definitions/explanations

to personal interests and dual relationships with the materials and topics discussed. Throughout the research process I was employed as a school social worker myself. I personally experienced the struggles and triumphs of being a school social worker, many times similarly to how the participants in the study were verbalizing. Furthermore, I helped plan and implement PLC sessions, therefore having a vested interest in the programming and outcomes.

Standpoint Theory and Positionality combined, the theoretical approach used for the purposes of this study, helped me recognize the significance of both participant and researcher positionality. Swigonski (1994) alluded to the notion that all social work research has implicit bias, because “The objects of our research are, in fact, gazing back at us” (Harding, 1991 as cited in Swigonski, 1994). Swigonski also noted that “Social work research must be grounded in an epistemology that honors all of our professional commitments” (p. 389), meaning that so long as this research maintained grounded in a scientific, rigorous methodology, I could continue to investigate while simultaneously ensuring that I recognized biases and engaged in personal reflections.

Bracketing

When initially undergoing this study, I contemplated the concept of bracketing and reflexivity for this specific research purpose. *Bracketing* is the ability to put aside personal perception, beliefs, opinions, preferences, etc. in order to ensure that they do not affect the subject’s perception, beliefs, opinions, or preferences, etc. (Fung, Chan, & Chien, 2013). It is meant to “suspend judgment” in order to “focus on the intrinsic nature” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 22). I decided to engage the concept of bracketing at specific key points throughout the research process in hopes to ensure stronger validity of the findings.

While this notion of bracketing provides an important concept that allows some

researchers an avenue to higher scientific rigor, completely continuous bracketing was not an ideal method for me during this study. As Bevan (2014) stated, while it can provide rigor, it may also diminish the natural human experience and ability to interpret information. I therefore employed partial components of bracketing during interviews and data collection as a method to maintain myself as judgment-free as possible. However, as Starks and Trinidad (2007) explained, it is essential to “recognize and set aside (but do not abandon) priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants’ accounts with an open mind (p. 1367). Therefore, I investigated and performed this research as such, by pursuing reflexivity alongside the more structured component of bracketing. I then used member-checking as an additional technique to attain further rigor and validity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an ongoing, “critical self-reflection” of thinking about biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt, 2015, p. 268). I engaged in the process of *analytic memoing* during data analysis as a technique to recognize and extract my personal biases. These analytic memos consisted of personal thoughts and opinions related to the information in the data. In writing these memos, I externalized personal identifiers and potential personal biases that could influence interpretation of the data. This process was continuous throughout data analysis so that these personal influences were “checked and set aside” with as much fidelity as possible in order to increase the rigor of the study¹².

Inter-rater reliability (IRR)

As a researcher, I also used inter-rater reliability [IRR] as a means to enhance the rigor

¹² See Appendix D for select excerpts from this researcher’s analytic memos for this study

and trustworthiness of the study. IRR refers to the process in which multiple people are coding the same data in order to ensure that they are interpreting the words/meaning in the same way for each code/label (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015). The IRR process ensures that the thought process behind the meaning of each code is understandable and practical.

For the purposes of this study, I created a codebook that explicitly stated the meaning and definition of each code; I then asked another scholar to use the given information to individually code the same data. This scholar coded one manuscript, which I selected based on its content being pertinent and useful, and also not significantly lacking detail nor containing uniqueness. In other words, I chose a manuscript that would not be considered as being an outlier of the data in any way. She then coded this transcript using the 14 main codes as defined in the codebook that I maintained throughout analysis.

When comparing the reliability of our coding, I found that while the Cohen's Kappa only reached almost 0.3, this was due to the stylistics of our different coding approaches. While I code specific information and exact words related to codes, this scholar had coded larger paragraphs and general areas in which the information aligned with the designated codes. Therefore, I utilized this process by carefully comparing our coding decisions manually. In doing so, I found that I coded multiple codes more often while she coded less often and found one or two codes in which she determined were best defined for the given data. Furthermore, while further examining our coding decisions, I recognized that my colleague had a more limited understanding of the data than I did, as she is not an expert in school-based social work specifically. I found this, for example, when looking for the 'beliefs and values' code, and recognizing that she did not have comprehensive knowledge of what was fact versus what was opinion; approaches to school-based social work are unique due to taking place within the host

setting of the education system.

Due to these noted differences, I recognized that I needed to more specifically define codes in order to ensure that all codes could be specifically and solely used based on definition, and without need to choose which definition was best. To rectify this problem, I restructured the codes by either redefining (further defining) them and/or created further subsets of the codes to better clarify specific meaning. For example, I more explicitly defined what I considered to be a ‘characteristic’ versus what was a ‘demographic’ for purposes of this study. I also had to better define ‘workplace demographics’ to entail that it could include demographics regarding the student body as a whole, or as a community, but that individual student demographics would be considered for ‘others’ demographics (demographics of other people).’ These, along with revisions of other code definitions as well, allowed for a stronger, more rigorous coding process.

This IRR process led me to better learn throughout experience about the intricacies of what a code’s definition could bring to (or perhaps take away from) the research findings. I learned that the specificity of each code is an important detail to consider with collaborators and other researchers. I also learned that the understanding of codes’ definitions must be redetermined for each phase of the coding and analysis process, as they can get more specific and more clearly defined when coding during the latter, axial phase. In all, though the IRR process did not lead me to reaching an ideal Cohen’s Kappa, the process enabled me to more carefully and intentionally consider the meaning of each definition in my codebook.

Member-checking

In order to enhance the rigor of this study, I completed the *member-checking* process. The member checking process is, as Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) assert, “also known as participant or respondent validation, a technique or exploring the credibility of results”

(p. 1802). Member-checking requires the researcher to send written interpretations of the data back to the original participants, asking them to verify if the interpretation correctly assessing their intended meaning (Schwandt, 2015, p. 195). While the process is good practice in general for qualitative researchers, I found this to be especially pertinent for purposes of this specific study, as the basis of this analysis sought to understand how a multitude of personal characteristics can lead to various perceptions and understandings. Therefore, I wanted to make sure that I understood what participants believed they understood.

Therefore, after completing the analysis process and writing the overall findings, which included my own explanations of participants' statements, I then contacted participants who had important and/or noteworthy quotes within the paper. If these participants agreed, we scheduled a time to speak via phone so that I could verify the accuracy of my understanding of their words, perceptions, and thoughts. In doing this, almost all explanations that I had written were verified as correct, meaning that these participants agreed with the way I incorporated their thoughts into my overall findings and explained their words. There was one time in which a participant requested that I add an additional sentence of explanation for one of her quotes in order for her to consider her thought was thoroughly explained in the paper; I then added this additional sentence to the findings.

Technology (software)

Technology has changed the way researchers initiate, implement, analyze, and disseminate their work (Gibbs, Friese, & Mangabeira, 2002). As compared to research prior to the surge of technological advances, current research has additional rigor and trustworthiness due to the technology available to the researchers. Therefore, I used NVivo 11 Pro during the data analysis phase of this study to support and enhance the coding process. Reading the interview

transcripts within NVivo allowed me to systematically manage and engage with the coding and analysis process. Qualitative research is often analyzed via NVivo because of its modern-day features. By using NVivo, I was able to organize data based on various characteristics (date, code, theme, etc.), created ‘mind-maps’ of commonly used language, and found patterns and emergent themes through creating code matrices, etc. (Gibbs et al., 2002).

Methodological limitations

While I attempted to ensure high rigor by employing several additional techniques such as member-checking and reflexivity, this study has limitations that must be recognized.

Sample

While literature regarding best practices to qualitative inquiry shows that best practices includes seeking a variance of participants in order to receive results from many perspectives (see, for example: Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; etc.), the data for this study was already collected from a self-selected group of individuals who volunteered to participate. Therefore, I did not have a choice in determining the final sample for this study specifically. While recruitment methodology allowed for a wide array of possible participants, the final sample did not include any males; all participants identified as female. While the lack of males is representative of the field of school social work (and school-based mental health practitioners more generally), the voice of a male would have been helpful in order to determine potential gendered nuances, especially because I used Standpoint Theory as part of the theoretical lens, which has roots in feminist literature (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009).

Furthermore, this sample included members of a voluntary Professional Learning Community; participants did not get paid nor did they receive professional education credits for

participation in the PLC. Their only motivation for participation in the PLC was for individual professional and/or personal growth, thus creating a self-selected group of professionals who were clearly eager to put forth their best efforts; these participants individually decided to use their personal time outside of work for continued professional learning and growth.

Interview protocols¹³

Another methodological limitation for this study relates to the interview protocols; the protocols used for this study were created by a colleague¹⁴ and intended for various research purposes. While I provided feedback and included one intentional question related specifically to the purposes of this study, the final interview protocols were not primarily intended for use for this study. Therefore, the data from the interviews is not extensively directed towards topics related to Positionality. One specific question allowed for prompting about personal demographics, but otherwise the data relates to other topics about these practitioners' professional opinions and approaches to their work. Therefore, the findings from this study may be inconclusive as to whether themes emerged due to specific prompting and questioning and/or whether they emerged due to natural significance and relevance to the practitioners. The same is true for the non-existent themes in this data; it is inconclusive whether themes did not arise due to irrelevance of the questions specifically asked (or rather, minimal direct questioning related to sense of self) and/or whether they were naturally insignificant to the practitioners.

In order to alleviate some of this uncertainty, I was conscious and alert to the nuances of the conversation throughout data analysis. While coding, I separated much of the coded material

¹³ See Appendix C for complete interview protocols

¹⁴ Protocols written by Dr. Andrew Brake (Assistant Professor, Northeastern Illinois University)

into two categories: prompted and unprompted. I was therefore able to seek patterns and themes throughout the data that was specifically prompted by the interviewers as well as patterns and themes that emerged more naturally, without prompting from the interviewers¹⁵. In general, there were few discrepant themes when comparing prompted data and unprompted data.

Another limitation of the protocols is that they lacked specific demographic questions. At no point during the interviews were the participants asked to directly identify their personal demographics. While questions related to personal demographics arose during some of the interviews due to the nature of the conversation, it was not part of the protocol to ensure that the interviewer prompted for these details. Therefore, demographic information about the final sample is incomplete; this missing information leads to possible inconclusive meaning for some of the data due to possible inability to understand from which *standpoints* (or, identifiers) the participants were speaking during various parts of the conversations.

Timeline

The phenomenological approach I used asserts that I was seeking to understand the lived experiences of the participants; the concept of hermeneutics asserts that I was interpreting the participants' words with my own understanding(s), and existentialism further explains the personal connection that I as a researcher naturally had with the data I was using (Baert, 2005; Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; Schwandt, 2015; Tracy, 2012). However, while various qualitative approaches can include an iterative process in which data analysis and interpretation coincide with data collection so that questions can be added and/or edited based on preliminary

¹⁵ Note: This specific component of coding was not included in the IRR process

understanding of emergent themes (Padgett, 2008; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2012), the process I used for the analysis of this data was disconnected from the data collection phase of the research.

For this reason, I consider this study to have partial components related to secondary data analysis; due to general scope of the interview protocol as well as the timeline I followed during data analysis, the approach and design for this study adhere to some of the techniques used during secondary data analysis. While I was personally involved and part of the research team during the data collection phase, I then did not read the interview transcriptions until several years after data collection. This prolonged length of time created a distinct separation from the data, which could have effects on the ways I read and/or interpreted the meaning of participants' words within the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Though I recognize that everyday conversations in the workplace do not directly or consistently relate to ‘sense of self’¹, it is typical that practitioners and their surrounding colleagues and clients have interactions and conversations that may provide opportunities to interject personal information. For this reason, it is important to understand the ways in which school-based social workers describe their ‘sense of self’ within their professional practices. In attempting to do so, I began by first distinguishing the principle tenets of Standpoint Theory and the related ideas of Positionality, which I used jointly as an analytical lens and tool throughout data analysis. Standpoint Theory emerged as a feminist epistemology, one in which its philosophers claimed that gendered nuances influenced the perspective and understanding of females within their environments, mostly due to socially constructed barriers associated with female identity (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hill Collins, 1986; 1989; Hartsock, 1983). Dr. Sandra Harding, Dr. Nancy Harstock, and other philosophers continued to expand the theory so that it encompassed additional assertions that other personal characteristics and identifiers, such as race, socio-economic class, etc., also contribute to individuals’ perceptions of social phenomena. My research questions required that I

¹ The phrase ‘*sense of self*’ was first used when stating this study’s research question. ‘Sense of self’ is an all-encompassing term that is meant to incorporate how an individual perceives herself and her environment(s) overall; it includes personal and professional characteristics, experiences, and feelings and then brings together all potential elements within an individual’s life. See Appendix B for more information.

consider the data exhaustively and comprehensively by seeking all emergent trends. Therefore, I also included the more expanded thoughts and ideas of the theories within analysis, so that individuals' positionalities (Acevedo et al., 2015; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002) are also included within this study. "Positionality has been illustrated to better represent the way diversity is emerging in other contexts such as the way people develop knowledge" (Collins, 1983 as cited in Kezar, 2002). This study is meant to enhance understanding of school-based social workers' knowledge as interpreted through the theoretical lens of Standpoint Theory combined jointly with the notions of Positionality.

Throughout analysis, several themes emerged to form my overall understanding of the findings. Within the data, I found reflections regarding how school-based practitioners think about and make use of their 'sense of self' in everyday conversations with their colleagues, students, families, and community members. Throughout analysis of the data, I included statements relating to Standpoint Theory and/or Positionality that were both prompted and unprompted throughout the interviews. These statements, though especially those posed spontaneously (without interviewer prompting), led me to a stronger understanding of how practitioners consider themselves and their surroundings when making professional decisions. I found data evidencing that practitioners do not always act based on their specific understanding; sometimes, they allowed external factors to reshape or form how they portrayed their 'sense of self' in hopes that their 'use of self'² would be more productive. Bringing together these themes

² See Appendix B for definitions and descriptions of the terms '*sense of self*' and '*use of self*' for purposes of this study

and ideas allowed me to conceptualize a model ('School Standpoint' Model³) that illustrates the various impact(s) of influences to professional school-based social work practices.

The 'School Standpoint' Model was formulated based on the three more significant themes that emerged from the data, which included: information about the *social structure* of the school environment, participants' understanding(s) of the components creating their *personal identities*, and participants' descriptions and opinions about their *professional role* as school-based social workers. These three themes became the domains⁴ of the 'School Standpoint' Model. These domains each include additional themes that emerged from the data in relation to them. Emergent themes within the domain of the social structure included: interpersonal dynamics, power and authority, and shifts and changes to a school. Themes that emerged in relation to the domain of personal identity included: personal identifying demographics (age and years of experience, language, race) and personal experiences. And, themes within the domain of the professional role included: 'school-informed professional mindset' and contextual conditions. Table 2 outlines the descriptions of the three main domains. Part One of Chapter Four (Findings) illustrates each of the domains and their related thematic findings with detail and evidence from the data.

³ The 'School Standpoint' Model encompasses the emergent themes from this data in a way that describes how school-based social workers may understand and/or utilize their overall 'sense of self' within their professional practices. The Model incorporates the three main *domains* (including: domains of social structure, personal identity, and professional role) with additional components within each domain. See detailed explanation of the 'School Standpoint' Model starting on p. 128. See Appendix B for written definition and explanation of the Model.

⁴ The findings elicited three significant themes (i.e. *domains*) within practitioners' overall 'sense of self' in their professional practices. These three themes are hereinafter referred to as '*domains*.' These three domains include: the domain of the social structure, the domain of personal identity, and the domain of the professional role. These domains are the three essential components to the 'School Standpoint' Model. Each domain is further defined, described, and evidenced within Part One of Chapter Four (Findings). See Appendix B for further description and explanation of the domains.

Table 2: Description of the domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model

Domain	Brief explanation and Notes	Relevant themes	
<i>Social Structure</i>	In ‘School Standpoint’ Model, overlays other domains / exists in tandem with domains of <i>personal identity</i> and <i>professional role</i>	Interpersonal dynamics	
	Social Structure creates backbone for perceptions and understanding of interactions	Power and authority	
	Understood via Social Identity Theory, an additional thematic concept; school-based social workers live and work within a social structure that shapes how they perceive experiences and how others perceive them	Shifts and changes to the environment	
		* <i>Future studies may find additional pertinent themes not present in this study’s data.</i>	
<i>Personal Identity</i>	Personal identity is composed of a multitude of demographics, characteristics, and traits	Personal identifiers	Age and years of experience
			Language
			Race
	In ‘School Standpoint’ Model, overlaps with domain of <i>professional role</i>	Personal past and present experiences ⁵	
In ‘School Standpoint’ Model, exists within domain of <i>social structure</i>	* <i>Future studies may find additional pertinent themes not present in this study’s data.</i>		
<i>Professional Role</i>	In ‘School Standpoint’ Model, exists within domain of <i>social structure</i>	School-informed professional mindset	
	In ‘School Standpoint’ Model, overlaps with domain of <i>personal identity</i>	Contextual conditions	
	School-based social workers’ roles may differ due to vague job descriptions, systemic inconsistencies, and individual practitioner influences	* <i>Future studies may find additional pertinent themes not present in this study’s data.</i>	

⁵ For purposes of this study, *personal experiences* refers to experiences that occur outside of the workplace with no intentional connection to professional practice

In addition to Table 2, Figure 1⁶ provides visual representation regarding how these domains come together to form the ‘School Standpoint’ Model.

Furthermore, the domains should be considered to connect with and relate to one another; Part Two of Chapter Four (Findings) gives specific examples with evidence from the data regarding how the domains function well together at times but also contrast in other instances. The findings delineated possible ways in which school-based practitioners may work to *balance the boundaries*,⁷ or alleviate their negative perceptions and experiences, of each of the domains in attempt to rectify their negative feelings and/or their practice outcomes they may be experiencing. The following Parts of the findings - Part One and Part Two - detail the journey of conceptualizing the ‘School Standpoint’ Model. Part One first reveals how participants explained their experiences in relation to each of the themes of the three domains. Part Two then expounds upon these descriptions by illustrating how the domains interact as a unified concept - as the ‘School Standpoint’ Model. The ways in which participants described their ‘sense of self’ can be interpreted via the ‘School Standpoint’ Model (i.e. via their perceptions of their experiences related to each of the three domains).

Findings and Discussion, Part One

As understood through the theoretical construct of Standpoint Theory combined with Positionality, the three domains of ‘sense of self’ within school-based practices were described by participants as affecting them unevenly and in both positive and negative ways. First, I found that the social structure - the overarching domain - overlaid all daily interactions for participants,

⁶ Figure 1 (visual representation of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model) is found on p. 127 (Part Two of Findings)

⁷ This process of *balancing boundaries* is defined and described in Part Two of this Findings chapter. See Appendix B for definition and description of the term for purposes of this study.

which they experienced in relation to both their colleagues and clients. Then, descriptions and opinions about their personal identity (the second domain) and professional role (the last, third domain) saturated my interpretation of participants' 'sense of self' within their professional practices. I learned how practitioners may emphasize the influences of the social structure within a multitude of contexts and situations, as well as how practitioners were influenced by their colleagues' reactions within facets of the social structure.

For purposes of analysis for this study, data regarding the social structure included information related to participants' perceptions of their own social experiences, including how their own perceptions were shaped by others' interactions and reactions towards them. Analysis of personal identity included data portraying participants' personal identity, such as demographic information (ie: race, age, language, etc.), participants' experiences, interests, and preferences. Analysis regarding the professional role included information regarding how practitioners perceived the outcomes of their professional practices, and their reasons, beliefs, and/or thoughts about their services.

Social Structure

This section will first portray findings and interpretation of the data of both 'sense of self' and 'use of self' related to the social structure. Based on the tenets of Standpoint Theory and Positionality, I analyzed the data with the recognition that influences of a social structure are natural, inevitable, and individually perceived based on socially constructed meanings (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Hill Collins, 1986; Kezar, 2002; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010; Vélez-Rendón, 2010). Standpoint Theory and Positionality allowed me to hone in on the perceptions and experiences that participants described with curiosity regarding how personal identifiers can shape perceptions. In doing so, I found that the social structure indeed created a backbone for

practitioners' perceptions; dependent upon how participants described the positive and/or negative effects of their surrounding environment and relationships, or the way in which participants perceived the social structure, they described making professional decisions with varying degrees of alignment or connectedness between 'sense of self' and 'use of self.' Furthermore, they described the ways in which others' perceptions influenced their own understanding(s) of 'sense of self.'

Because I found ample instances in which participants spoke about their colleagues in relation to their own work, relevant literature regarding *Social Identity Theory*⁸ additionally aligned well with the principles of Standpoint Theory and positionality and supported the findings for this study. Han Tapper (2013) explained that 'Social Identity Theory' "maintains that human beings are social by virtue of their relationships with one another, an existence embedded within a vast web of networks that are constructed based on identity-based associations" (p. 417). Tajfel (1974), who is credited as being a creator of this theory, further claimed that "intergroup behaviour must take into account both causal directions: from ingroup processes to outgroup behaviour and attitudes..." (p. 67). Thus, by understanding concepts of this theory, I was able to understand participants' descriptions regarding their perceptions not only about their own identifying characteristics, but also based on social networks around them (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974), which provided a solidified understanding of the nuances of the social structure within this data. Along with the principles of Standpoint Theory and Positionality, Social Identity Theory also philosophizes the significance of power and authority within and among group relationships (Tajfel, 1974). Therefore, analysis

⁸ See Appendix B for definition and description of *Social Identity Theory*

of data related to social structure evidenced my interpretation regarding how and why participants extensively spoke about their perceptions of power and authority, and other interpersonal relations.

In alignment with concepts stemming from Standpoint Theory, Positionality, as well as Social Identity Theory, I found that participants' descriptions illustrated that social workers in schools live and work within a social structure that shapes how they perceive all experiences ('sense of self'), and how others perceive them, both personally and professionally. The social structure is also what organizes professional roles and shapes components of their interpersonal interactions with colleagues and clients ('use of self'). Based on these experiences, participants explained various and inconsistent ways in which they reacted to their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (their 'sense of self'), which were also described as being compelling within their professional decisions and approaches. Therefore, because all school-based social workers work within a social structure that shapes both how they are perceived as well as how they perceive the world (for this study, their school building), I will begin Part One by portraying findings and interpretations of data describing participants' 'sense of self' and 'use of self' within their social structures and as part of their social identities. I will then incorporate findings related to the domains of personal identity and professional role in the latter writing within Part One.

Interpersonal Dynamics

While employees within all work sites experience social dynamics with their colleagues, the dynamics of a school are unique due to the consistent necessity for interdisciplinary collaboration. I found a theme related to 'sense of self' within professional decision-making and practice approaches regarding participants' interactions within and among colleagues, most of whom come from different professional backgrounds and specialize in different knowledge than

do school-based social workers. The theoretical perspectives and ideologies of social work do not consistently translate to the school environment, where school administrators and teachers may be focused on academic lessons, curriculum enhancement, etc. Further, these colleagues do not usually begin their positions with existent knowledge regarding the social work profession specifically; this lack of knowledge can cause further confusion and/or discomfort during collaborations. Leyba (2009) went as far as to say that “School social workers’ roles are so complex and multifaceted that their supervisors often lack a clear understanding of what they accomplish in a given day, week, or month” (p. 219). On that account, participants described concerns and frustrations, as well as some more positive insights, in relation to the ripple effects that their collegial interactions could entail. I found that in general, interpersonal dynamics elucidated statements from the participants in this study about varying feelings of ‘sense of self’ and how their ‘use of self’ was similar and/or different than this personal ‘sense of self.’

Understandably, participants described positive perceptions of their professional outcomes when feeling as though they were part of cohesive teams and had supportive relationships. In contrast, they felt that their professional outcomes were hindered by negative interpersonal dynamics. For example, Norchelle explained her perception of the effects she experienced having previously been part of a cohesive team and currently finding herself as less aligned with some of her colleagues. She said, “Like, we had a strong team last year. We were a well-oiled machine last year. We were getting it done. You know, everybody was getting whatever they needed and everybody was playing a role in pushing us to that next level.” She described an understanding amongst the teammates and remembered the experiences as causing more productive outcomes for students and families. She felt that “getting along” had allowed her and her teammates to “get it done.”

However, when these groups of people were not as “well oiled” as Norchelle had described, then many participants spoke about how the differing opinions and/or competing agendas created tension. One of the commonly described social phenomena showed that participants’ personal feelings and perceptions of intentional blame or ‘finger pointing’ by colleagues could lead to feelings of anger and/or feelings of victimization. Participants portrayed in various ways how these feelings then influenced their professional approaches. For example, Denise found that she changed her ways of interacting with teachers when she ultimately perceived some ‘finger-pointing’ as the year progressed. She explained, “I have more of an insight to how teachers are now. Some teachers I thought were on my side, I’m just like, no they are part of my problem, you know, so it’s like I’m trying to also tell myself [to] step back.” She decided to reduce the intensity of some of her communication and action with these colleagues when advocating for students in order to diminish the number of negative interactions she might encounter. Denise’s comments depicted her disheartenment about her realization that she would “step back.”

These examples portrayed how developed relationships - both positive, productive relationships and difficult, inefficient relationships - can impact ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ within the workplace for school-based social workers. While participants reported how these interpersonal dynamics influenced their approaches within their professional tasks (influenced their ‘use of self’), I found additional themes related to how they experienced power differentials amongst their colleagues (these experiences as understood via their ‘sense of self’). Participants explained feelings related to *power and authority* as notable and impactful within their professional work.

Power and Authority

One of the strongest emergent themes related to the domain of the social structure as experienced by participants in this study showed that they mainly felt effects related to their perceptions of the power relations within and amongst the staff. In accordance with the tenets of Standpoint Theory and the ideas of Positionality and Social Identity, it was clear to me that many times, participants understood their jobs and made practice decisions based on their understanding of varying levels of authority and power around them rather than solely based on their knowledge of best professional practices. In other words, while describing power and authority dynamics, their descriptions of their actions or their ‘use of self’ was described to be disconnected and different than their understanding of their ‘sense of self’ internally.

In many work environments, including schools, authority is prescribed and given, while power can be earned and attained (Davies & Ellison, 2001; Jarvis 2012). This means that, for example, teachers’ and/or administrators’ positive perceptions of school-based social workers could earn them more power within the school (Cambré, Kippers, Marc, & De Witte, 2012; Tajfel, 1974; Vansina, 2014). However, data evidenced that this given explanation of authority and power was not upheld consistently across professional activities. Maria, for example, worked alongside another school social worker; the other school social worker was on the school leadership team, yet Maria was not. Maria explained that these confusing power dynamics created social perceptions, both her own perceptions and colleagues’ perceptions, that she had less power and authority than did her counterpart. Maria explained that she was unsure how to gain professional momentum within the social structure so that colleagues would listen to her professional insight to the same extent that they listened to the other social worker. She explained, “... [it’s] a weird dynamic, kinda blurry sometimes. But, like, she’s my boss and my

principal is my boss... So there's a lot of, I guess, layers there." Maria described how these confusing power differentials affected her daily confidence within professional approaches and decisions, as was similarly true for other participants as well.

Despite there being definitions of levels of employment, principles of Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory posit that there are there are also social implications of authority and power that determine how people are perceived and approached within daily interactions (Acevedo et al., 2015; Harstock, 1983; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974). Further, participants described that they felt uncertain and unsure regarding the amount of power they had; not only did findings illustrate participants' perceptions and understandings of the social dynamics surrounding them, but there was also a theme of uncertainty regarding their power within their overall 'sense of self.' This uncertainty then manifested in forms of questions from the participants about how to go about their designated role and/or how to achieve their professional goals. Therefore, when feeling uncertain or experiencing unclear boundaries within the social structure of the school, I found that uncomfortable feelings within 'sense of self' could become more influential than practitioners' knowledge about how to service their clients; in other words, participants described how their uncertain 'sense of self' translated to a less efficient 'use of self,' which was generally described to be due to the discomfort they were experiencing.

Some participants explicitly described being unable to practice according to their professional knowledge and opinions due to feelings of inadequate power. For example, Nathalia and Julie both explained that even though they had clinical insight about differentiated ways to work with students, they found it difficult to guide colleagues through making recommendations regarding how they should interact with students. They portrayed that their 'sense of self'

negatively impacted their actual ‘use of self’ as well. Nathalia’s discomfort within these interactions stemmed from what she considered being “the middleman” due to the lack of power and authority within the structure of the school building. She explained feeling uncertain as to how to get students what she believed they needed due to her questionable interactions with teachers and other staff members. She explained her feelings uncertainty when she said, “Like, we’re not classroom teachers... But we’re also not administrators where we have the authoritative power of, like, telling teachers ‘this is what you need to do’ [or] ‘This is your job.’ You know, to be their boss. So in a way we are colleagues but at the same time we’re in a different role.”

For this same reason, Julie described her approaches in these situations more passively. She said that she tries to have a conversation with colleagues when necessary, but simply falls back on administrative support when it is needed. She said:

I would like to talk to the staff person directly... um, in terms of consultation and feedback ... Especially with data, I’m the one that [reports data during] the meetings and if it’s not taken correctly or they are not sure what they are looking for in those observations... then we do have our administrators at the team meetings when administrator support is needed... ‘cause I’m not their supervisor.

In this regard, both Nathalia and Julie showed being vividly aware of their ‘sense of self’ within the social structure, recognizing that they did not want to overstep or cause problems despite the hindrance of the situation towards best practices for students. Because they already perceived themselves as ‘different’ being in the role of a school social worker, they did not want to diminish their images or reputations based on these interactions with staff members from other backgrounds. They described being unable to rectify or problem-solve their somewhat inefficient ‘use of self’ in these situations. These descriptions illuminated the importance of power differentials (or, lack thereof) within their reputations.

In a similar way, Norchelle described a situation in which she wanted to provide training to the security guards in the school building to teach them how to approach students positively, with a preventative approach. Yet at the same time, both due to lack of given authority, as well as her recognition that "...for them to do what I'm asking them to do, it, honestly, it creates more work for them...", she was uncertain about what she could and could not specifically request they do as part of their jobs. She said, "I try to explain to them in the simplest way possible," and then continued explaining her feelings of uncertainty because she could not enforce methods to ensure that her knowledge of behavior management would be utilized by her colleagues. This example again shows how the uncertain dynamics related to authority and power can create confusion and/or tension with colleagues.

As the variation of ideas within Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory all contend, power dynamics can lead to conflictual 'use of self' within collegial interactions (Acevedo et al., 2015; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974). Accordingly, participants explained that they had difficult, sometimes tenuous interactions with colleagues when their professional understandings were not in alignment. Helene, for example, felt extreme frustration due to barriers she experienced in her relationship with the school administrator. When she wanted to change her service delivery approach in order to provide support to a student during an art class, she regretted approaching the principal about the change. Helene explained, "It's been a month, and I can't get an answer from the principal on that. And, so that's my biggest challenge right now is trying to work with a very ineffective leader..." Throughout the year, her experiences when interacting with the principal, the authoritative figure in the building, only became more negative as she continued to experience negative feelings regarding

these frustrating social dynamics. Helene believed that his negative attitude towards her was partially due to their demographic differences. She said, “You know, he just turned 40... It’s like, [he] wants his own age group or something... I know it kinda sucks...” Ultimately, towards the end of the year, Helene said that she would need to change approaches (change her ‘use of self’) regarding her communication style if the hostile social dynamics between them were to remain the same the following year; she said, “it’ll definitely change how vocal [and] direct I can be.” She did not want to continue experiencing the negativity. Helene’s input showed how undertones of the social structure - including experiences of her own perceptions and what she believed were others’ perceptions - influenced her practice; this was despite the fact that authority and power definitions were known and defined within her relationship and interactions with the principal of the school. She described her individual perceptions of the social structure as being more influential to her practices in comparison to the prescribed authority of the principal, and her services all but discontinued due to her feelings (her ‘sense of self’) within the situation.

Furthermore, I found that there were participants who did not feel consistently certain about their abilities to influence others’ work habits and approaches despite their clearly prescribed roles of authority and power; they did not encompass their professional authority within their ‘sense of self’ and were therefore efficiently utilizing the given authority within their ‘use of self’ at the same time. Three participants in this study were social workers with a unique position of authority by having a title designating a leadership position (ie: social work department chair, Dean of Social Emotional Supports, etc.), yet these three participants also felt ramifications of the power differentials within the building, just as the other participants with less prescribed authority in their roles, which illustrated how being in a leadership position did not necessarily relate to easier or more consistent professional decision-making. These

participants also described reactionary feelings and behaviors towards individual circumstances. For example, Jahara, who identified as being a Licensed Social Worker and Dean of Social Emotional Supports, depicted her perception of the effect of her authority within the building, explaining that she believed it to negatively influence some of her interactions with teachers. When teachers may begin to talk about their feelings with her, she explained, “I think the drawback is that sometimes... I think the teachers have found that it’s confidential but there still is a bit of a barrier.” Jahara was describing what Social Identity theorists could consider the implications of ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ dynamics (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Tajfel, 1974) and also experiencing the nuances of positionality (Acevedo et al., 2015; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002). While some practitioners desired more power and authority, Jahara instead wanted clarity regarding how to follow-through with difficult conversations in which her prescribed authority created a barrier; Jahara showed how uncertainty and uncomfortable feelings can influence professional actions, regardless of the actual level of power or authority. Her ‘sense of self’ and perceptions created instances in which they influenced how she interacted with teachers, or how she made use of the power she was given.

Thus far, I portrayed how practitioners described their ‘sense of self’ in relation to their colleagues, adults with whom they worked. Yet participants also characterized the social structure as impactful on the students as well. Denise described her experiences interacting with staff members across various levels of power and authority, explaining that she becomes frustrated when social tensions affect the students and classrooms. She explained that because she works with so many colleagues within the school, she has experienced both negative and positive collegial relationships, all of which have had different influences on her work.

Regardless of the type of relationship, she stated that she ultimately wants to be able to provide a consistent positive experience to her students. She explained:

Teachers don't feel like they're supported. And the support comes from admin., and I can't overrun admin., but I can work with admin. And we have a greater issue, the network dictates the administration, so I know it feels like running into the wall every time we get somewhere. This is what we're doing, we're bumping into each other.

I interpreted Denise's unique response as her individual reaction to the social structure, which inevitably stems from her own *standpoints*, or personally lived experiences. Denise had previously trained to become a principal, and therefore had knowledge and experience of principals' experiences that most teachers do not have. While some participants described ways in which they allowed interpersonal incompatibility to diminish their work, Denise described how the influence of the social structure can cause her to work even harder to maintain compassion for all colleagues and be effective for her students. She expressed her additional efforts to diminish effects of 'sense of self', such as the frustration she was feeling, when in the company of her students.

Even still, while Denise worked to use and portray a 'self' other than what she was feeling, her experiences of these barriers to ideal practice caused her a frustration that she could not entirely curtail. Therefore, remaining in accordance with the other findings, Denise's example demonstrates that regardless of what was necessary for best professional outcomes, the implications and her 'sense of self' within the social structure of the school impacted her professional decision making and approaches. Overall, participants portrayed how authority and power dynamics may influence their 'use of self' within their professional practices, which could cause them to inconsistently react with varying responses, and in turn potentially diminish the legitimacy of the school social work profession. Yet additional themes further informed these

understandings and my understanding of the overall social structure. Participants reported about their perceptions of the ever changing and evolving school system and environment around them, which emerged as a recognized component to the nuances of the social structure.

Shifts and Changes

Literature about social dynamics states that the concepts are not static; rather, the nuances of the social structure are constantly shifting and changing; as Higgins and Abowitz (2011) explained, the “common public school” is currently in an important time where “Its very meanings, aims, and legitimacy are under vigorous debate,” (p. 369). In this study, participants similarly portrayed their perceptions about these shifts and changes. The frustrating feelings that can stem from misunderstood - or *not* understood - changes have been found to be detrimental to the employees experiencing them. For example, based on their research study, Hofmans, De Geiter, and Pepermans (2013) determined that it is not necessarily the working conditions themselves, but rather how these conditions are experienced and valued that is more influential for public sector employees. Leyba (2009) asserted that for social workers specifically, it “is challenging... to fulfill mandates, pursue new initiatives, or complete certain activities... If this is the case, [overloaded social workers] may feel frustrated or burned out” (p. 219). In turn, these feelings could lead to a detrimental social structure, inefficient systems, and lower quality work within an organization. Within this data, participants generally described intense feelings within their ‘sense of self’ and/or explained reasons for their newly developed perceptions when encountering such changes within the social structure or overall environment; they spoke about these experiences affecting themselves as well as their colleagues. For example, participants described how staff turnover inevitably created new working collaborations. Participants described how these changes caused new distinct power dynamics and collegial relationships.

Thus, they were finding themselves constantly needing to consciously shift their ‘use of self’ regardless of their internal ‘sense of self’ in order to maintain productivity while at work.

In congruence with the existent literature, as well as my analysis via the multiple lenses of Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory, I learned from the participants how new staffing changes, or less developed relationships could influence how they understand and experience their ‘use of self’ in the work that they do. For example, when participants spoke about working with a new or different principal than in the past, they illustrated how the various nuances of principals’ prescribed authoritative power provided them a backbone to support or diminish practitioners’ perceived power as well as potentially cloud their understanding of their ‘sense of self.’ As Helene said, “The buck stops with the principal in the building.” She made this statement to demonstrate the negative effects she was experiencing due to working with a new principal that school year. It is important to note here, that while negative descriptions most commonly emerged from this data, it is possible that changes can be productive as well.

Regardless, the effects of staff turnover are important to understand, as literature has shown how staff turnover within education is a common phenomenon that continuously affects American schools (see, for example: Allensworth, Ponisciak, & Mazzeo, 2009; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckof, 2013). In this data, I found that most participants spoke about staff turnover and changes related to administrators specifically, though various other staff (ie: psychologists, teachers, etc.) were also mentioned at times.

Helene explained how her professional approaches drastically changed when a new principal began working in the school. She spoke extensively about the antagonism she experienced in the building after the change of personnel, which restricted her from some professional activities she aimed to do, such as joining her desired committees. She explained

that her approaches while working with the previous principal had been different. She said, “I mean, before this principal I’ve had a great relationship with the principal. I would meet with her every week; we talked about kids. We were exactly the same age - that probably helped. She hired me - that probably helped... I mean, I’ve worked with other principals, because I covered other schools and, you know, it was fine, but this one isn't fine... this one is a bully.” She described how after this change, she also experienced detriments within relationships with other colleagues in the building, and she described how she therefore believed that much of these difficulties were rooted in the problems due to this new principal. When talking about her work during the time while the previous principal had worked in the school, she described memories of stronger outcomes to her professional practices. She described herself as previously having a vastly different ‘sense of self’ simply due to the principal with whom she worked.

Norchelle also consistently discussed the repercussions she felt throughout the school year due to administrative turnover. In her first interview for this study, towards the beginning of the year, she spoke about the “big changes,” though simply with minimal hints of uncertainty, as she simultaneously expressed her recognition of her ‘sense of self,’ explaining that she knew any big changes could make her feeling uncomfortable. She explained that the previous principal had been the only principal with whom she had ever worked. She said:

... So this is very new to me. Umm, I’m trying to adjust to new administration. And their styles are very, very different [compared to before]... The old principal, we would have weekly check-ins, and she would tell me her vision, ‘this is what I want you to do.’ And it was, you know, ‘go execute.’ This year is like, ‘well, you know, do whatever you used to do but here’s some other gaps.’ ... And so for me, I’m trying to find that line of like ‘I don’t want to tell you what to do and how to do it’ but, like, this is how it’s been done too, and this is what I can do. And so, it’s that balance act for me trying to do that.

I found that this uncertainty was common amongst participants.

Sherry echoed Norchelle's example, describing similar concerns about the change of building principal. She expressed that she already recognized changes in her approaches, saying that since the previous principal left, she no longer attempts work with the new principal. She said, "And [the previous principal] was someone that I really had a good relationship with and that I always felt like I could go to. This principal, I feel like he, is new, that he has a lot on his plate, and is trying to figure things out. And I don't feel like he is brushing me off, but I also don't feel like he is invested in me [or] like he wants to try." In this case, collaborating with administration proved to be problematic for Sherry.

And, for Norchelle, the situation spiraled, developing what portrayed as intense negativity. As the school year progressed, she continuously experienced new responses from the new administration regarding what she could and/or could not do within her role as the school social worker. Therefore, as her professional approaches had to change, she then also perceived that her relationships with other teachers also changed. She said, "You know what, the staff here, this year, for the role that I'm in this year, they are very, very patient with me. They are so patient with me... Because there are a lot of things that I used to do, that I no longer do... Like I used to push into classrooms..." In Norchelle's experience, the change was entirely negative and counterproductive to her ideal practice approaches as a school social worker. Her sense was that she was not using either her personal or professional skills or strengths, which she described in a discouraging way.

It was not solely principal turnover that participants cited as causing effects on their professional practices. Jahara explained that even though she was a leader with prescribed shared authority in the building, she felt as though she could not be as effective with the new leadership team as compared to what she was able to accomplish with her colleagues on the leadership team

during the previous year. She said that due to the changes in staffing, she perceived her new team to be less efficient than her teams in the past. She explained, "...You don't build trust as a team when it happens that quickly. Um, so I would say that with part of the team I felt really comfortable and had strong relationships. And part of the team, it was like really big building effort..." Jahara's statement exemplifies how turnover can be detrimental to an existent social structure within a school building; it causes multiple people to change and accommodate their 'use of self' and therefore exaggerates the feelings of uncertainty within 'sense of self'.

Summary: Social Structure

Through my attempts to understand this dataset as a whole, I found that the domain of the social structure emerged as an overarching influential component to practice for school-based social workers. This section built upon the understanding of the social structure within a school environment, as Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory all posit that it is natural and inevitable that practitioners will experience and understand their work within the surrounding social structure (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999, 2009; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974). Therefore, I began this findings chapter by portraying how participants described the social structure to overlay all perceptions: participants' own perceptions of their personal 'sense of self,' participants' perceptions of their colleagues, and also participants' understanding of their colleagues' perceptions. Thus, in accordance with the three theories, I found that participants described how the social structure, which is a host site for social workers, can play a role in determining how practitioners perceive their personal and professional identities (overall 'sense of self') while making professional decisions (overall 'use of self'). For example, while participants recognized

their ideal approaches that they wanted to enact, they also had to consider the social dynamics that could influence outcomes for their clients and/or influence their ‘sense of self.’

This section portrayed how the data regarding the social structure contained three main themes: interpersonal dynamics, uncertainty regarding power and authority, and experiences when encountering change. Participants described how these emergent themes influenced both their ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ within their professional decisions and approaches to practice, and caused them to respond with various feelings and reactions, both consciously and unconsciously. These findings align with previous studies that show the importance of positive relationships. For example, in their study about public-sector professionals, Emmert and Taher (1992) found that “Public professionals seem to derive their attitudes more from the social relations on the job and from the extent to which their intrinsic needs are met. The dimensions of the work itself appear to be a secondary consideration” (p. 44). Their finding reiterates the importance of the social structure domain.

Yet as the next section will further detail, there are additional influences on professional practice that are imperative to better understand. Participants in this study, in addition to portraying various ways in which they understood their ‘sense of self’ within the social structure, also reported how they experienced personal identifiers to be present within their ‘sense of self’; thus, the domain of personal identity emerged as another influential component to school-based social work practices. These personal identifiers were described to be both distinct from external influences (such as colleagues, the social structure) and/or as entrenched within the overall social structure. The next section outlines this next influential domain (Personal Identity) within practice that emerged from the data, and illustrates how participants described their personal identifiers, personal experiences, and personal interests while considering their professional

decisions, approaches, and practices - rather, while considering their overall ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self.’

Personal Identity

With a vague consensus of the role of a school-based social worker, there is discretion as to how to be a successful practitioner (Kelly et al., 2016; Kelly & Stone, 2009; Phillippo et al., 2017; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010). Without strong systematization of approaches and further developed professional models and theories to guide practice, practitioners may intentionally and/or unintentionally interpret and/or make use of their personal identity or ‘sense of self’ within the social structure of their work. Literature evidences that mental health practitioners will naturally and inevitably make use of their personal knowledge when tacit knowledge is not readily available (Payne, 2005; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010; Willig & Billin, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2009). Additionally, tenets of Standpoint Theory and Positionality philosophize that personal identifiers such as age, language, race, etc. will influence one’s understanding of the world around her (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Haraway, 1988; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009). Therefore, I sought to understand the components of personal identity that participants described as important within their decision-making about professional practices, in order to answer the research questions posed for this study regarding how social workers describe their practice choices (their ‘use of self’) based on their personal *standpoints* (their ‘sense of self’).

These interconnected principles of Standpoint Theory and Positionality led me to find that the data related to personal identity created two main subcomponents: *personal identifiers*, which includes demographic information, and *personal experiences*, which includes personal interests. In order to illustrate the emergent findings from the data, this section will first

exemplify how participants described personal identifiers in relation to professional practices, and will then move into how personal experiences and interests were described as part of professional practices.

Personal ‘Standpoints’: Personal Identifying Demographics

Because I was seeking to understand how school social workers describe their practice choices based on their ‘personal *standpoints*’ (‘sense of self’), I found that this data produced three personal identifiers (or demographics) that were commonly discussed by the participants: age, race, and language. While other personal identifiers were also recognized at times (such as select statements regarding a participant’s gender), I did not find other demographics to be discussed as important to the thematic findings as I did for age, language, and race; therefore, this section will depict these three personal identifiers.

While data analysis showed that personal identifiers were clearly existent and influential within participants’ professional practices (within their ‘use of self’), I found lacking fluidity in which information about personal identifiers surfaced. It should be noted that the interview protocol was vague in relation to directly asking about personal identifiers, which could attribute to some of the minimal discussion about personal identity. In this data, while recognizing the indirect nature of the interview protocol as one of the limitations of this secondary data analysis, there was an underwhelming number of participants who spoke about their personal identifiers without first being prompted by the interviewer, and even when prompted by the interviewer, the discussion remained limited. Regardless, this section outlines the findings that emerged from the data in relation to personal identity, including information about participants’ personal identifying demographics.

Personal Identity: Age and Years of Experience

Overall, participants portrayed age as being one of the most commonly recognized demographics when reflecting about professional decisions and approaches as a school-based social worker. All participants spoke about age as an influence in various ways, both relative to their clients and in relation to their colleagues when referencing social structures and power dynamics around them. Participants referred to and described age by using chronological years of life, but also often alluded to age as *years of experience*. While both descriptions (*age* and/or *years of experience*) were influential to practice, I interpreted the data with the assertion that *age* carried a stronger personal connection, whereas *years of experience* referred to professional practices. In these descriptions, I found that some participants dismissed the influence of *years of experience* as part of personal identity specifically.

For example, throughout all her interviews, Denise used both terms while reflecting on her previous professional decisions and her perception of her knowledge as a school social worker. I am providing this example to distinguish the potential dual meanings of these two terms. In relation to wanting to change her colleague's manners with kids, Denise said that she came to realize that she would need to simply continue practicing and learning in order to improve her outcomes. She said, "I think that just comes with time, it comes with age, it comes with experience. Nobody ever has a quick answer for that, you'll just get there as you get there." In this statement, she referred to *age* separately from *experience*; she then described "get[ting] there" in relation to both terms/meanings.

In some instances, it made sense that the participant described age in reference to *years of professional experience* such as when focusing on the established rapport or reputation a practitioner believed she had in a school. For example, it was again Denise who explained that it

took time in order for her to be accepted as “part of the family” in her school building. At the end of her first year of working in the school, she experienced a new sense of belonging due to her prolonged experience. She explained that once her name was officially on the school’s sign-in sheet, she was able to consider herself “part of the family.” She said, “... It’s so funny, cause at first, [I thought] they are never going to put my name on this list. One day, sure it was, I didn’t have to write it in... [now I’m] part of the family.” As she recognized, this realization had nothing to do with Denise’s age, and rather referred to the length of time that she had worked in the school building.

Another participant, Helene frequently referred to her *age* throughout all of her interviews for this study, without any prompts from the interviewer. She experienced several negative encounters with younger colleagues throughout the year, referencing their ages as the reason(s) for their negative interactions. Helene described her age in various ways, sometimes with conscious recognition regarding how it affected her ‘sense of self’ and/or ‘use of self’ and sometimes with more discreet infliction as though age was separate from her personal identity. For example, when she was depicting her attempted collaboration with a teacher in the building, she inserted information about her own age as well as the colleague’s age. She said:

... Just one of our teachers is very hard to work with. She’s new this year. She’s literally 40 years younger than me and inflexible. That stresses me out. There’s nothing to do with this thing; there’s nowhere to go, there’s no problem solving to be done. So I think those are the things that come up that are stressful for me.

While this description lacks verbal understanding of ‘sense of self,’ Helene did indeed describe a more defined ‘sense of self’ when she emphasized the influence of her age and years of experience in other statements. For example, she said, “I have been around for a long time, so I feel like I can [...] try to keep people, keep things into perspective.”

Denise, who identified as “younger,” recognized that within her overall ‘sense of self,’ her younger age was a barrier to having a difficult conversation that she believed should occur. She said, “... I am young. I’m not that young, but my administrators are probably well in their 50s, you know, they’re older... How do you approach somebody who’s first of all older than you but [also] in the higher position than you to say ‘hey, I don’t really think that kinda came across so well?’” Denise followed-up her previous statement by saying, “I have to work on it, because I recognize that somebody has to be the one to address it, but the way you do it will either make or break you... I wanna do a lot, and if I make the wrong impression on them they can really hinder me from doing what I want to do.” These considerations denote Denise’s ‘sense of self’ as well as her understanding of the social structure in relation to her age and identity. She realized that she would need to be cautious and considerate while actively remembering and planning her ‘use of self’ with older colleagues

Generally, participants spoke about their own increasing years of experience being positive, in that they believed their own years of experience led to stronger practice approaches. They described their age and/or years of experience as being influential towards their reasoning about their own professional choices. For example, when Janice spoke about her level of stress, saying, “...I try not to really, you know, get a lot of stress going on...” she then explained that age and experience have led her to improve her abilities to manage her stress. She said, “Um, probably with age. You know, I just learned to accept the things that I can’t change... And change the things that I can... And then know the difference.” And, when asked specifically about her current level of stress, she stated, “I would say every year, to me, it gets better because ... I’m older, wiser.” Along the same lines, when Tamira was articulating her reasoning for one

of her chosen practice approaches, she said, "... because, like I said, I'm older, I've learned a lot."

Melinda utilized age within her 'sense of self' as she was describing her reasons for her stress levels. She reported that she considers herself to have many years of experience, and described this as a benefit as compared to practitioners who are newer to the field:

...I've been a school social worker... a long time... And, like, when I look at the woman who I mentor and some other people who are new to the field... I think, 'I've been through it...enough times. I've seen the trends come in and go and I know, kind of... what I need to worry about and what I don't need to worry about.

In this way, she wanted her 'sense of self' to support her 'use of self' when encountering stressful situations.

I found that participants described age to be impactful towards their approaches when building relationships with their clients. For example, I found that older participants perceived being able to more easily connect with parents, as they often cited their own experiences of raising children as a uniting experience. For example, Helene said, "Because I'm older, and I do have the benefit of having raised three kids and they're like crazy in their own way. I mean, they're totally not straight and narrow, so I can throw in my kids' stories and you know, they turned out fine. My son couldn't read or write and he did fine." In this example, however, while Helene was seemingly relating her age in conjunction to building rapport with parents, she also ended up citing her family demographics as a related explanation of an important personal factor.

I found that age and years of experience emerged as being connected to the domain of the social structure as well. Generally, participants spoke about their colleagues with more practice experience as having more positivity, and therefore more productive power and influence within a school building. In other words, I interpreted based on participants' descriptions that colleagues

with more experience were able to better interact within the school's social structure because they had developed stronger skills to navigate relationships and other social dynamics in order to find success in their work. For example, Jillian explained that she had learned the 'ways of the building' throughout her time working there. She said, "A few years ago, I was definitely younger and not quite as seasoned as I am now." Similarly, Pam perceived that she enjoyed working with a specific colleague due to their shared years of experiences and stronger understanding of the school dynamics. She explained, "[My coworker]... understands the building, the dynamics and doesn't have the expectations... that some people might."

Personal Identity: Language⁹

Findings from the data about language as a personal identifier was somewhat limited. It should again be noted that the interview protocol was vague in relation to directly asking about personal identifiers, which could attribute to the minimal discussion about personal identity. Of the participants who did describe language as influential, there was a difference in the experiences for those who identified language as a barrier versus those who identified using (or not using) language as a means to support and advocate for students. Participants explaining these barriers generally spoke about the discomfort that the barriers caused internally, within their 'sense of self.' When referencing language as a barrier, most of the data was in reference to parents of students rather than students themselves.

⁹ It should again be noted [see 'limitations' section] that it is unknown whether this specific sample included a participant who spoke a language other than English with clients. No participant outwardly verbalized speaking another language, though there were participants who did not speak about their language abilities at all. The findings I portray include only perceptions of participants who experienced language barriers when clients did not speak English. When referencing these language barriers, it was most common that participants spoke about Spanish-speaking clients, though one participant spoke about barriers with numerous languages in her school.

When spoken about, language barriers were mainly verbalized as a barrier due to the inability to communicate (rather than, for example, due to a cultural clash or feelings related to language as a culture). I found that it was common for participants to talk about instances in which they could not communicate directly with clients, such as when Helene said, “Um, definitely if I could speak Spanish it would be nice.” Therefore, in relation to the influence language had when making professional decisions, participants described effects of explicit language barriers as an inability to communicate; the inability to communicate was described as causing difficulties in building rapport with clients, or how participants were able (or unable) to control their ‘use of self.’ When responding to a question during an interview about relationships, without pause Robyn immediately said, “Well the barrier is definitely language, ‘cause I don’t speak Spanish... I would definitely not turn away having better contact with my parents.”

The language barrier, usually described by participants as an inability to speak Spanish specifically, manifested as a frustration in building rapport and feeling effective when working with Spanish-speaking clients. For example, Jillian, who does not speak Spanish, described how the impact of the language barrier affected her clinical approaches in various ways. She explained that even the parent interview for the social developmental study could cause frustration for her and/or her clients because she always had to use a translator when with Spanish-speaking clients. In doing this, she explained, the language barrier causes a disconnect. She said, “I personally, I love getting together with people... I just... I really like the connection... And that’s why I have a hard time when I have an interpreter.” She did not like having limited options regarding her ‘use of self.’ She then described a more specific instance in which the language barrier created complex feelings for her within her ‘sense of self.’ There had

been several recent instances when a social work intern at the school acted as an interpreter during the parent interview for a social developmental study report. Jillian said, “[Paola, the intern] made some wonderful points about, when she was sitting in the role of the interpreter, how she felt very close to that parent, whatever they were going through... It was interesting that she saw that ‘cause I always feel like I’m just like the outsider in a way. Like, I’m working with their child but that interpreter really, there’s that more of that connection piece.” Later in the interview, Jillian again said that for her, a language barrier is the most difficult part of building rapport and connections with the families she services.

Contrarily to these feelings of frustration when language acted as a barrier, practitioners instead had an appreciation when language was more simply an additional identifier rather than a strictly a barrier (ie: such as for student(s) who spoke English as another native language). Denise spoke about the strategies she used to move past the language barriers as well as the related cultural implications of her students directly. Because her students are in high school and are mostly bilingual in both English and Spanish, they were able to communicate together about their language differences while speaking in English. Denise described how she used these language differences as a positive variable when interacting with students. She asked her students to teach her the meaning and reasons for various Spanish words or phrases, which led to stronger affinity and rapport-building within their relationship. She explained, “So, they’ll tell me this word in Spanish and they’ll say ‘I don’t like the history [explanation in class]...’ And I’m like ‘Well what do you mean?’ And they tell me the history that’s been told to them in their family [versus] coming to school and hearing it from a textbook.” In this way, Denise used language as a way to empower and advocate for her students and their families. She was conscientious and intentional about her ‘use of self’ in relation to the language around her.

*Personal Identity: Race*¹⁰

Note: It should be noted that the interview protocol was vague in relation to directly asking about personal identifiers, which could attribute to the minimal discussion about personal identity, including racial identity. Six participants did not speak about their personal racial identity at all; the interviewer did not prompt for it and the participant did not initiate the topic. Three participants spoke about their personal racial identity independently, naturally describing race as influential to their practice approaches and decisions, without interviewer prompting. Seven participants spoke about their personal racial identity, to varying degrees and in various ways, and after the interviewer prompted about it.

The social work profession claims its values as being justice-oriented on behalf of minority and marginalized populations through compelling its practitioners to maintain active understanding about the significance of culture and using professional approaches in accordance with strengthening and empowering clients of minority populations (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Fong & Furuto, 2001; Guy-Walls, 2007; Joseph et al., 2012; Krentzman & Townsend, 2008; NASW, 2001; NASW, 2008); the corresponding NASW Standards for School Social Work Practice (NASW, 2012), which is meant for school social work practitioners specifically, further mandates that school social work practitioners uphold these principles (Alvarez et al., 2012; Brake & Livingston, 2016; Joseph et al., 2012; Teasley et al., 2010). The social work profession is meant to educate its professionals about the significance that race plays within and throughout individuals' experiences; MSW curriculum should emphasize not only the importance of others' races, but also the significance the clinician's individual racial identity has within therapeutic relationships (CSWE, 2018; Guy-Walls, 2007; Joseph et al., 2012; Krentzman & Townsend, 2008; NASW, 2008; Teasley et al., 2010). My analysis using Standpoint Theory and Positionality, which allow for expansive ways in which to consider race and other personal

¹⁰ In this sample, five participants identified as African American, five participants identified as Caucasian, one participant identified as Indian American, and five participants did not identify a specific race.

identifiers, allowed me to specifically seek for data in relation to race. I found that there were participants who did not make mention of race at all, other participants who spoke briefly about race after being specifically prompted, some who asserted that race was not influential; additionally, there were participants who spoke about race extensively, providing explanations of their perceptions of others' racial identity as well as their perception of their own racial identity. Most participants in this study (though not all) did not describe race as a priority within their practice decisions, which could be due to the limitations regarding the lack of direct alignment to this study within the interview protocol, or other reasons.

Helene was a participant who described being unconcerned with the concept of race. When specifically asked how race may impact her work, said, "We're pretty Caucasian, I think [referring to the student population] ... And it [referring to race] doesn't really matter, you know..." Helene believed that because she had the same racial identity as most of her students, she did not need to consider its importance. She did not think about race when considering her overall 'sense of self.' Helene, therefore, provided an example of a school social work practitioner who chooses to set aside notions of racial identity in her practice approaches and decisions. She further evidenced her style of approaches when she described a situation involving a student of biracial identity. She explained that the school team was attempting to qualify the student for special education services, and believed that the Special Education administrators were creating an unnecessary impact related to his racial identity. She said, "Oh this is a biracial kid, you know, it's so sensitive... The other kid went straight to a case study. This one, *oh no*. And this kid is making everybody miserable... it's terrible." She expressed her frustration related to the lack of change and movement within the case study evaluation for

Special Education; while her administrators believed that race was important to consider, she expressed that she did not believe race should be a factor in the evaluation decision.

Yet Helene's statements would have likely made Norchelle and Denise uncomfortable, as they emphasized the influence of race within both their 'sense of self' and intentional 'use of self' within their professional practices. Denise explained that she identifies as African American, which she said can be helpful when working within a largely African American population, though she also referenced its disadvantageous effect at the same time. She explained that she works with determined conscientiousness to remember to understand each student or family situation "as different" and unique.

Norchelle, who identified as African American, also explained her own recognition about the need to reflect about how her own personal identity related to the students and families with whom she works. She emphasized what her race means to her within her daily professional practices. She described entering the field of school social work with one understanding of her own race and then altering some of her perceptions as she reflected on her 'sense of self' and 'use of self' within her professional practices. She explained:

So, when I got this job... It became my responsibility, as a woman of color, to... to be this for my kids, my students. Like, they needed to see and they needed to know more than what was in the context of their books. And I felt like I'm responsible for this... And I want my kids to experience a world where people of color are seen as more than just criminals.

Norchelle's words illuminated the pride she felt regarding the meaning of her racial identity within her professional practices. Yet she also described discomfort due to her racial identity, showing a variety of ways in which her own race unevenly affects her own practices. She explained that being mindful of her own opinions is especially pertinent while working as a school social worker because, while she identified as being African American and therefore

having the same or similar racial demographics of her students, she further recognized that she did not align with most students and families in regards to her other personal identifiers or demographics, such as socioeconomic status and level of educational attainment. She found the influence of her race to be extremely influential, which she experienced as a difficult component to her practice approaches due to the combination with other parts of her personal identity. She explained:

It's extremely difficult. And what we have to do, as, as educators is switch lenses. And, so... Because I'm a woman of color, [to think] 'every kid of color needs XYZ'... I can't feel that way... I cannot. Every family does not have access that I have... I have to change my mindset also. And so, like, that's a conversation... about cultural competencies and... when to change your mindset, how to change your mindset.

Norchelle and Denise illustrated how even though they considered their African American identities to be a supportive factor in building relationships with, and understanding some of what students of African American identity may experience, they additionally described their recognition of the inconsistent discomfort that race can continue to cause within their services for students and families.

After minimal prompting by the interviewer, Maria, who identified as Caucasian, also spoke about race; she said that all students with whom she works identify as Black or African American, and then articulated her feelings of being the outsider. She recognized feelings of discomfort, explaining that the influences of her race were greater than she had ideally wanted them to be. She described how she attempts to work while maintaining “cultural sensitivity” within everything she does. Yet her awareness and ‘sense of self’ in relation to racial influences was not enough to abate uncomfortable situations. For example, she said that she consults with

another social worker, who identifies as African American, when encountering situations she finds confusing or uncertain. She explained:

I try to have cultural sensitivity and... I'm lucky because the other social worker is African American and, you know, has been working with this population for quite some time... I can, kind of, compare notes or have open conversations with her about how to handle situations that may be questionable... At the same time, there are definitely times we disagree how to handle, you know, disciplinary things... So, it's a case by case sort of thing but, I'm always open to acknowledging, you know, it's different.

Maria's explanation showed me that while she was attempting to utilize a beneficial 'use of self' in relation to racial identity by practicing with cultural sensitivity, she continued to find herself in uncertain situations in which she disagreed with the other social worker, and continued to experience feelings of uncertainty and a lack of confidence within her 'sense of self.'

In all, Jahara summarized what several participants were conveying about cultural sensitivity and self-reflection. Jahara further revealed the need for honesty and open communication. She explained her experiences of relationships growing over time while simultaneously developing a stronger sense of trust both towards and from her colleagues and clients. She said:

I think it comes from a lot of honest conversations, and then people feeling connected to your feeling. Like even if I don't understand your experience, I'm willing to listen to it or acknowledge it or had my own experiences with minorities, which aren't the same as yours, but would you allow me to empathize with some of the things that you are bringing to me.

Jahara's words ring true to the intent of MSW curriculum, which includes teaching future practitioners about the importance of cultural identity (which includes racial identity) as well as the ways in which to approach practice based on various nuances of cultural identity (ie: race). Yet the participants in this study described uneven ways in which they practiced (their 'use of self') with consideration to cultural and/or racial identity.

Personal Experiences

Literature shows that it is unavoidable for mental health practitioners to bring their own personality alongside their practice approaches (see, for example: NASW, 2008; Payne, 2005; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010; Willig & Billin, 2012; Zamudio et al., 2009). Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of Positionality, which suggests that in addition to demographic identifiers such as age, language or race, there are more personal characteristics and experiences that can greatly influence individuals' perceptions and understandings as well (Acevedo et al., 2015; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2010). Because I wanted to understand how practitioners describe their overall 'sense of self' for this study, I analyzed the data with consideration of participants' thoughts about their personal interests and experiences. I found it true that in accordance with claims based on Positionality, participants described how experiences that occurred outside of the school setting shaped perceptions and opinions that affected how they decided to approach professional practice within the school setting. Tamira's description of her conscious awareness of her life outside of school portrays how practitioners may generally consider their 'sense of self' and 'use of self' in their practices. She said:

...You know, sometimes when your foundation from your home is what makes you the person that you are... And my background is, um, I'm originally from south Georgia, which is a rural area, and we believe in family and eating food, a lot of good food. So, throughout my life, with just seeing my parents and how they lived and all the things they went through, just made me appreciate my life and just... live my life the best I can... Don't be so hard on myself and... it can humble you.

Tamira's words articulated how experiences not only influence professional practices, but the outcomes of the experiences also influence future preferences and interests.

Overall, in both prompted and unprompted ways, various participants in this study described their recognition that their personal childhood experiences had shaped their

understanding of their personal and professional identities. When participants reported that personal experiences distinctly influenced professional practices, I found that they also generally described a discomfort across the three domains. In other words, if/when feelings of discomfort emerged, participants' explanations regarding their 'sense of self' both professionally and personally included more intense descriptions about the impact on their practices. Therefore, because of this strong impact to practice, and because personal experiences are different for each individual practitioner, I found that personal experiences influence school-based social workers' practice decisions; some participants described their personal experiences as being vaguely related to their professional decisions and approaches and others explicitly described the ways in which their personal experiences impacted their professional decisions and approaches. Regardless of the type of explanation, I found a definitive overall theme regarding the nature of personal experiences within professional practices.

Norchelle was perhaps the participant who most frequently and extensively explained about her own childhood throughout all of her interviews, describing and demonstrating her strong 'sense of self' and conscientious 'use of self.' She explained that her childhood and culture have been influential to her professional life; not only did she initiate her job as a social worker due to specific experiences she had as a child, but she continued shaping her professional practices based on these various childhood experiences as well. For example, Norchelle described how her mom has created lasting impact within her work. She explained:

My mom did community organizing. As a kid, I watched her and I was like 'I want to do that.' You know, like the, ability to empower people to change the environment that they live in was, like, transformative for me as a kid. I was in sixth grade and ... it changed the expectation of what we were going to live in. Right? 'We will not allow you to sell drugs in front of our house,' 'I will not see you shoot up,' 'My kids will not step over your needles,' and things like that. 'Cause that's what had happened before. You know? So to be a part of that culture

was... changing for me as, as a kid. So I knew I wanted to go into social work.

Norchelle continued to reference her own life throughout the duration of all interviews for this study. Not only did Norchelle speak about these memories and experiences as the grounds for her current professional practices, but descriptions regarding her past during childhood simultaneously elucidated descriptions about her current personal values as well. She said:

So, my mindset changed as far as what kids in urban or poor ghettos could do 'cause I was that kid... But my choices that I made and the family that I had put me in the right places to have other choices and opportunities and exposures and experiences. That really transformed my life. And so I feel like I have to do that just the same. And so that is what motivated me... if I can touch one kid, one parent, one family, one administrator, change the mindset of one teacher, then it's a job well done for me...

Norchelle's childhood experiences were described as clearly and consciously infused within her professional practices and decisions, and she was not alone in demonstrating a tendency to describe her childhood as a justification for her approaches.

Tamira communicated that events from her childhood informed her decisions and values, and grounded her to ensure she remained productive and optimistic in all of her personal and professional approaches. In one example, she portrayed how her parents' young deaths sparked a stronger motivation to ensure her own happiness. She explained, "... just seeing my parents, you know, work all their lives and just work, work, work, work, and then die, both of them die at 63... I have to have balance." Tamira said that she remembers her childhood experiences in order to be her best professional self, and does so by creating values and boundaries within her identity, which again demonstrates how 'sense of self' can manifest in 'use of self.'

Childhood experiences were also described as a reason or explanation for more specific professional approaches and skills. Jillian, for example, explained (without prompting) her own childhood in order to best describe the basis of some of her strengths as a professional. She

described how her family's traditions unexpectedly helped her learn to navigate larger, professional social situations, which she considers an important skill to possess. She attributed her time spent at yacht clubs, sailing, as part of the reason she has been able to find professional successes. She explained:

... I feel like the yacht club scene actually helped me out, like being around adults, when I was younger... how to navigate that, how to just engage and communicate in a, you know, polite, appropriate way and get needs met... But I feel like it's that schmoozing a little bit... I feel like I'm outgoing to a sense, but I still kind of consider myself an introvert [so] just to be forced and thrown into those situations, like you sink or you swim...

Her experiences lead to her to abilities to shape her perceptions and opinions of productive communication with her colleagues; she believes that her need to communicate 'politely and appropriately' during childhood sailing events provided her a foundation for some of her 'use of self' within her professional approaches.

Another participant, Maria, also initiated the topic of her childhood as a reason or explanation for her specific professional approaches and decisions related to student discipline. During this topic of conversation within the interview, she referred to her own experiences of discipline when she was a student herself, and directly stated that she believes her memories have been influential to the decisions she was making about disciplinary approaches as a professional school social worker. She explained, "With my own family upbringing, and how disciplinary actions were taken at schools that I have attended in the past... sometimes, that does cause a little friction." She described her experiences as being both negative and positive influences within her current identity due to the differences within the culture she experienced as a student herself versus the culture in which she currently worked as a school social worker.

Therefore, with the understandings of Standpoint Theory and Positionality which claim that all individual experiences help shape individual perceptions and ‘sense of self’ within one’s environment, I also found that some participants’ illustrations of their more current lived experiences were described as just as influential on their professional practice approaches as were their childhood experiences. In addition to individual interests and knowledge existing within professional tasks for the workplace, I found that practitioners’ personal experiences outside of the workplace were also described as influential to their experiences and approaches - their ‘use of self’ - within the workplace.

Additionally, the participants’ descriptions led me to interpret that it was common for distinct personal life events, meaning events that specifically occurred outside of the workplace with no intentional connection to professional practices, to be impactful towards professional practice decisions. In analyzing information related to participants’ more current experiences, I also found that generally, participants readily and outwardly recognized that they were describing external lived experiences, or components of their personal identity, while speaking about their professional practices. For example, Helene spoke about her difficult school year, citing reasons that work itself was difficult, but further explained how her experiences outside of work exasperated the problems she was facing. She explained, “I came back to work a week after my mother’s death in August. Which was a mistake. Maybe, I’ve been distant, you know...” She continued by describing the feelings she experienced when her dog was ill, saying that this situation inevitably emanated into more difficult and draining experiences at work. At one point she said, “...it hasn’t been work stuff... it’s more personal than work,” relaying how her personal feelings and experiences outside of work influenced what she considered being able to feasibly do inside of work.

Pam also considered her own experiences when she recognized the positive effects of her knee injury and its follow-up surgery. She explained that she felt she had no choice but to let this personal experience (the injury) affect her work, as her doctor required that she walk as minimally as possible and then undergo a surgery, she demonstrated her reflective nature of her 'sense of self' within her professional practices as she explained her insights about the experience:

... usually, I'm with gym shoes on, I'm in PE, I'm all over the place. Realizing that you're a 'systems-person' being everywhere, there needs to be a balance in this... and I'm like, 'just stop, you're not doing it because your knee is messed up.' So, I've sat more and that lent me to just think... I'm really thinking through things. I'm really thinking beyond what I did initially... I am able to problem-solve much smoother... And then it's making the kids more independent, because I may not want to walk across the gym. I may say, 'no, you need to go get that football.' And then spend my time more specifically.

Pam's experiences exemplified how her injury then created specific ways in which she approached her job and interacted with students. She then considered and explained that her injured knee in fact resulted in generally positive outcomes as related to her professional practices. Both her 'sense of self' and 'use of self' were changed after experiencing the injury.

Robyn was another participant who was able to determine how an external personal situation affected her professional work. She explained that during the previous summer, her family's dog had passed away, which then changed her schedule, since she was able to stay later at work. Because she did not need to arrive home promptly to walk the dog, she therefore spent significantly more time working before and after school hours. Through this recognition, she gained awareness as to how her dog had helped her maintain a healthier, more balanced schedule. Once she and her family adopted a new dog, she maintained and followed-up on her perceptions regarding the beneficial impact it had on her working schedule. She explained:

... [we] had to put the dog down... [so] that was the first time I could come to work in 11 years and not have to get home for the dog. You know, and now we did adopt a new dog and now I do have that in me that I have to get home for the dog. And, so I think that kind of builds in that piece of like okay, you can't just stay here and keep working.

Robyn's consciousness of her work-life balance allowed her to actively consider how she spends her time, which she portrayed as a valuable skill to have, personally and professionally.

Overall, these examples showed how personal experiences (ie: experiences that occur outside of the workplace with no intentional connection to professional practice) illustrate the significant impact that the domain of personal identity can have within professional practices. Yet the details reported from these participants exemplified the wide-ranging and potentially unpredictable impact that personal experiences can naturally bring to professional decisions. While participants described positive consequences coming from their personal experiences, there were additionally reports of adverse effects that occurred when not actively recognized and/or monitored by the individual practitioners.

Summary: Personal 'Standpoints' and Experiences

Standpoint Theory and Positionality helped me to understand how school-based social workers described their personal identity and experiences ('sense of self') in relation to their professional practices ('use of self'). The theories posit that individuals' perceptions, understandings, and beliefs, which are understood through unique personal identifiers, then influences the actions individuals will decide to take (Acevedo et al., 2015; Kezar, 2002). Participants in this study reported ways in which it was inevitable that they used their own positionality as they determined their practice approaches and made professional decisions, whether consciously and/or unconsciously. Participants described using their personal perspectives, which were based on their personal identity (including personal identifying

demographics, personal experiences, and interests) throughout their descriptions of professional tasks and responsibilities. The theories also conclude that social dynamics can affect and form parts of individual identity (Acevedo et al., 2015; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Hartsock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar & Lester, 2010; Willig & Billin, 2012). These theoretical tenets underlie findings from this study, as I found that participants' described masked and unclear or uncertain boundaries about their personal impact(s) on professional practices.

During analysis related to personal identifiers, I found that most commonly, participants spoke about demographics in relation to age and/or years of experience, and described influences on their practice approaches and social dynamics in both positive and/or negative ways. Influences of language were mostly described as creating an inability to communicate with clients. Most of the participants of color also spoke about race as an important personal identifier within their professional lives. Furthermore, during analysis of personal experiences and interests, I found that participants were able to provide extensive descriptions regarding how their personal life events, both during their childhood and more currently, affected their professional decision-making and practice approaches.

Yet because this study sought to understand participants' 'sense of self' within professional practices specially, analysis was not complete without additional investigation regarding the professional role more specifically. Therefore, in addition to Standpoint Theory and Positionality leading to the findings thus far regarding participants' explanations of their surrounding social structure and personal identity, I then sought to determine how the social structure and personal identity did and/or did not relate to the professional role. The domain of the professional role allowed for a more saturated response to the posed research questions; intentionally looking for information about participants' professional role provided additional

understanding regarding how ‘sense of self’ was pertinent to professional practices specifically. I specifically employed the theoretical framework as a lens towards finding participants’ perceptions and understanding of their professional identity. These findings, provided in the next section, will build upon the previous sections in order to better clarify how participants described their understanding and utilization of ‘sense of self’ within the domain of the professional role specifically.

Professional Role

The findings about the professional role provided an understanding about the intricacies and complex sophistication that school-based social workers experience within their unique positions in schools. We know that whether it be due to vague job descriptions, evolving school policies, local/state/federal legislature, and/or different educational training for the job, school-based social workers themselves are often only able to partially understand a prescribed job role, while colleagues and other professionals have an even looser grasp of the role (Allen-Meares, 2013; Altshuler & Webb, 2009; Alvarez et al., 2012; Berzin et al., 2011; Bye et al., 2009; Franklin, Kim & Tripodi, 2009; Kelly et al., 2010; 2016); this may stem from widespread differences in required qualifications, such as education or licensing (Boland-Prom & Alvarez, 2014; Kelly et al., 2016). Regardless of the reason(s), school-based social workers often find themselves overloaded with tasks that may not necessarily be within their understanding of the job description and role responsibilities. Therefore, in order to fully answer the posed research questions, it is important to explain the findings related strictly to the professional role domain prior to illustrating how the domains of the social structure and personal identity come together to influence school-based social workers’ professional approaches and decisions overall.

The combined use of Standpoint Theory and Positionality as a theoretical framework provided a useful lens in which to better understand how participants experienced their feelings and perceptions of their professional role specifically. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the data about the domain of the professional role included participants' descriptions that were specifically related to professional expectations, practices, and outcomes in addition to their reasons, beliefs, and other thoughts about their professional services (ie: references to their given job descriptions, utilized and/or attempted practice theories and approaches, demographics and policies within the school, etc.). I also found that participants described the ways in which they emphasized their colleagues' perceptions (rather than their own) in some situations, such as when still considering their personal perceptions of the roll. Based on this data, this section portrays how participants perceived and described their experiences and understanding of their own professional role(s) as school-based social workers. I begin with the more comprehensive concept that emerged from this data (*'school-informed professional mindset'*¹¹), and then further describe additional findings.

School-informed Professional Mindset

Similarly to how social workers are trained to recognize and reflect on their personal identity, I found that participants described the ways in which it was inevitable and/or necessary that they recognize their professional differences in order to produce effective outcomes within the host setting of a school. Due to working in a host site and amongst interdisciplinary teams, participants described how school-based social workers have unique professional goals and agendas as compared to most other staff members in the building. Overall, I found that the

¹¹ *School-informed professional mindset* refers to a way of thinking (a 'mindset') for school-based social workers. See Appendix B for further description and definition of the term for purposes of this study.

participants provided descriptions of their role in a way that created what I am coining as a ‘*school-informed professional mindset*’ for purposes of this study.

While there is a knowledge base in within social psychology literature regarding the concepts of ‘mindsets’ and ‘attitudes,’ (see, for example: Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2005; Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, Steller, & Sherman, 1990; Hamilton, Vohs, Sellier, & Meyvis, 2011; Mackay, 2015; Nolder, & Kadous, 2018; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; etc.), there is no specific definition for what would be a *school-informed professional mindset* specifically (or, for that matter, nor is there a definition a somewhat more general *professional mindset*). I constructed this term (*school-informed professional mindset*) based on literature about ‘mindsets’ more generally. Based on work by Gollwitzer and his collaborators, Nolder and Kadous (2018) described a ‘mindset’ to “consist of a collection of judgment criteria and cognitive processes and procedures to facilitate completion of a particular task. Accordingly, mindsets are evidenced by cognitive processing measures, such as those capturing an individual’s openness or receptivity to information and the extent to which they seek out confirming or positive information” (p. 2). Hamilton et al. (2011) explained that ‘mindsets’ have two significant properties: that cognitive processes are relative to more than one specific task, and also that thoughts relevant to the mindset “remain active beyond the initial task, influencing subsequent and even unrelated tasks” (p. 13). While there are qualifiers of what characterizes ‘mindsets,’ the term continues to be used widely, in a plethora of contexts.

The literature about ‘mindsets’ is widespread. It pertains to all environments, not specifically the workplace; though future literature could acknowledge how the overall concept of a *school-informed professional mindset* (or, *professional mindset* more generally) relates to other areas of the social work profession, or even to other professions outside of social work, the

terminology for purposes of this study relates specifically to school-based social workers. Furthermore, literature about ‘mindsets’ has depicted numerous characterizations and qualifiers for a type of thinking (see, for example: Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2011; Nolder, & Kadous, 2018; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; etc.). For example, as Nolder and Kadous explained, “holistic mindsets” relates to thinking about the ‘bigger picture,’ and “abstract mindsets facilitate making and evaluating decisions in line with one’s principles, while concrete mindsets facilitate attending to immediate problems” (p. 5). For purposes of this specific study, *school-informed professional mindset* relates to how social workers, who have different knowledge than most school employees, are interpreting and deciding how to respond to the needs of students in a non-social work school setting (or, host setting).

This conceptual idea of *school-informed professional mindset* emerged from the data based on participants’ descriptions of their recognition that they think differently than do teachers and other staff members. Participants described their *school-informed professional mindset* as creating both unique opportunities to utilize specific training and knowledge but also as a reason for less comfortable feeling of dissonance surrounding some professional responsibilities. Regardless of the struggles it caused, participants also described the *school-informed professional mindset* as being necessary and meaningful to their work and as the reason for having different way of thinking as compared to colleagues in the school. Nathalia, for example, explained how her thoughts stemming from her *school-informed professional mindset* were of importance throughout her daily work. She expressed excitement about her unique professional approaches as a social worker in a school describing her *school-informed professional mindset* as conducive to bringing a well-rounded perspective to what could be otherwise become deficit-focused conversations about students. She explained:

I bring to my school... my own personal experience and my background and how I identify. Along with that, I bring with my social work training... a lot of the times I notice it comes out in meetings. I feel like having [a seat] at those tables to have those conversations I think is very important.

Her words here, which were not discrepant from other participants, resonated with affirmation.

Other participants provided specific examples about approaches and strategies they use due to having a *school-informed professional mindset* as school-based social workers. Maria said she knows she takes different approaches than would others with whom she works at the school. For example, she explained that she does research “On social emotional, kinda accommodations and interventions to use with these children... because not everybody has their Masters in social work... I would say my role is particularly, you know, advocating for the social emotional needs of the kids.” She further expressed her belief that her approach(es) to the job should relate to what others are not doing as a way to fulfill those needs.

Interestingly, Jahara, who was a social worker holding an administrative role at the time of the interview (and previously worked as a school social worker), recognized how she continued to maintain a *school-informed professional mindset* in accordance with her social work values while in her role as an administrator. She said that she notices her social work background when working with other administrators, as her opinions and approaches differ from their areas of expertise. She said:

... when my principal and I were talking... It was that we had an incident in the school [between two students] and a lot has resulted from that... And so, like, I was able to build time into our leadership team last week saying, like, ‘we have to address this. It’s affecting our students’ functioning. It’s creating conflict. It’s having a lot of ripple effects.

She also then explained that the other administrators had, without intention, ignored the social emotional effects the incident had on the student body as a whole. They had not considered if or

how to manage the “ripple effects” that Jahara described. Jahara voiced her appreciation of her social work background, explaining that it allowed her to insightfully manage a difficult situation with students in an advantageous way.

Throughout her interviews, Denise also described her opinions of being a social worker within a school. Her thoughts characterized both positive and negative connotations of the role she found herself experiencing. She explained that she refused to automatically adhere to what others wanted her to do or what others believe she can do without also reflecting on what she believed to be the correct or best approach(es):

Everybody always thinks that ... when there's a kid that acts up, it's our job to fix them. Not necessarily... It's our job to understand them and to help get them a balance where we can. But sometimes they're up against a Great Wall so the thing could just be helping them have a great day. Not everybody gets fixed.

Here, Denise's word depicted how her 'sense of self,' which supported her formation of her opinions of her 'use of self' in accordance with her *school-informed professional mindset*, caused her contrasting or incongruent beliefs with her colleagues.

Other participants also portrayed these differences as a reason for their difficult relationships with some colleagues, explaining that their unique *school-informed professional mindset* and/or misunderstood professional role caused tension when contradicting with colleagues' mindsets. This shows how the *school-informed professional mindset* can cause a drift or tenuous undercurrent within school-based social workers' collegial relationships and/or the overall social structure. For example, Janice described her perceptions of teachers' beliefs and approaches with students exhibiting external behavioral needs. She explained that teachers in her school usually associated such behaviors with students' uncontrolled anger, and she wished they would be more cognizant of various different emotional needs and other possible reactions they

could have when working with the students. She said, “The whole thing with the teachers always referring kids for ‘Anger Coping.’ You know, every kid in my school is not angry. You know? And that’s the thing that gets me...” This shows how her *school-informed professional mindset* and knowledge of mental health helped her to make sure students received what they actually needed (her ‘use of self’), but then caused her frustration with her colleagues (her ‘sense of self’) at the same time.

Participants also reported that the *school-informed professional mindset* not only caused discordance with colleagues, but caused them to feel divergent and conflicted with various existent legislation. Fourteen participants in this study were working within the state of Illinois, where there is legislation requiring that school-based social workers provide services via mandated Special Education services. And, school-based social workers who provide special education services to students are required to monitor and document each student’s progress based on the Individual Education Plan [IEP] goals, often written by the Special Education team. Participants’ *school-informed professional mindsets* did not necessarily align well with the policies regarding how to track and report on these IEP goals. For example, Melinda expressed frustration about the seemingly “deficit-focused approach” that she perceived while monitoring and documenting performance surrounding students’ goals. She explained, “[It] just doesn't feel good to me ... You can still have measurement and progress that are related to important behavioral factors, but like maybe holding on to this really important but specific behavior isn’t the best way to say if a student is doing well or not.” She additionally said that “the things that kids really care about are not always measured really well in a linear graph.” Another participant, Sherry, similarly said, “I try to, like, turn it into a lesson ... Not to say I don’t work on their goals, ... but, there's always more than the goal.” In this example, Sherry showed how her own

‘sense of self’ in conjunction with her *school-informed professional mindset* causes her approaches to differ not only from teachers and interdisciplinary colleagues, but also from other school-based social workers.

Regardless, some participants were able to recognize the positive effects of their unique *school-informed professional mindset*. I heard from participants that their different *mindset* was a positive quality and unique asset that they could bring to their school in a beneficial way. This awareness was apparent when participants were describing their professional identities, such as when describing ideal practice approaches in contrast with realistic practice choices. The use of Standpoint Theory and Positionality combined as an analytical tool led me to understand how individual practitioners’ varying ‘sense of self’ further exacerbates the complications of this sophisticated yet inconclusive role identity that existent literature evidences. Further understanding and defining of this *school-informed professional mindset* could clarify some aspects of the scope of the social work role in schools. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974), which was evidenced and explained as part of the domain of the social structure, also provided insight into the participants’ descriptions of their colleagues’ understanding(s) of their *school-informed professional mindset* and/or overall role. Even further, however, as the next section shows, there were more factors of the professional role related to ‘sense of self’ that participants described utilizing (‘use of self’) within their daily work.

Professional Role and Contextual Conditions

In addition to the emergent conceptual theme of *school-informed professional mindset* that practitioners perceived as influencing them in their roles within the school, I will now show

how participants also described schools' contextual conditions¹² to influence the professional role for school-based social workers in various locations. The joint use of Standpoint Theory and Positionality as an analytical tool generated opportunity for the meaning of the contextual and environmental structures to emerge; the literature regarding facets of Standpoint Theory substantiates how characteristics and nuances of the contextual environment interact with individuals' perceptions, thus affecting their functioning (or, 'use of self') (Harding, 1992; 1998; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015).

For example, the school building's geography was an indicator for evolving school policies, including local/state/federal legislature. Or, different school locations created the need for practitioners to gain distinct knowledge in order for them to successfully perform their jobs within the specific school context. Therefore, the effects of the school context, while inevitably out of practitioners' immediate control, were also reported as influential towards how participants made professional decisions in their specific positions.

I want to note that the concept of geographic location (as one example) is a contextual characteristic that can relate to both the domains of the social structure and personal identity as well as this domain of the professional role. For instance, the geographic location of a school could be described to have strong negative and/or positive impact with a practitioner's personal identity depending upon whether her own identifiers are similar and/or different than the identifiers related to the school's context. It could also relate to the social structure domain, as I found participants in this study describing how the school's geographic location and/or other contextual conditions were associated with disagreements with colleagues about available

¹² See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *contextual conditions* for purposes of this study

resources or funding. Within this data specifically, I most frequently found descriptions of geography to emerge in relation to the scope of participants' professional role(s).

For example, Denise, a school social worker within the inner-city of Chicago who worked within three different school buildings, each in a different geographic neighborhood of the city, illustrated the different experiences she had in each of the areas. I learned from her that as she traveled between school sites during the week, she recognized the need to change her approaches and 'use of self' with students based on the geographic location. She explained her perception of the different behavioral nuances of the neighborhoods on the south side in comparison to the west side of Chicago. She said:

It's like you're expected to be a little bit more of a grown-up kid here [the south side] and then the atmosphere there [the west side] neighborhood that I'm in ... plays a part too... You know, if I were at a high school on the west side in an impoverished neighborhood I would probably see a whole other different dynamic. There's no reason for them to jump off the walls here [south side].

Her explanation elicits not only her awareness or recognition of the various cultural implications of the geographic area, but also her perception that she needed to use differentiated clinical approaches dependent upon where the school was located.

Differing clinical approaches were further cited as other participants explored the meaning of geographic location and related contextual characteristics within their professional role. For example, as a licensed social worker with an administrative position within the school, Jahara was highly aware of the economic instabilities a school could encounter. Perhaps due to her multiple perspectives as a school social worker, a current licensed social worker, and a current administrative position, she referenced the geographic area multiple times during two different interviews, evidencing her perception of its significance within her experiences in her role(s). At one point, she explained that the culture in her charter school was known to be

different than culture in other charter schools specifically due to contextual considerations. She explained that while charter schools typically bring together students from various areas and neighborhoods, her specific campus incorporates a unique student population in which most students (she said about 75%) come from the same neighborhood. She said that this factor influences her necessary practice approaches because of the more common interconnectedness amongst students and some staff members. Jahara described how the fact that students lived near to one another outside of the school setting created a different, unique dynamic inside of the school setting. She explained that while at work, she feels “the neighborhood inside of the school.” She explained, “I think that because it’s a charter... they don’t always acknowledge that community tie. But for our school in particular, because of where we are located... we’re like a neighborhood school... So it’s a little bit of a different dynamic.” While she articulated this in a positive light, saying that it feels like a “family” and “community,” she also recognized additional challenges that the contextual characteristics brought to her experience. She explained that gang affiliations and interactions from the neighborhood then manifested within experiences at school. She said:

... I don’t know if it’s turf wars or what’s happening, but they’re [the police] seeing the increase in violence across [the area]. And that’s really affected our kids... And then, I also think, like, as we become a bigger school we also have kids that are far more connected in the community.

Jahara therefore depicted how she actively and specifically learned about the specific gangs and neighborhood conflicts in order to be able to approach student needs with the necessary information for the conversation.

Yet another participant, Helene, contrarily expressed being able to dismiss knowledge about occurrences at ‘schools in the city,’ as she characterized her school as being “suburban”

and therefore explaining her perception that her school had less intense needs than would schools within the city. She said, “I mean we have a handful of families that are hard to connect with but, you know, we are suburban and we aren’t facing issues that the city faces, at all.” Helene’s depiction of ‘the city’ illustrated how she views it as an external, outsider phenomenon, and apart of her own ‘sense of self.’

While describing the lack of significance regarding her school’s overall contextual conditions, Helene then depicted a smaller geographic location within the school district’s boundaries, creating what Helene believed to be a barrier for specific families who lived within that area. She explained, “I think... [this area/suburb] is this bubble kind of community. But, there’s a lot of outsiders... We have a little corner over there and I know those families do not feel connected because the socioeconomic piece is much different there.” Helene characterized the students from this smaller, disconnected area as living a different socioeconomic experience than the rest of the students and families who attended the school and lived more directly in the area. Therefore, Helene may not need to learn and/or implement trauma-informed practices, for example, in the same way as those practicing within the inner-city. Yet, she described a situation that then evidenced why she must use cultural humility in similar ways as is needed by school-based social workers (and colleagues) within the city.

Jahara also characterized the co-occurrence of different socioeconomic statuses related to the geography of the school building. Similarly to the above example cited by Helene, she said, “I also feel conflicted sometimes around just the natural barriers to services within our neighborhood and how... we don’t have the capacity to service students but then, also, maybe they’re not going to get services then [because they live in this location].” While Helene described her role at a school within an affluent suburb, Jahara had described her role at a school

in a rough inner-city neighborhood. There are clear distinctions between the two, yet both participants shared their reasons for needing the ability to find and access outside resources.

Denise also recognized the necessity to find and distribute resources in all three schools in which she worked as a school social worker, which were all within areas of lower socioeconomic status in the city of Chicago. Yet, she portrayed that she experienced disparities even amongst her three schools, which saw cause varying student and family needs. She explained, “[I do] whatever I can do to get the services out there ‘cause I know I’m in the west side, where it’s very impoverished. Unlike the south side, where they have access, they just don’t take advantage of it... It was kinda a culture shock moving from the south to the west because the west side has no resources.” These examples portrayed how individual practitioners may approach their jobs in relation to a singular, unique contextual need. Despite there being such evidence indicating the value of what more systematic school-based social work practices could bring, I continued to find fluctuation amongst participants’ descriptions of being either mandated and/or individually deciding to emphasize a focus on resource allocation versus other tasks within the role.

Norchelle was not thinking about a sole need of her school’s context, though she consciously and intentionally allowed geography to inform her practice approaches with students. When explaining her reasons for doing so, she described how geography has always been a large part of her personal identity, her ‘sense of self’ as well as her ‘use of self.’ In her own words, without interviewer prompting, she explained that she chooses to actively emphasize her ‘sense of self’ within her professional role. Based on her own past and present personal experiences, she believes that contextual conditions can have strong influence on students’

success. She explained that she therefore makes sure to have conversations with students regarding the needs of their geographic area. She said:

I tell [students]... I went to a high school far away from where I lived. Three bus rides to get to school. And I'm like... 'I need you to go beyond. There's more to this world, there's more to this city than this community.' And so I'm really pushing them to go to more diverse schools. And I'm sharing my story on how impactful it was for me. I traveled, probably, the farthest of anybody that went to that school the four years I was there, but that experience was everything that I needed. Everything that I needed.

Summary: Professional Role

In order to best understand how school-based social workers make use of their 'sense of self' within their practice approaches, it was also essential to determine how school-based practitioners may experience the domain of the professional role specifically. Because we know from existing literature that school-based social workers provide a plethora of services as part of their varying roles, I analyzed this data to better understand participants' descriptions of their feelings and experiences as a professional social work practitioner within a school. Participants characterized their *school-informed professional mindset* as unique, containing specialized knowledge, and as being influential in forming their professional opinions and perspectives. These descriptions then led me to more deeply investigate participants' specific experiences, which formed my understanding that while the *school-informed professional mindset* was often described optimistically, it was also met with feelings of frustration and/or uncomfortable professional incongruities (as could be explained through principles of Social Identity Theory, along with those of Standpoint Theory and Positionality).

Overall, participants were able to more articulately describe an understanding of their ideal role and less clearly describe an understanding of their actual role. This was evidenced through statements and descriptions about actual current tasks and functions they were doing in

comparison to the tasks and functions they wanted to do but were not doing. Nathalia expressed these findings articulately, verbalizing what other participants similarly shared in various ways. Nathalia outwardly expressed her passion about this specific topic related to her role as a school social worker. She explained that she believes school-based social workers to have a necessary and meaningful position, but that she feels burdened by the work due to what she perceives as an overwhelmingly wide array of tasks, expectations, and/or responsibilities. She stated:

I wish there were more social workers in schools. And I wish we had more resources and, in my ideal world, there would be more than one mental health trained person in our school... Ideally... I mean, I see that, like special education and IEPs are such a huge important part of my role, so I am not saying that that's not valuable enough or that's not important. I guess I mean in terms of the paperwork and all of the time that goes into writing it... I guess that I wouldn't have to write it up in my dream world.

She also said that the reason she would relinquish the requirements of documentation so that she would then be able to spend more time completing the tasks she felt were more important. She explained:

Like have more time to be in the classroom. And then also, ideally, expanding a whole other level of my job. Which is another position in itself. Like the community resources development position. I feel like a lot of the time, because our jobs get so consumed with, like, on the ground, minutes, IEPs, servicing, and that... [I want to service] like, other students in general education as well as, like, developing community partnerships and relationships... Which I think is so important.

Nathalia articulately described what I found to be a general consensus among participants. In alignment with Nathalia, participants' descriptions formed a sort of 'role dystopia', as they described frustration and isolation in conjunction with their ideal, yet possibly elusive, role of a school-based social worker. Reasons and causes of role dystopia, or role confusion, was evidenced by statements from practitioners about what they would appreciate and/or enjoy doing if various other job tasks, restrictions, limitations, or nuances of the domain of the social

structure were to change. I found that such confusion about the role created conflicts, both interpersonally (ie: between colleagues) as well as introspectively (ie: practitioner questioning herself about how or when to take action, whether to deny services, her ‘sense of self,’ etc.).

In addition to experiences related to the job role itself, contextual conditions (ie: geographic location, socioeconomic status, etc.) emerged as a theme from the data, described as influential towards the way in which participants identified and approached their jobs. While geographic location is an identifying demographic that can additionally influence the domains of both the social structure and/or personal identity, participants’ descriptions of their experiences illustrated how context strongly influenced the scope of their professional role(s).

Part One Conclusion

After analyzing data for this study via the lens of Standpoint Theory and Positionality jointly, this first part of my findings (Part One) portrayed participants’ descriptions of three emergent thematic domains, which included experiences and feelings related to: social structure, practitioners’ personal identity, and the professional role. These three themes then further elucidated descriptions about the ways in which participants made decisions given their ‘sense of self’ within professional practice approaches and decisions.

Because practitioners inevitably work in a social structure that will shape the way they perceive their personal and professional identity, I first explained both the negative and/or positive effects that the domain of the social structure can have within professional practices; these effects were described to include participants’ perceptions of themselves, of their relationships, and of others’ perceptions of them. I then sought to understand how participants described their personal identity, including personal identifiers (demographics) and their personal experiences, affected the ways in which they felt and/or perceived their social structure

as school-based social workers. I found that age and/or years of experience, language, race, and personal experiences were the forthcoming themes in the data. Participants reported that influences coming from their ‘sense of self’ fluctuated or varied based on both the domain of the social structure and the domain of practitioners’ personal identity. However, because this study sought to understand ‘sense of self’ specifically in relation to school-based social workers, I therefore analyzed the data to find participants’ understanding and experiences of their professional role(s). In doing so, I found how practitioners’ *school-informed professional mindset* and scope of the professional role played a part within the overall findings related to practitioners’ ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self.’ Overall, findings illustrated inconsistent understandings of ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ amongst participants.

The provided explanations have not yet exhaustively portrayed the findings related to how participants in this study inconsistently understood their ‘sense of self’ and or acted upon it (‘use of self’) within their professional approaches. While the above information showed the ways in which the three domains (social structure, personal identity, and professional role) may guide practitioners’ professional approaches, I will now additionally illustrate how participants described their experiences of these three conceptual domains interacting together throughout day-to-day professional practices. Through use of a conceptual model that I created based on the themes found in the data, the next part (Part Two) of these findings will further illustrate how the three domains from the data come together to jointly influence school-based social work approaches and practices.

Findings and Discussion, Part Two

The previous section, Part One, described the three main thematic domains that emerged from this data: influences of the social structure, personal identity, and the unique professional

role of social workers within schools. Participants' descriptions of these domains then led to additional information regarding their experiences of the residual effects they experienced in relation to these concepts, such as the wide array of job tasks and responsibilities they had in their roles, the discomfort they experienced due to these tasks, and their actions/reactions ('use of self') based on their 'sense of self'. Overall, I found that participants' perceptions and understanding of their situation(s) were rooted in their desire to remedy experiences of current and/or potential feelings of discomfort.

In this portion of the findings (Part Two), I expand on Part One findings by showing more specific ways in which participants described their vastly variant roles via their understanding of the domains of the social structure, personal identity, and professional role. In doing so, I will portray the interconnectedness found within participants' descriptions of these three influential domains by first introducing a conceptual model that illuminates a *School Standpoint*, which is a term I conceptualized based on the emergent findings in this data. Then, through making use of this model, I will describe the findings that emerged from the data regarding the ways in which participants described their 'use of self' (based on their 'sense of self') within their professional practices to the best of their abilities. Overall, I found that participants' descriptions of their 'sense of self' and their resultant actions emerged as a '*balancing act*' of the three domains (social structure, personal identity, and professional role) incorporated in the 'School Standpoint' Model. The three influential domains presented in Part One of the findings chapter are the domains creating the overall 'School Standpoint' Model¹³.

¹³ School-based social workers can seek understanding of their 'sense of self' by utilizing the 'School Standpoint' Model. The three domains of the 'School Standpoint' Model include: social structure, personal identity, and job role. See Appendix B for more information about this (and its related) terminology.

The Conceptual ‘School Standpoint’ Model

Based on the emergence of the three conceptual domains to practice (including: social structure, personal identity, and professional role), I developed a conceptual model based on the data provided by participants in this study that details what has come to be the ‘School Standpoint’ Model (*See Figure 1*). These three factors are hypothesized to be the three domains of this model. As per my previously stated research questions, this model encompasses findings that demonstrate possible ways in which school-based social workers experience and determine their practice approaches and decisions based on their ‘sense of self.’ The term *School Standpoint* refers to the overall concept of school-based social workers’ understanding of their identity/identities, or ‘sense of self’ while working in a school setting. Data showed that practitioners’ professional identities were naturally and inevitably constructed based on the three main domains included within this ‘School Standpoint’ Model.

These findings align with conclusions by the philosophers of Standpoint Theory and Positionality, who conclude that individuals’ experiences across all areas of life uniquely affect all of their understandings and perceptions (Acevedo et al., 2015; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar & Lester, 2010; McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Findings evidenced that the social structure overlays all experiences, both personally and professionally; then, within the domain of the social structure, the influences of personal identity and professional role simultaneously project their effects on the other domains. Participants reported various and differing effects of each of the domains based on their individual evolving contexts and situations; therefore, this visual (*Figure 1*) is not meant to be static. The dotted lines surrounding each domain are meant to symbolize the fluidity of the boundaries of the domains. The image also shows that the domains of personal identity and professional role extend outside

of the domain of social structure, of which there are two reasons: first, the personal identity domain is extended because each participant (rather, each social worker) has a personal identity outside of the school setting, and second, the professional role domain is extended because the professional role contains elements of social work practice that may be irrelevant to a school setting specifically (ie: theories, approaches, knowledge that is not utilized within a school). The ‘pinpoint’ of the *School Standpoint*¹⁴ (the intersection of the domains) could include more or less

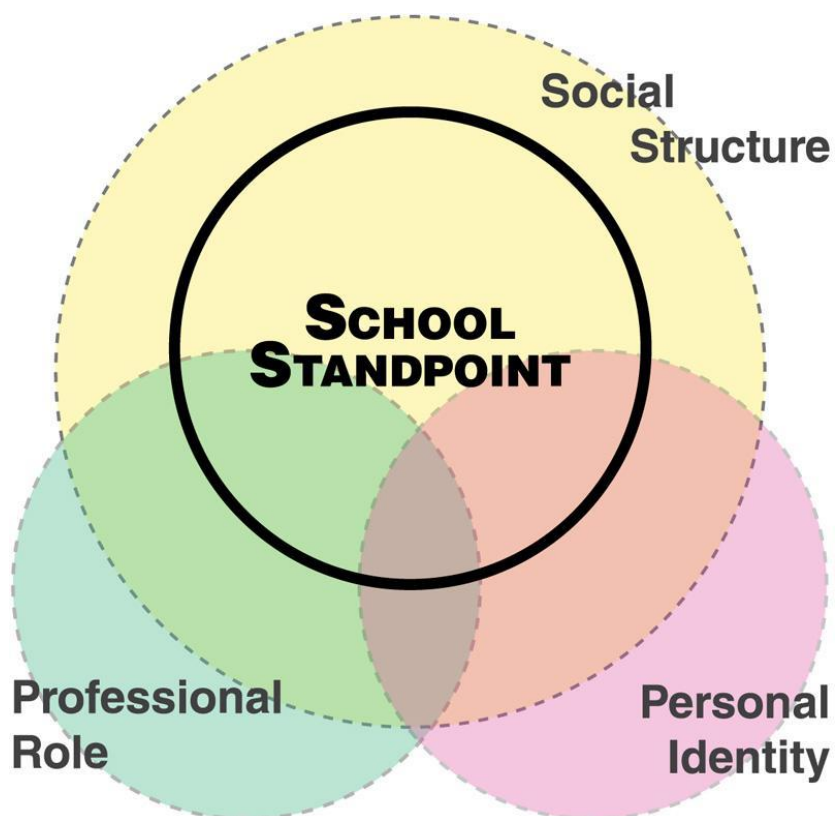


Figure 1: Image of conceptual ‘School Standpoint’ Model

¹⁴ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *School Standpoint* for purposes of this study

of each individual domain, dependent upon the circumstance (again, hence the dotted lines of each domain).

Through phenomenological interpretation of the data, and because these three domains are each multifaceted in and of themselves, I found that the participants' statements were not only pertinent to solely the social structure, their personal identity, and/or simply their professional role(s). Rather, these three domains of the 'School Standpoint' Model interact together in flexible and fluid ways. For instance, at surface level, participants may have been asked about a topic related to one of the domains (ie: either their personal and/or professional life), but I found that the descriptions of their thoughts and feelings then led to participants' follow-up explanations regarding the ways in which the boundaries between personal and professional identities were vague, fluid, and/or changing/shifting. Participants' understanding of their 'sense of self' and consequential 'use of self' was described as pertinent across all domains simultaneously.

Based on the overall contentions of this 'School Standpoint' Model, I found it important to determine how participants depicted their current status(es) as a professional and consider what they were doing (and/or not doing) within their professional approaches based on the effects of these domains. Findings that emerged from this data led me to interpret that participants were indeed continuously *balancing boundaries*¹⁵ and adhere to, as much of their personal and professional understandings as they could. While further analyzing this *balancing*

¹⁵ *Balancing boundaries* is a term meant to describe a process in which school-based practitioners attempt to productively mitigate their perceived understandings of the three conceptual domains of a School Standpoint in order to utilize their ideal practice approaches when feeling negative and/or disconnected from the work. See Appendix B for definition and description of the term for purposes of this study

act, I found participants to describe ways in which their professional practices produced outcomes that were generally described as uncomfortable for various reasons. I will explain the details of these conclusions throughout the next section.

Balancing Boundaries: Mitigating the Effective Strategies and Potential Barriers of an Ideal ‘School Standpoint’

Based on the findings portrayed in Part One, I created the conceptual ‘School Standpoint’ Model¹⁶ that incorporates the three domains evidenced as influential to practice based on participants’ descriptions of their overall ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self.’ There was more within the data, however, that this visual does not portray. As the model shows, there are three primary domains to an overall *School Standpoint*, and it also shows that each domain has flexible and fluid boundaries. I found that malleable boundaries, flexible approaches, as well as understanding the necessary limitations, were all crucial aspects within participants’ descriptions about how their ‘sense of self’ influenced them beneficially while at work. In other words, I found that participants naturally and consistently provided their insight regarding how each of the three domains influenced the other domains (ie: how social structure influences personal identity, which influences professional role, etc.). Their descriptions showed that they maintained a general flexibility within their approaches in a way that allowed them to continue practicing productively given - and/or despite - their internal understanding of their ‘sense of self’ within the three domains.

This flexibility of practitioners, in regards to their approaches to influence and/or restrict the perceived effects and understanding(s) based of the three conceptual domains, is what I interpreted as an act of *balancing boundaries*. *Balancing Boundaries* is a term meant to describe

¹⁶ See Figure 1 on p. 127 for visual/image of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model

a process in which school-based practitioners attempt to productively mitigate their perceived understandings of the three conceptual domains of a *School Standpoint* in order to utilize their ideal practice approaches when feeling negativity and/or disconnected from their work. In other words, *balancing boundaries* is meant to portray how participants described their independent responses to their own needs as they encountered various problematic situations as social workers employed in a school setting. Participants' descriptions of their actions portrayed various styles within their work; for example, some participants were purposeful and intentional in managing the social structure domain while other participants reported that they focused more strongly on managing the domain of their professional role(s). Other participants described their approaches in multiple ways, explaining that they changed their tactics based on their perception(s) of the situation(s) they encountered. In all, *balancing boundaries* means that practitioners are engaging in a process that can lead them to find ways to mitigate their experiences of the influence(s) of relevant domains.

While Part One evidenced forms of discomfort and/or pleasure participants experienced within their 'sense of self' while working within their school settings, the following information in Part Two shows intentional and unintentional (natural) ways in which participants described how they might work to *balance boundaries* in order to diminish discomfort within their 'sense of self' and increase the perceptions of positive outcomes of their practices. This section illustrates the ways in which participants described what they were doing in attempt to moderate their perceptions of the impact(s) of the domains of the model, usually in relation to when they perceived a domain as causing negativity within their professional practices. When participants described their attempts at *balancing boundaries* of the three domains, I found examples of success, as well as examples of incomplete and/or inconclusive results.

I will therefore continue this paper by describing the findings related to how participants in this study worked to *balance boundaries*, which included: educating their colleagues, altering and accommodating their approaches, finding allies, and utilizing their personal interests for stress relief. I will then also explain my understanding of situations in which participants described encountering *unbalanced boundaries*¹⁷, including: influences of race, managing collegial relationships, and the uncertainty involved in finding a work/life balance. Firstly, however, I want to recognize that the findings from this data are not exhaustive. These findings include the themes found amongst this sample of school-based social workers. It is likely that practitioners in other schools have additional ways in which they *balance boundaries*, manage the influences of the three domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model and/or have alternative unique situations in which their *boundaries* remain *unbalanced*. It is perhaps the lack of existent systematization to ease these problems that further complicates the extensive factors at play within the sophisticated position of school-based social workers.

Successfully Working to ‘Balance Boundaries’

Findings evidenced how participants described the influential effects of the three domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model to interact in ways that caused them feelings of discomfort, frustration, and/or negativity. Yet I also found more positive insight in participants’ descriptions surrounding their interests, motivation, and/or desires to move past some of the struggles they were describing. In other words, I learned how, when possible, participants reported that their negative feelings then led them to work towards *balancing boundaries* of their individual experiences and perceptions of the three domains (the school’s social structure, the participant’s

¹⁷ See Appendix B for definition and description of the term *unbalanced boundaries* for purposes of this study

personal identity, and the social work professional role) in order to be in stronger accordance with their ideal *School Standpoint*. The following four strategies emerged as common ways in which practitioners went about *balancing boundaries* in order to achieve what they described to be professional success.

Educating Colleagues

I learned that while participants' unique *school-informed professional mindsets* were portrayed as productive and/or special, these *mindsets* were also frequently a source of frustration or other discomfort regarding the approaches participants wanted to use versus the approaches they were actually able to use. As the 'School Standpoint' Model exemplifies, the social structure domain can influence the professional role, and visa-versa; and, collegial discordance is just one reason for the fluid boundaries of these two domains within the model. Thus, I found that some participants engaged in *balancing boundaries* related to their ideal professional role in a preventative way - by educating their colleagues about their perception and knowledge of the scope of the social work role within the school. For example, as Norchelle spoke about her feelings of frustration stemming from the clear misunderstanding about her role from others' perspectives, she also articulated her opinions about how an administrator could make better use of a school social worker if he/she knew about the knowledge and unique expertise that social workers have. At the time of the interview, Norchelle said that she believed she was unable to use her best skills because she was assigned tasks that were not necessarily what she considered to be within her professional role. Yet she was not completely discouraged. She said:

I think it's important for administrators to seek to understand [the role]... that's the first thing - understanding the role of a school-based social worker... because I'm here every single day... And, so I think it would be beneficial for her to seek

to understand that and then understand what systems I can connect to...

Therefore, while Norchelle expressed frustration about feeling unproductive and used for tasks beyond what she considered her role to be, she also had ideas about how to *balance the boundary* through explanation and education of the administration in order for her to experience a more fulfilled role within her *School Standpoint*.

Norchelle was not alone in recognizing the need to educate administration and other colleagues about what she can do as a mental health practitioner in a school. Pam explained how she actively “does the PR” for her role. She described ways in which she makes sure to explain everything she does to those around her, because as she explained, she wants and needs “their buy-in and understanding.” She said, “...You have to explain it [the role]... there is PR, there really is...” Pam said that she has experienced positive and productive results of what she calls her “PR,” and illustrated how it led to an increase of her own trustworthiness, which then gave her more power within the school because the administrators and teachers knew how she was working to be helpful. She said, “[They] like me cause I try to mend things. And they’ve wanted me, in several occasions... within their work. I mean I think they know I’m trustworthy.”

Shannon’s insights echoed Pam’s approach towards educating colleagues in order to *balance boundaries* of her professional role. Shannon, however, said that simply getting to know more people, especially administration, changed what she does on a daily basis. She believed that these proactive social interactions have helped her to navigate components of her professional role within the components of the social structure in ways that she prefers and desires. She explained:

Initially I was... doing individual work, individual therapy, just one-on-one, but, as I’ve gotten to know the administration... once I’ve gotten to know just different people in the building, like teachers [and] department chairs, I’ve been

more integrated into what's going on in the school on a day-to-day basis.

She explained that throughout her interactions, she is able to talk about what she does and why she takes the approaches she does.

Denise shared a related concern regarding the boundaries of her professional role within the social structure, but wanted to additionally emphasize the domain of her own personal identity as well. She shared how she worked to “prove [her]self” within the school in order to recreate her reputation. Upon starting in the school, she had experienced what she perceived to be a lowly reputation, which she attributed to the previous social worker, who had not been highly regarded. Therefore, she explained that in order to ultimately do the work she desired to do, she first had to teach others about her abilities and strengths, personally and professionally, and as a school social worker. She said, “I wish, I could have done more, I felt like, you know, I [first] had to prove myself a lot... The social worker here last year didn't really do much. Um, so I was getting that backlash...” She then explained how she took time to “prove [her]self” by first ensuring that she followed through on all of her assigned professional tasks and responsibilities, and then showed and communicated to her colleagues about the work she did. She was thinking about her future *School Standpoint* as she took these actions.

Overall, these examples synthesize participants' overall desires to assert and define the boundaries of the domain of the professional role. Norchelle, Pam, Shannon, and Denise, as well as others who are not directly quoted in this section, all explained their approaches towards educating their colleagues about their perceptions and opinions of the role. Yet their approaches differed in scope. While perhaps conducive to individual practitioner positions, these varying approaches that practitioners used towards alleviating a problem about various role approaches may lead to further role discrepancies and misunderstandings within the overall profession of

school social work. For example, Pam spoke about direct explanation of specific tasks and responsibilities, while Shannon and Denise took a more general initiative to meeting and interacting with many people in the building, which therefore evidences the complicating factors of unifying role formation for school-based social workers.

Altering and Accommodating Approaches

Part One findings evidenced that even though participants described their *school-informed professional mindsets* as helpful in the sense that others turned towards them when needing unique knowledge or a fresh perspective, it also caused feelings of frustration and/or instances of interpersonal conflicts with colleagues due to their different professional goals and intentions. Therefore, participants described the need to fluidly adjust the *boundaries* of the domain of the professional role in accordance to other circumstantial effects while simultaneously adhering to predetermined, feasible limitations. Consequently, as participants experienced being burdened with tasks that were not necessarily within their perceptions of what should be their professional responsibilities, they found various ways to maintain their individually predetermined limitations but also *balance boundaries* of the domain by altering and/or accommodating their specific approaches to the tasks in order to continue providing the services they described as the best fit within their ideal *School Standpoint*.

For instance, discipline was frequently cited as a common component or responsibility of many participants' roles per administrator and/or teacher request, and participants generally considered discipline to be outside of what the domain of their professional role should include. For example, Nathalia had just recently experienced a conflictive situation in which she was asked by the principal to be a part of the disciplinary process. She explained, "I was really uncomfortable when she called me in, and she was in the middle, and you know, talking to [the

kids] and disciplining them and saying how disappointed she was... And I was just standing there like ‘what the hell am I doing here?’” Nathalia further explained that she had wanted to leave the room, but because she was requested to be there by an administrator, she stayed throughout the encounter. Nathalia then articulated that she understood the confusion of other professionals, but wanted to adhere to her understanding of the role of a school-based social worker. She said:

...I feel that’s where a lot of times where my role gets conflicted and confused ‘cause, how, ‘oh can you talk to the student and figure this out...’ And it’s like, ‘well my job is not to investigate, and my job is not to be the disciplinarian and I don’t feel comfortable with that.’ So I feel like that’s been a blurry line as well, and having to balance a responsibility that we have as social workers... My role is to support and guide, not discipline.

Fortunately, Nathalia said that she had been able to speak with the administrator afterwards, and in doing so, she was able to clarify the conflictual task by explaining what she could do separately from the disciplinary conversation; she explained to the administrator that she could support students in learning to move forward in more positive ways during separate conversations. I learned that instead of saying she would not be involved at all, her strategy was to emphasize how she could reflect with students after the fact, by providing an alternative solution she felt okay doing.

In general, participants described the ways in which they *balanced boundaries* when required to take on undesired tasks with enjoyment and words or pride, describing feelings of success in being able to adjust and strengthen their approaches. For example, Julie and Helene explained that while they completed their given tasks, they did so in ways that they perceived as better aligned to their ideal *School Standpoints*. Both participants explained how they used therapeutic approaches even though the issue did not stem from therapeutic needs. For example,

while Julie's colleagues had wanted her to question a student about her absences and school refusal, Julie said she went "back to that initial, like, social work practice mind" in order to work with the student with a more positive approach rather than being a disciplinarian. She described how she used her clinical knowledge to formulate questions for the student, and did not simply directly question her as her colleagues had requested she do. Julie explained:

I started to do some art with her. 'Cause that's kind of her interest... some prompts and some writing or art activity. So, working with her on that rather than being like 'why aren't you coming to school, where you have a 29% in this class?'... So, I think just finding new strategies and working where the clients are, and then I kind of go back to that initial, like 'social work practice mind.'

Similarly, based on her previous experiences as a school social worker, Helene conveyed her opinion regarding how school social workers end up providing services to students who are demonstrating behavioral difficulties outside of her perception of the professional role domain, such as for students who do not complete their classwork. She said that she disagrees with this reason for a social work referral. In order to feel better about doing this work, she then decided to interpret the referral as, "Maybe there's some self-regulating issues." She said that while other school-based social workers in this situation may help grow functional skills so that students can better complete the classroom work, she spent her time with the students focusing on social emotional skills such as self-regulation.

Just as Julie and Helene demonstrated a change in their thought patterns and actual actions they took, I found other participants who also consciously changed their own understanding of situations they disliked. Norchelle did not change her approach with the students, but instead changed the approach she took within herself. She did this by creating a new interpretation of her 'sense of self' within a specific statement. During the interview for this study, she had been articulating clear frustration regarding an interaction with the principal, and

then described how she changed her approach within her own thinking, thus illustrating a specific instance in which she *balanced the boundary* of her professional role in order to more optimistically and positively understand her position. Norchelle explained:

So, one conversation the old principal and I had, she called me ‘miscellaneous.’ And I was like, ‘what the f- she say to me?’ And I realized then that my role is a ‘whatever you need me’ role in this school, in this setting. So me being just a social worker and building social emotional knowledge, that’s pretty, and sounds good, but the fact of the matter is that in this school, in this role, I have to be flexible... I have been the substitute, I’ve been the nurse, I go to the hospital if a kid falls out, I’m the one that goes to the hospital... I have done it...and do it all.

Within this statement, Norchelle showed how she had frustration regarding the “miscellaneous” job tasks and then came to terms with it by calling herself “flexible.” In essence, she reduced the impact of what she considered the domain of the professional role and expanded her dependence on her understanding of her personal identity, which she considered to include a flexible personality. Norchelle was not the only participant to express various emotions and opinions about the frustration of ‘outside’ tasks, and needing to alter professional approaches.

Finding Allies

As Part One evidenced, there were multiple reasons participants portrayed regarding their experiences and feelings of disconnect from their colleagues in a school. For example, in reference to *unbalanced boundaries* of the social structure domain, Tamira described feelings related to isolation. She said, “...Because you are inside the school, it’s like, one social worker and you got about a thousand teachers... Not a thousand, I’m exaggerating. But I find that sometimes being a school social worker can be isolating... because I’m a social worker within education.” Tamira’s words captured the thoughts of almost all the participants in this study. I found that the social structure commonly influenced practitioners in ways that made them experience uncomfortable emotions.

Therefore, I was not surprised to find how participants in this student were already working towards *balancing boundaries* in relation to this isolation and related discomfort. Participants described doing so by consciously seeking allies and engaging in collaborative efforts with like-minded individuals in the school. While participants acknowledged the necessity for school-based social workers to share their unique perspectives and approaches with colleagues, I also found that participants described their positive and/or negative feelings regarding these collaborative outcomes to also include their perceptions of the support and/or agreement they believed they received from their colleagues. This interpretation of the data was further understood through Social Identity Theory, which explains how individuals are inevitably part of a plethora of social networks - and inevitably excluded from other social networks as well (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974). As evidenced by participants' descriptions, I then learned that as a form of *balancing boundaries* or mitigating these effects, it was common for practitioners to seek out members of their own professional networks, or rather, other like-minded people and supportive colleagues.

For example, Jahara explained that she knew about the importance of shared values and visions even before starting her job. She said that one of the reasons she took her job was due to the principal's statement regarding his opinion about the importance of social emotional learning; based on his shared values regarding social emotional learning, Jahara said that she knew that she would already have an ally with an agenda related to recognizing the importance of social emotional needs. She explained, "... [the principal] said, 'I think social-emotional is really important, so I won't separate the two...' When he said that, I was like, oh now I want the job because you're invested in it. You're not just putting a social worker out there without knowing the purpose of it."

Regardless of the specific position, when participants spoke about wanting to implement new practice approaches and make decisions about their clients, they often mentioned their key allies within the school who could help them do so by providing the social influence and/or support they knew they needed. Data showed that participants commonly sought out other school-based mental health practitioners to find motivation or encouragement when feeling isolated. For example, Denise said that the counselor/case manager is “the person who could really be my biggest push in helping me”; Helene said that she relied on the school psychologist. Further, Helene’s experience having a like-minded professional with whom to work was extremely meaningful to her, as she otherwise spoke about negative feelings of blame and victimization, believing that her colleagues caused most of her stress and frustration. Therefore, when she found a new colleague to be an ally with similar values and goals, she recognized the difference the relationship made within her ‘sense of self’ and ability to productively *balance boundaries*. Helene said, “We get that lovely scapegoating with who you work with... You know, the talking in the hallway... so it’s made it better that [now] I have somebody who is on my team. I had finally another mental health person there... Who is smart. Who sees it my way.”

Melinda recognized that working with another social worker is not typical in a school setting and voiced that she felt fortunate having worked with her social work colleague for many years. She said, “I feel really lucky that I, in both middle school and in the junior high where I work now... I’ve worked with another social worker full time and that is just a rarity. So it’s really nice to have a colleague.” Yet at the same time, Melinda continued her statement, additionally citing the administration with whom she worked, saying that they had proven to be positive allies and a good support thus far. She spoke about her colleagues and described a positive school culture due to their shared values. She explained, “Overall, I think I have a great

job. I have a very supportive administration... they are very accessible. I think they really value the social work contribution and that always feels good..." And other participants also described a supportive teacher or other professional who aligned with their professional goals, and therefore became an ally within the school building.

Norchelle said that she thinks about a specific teacher when considering her supports within the school: "There's one person, Miss. Jeanie... She's very much like a believer. And she's probably my closest ally in the building. Like, she definitely supports my initiatives, my efforts, umm, and the person that I bounce things off of the most here." Similarly, Jillian said that she found unexpected allies in the school counselors:

I made some great allies. People that, kinda came out of woodwork that I didn't really even think would align with our philosophy in what we're seeing here in the school... Through those conversations I learned a lot more about them, just, as a person and what other professional and personal experience that they had.

Jillian's thoughts echo concerns regarding the common misunderstanding about roles and professions within a school building, though Jillian was pleasantly surprised at the relationships she formed with those from other disciplines.

Overall, these participants' examples show how allies can be helpful in implementing ideal practices, while opponents can cause complications or problems; Social Identity theorists would describe this phenomenon as being due to 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' dynamics (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Tajfel, 1974). Due to the difficulties that come with having a unique role and *school-informed professional mindset*, participants showed how they *balanced boundaries* by intentionally seeking out like-minded individuals as supports in order to find avenues to professional success. In all, the data showed that finding professional allies emerged as a

productive technique to *balancing boundaries* within school-based social workers' feelings and perceptions of their individual *School Standpoint*.

Personal Interests as Stress Relief

Findings showed that participants described a complex integration of individual, personal interests within and/or related to professional decisions and approaches. For example, in Part One, I showed how participants described connections between their childhood memories and their reasoning for their current *school-informed professional mindset* and specific approaches; this showed a way in which individual positionality can influence professional practices for school-based social workers. I also found indications within the data that individuals reported specific interests (as part of their personal identity) that they believed influenced their professional activities within their social work practices. More specifically, I found that participants described using their specific personal interests as a form of stress relief. Overall, while personal interests were described as influential towards overall practices, such as when participants were sharing their opinions and/or preferences while interacting with students and colleagues, there was a strong consensus within participants' examples showing how they purposefully and pointedly utilized their own preferences during especially stressful times of the school year. In other words, I found that participants described how their personal interests (part of their personal identity domain) had become a support mechanism in order to manage their stress - another example of *balancing boundaries*.

These findings related to personal interests emerged from the data mostly due to specific questions by the interviewers, who asked participants about how they manage the stresses they encounter within the workplace. Participants' responses, however, showed how they *balanced boundaries* of their stress through consciously understanding their own 'sense of self' and while

actively determining their ‘use of self’ regarding their personal interests. By this, I mean that I found descriptions of their personal interests as their strategy for stress-relief, rather than, for example, descriptions of their time management or other functional skills/abilities. Thus, I learned that their personal interests provided outlets for their professional disinterests or frustrations, therefore creating an opportunity to *balance boundaries* of discomfort through specifically accommodating ‘use of self’ during demanding situations.

Jahara, for example, described how a yoga retreat allowed her to maintain her professional approaches in a positive way. Her unique administrative position required her to support many staff members while maintaining an optimistic and positive persona. She explained, “Well, this past weekend I went on a yoga retreat with my sister which was amazing. I mean... it’s probably why I’m very calm talking to you right now... I mean, yoga is big for me. I try to, you know, keep up with it regularly.” She recognized her need to continually refresh and progress through the year productively.

Julie described her family as being a large part of to all aspects of her life, including work. She explained that she had been content prioritizing her children for many years, and more recently started developing more professional interests because her children had grown older. Regardless, she said that her children continue to “distract” her in positive ways when she wants a break from her professional life. She said, “...Before... I got to really focus more on my kids and babies and all that, and now that they’re older, I want to get back to more developing my professional practice.”

Helene, who frequently spoke about experiencing an extremely stressful year, said that she also makes sure to spend time with her family outside of work, and said that her child’s new puppy was one of her favorite interests at the time. She explained, “I have three grown kids and

the one that lives here with a puppy. That's been good because, normally I would see him every couple months, but now I am seeing him every week because 'I have to see the puppy.' So I am doing that, for myself. It's very conscious. Like, I just need that."

Three participants described how their spiritual and/or religious affiliation provided a support throughout both their personal and professional lives. Janice said, for example, "...If I didn't have a spiritual life, I'd probably be real stressed." She described her use of prayer as a strategy to use throughout her day, including while she is at work. She said, "I do my devotion, maybe, before I come to work. You know, I get my bible in, I listen to praise music on the way to work, so by the time I get to work... I'm feeling at peace. So, if I need to pray throughout the day, I do so."

Jillian explained the integration of a personal interest within a specific activity within the workplace. She explained that was well aware of her choice to participate in an art activity with students simply because it had previously been one of her favorite hobbies when she was in high school herself. She was enthused and highly positive as she explained her excitement about the wheel-throwing art project she completed with students. She said, "I'm like, 'okay, I'm gonna be signing up for that [activity]' 'Cause I did that in high school and I loved it. I'm like, 'oh I've been dying to get back on the wheel.' So, that was a huge stress reliever. Something really fun to do." She verbalized that she chose to participate because she "personally" liked the activity, specifically incorporating the word 'personally' as she explained her reasoning, thus showing her conscious understanding of the influence of her 'sense of self' within her 'use of self' while *balancing boundaries* of her stress within her work. During this topic of conversation, she additionally explained her self-awareness that winter months are harder for her to manage, and she therefore utilizes her interests such as sailing and swimming, outside of work whenever she

can. She said, “I’m more of an outdoorsy person, that’s why the winters are really hard for me.” Her explanation that she “just makes sure to not lose sight of those good outlets...” summarized Jillian’s conscious ‘use of self’ in relation to her personal interests and overall ‘sense of self’ within professional activities.

Jillian also spoke about how she trained for a marathon specifically due to the stress she experienced, which was rooted in her professional life. She related her marathon experiences to her professional experiences, saying that the marathon-related efforts reduced the stress she felt professionally by increasing her abilities to manage the chaotic nature of her jobs. Jillian articulated the experiences that many of the participants expressed in various ways: “I try to maintain more of a healthy lifestyle, so I feel like having that be so ingrained in part of who I am, it’s hard not to bring it here [to work], or vice versa.”

Therefore, participants described making use of their personal interests (as part of their personal identity domain) specifically in relation to their professional stress; this was mainly evidenced within the data by how they described their interests as tools or strategies for stress-relief specifically for their professional responsibilities, which then resonates with the inevitable need for self-care in a caregiving profession such as school-based social work (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). I found that rather than, for example, describing functional and/or professional skills/abilities that enabled them to manage stress, most participants instead referenced their personal ‘sense of self’ and consequential ‘use of self’ when asked about stress management during difficult workplace experiences. Overall, this finding demonstrates how school-based social workers may *balance boundaries* of their overall stress by making use of their personal identity within their overall professional *School Standpoint*.

‘Unbalanced Boundaries’

Participants described how each domain of the *School Standpoint* influences their decisions and approaches within the school setting. The previous sections, which related to *balancing boundaries*, showed that practitioners, whether intentionally and/or unintentionally, attempt to *balance boundaries* in order to mitigate effects of uncomfortable feelings, as well as limit potential adverse practice outcomes. I found that malleable boundaries, flexible approaches, as well as understanding the necessary limitations, were all crucial themes within participants’ descriptions about how their ‘sense of self’ productively influenced them while at work. Yet while I found successful examples demonstrating participants’ reconciliation of the *boundaries* (via educating colleagues, altering their approaches, finding allies, and/or using personal interests as stress relief), there remained uncertainty amongst participants’ descriptions regarding how certain domains, whether consciously or unconsciously, affected the other domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model. In other words, I found that participants specified certain influences as unfavorable, due to feeling unable to alleviate the problematic situations. Therefore, descriptions of certain *boundaries* remained *unbalanced*. The following section depicts the emergent findings from this data that participants described to be continuously uncertain, or *unbalanced*.

Influences of Race

Note: As noted in Part One of the findings, participants could have been led astray from speaking about their race due to the limitations regarding the lack of direct alignment to this study within the interview protocol. The reasons for minimal information about race within this specific dataset is unknown. Regardless, the findings in this section include the descriptions from participants that were existent within the data for this study.

As was described in Part One, I found there to be irregularity within participants' descriptions regarding their abilities and/or willingness in recognizing the potential influence of their personal identifiers, which was apparent in relation to their descriptions and beliefs about race. There were many participants who, even when prompted by the interviewer, provided limited answers and/or denied giving explanations and opinions regarding race. For example, when specifically prompted about whether her identity, such as her race, had an effect within her professional practices, Helene, who identified as white in some instances and Caucasian in other instances, responded by saying:

We're pretty much, we're pretty Caucasian, I think [referring to the student population] ... And it [referring to race] doesn't really matter, you know, the last one who called up and yelled at me happened to be African American. But, I should have called DCFS... she was mad at me... I'm naturally gonna be part of that system. Plus, I'm white, you know.

Helene's response demonstrates how she generally believed that race was insignificant within her professional approaches as a school social worker. Throughout all of her interviews, she made no recognition that race could have an impact, and in fact stated contrarily, explaining her belief that, due to working in a school where many of the students and families identified as white along with her, she did not need to consider racial implications. There were several other participants who also described a dismissal the importance of race.

Contrarily, however, participants who identified as African American or another minority almost always illustrated beneficial influences of their race and 'sense of self' while describing their professional work. Four of the five participants who self-identified as African American extensively spoke about the advantageous influence of their race within their professional practices and recognized that they consciously remembered race within their 'use of self' in the workplace. All five participants who identified as African American believed that their racial

identity was a unifying and/or supportive factor with clients of the same racial identity. For example, after being vaguely prompted about personal identity by the interviewer just once, Janice, who identified as African American, then described her race as purely beneficial when interacting with her clients (she identified the student population as being about 98% African American). When she was initially asked about how her personal identity may influence the work she does, she responded without pause, immediately saying, “Um, well I think because I’m African American, of course, that makes it easier.” She then paused briefly before continuing by saying, “Well I shouldn’t say easier. It makes it, um...” She then quickly paused again, then said, “Well I would say easier...” She then explained what she meant by “easier,” describing her understanding of students’ situations as more natural because she herself likely experienced the same or similar situation. To conclude her statements, she said, “You know, because I am an African American... it really gives me an edge ... I can relate to [students’] situations, um, not that all African American people are the same but, I can relate to some of the things that they experience...”

Overall, I found that in this data, influences of racial identity were experienced largely by participants who identified as Black, African American, or another minority; they described their understanding and experiences stemming from their personal identity (personal identifiers and experiences) to a larger extent than did participants who identified as white, or perhaps did not identify a race at all. (Again, it should be noted that the reason for this emergence is unknown, as the interview protocol did not specifically ask participants about their race.) Denise, who identified as African American, consistently recognized the racial influences she experienced across various elements of her professional practices. Denise explained that being African American along with most of her students being African American allowed her a stronger

connection and perhaps a unique understanding of their experiences. Because she spoke about race throughout numerous topics within the interview discussions, I understood that Denise considered racial identity as important and influential within her *School Standpoint*. Denise continued to portray these feelings when she explained her experiences upon starting to work with a large Hispanic population and reported that she then experienced an even larger influence of race within her practices than she had previously considered possible. She said that due to the resulting implications, she reconsidered many of her approaches in new ways. She explained, “It’s typically that I work with my own race of people... [and] you already know what the situation is going to be because you’ve seen it or you heard it enough or you’ve experienced personally in your family...” She said that in this new situation, she was more consciously aware of her interactions and approaches, her overall ‘use of self.’ She said, “... But then to step into somebody else’s world where the majority [of students are] Hispanic over there, and I’m more of a minority. And it’s, like, a very different kind of feel. It’s a different kind of vibe. It’s not bad or anything, but you know, it’s always just good to be culturally competent...” Denise continued explaining how these new experiences being a racial minority allowed her to review and refresh her ‘sense of self’ and examine her ‘use of self,’ which she appreciated. She said, “It’s like you have to take every situation as different... Here I’m learning a lot, and listening a lot more than I’m offering input, because I know there’s a lot of cultural things...” Similar to Denise, I found that participants who identified as African American/Black or another minority typically described a precise ‘sense of self’ in relation to their racial identity.

There were also select participants who identified as white or Caucasian who expressed a conscious understanding of the importance of race within both their ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self.’ While all participants who identified as African American believed their racial identity to

be a supportive factor with their clients, Maria, who identified as white, described her experiences in different, more divisive ways. She experienced her racial identity as a cause of stress or discomfort within her ‘sense of self’ and overall experiences within her *School Standpoint*. Maria spoke about her race as a barrier she encountered, due to her white/Caucasian identity while working within a school where most students and families were part of minority populations. Maria said, “Well, being white, hands down, is a barrier. I think people think that I come from a very privileged background or that, like, I had never... Never had hardship or trauma.” Through describing her own experiences, Maria affirmed Janice’s perceptions and opinions regarding the benefit of a shared racial identity, as Janice had referenced in relation to having an “easier” time working with students within the African American population as an African American woman herself. This also evidences how ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’ social networks (see: Social Identity Theory as cited in Tajfel, 1974) as well as power differentials based on positionality can complicate social workers’ ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ (Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974).

Yet, just as I explained through the previous examples’ portrayal of the unbalanced ways in which practitioners consciously identified the general race within their overall *School Standpoint*, there was a further imbalance of how participants described race to impact their professional practices. Sherry, for example, who identified as African American, explained that she prefers to not consider racial implications in her work. Unlike the other participants in this study who identified as African American, Sherry explained that while she knew her race would naturally and inevitably influence interactions, she did not want to focus on its effects. However, at the same time, Sherry additionally stated that amongst the interactions she encounters with students, she noticed African American students may feel more “confident” with her due to her

race; she also said that white students may be “a bit more apprehensive” if seeking her out for support. She said, “...there are a few white students that I will talk to that are probably a little bit more apprehensive, maybe, to some degree.” Sherry then said that she did not want to further speak about racial influences to her practices, again saying that she likes to approach everyone as an individual regardless of race, and wanted others to approach her in this way as well. She did not want race to be a significant component of her ‘sense of self’ or ‘use of self.’ Her statements further showed me that each participant’s own experiences, opinions, and beliefs create differing approaches to professional practices as well as various desired boundaries within the domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model.

Influences of Race Amongst Collegial Relationships

Thus far, I have noted how participants’ have described their perceptions of their race as influential within their practices in relation to their services for students. Yet I found that participants reported examples and explanations of how they also experienced racial implications directly influencing their workplace relationships, interpersonal dynamics, and overall experiences of the social structure as well. This was most often specifically related and understood through the principles of Social Identity Theory (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974). For example, Shannon, who identifies as white, verbalized (after a prompt from the interviewer) that she did not believe race to have strong influence in relation to the students with whom she worked (she said, “...the kids are definitely not bothered by it... they call me white chocolate...”), but did explain problematic influences within her relationships with colleagues. She explained, for example, that when she learned about a field trip many of her students were attending, she was unsure why she had not been invited as a chaperone. While she did end up attending the trip, she explained, “I had approached [the lead teacher] about going. If

I hadn't done that though, I would've never been included... And I was the only white chaperone, um, which didn't bother me..." She further explained her weariness about the situation due to there being "not that many African American teachers" which is why she perceived the situation, as she articulated, with being partially due to "an underlining race issue." Shannon's perception that racial influences impacted her collegial relationships was not a singular occurrence among the participants in this study.

Maria, who described the restrictive influences of her white racial identity with her clients, then additionally described how she also perceived the influences to diminish her personal and professional credibility among her colleagues. Her descriptions regarding her feelings of lack of power due to her race align with the tenets of Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory (Acevedo et al., 2015; Harstock, 1983; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974). In reference to others' thoughts or judgments, she explained, "There is some of this 'well you didn't grow with a community like this,' you know... [or] 'well we know what works in this culture' sort of mindset... [so] getting that kind of buy-in and having that trust [is difficult]." Maria continued describing this difficulty, explaining it as additionally complicating when in disagreement with others' opinions about her practice approaches. She explained the friction she perceived within some of her interactions, especially when she perceived her values to be different than those of her colleagues who identified as African American. She cited complicated experiences and conversations in which she had felt the necessity to report a situation of child abuse or neglect, but found that her colleagues perceived the situation as a cultural factor and did not want to involve the Department of Child Welfare [DCFS], simply determining to "move on" despite Maria's objections. Maria sighed as she said, "So that's something that's uneasy... and conflictive... and that's just different from my own upbringing."

Her example demonstrates that perhaps the absence of a predetermined and/or designated practice approach, combined with the contradictory ‘sense of self’ among colleagues, led way to discontentment within Maria’s ‘use of self’ within her professional work.

Jahara, who identifies as a person of color, an Indian American, additionally explained discouraging experiences related to racial influences amongst her colleagues, depicting the effects that race had on collegial relationships and the social reality of her workplace. She felt a divide amongst her collegial team, which she attributed to racial influences. She explained:

We went from mostly a minority team, to being about half and half. And there was some racial divide, among how people aligned on certain things... Now I’m trying to work past it, but there were some difficult moments and some discomfort... It’s a hard thing for people to acknowledge race...

In addition to these effects within her smaller team of colleagues, Jahara then also described her perceptions of racial influences on other teams and colleagues. She explained that she noticed that staff members of color primarily sought out administrators of color when they needed help or support at work. She said, “I do find that our teachers of color are more likely to come to an administrator of color.” When asked why she thought this occurred, Jahara related the social dynamics within the school building to the social dynamics within the political atmosphere of the city in general. She explained:

...I think that, given the dynamics of what is happening around us. I think that there were certain conversations that some teachers felt that the administration wasn’t having that they should have. And they wanted more talk around race, around *Black Lives Matter*, around what are we doing to build social justice in our kids. I think they felt, more comfortable coming to the people of color to raise it before they raised it with everybody, or asking us to raise it with everybody.

Jahara’s examples demonstrates how staff members of color may have simply felt more comfortable discussing topics related to race with other staff members of color, which influenced how she then understood her own role within her ‘sense of self’ at school.

Relationships and the Professional Role

Participants expressed continued conflictual feelings regarding how the scope and approaches of their role as school-based social workers affected their relationships with teachers with whom they worked. This finding emerged as participants spoke about the uncertain and/or inconsistent dynamics of both the domains of the social structure and the professional role. I found that school-based social workers may be unable to rectify various elements of either domain and therefore continue to experience related discomfort within the school setting overall, and especially in relation to building and/or maintaining relationships with teachers while continuing to work within their understandings of their position. These feelings and perceptions were described to create a persistent negative impact within participants' *School Standpoint*.

My interpretation of this negativity - this lack of balance - was due to the ways in which participants described their working relationships with teachers. Commonly, participants did not easily talk about easy relationships; when talking about their affiliations and rapport with teachers, they instead made follow-statements that depicted coinciding affirmative and unfavorable feelings. They described conflictual feelings in which they wanted to recognize teachers' difficulties, but also frustration regarding the responses they received from teachers regarding their own difficult work as well. I found that participants described their relationships with teachers in contrary ways, and I did not find that this discordance was improved or *balanced* at the conclusion of their explanations of the situations. In all, while it was clear that participants recognized the difficult and effortful work that teachers accomplish daily, participants also wanted teachers to recognize their demanding work as social workers in the school. Participants described feeling discontent about the dynamics and characteristics within their personal and professional relationships with teachers. These contrasting beliefs manifested

in confusion and uncertainty regarding how they ultimately ensured a positive ‘use of self’ despite a frustrating ‘sense of self’ in these situations.

I found that when speaking about their own discontent, participants also wanted to first recognize why teachers may struggle as well. In their explanations, participants generally first affirmed their appreciation of teachers’ demands before talking about their personal frustrations. For instance, Pam first explained the stressful situations that teachers experience on a daily basis, and she said that she therefore makes sure to be a support to them to the best of her abilities. She expressed her empathy and concern for the teachers with whom she worked before expressing feelings about her own work. She said, “Culturally, I think, because now the teacher is the target... It brings them down. The stress level goes up. And I feel like I’m spending a lot of time talking to the teachers. And trying to talk them down from the cliff... There’s a cloud in the district with a lot of hurtful things.” Similarly, Denise also spoke about teachers’ overwhelming responsibilities by also first and foremost describing her understanding of their numerous demands before beginning to explain her own work. She said, “A teacher has a lot to do... And I feel like when I work with a teacher, my job is to also encourage the teacher and to validate them, because they have a tough job to do.” These statements from Pam and Denise show just two participants’ understanding of teachers’ taxing jobs, yet other participants also echoed their sentiments of empathy and understanding through other avenues. Participants generally illustrated admiration towards the teachers with whom they worked despite conflicts they may encounter in these relationships.

Other participants recognized their own connections to teachers’ difficulties, and illustrated how their own concerns are also teachers’ concerns. For example, Norchelle, similarly to Denise, and Pam, expressed her desire to please teachers, though she additionally related her

opinions regarding her own role and professional understanding. She explained, “I really, really try to please teachers, because again, I know that as a social worker, like everything that I do is based on how they feel about me. And what they can speak about my work, and you know my ability to support them. So, I’m really conscious of that.” Norchelle’s description exemplifies a strong interrelatedness between teachers’ demands and school-based social workers’ demands, which I found to be a continued theme of practitioner distress and/or discomfort. Norchelle wanted to maintain positive relationships with teachers because she recognized how her own job can be affected by them.

Sherry also explained her perspective about the difficulty in building and maintaining strong relationships with teachers. Her perspective pinpointed an aspect of her own positionality, in that her mom, who is a teacher, provided her additional understanding that other school-based social workers may not have. She said:

I just think working in a school is unique. Just in general. You’re working with teachers who are running their own classes. And then, having someone come in and they kind of take control... That is [hard.] ... My mom is a teacher and so I told her [about it], and I like teachers and I am good friends with teachers. But I feel like there is a loss of control. And, at some point, it becomes difficult to work with them in changing what they are doing in the classroom, and see those changes.

Her positionality led her to articulate a more comprehensive, empathic understanding of a reason for teachers’ frustrations. And thus, Sherry’s understanding provided her with justifiable reasons for potentially difficult encounters with colleagues to appease or satisfy her understanding of her ‘sense of self.’

Helene spoke similarly to Sherry, and expressed her belief that she was missing a key experience that could have allowed her stronger rapport with teachers. She said that she perceived what she called an “impossible credibility” because she has not been a teacher herself.

However, she then expanded upon her statement, explaining that she continues to work towards overcoming the barrier through consistent self-reflection. She explained:

Probably the biggest [barrier] with teachers is that I have not been a teacher... So you know, there is that credibility piece. But I try to be very self-aware about that and open about that... So but I also think that can be a barrier with social workers in schools because we are not doing what they do... You know, the stresses are different.

Sherry and Helene explained one possible element of the uncertainty and conflicting feelings that participants described about their relationships with the teachers with whom they worked.

Maria was another participant who expressed being unsure about the status of her relationships with some of the teachers in the building. She recognized and explained that in her experiences, different teachers have appreciated different types of support, and then expressed feeling overwhelmed by this fact at times, as she did not believe she could maintain strong understanding regarding each teacher's individual and unique preferences as she perceived her role required her to do. Maria said: "...with the teachers, I feel like often there is more room for a conversation and consideration... it's a case by case thing too with each teacher, 'what works, do you feel supported...?'" She said due to these varying opinions and needs, she was unsure how to find a capacity to ensure consistently positive relationships in the way that teachers want.

Shannon's frustration occurred because she believed teachers perceived her negatively at times due to using techniques or approaches that they did not like; she believed they felt unsupported or combative at times. Shannon was employed as a social worker in a school through a school-based health center. She said that some teachers do not consider the center to help the way it actually does in her perspective. She explained:

Um, I think there's some, like, misconception, because we allow students to sit in here during their lunch period, they [teachers] think we just let them run wild, and skip class. And we're like, 'no, we hold them accountable and like, if they're

down here, and it's not their lunch period, it's for a reason.' Um... because I think there's some misconceptions.

Therefore, based upon Shannon's explanation of her relationships with teachers, this *boundary* remained *unbalanced* because both Shannon and some teachers were frustrated by their perceptions of the scope, role, and some of the strategies used within Shannon's position as a school-based social worker.

Julie also noticed frustration that occurred when teachers perceived her help was not helpful, explaining how conflictive outcomes of the collaboration led to discomfort. She said that she perceived teachers' feelings of frustration when "...what we are trying to do with behavior or social emotional side is not really working. And, I think, with the teachers thinking, like, we can, help them more, and sometimes it's not [helpful]." Her words reference the results of difficult situations that are bound to occur. Another participant, Denise, made another similar statement, saying, "People think that we're supposed to have answers; we don't always have answers." Similarly, Pam also described the significance of her own involvement within situations when teachers feel stress. She said, "I think that because I am usually involved in the stressful things... they might identify me with the stress." This statement describes how Pam believes her involvement could have varying results due to the perceptions teachers could develop simply based on the necessary collaboration that her job entails. Therefore, as these participants illustrated, despite their understanding of the stressful environment that teachers encounter, there continues to be discomfort and/or discordance amongst the understanding between teachers and school-based social workers.

These explanations resulted in my interpretation, as per tenets of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974), that dissatisfaction may result from teachers' misconceptions of the work done by

school-based social workers. Accordingly, Nathalia conveyed her own frustration about teachers' frustrations, which stemmed from the ramifications of finding herself unable to *balance boundaries* within certain situations involving unexpected crises. She said that for her, when crises or other unexpected tasks occur, the resulting shift in her daily schedule may negatively affect her relationships with teachers and/or their perceptions of her. She said, "...I feel like my role, a lot of the times, gets confused and everyone is thinking that my job revolves around *them*. And it's like 'well sorry, like, I'm not in classrooms 24/7.'" She wanted teachers to understand that she may need to rearrange her plans and services based on the priority of other developments, such as crises, but expressed that she had not found a way to ensure that teachers consistently understood this necessity of her role. Teachers, who are 'outgroup' (Tajfel, 1974) of school-based social workers, did not understand Nathalia's schedule. This was true for participants overall, which shows that school-based social workers truly want teachers to understand their professional role, and to be utilized efficiently within the school setting. Because of these perpetual *unbalanced boundaries* of the domains of the social structure and professional role, I continued to find descriptions of participants' perceptions of teachers' discontentment as well as of their own disgruntlement.

When describing their empathy and/or understanding of teachers' arduous responsibilities, participants continued to describe their own conflictive feelings and experiences while collaborating and working alongside teachers. When interviewed towards the end of the school year, Pam summarized the tenuous endeavors she perceived in relation to attempting to improve these difficulties - attempting to *balance boundaries* - regarding the help and support she provides as a school social worker. She explained:

I realized something this year, which is that I'm the helper. So no one helps the helpers much... You know, and they just look at you like, 'well what are you talking about? You're the one who supposed to handle it.' Well, no I don't have a cape, you are here too.' ... It's not popular. But it's appropriate I think...

Indeed, discomfort arose for Pam when the form of 'support' as the teachers envisioned did not align with Pam's desired form of support within her understanding and perception of the *School Standpoint*. She expanded upon the topic, reiterating that she wanted to continue *balancing boundaries* to alleviate her feelings of discomfort. She said, "I know I'm appreciated and everything like that. That is not a question, but it's just that [in] certain relationships... I gotta think about what I need to do to get rid of that [uncomfortable] feeling, and work on that." In her words, Pam illustrated that, even while experiencing the feedback of her 'unpopular approach,' she remained aware and cognizant of the necessity to *balance boundaries* and also to form effective relationships with the teachers in order to successfully achieve her professional goals and support her clients in productive ways. Her words portrayed the fact that in general, participants wanted to support teachers in a way that could simultaneously be in accordance with both teachers' and their own perceptions, while additionally adhering to their ideal *School Standpoint*. Participants described situations in which they encountered conflictual perceptions with the teachers regarding services that school-based social workers provide, which they explained as having an impact on their relationships with teachers. Therefore, these findings portray the *unbalanced boundaries* regarding how collegial relationships may influence school social workers' domain of the professional role (and visa versa).

Work/Life 'un'balance

I found participants to describe *unbalanced boundaries* in relation to the separation (and the lack of separation) between work and life boundaries. There were feelings of discomfort

explained by participants who experienced personal feelings while at work and/or visa-versely thought about work as part of their personal lives. The first overlap between work and life ‘*un’balance* showed via participants’ explanations about their personal and professional interests. For example, in an above section, I described how practitioners’ personal interests provided a form of stress relief to successfully *balance boundaries*, yet there were other descriptions of activities that were less distinguishable as solely a personal interest or professional interest, and their ‘sense of self and consequential ‘use of self’ remained *unbalanced*. Within the data, I found descriptions of professional activities and approaches that were directly related to participants’ individual preferences, yet these preferences were described as *unbalanced* due to an indiscriminate way in which to categorize it within a domain of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model. I came across descriptions of interests that were difficult to interpret and categorize as either a personal interest (within the domain of personal identity) or a professional interest (within the domain of professional role). This unclear, *unbalanced* finding emerged due to participants’ insinuations that they were characterizing their ‘use of self’ in both personal and professional topics simultaneously.

In some cases, this was exemplified as practitioners describing their various practice approaches that then manifested in feelings of more personal pride and/or excitement. Other participants spoke about activities in which they volunteered to work extra hours outside of the workday because they enjoyed what they were doing. When participants described these professionally-based examples about activities or tasks that excited or interested them, their words articulated genuine, personally-induced emotions, and described as though part of their personal identity domain as much as part of their professional role domain.

There were also explanations of professional approaches and activities portrayed in unique ways that illustrated how individual identity and/or positionality influenced workplace decisions. For example, Julie actually prefaced her description about a specific professional responsibility by stating she was “personally excited.” She started by saying, “Well I was personally excited about it... They wanted us to celebrate inclusive schools week, and we ended up having a ‘Mix-it-up Day’ here... For the general population to get that experience... So, I was excited about it...” Julie continued explaining that she was “personally excited” because she usually feels limited to helping a smaller portion of the student body, and this activity allowed her to plan lessons for the entire school. She said that she was already looking forward to developing the program further for the following school year. Julie was not mandated to specifically partake in these events, but rather individually decided she wanted it to be part of her professional responsibilities because she personally liked the idea of it. This shows how explicit ‘use of self’ can stem from personal, individual interests and values.

Furthermore, existing literature shows that school-based social workers are frequently asked to take-on extra work and responsibilities, tasks that they consider to be outside of the designated scope of their role, by their supervisors and/or colleagues (Agresta, 2006; Bye et al., 2009; Kelly et al., 2016). Yet participants did not always describe this extra work as burdensome or frustrating. In fact, participants themselves decided to participate in additional or non-mandated work tasks, especially when they were able to choose activities related to more personally-driven passion and/or regarding their own interests. Janice, for example, said that her favorite part of her job is when she can engage the parents of her students. During her interview, she spoke with excitement when she described the Parent Advisory Committee she herself had implemented three years prior. She had gone as far as to request a change to her working hours

in order to work later into the evening, and therefore have interactions with more parents who were available only during evening, after-school hours. She did not mind that she then worked different hours than the rest of the staff members in her school building. She explained that she continued to be eager to continue the work in coming years, and said, “I really enjoy that... this year it seems like we’re building up some momentum...”

Denise similarly articulated her excitement about her interest in a specific project she helped to initiate that school year. She was even pleased that her investment in the professional task, which was to further develop and grow a ‘check-in, check-out’ school-wide program, could expand into her available summer hours. She said, “You know, we’re really doing a lot of planning and we’re going to even meet over the summer just a few of us. And so, I’m really excited about the commitment.” Despite the work during the summer months, Denise’s description illustrated her genuine motivation to spend time with her colleagues in preparation for the next school year in order to develop school programming.

Janice and Denise’s descriptions evidenced how school-based social workers may work additional hours and/or take on extra responsibilities due to their individual desires, values, and/or passions. Furthermore, their examples illustrate how overall school-based social work services can differ based on individual practitioner preferences, values, passions, etc. Different practitioners with different interests may or may not have chosen to include the activity within their professional approaches, as they were not mandated by authority figures and/or legislation.

The second way this lack of *balance* emerged from this data (in addition to how interests were spoken about simultaneously) was in relation to feelings. Participants described wanting to separate their feelings from home and work, and/or explained that they were unable to keep their feelings from the two settings distinct, therefore recognizing feelings at all hours of the day

regardless of the root of the issue. For example, Denise, who was a highly self-reflective participant throughout all of her interviews, said, “I’m very hard on myself, as a social worker, I’m very reflective of my personal practice and then just my professionalism in general.” When she made this statement, it was unclear if she was describing herself personally, professionally, or both in general. However, her follow-up regarding her experiences provided insight into the dual impacts she experienced both inside and outside of the school setting. She described her feelings by saying, “I used to get frustrated all the time, I used to come home, I used to cry, I used to get so upset because I saw so much need and I wanted to do so much more... I was just so on pins and needles all the time.” The statement shows implications of her overall ‘sense of self’ to both her personal and professional identities.

While Denise was unable to separate her feelings to the extent she wanted, Sherry then described her conscious choice to merge the boundaries between her personal and her work lives. Her explanation and reasoning differed from other participants. She wanted to reduce potential barriers with her colleagues with the intent to improve her professional effectiveness within the school setting, Sherry found ways to build stronger personal connections and spend additional time with colleagues outside of work. She said that she plays games with some of the teachers in her building, and in doing so, has noticed that there is additional comfort between her and the teachers with whom she spends this time. She said, “That just kind of helps because [it] helps to bring down the stress level. But I also think that it helps them, maybe, to feel more comfortable talking to me. Because they see me in a different light.” In essence, Sherry’s description shows her motivation to strengthen the relatedness between domains of the social structure and the professional role, but not necessarily personal identity. Therefore, at the same time as improving

her collegial relationships, Sherry explanation showed how she was perhaps diminishing the boundaries of a work/life balance.

This work/life *unbalanced boundary* continued to emerge as other practitioners made conscious statements about their understanding of their work/life balance and/or personal and professional boundaries. For example, Norchelle, who was a participant who extensively explained her personal identity as being a strong influence on her professional approaches, portrayed her active understanding about the effects of her ‘sense of self’ within her actual ‘use of self’; without prompting, she naturally spoke about her childhood, her personal future aspirations, and her opinions about her job role throughout all of her interviews. Interestingly, during her first interview, after extensively explaining the meaning of her childhood within her professional approaches, she then said that, “I don’t get too personal with staff. They don’t know that much about me. I’m like a ninja. I’m a thief in the night.”

As she explained her emotions regarding a colleague, the assistant principal, she verbalized the connections between her personal and professional boundaries. She said, “Um, I am feeling a little bit uneasy when working with my assistant principal... She’s very abrasive and not the most positive person to work with, um, so I’m trying to kind of remove myself and my personal feelings about her and just get to the work.” This statement shows how Norchelle was consciously attempting to separate her personal emotions from her professional situation. However, in a subsequent interview, she explained that she was not always successful in maintaining these separate boundaries. At the end of the year, she said:

...it was extremely hurtful, this is probably the first time in my professional experience that I’ve ever been just like really emotionally hurt... Um, typically I’ll separate work and personal life... But this is really hurtful, because I really did try. I really tried, to have a better relationship with her...

Throughout these statements, Norchelle provided insight into the tricky decisions that practitioners make on a daily basis about creating and maintaining personal and professional boundaries.

Therefore, the uncertain or *unbalanced boundaries* amongst the *School Standpoint* were reported to elicit feelings of discomfort when having strong negative influence on participants. Participants explained that it was clear that personal feelings can overlay professional practices, as can personal interests and individual professional preferences. As participants engaged in attempts to *balance boundaries* related to their personal and professional identities, they encountered complications due to uncertain understanding of how to maintain a separateness between the various domains in their ‘use of self.’ Regardless, however, I found that the nuances of each domain influenced the other domains, which lends to the overall fluidity within the conceptual ‘School Standpoint’ Model.

Part Two Conclusion

Part Two introduced the conceptual ‘School Standpoint’ Model. This model encompasses the findings of the described influential effects on school-based social work practice by demonstrating the fluidity and inconsistency of three thematic domains: the social structure, practitioners’ personal identity, and the professional role of school-based social workers. This model shows how the domain of the social structure overlays all interactions and perceptions of practitioners’ lives, both within and away from the school setting. This model also incorporates a practitioner’s perceptions of the way that personal identity and/or their professional role may influence their perceptions and approaches.

Therefore, the Part Two then depicted various interconnectedness and relationships between the three domains. Because the influential factors within these domains were reported to

create tenuous and/or detrimental outcomes of services, school-based social workers can conscientiously engage in *balancing boundaries* within their *School Standpoint(s)*. Participants reported ways in which they utilized effective strategies to reduce their discomfort within a school, such as: educating colleagues, altering approaches to practice, finding allies, and using personal interests as stress relief. However, school-based social work practitioners will need to continue seeking pathways to find more consistently maintained *balanced boundaries* within the three domains. In various ways, participants explained that rigid boundaries could diminish their confidence and/or hinder their positive perceptions within their ‘sense of self’ and consequential ‘use of self,’ though indeterminate boundaries could also cause negative feelings of frustration and other discomfort.

Overall Summary: Findings and Discussion, *Parts One and Two*

Overall, these findings illustrate the need for additional development and professionalization to the school social work profession and related work of school-based social workers. The emergent themes portrayed in Part One depicted the three significant domains of school-based social work practice: the social structure, personal identity, and the professional role. Findings in Part One evidenced the discomfort that school-based social workers experience within their role, which was largely seen within participants’ descriptions of inconsistent practice approaches. This fluctuation amongst school-based practitioners was described to cause feelings of frustration - including both their own feelings and/or the feelings of their colleagues within the school setting.

Part Two then portrayed how participants described conflictual feelings and/or discomfort as stemming from *unbalanced boundaries* within a *School Standpoint*. Part Two provided data that evidenced the indiscriminate definition or *boundary* of each of the three

domains, which was described with some ambiguity, remaining unclear how to consistently determine what may be a practitioner's professional perspective(s) versus that practitioner's personal perspective(s). Furthermore, participants described both negative and positive effects of the various influences of the three domains of school-based social work practice. Overall, the data suggests that school-based social workers will inevitably find themselves practicing (their 'use of self') based on their understanding of their individual *School Standpoint*. Additionally, a tenet of the concept of *School Standpoint* contends the importance for school-based social workers to maintain malleable boundaries so that they can intentionally reflect, reappraise, and potentially reshape their approaches - their 'use of self' - based on their overall 'sense of self.'

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This study was based on purposes to improve the professionalization of school social workers¹. Prior to this study, the existing literature had lacked specific information about school social workers' use of personal identity within their professional practices, as understood through the lens of Standpoint Theory and tenets of Positionality. While analyzing data and coming to the related conclusions, The 'School Standpoint' Model was conceptualized to fill this gap in a way that is practical and easy to understand for practitioners, legislators, and academics alike. Therefore, the 'School Standpoint' Model explained in Chapter Four has implications for practitioners and for policymakers (legislators), as well as for those within academia, including researchers and educators. Based on the principles of Standpoint Theory and Positionality, which I used throughout analysis of this data, I found that school social workers will inevitably make practice decisions and provide services based on their understanding of their individual *School Standpoint*. The conceptual 'School Standpoint' Model, which emerged based on findings from this study's data, encompasses the resulting experience that school social workers can encounter within three main influences that surround their professional practices while working with

¹ Note: This chapter refers to 'school social workers' instead of 'school-based social workers' (see Appendix B for definitions and distinction between these terms). It is my hope that this study can be used to enhance the professionalization of the school social work profession. While I recognize and value general school-based social workers, who currently provide instrumental and necessary services, this chapter puts forth a call for a more unified profession in order to enhance social work services in schools. Thus, in this chapter, I speak about implications for the future of 'school social workers' specifically.

students and their interdisciplinary colleagues within the school setting: the social structure, personal identity, and the professional role.

The concept of this model contends that each practitioner will find her *School Standpoint* based on perceptions of her personal identity and her understanding of the professional role, which exist within her overarching social structure(s). This model is fluid, meaning that the influence(s) of these components can shift and change depending upon current situation(s) and context(s). There are times that these influential components can have positive and productive effects within the school building, though other effects in fact diminish efficiency and/or efficacy of school social workers' professional practices, which may be due to intense personal feelings stemming from negative outcomes of their attempted practices. Thus, these findings elicit the need for school social workers to know how to consciously and actively seek strategies that could limit counterproductive effects for both their clients, their colleagues, and/or for themselves when encountering vague and/or conflicting boundaries within the three domains of a *School Standpoint*.

There was evidence portraying a multitude of factors that can lead to discomfort amongst school social workers. The descriptions of uneven, inconsistent practice approaches was just one of the reasons for negative feelings that practitioners experience. Therefore, school social workers engage in what was coined as '*balancing boundaries*,' a technique used by school social workers as they attempt to mitigate negative and/or uncomfortable feelings and experiences they encounter within the school setting. Data evidenced that practitioners themselves have difficulty determining what may be professional perspective(s) versus personal perspective(s); consequently, this ambiguous 'sense of self' can lead to inconsistent professional practices ('use

of self’) amongst school social workers, and may result in more prevalent inefficiency for students, families, and all school staff members. There is a necessity to determine and systematize stronger, more defined boundaries to which school social workers can refer and utilize in order to unify and continue the development of the school social work profession.

Findings evidenced the sophisticated nature of the professional role of school social workers. Findings also illustrated the need for purposefully directed, continual growth and professionalization of the school social work profession, with needs related to: research, policy, practice, and professional development training. The following sections within Chapter Five are segmented according to the pertinent professionals relevant to the information.

Implications for practitioners

Ensure productive ‘use of self’ through awareness of ‘sense of self’ and cultural humility

As this study sought to understand how practitioners described their ‘sense of self’ within their work, findings concluded that ‘use of self’ can vary based on elements within each of the three domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model. ‘Sense of self’ was described to be internal feelings, while ‘use of self’ related to the actions and behaviors school social workers decided to use based on their perceptions and understanding of their ‘sense of self’ and their surrounding workplace environment. Therefore, the conceptual idea behind the Model encompasses the importance for practitioners to maintain malleable boundaries so that they can intentionally reflect, reappraise, and potentially reshape their approaches (their ‘use of self’) based on the pertinent elements of individual situations.

First and foremost, therefore, the findings from this study suggest an imperative that practitioners maintain skills and abilities to be consistently conscious and aware of the fluid

movements within and across the boundaries of their own *School Standpoint*. In other words, school social workers should strive to ensure their ‘use of self’ is purposeful and intentional, and based on a conscious interpretation of the surrounding social structure, their personal identity, and their professional role. This data showed that the social structure, along with personal identifiers and the complexity of the professional role, each impact the scope and approach(es) of individual school social work practice decisions, which means that school social work practitioners must maintain an understanding regarding how their practice approaches and decisions are inevitably influenced by these various external components of the profession.

Based on these findings, I claim that it is important for school social workers to maintain mindful awareness of their ‘sense of self’ (ie: personal identifiers such as race, gender, age, etc.). And, while being prepared for their understanding to cause feelings of discomfort and/or frustration, continue to aspire for beneficial, effective ‘use of self.’ Findings showed that due to their unique *school-informed professional mindset*, school social workers may have difficult and/or conflictive interactions with interdisciplinary colleagues and/or feel isolated within the host setting of a school building. In alignment with my findings regarding the influence of personal identifiers within professional practices, details from Krusen’s (2011) research additionally delineated how personal identifiers are correlated to various emotions. He stated that “...gender has been shown to influence the frequency, intensity and experience of anger...”, that “... race has been linked to feelings of anger with the external attribution of prejudice against members of minority groups...”, and that “... young adults are more likely to experience and express more anger while older respondents are less likely to experience potent emotions...” (pp. 2081-2088). Therefore, while this study reveals the specific impact(s) that the social environment

and/or identity can have on practitioners within school settings, previous research has additionally asserted similar findings relative to a wider range of caregiving professionals; this further evidences the need for intentional self-reflection so that negative feelings do not hinder or diminish productive results of professional practices.

This implication for practice, in that school social workers must engage in consistent and conscious self-reflection, aligns with NASW's Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) and NASW's Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (NASW, 2001). Though described as manifesting inconsistently, participants in this study described definitive impact of 'sense of self' within their professional decisions and approaches (their 'use of self'). Therefore, I claim that it is essential for school social workers to actively recognize, interpret, and maintain understanding of both their personal and professional identities while making professional decisions. Consistently doing so will improve practitioners' abilities to consciously and meaningfully *balance boundaries* of their *School Standpoint*, even if feeling conflictual emotions.

Make use of cultural humility

In maintaining a 'sense of self,' yet another implication comes from the findings in this data in consideration of beneficial 'use of self.' As participants in this study described, it is common that school social workers will work with students and families whose experiences are different than their own. They will also work with colleagues coming from various personal and professional backgrounds. Existent literature compliments the experiences of participants in this study, who described uncertainty and/or disagreement regarding the best practice approaches for students and families within cultures other than their own. "Educators and families have the

same fundamental goals for a child, although they may have different ideas and ways on how to get there. They view the world differently based on their culture, their knowledge, and their positions of power” (Olivos, 2009, p. 114). Olivos continued by explaining that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ culture but that, “...these differing views and social positions may cause distrust” (p. 114). Such evidence was found within the data used in this study, and therefore the concept of the *School Standpoint* includes culture being influential towards practitioners’ understanding of relationships, interactions, and the overall school environment. Furthermore, I found that participants in this study described their personal perspectives throughout various reasons for professional practices.

Therefore, findings from this study demonstrate practitioners’ necessity to grow and develop their understanding of ‘cultural humility’ in relation to the school setting. The term ‘cultural humility’ describes a lifelong process that encourages clinicians to practice with curiosity and investment in the environmental, social, political, and cultural factors that could influence interactions with clients; it encourages questions and conversations between the clinician and the client and explains the importance of equity within the clinician-client relationship. The term ‘culturally competent’ has been criticized within recent literature, and scholars are asserting that ‘cultural humility’ is an improved approach to ‘cultural competency’ (Drinane, Owen, Adelson, & Rodolfa, 2014; Kirmayer, 2012; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). While Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) coined the term ‘cultural humility’ to suggest a process in which clinicians continuously reflect on their practices in order to ensure that clients can receive the care they both want and need, the ‘School Standpoint’ Model adapts the idea to the school setting specifically by illustrating that cultural influences are inevitably going to exist

and interact within all domains of school social work practice (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Haraway, 1988; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 2009; Tajfel, 1974; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998).

In all, findings from this study lead to implications that, in order to ensure that school social workers are practicing with cultural humility, they must consistently, consciously reflect upon their own identity and experiences ('sense of self') while interacting with both their colleagues and their clients ('use of self'). As research and literature within the field of social work continues to develop the notion of cultural humility, school social workers should simultaneously seek ways to incorporate the concept into the school setting. Practitioners can follow-through with this suggestion, and can engage in a process demonstrating cultural humility, by actively engaging in both formal and informal conversations that explore personal opinions, biases, and other individual identifiers. Practitioners should intentionally engage in consistent discussion with colleagues and clients, as well as with professionals and personal friends outside of the workplace. Without careful and conscious consideration, practitioners' 'sense of self' has the potential to be detrimental towards 'use of self' with clients. Contrarily, however, with careful consideration, and with a conscious understanding and engagement of cultural humility, practitioners can make sound, professional decisions within their professional approaches.

Educate colleagues

School social workers must learn when and how to educate their colleagues about their professional role. The 'School Standpoint' Model and its accompanying evidence demonstrates the varying influences of school social workers' unique *school-informed professional mindset*,

which does not necessarily align with mindsets of school teachers or school administrators. Participants in this study described trends of tension and uncomfortable feelings that stemmed from misunderstood job roles or contrasting knowledge between professional fields. This lack of understanding is partially understood through the use of Social Identity Theory, which claims that others may feel and/or act negatively when feeling ‘outside’ of a group (Acevedo et al., 2015; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Hann Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974). The differing knowledge can be partially understood via ‘mindset’ theories (see, for example: Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2005; Chatman et al., 1998; Gollwitzer et al., 1990; Hamilton et al., 2011; Mackay, 2015; Nolder, & Kadous, 2018; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; etc.). Administrators and teachers, for example, may have different perceptions of what can or should be done within the role than does the social worker (Bye et al., 2009; Leyba, 2010); they then may demonstrate negativity towards a professional role not being implemented per their expectations. Therefore, based on existent literature and this study’s findings, I claim a strong need for practitioners to more consistently and intentionally take time to educate their colleagues about the reason and meaning for the work they do within the host setting of a school. School social workers must be assertive towards ensuring that their services are understood and valued. Enhanced understanding of school social workers’ professional role(s) will therefore enable colleagues to collaborate with more directed intention and a stronger purpose.

Fortunately, there are tools and strategies that can enhance this specific professional relationship; education and publicity about the job (and a *school-informed professional mindset* for social workers) is one such method. By educating their colleagues, practitioners may then receive stronger buy-in and/or support for the work they do. While school administrators will

continue to provide leadership within the host setting of a school, school social workers can and should provide clear evidence of the outcomes they witness based on the work they are doing. For example, submitting a weekly or monthly progress report can help administrators to understand the essential function(s) of a school social worker. Practitioners should also consider how they are communicating the productive outcomes of their work by “clearly identify[ing] and communicat[ing] how their outcomes affect student learning” (Bye et al., 2009, p. 97). Additionally, practitioners should clarify and communicate the specific needs of the school in order to prove why their services are necessary (Altshuler & Webb, 2009; Bye et al., 2009; Leyba, 2010). Regardless of the specific methods in which they choose to educate their colleagues, the findings from this study demonstrate the necessity for school social workers to intentionally schedule time in their schedules to consistently work towards creating awareness and clarifying their professional role.

Implications for policymakers, legislation

Implement and enforce consistent standards of practice

The ‘School Standpoint’ Model demonstrates the influential factors that the social structure emanates, such as conflicts due to dynamics of power and authority within a school building. Participants also discussed a lack of coherent, systematic approaches within school social work practices, meaning that the absence of consistent guidelines for school social workers may be a cause for increased complications across the *School Standpoint* for them. These findings therefore evidence a need for policymakers to support school social workers’ efforts, especially in relation to educating interdisciplinary colleagues about the their

professional role (including its boundaries, knowledge-base, nuances of the *school-informed professional mindset*, etc.).

In order to do so, however, policymakers must first take action towards stronger, more clearly defined mandates relative to school social work practices. In addition to the data from this study, there is evidence from Tyson McCrea and Bulanda (2010) that explained, “Practitioners’ use of theories and evidence is uneven, and practitioners’ knowledge needs further understanding, especially using ‘an epistemology of the situated’ (Floersch, 2004; Fook, 2002, as cited in Tyson & Bulanda, 2010, p. 344). Maintaining systematized practice standards across various levels of policy would provide a buffer, and diminish the need for school social workers to continuously *balance boundaries* in individually varying ways. It would provide more explicit knowledge and approaches for school social workers to understand and utilize as part of their *school-informed professional mindset*.

Policymakers across various platforms (ie: within national, state, district, and/or school levels, etc.) should work to improve school social work practice through implementation and enforcement of consistent practice standards. For example, state and national education policies have recently recognized the need for students to receive interventions prior to qualifying for special education services (‘Response to Intervention’), and these policies could further emphasize that social work services adhere to the same standards (Kelly et al., 2010b; Sabatino, 2009). More specifically, designated entry/exit criterion for school social workers would alleviate unevidenced and/or personal influences seen within professional practices, which stem from practitioners’ personal identity and/or the school’s social structure. Then, school and

district policies should provide other school staff members with knowledge to know exactly when and how to utilize school social work services.

Increase job satisfaction by investing in the profession

The education system must more formally invest in school social workers in order to ensure productivity within the workforce. Though I found that positivity and encouragement was not lost among the participants in this study, findings also showed definitive frustration, loneliness, and negativity throughout descriptions of their experiences as social workers in school settings due to having different and/or discrepant knowledge that simultaneously provides additional and unique considerations within the education system. Therefore, in order for the field to continue growing momentum and efficacy, and in order to maintain positive standards for school social work, policymakers and legislation should seek to increase practitioners' job satisfaction by investing in the profession.

Butler (1990) wrote an analysis of job satisfaction among social workers, and illustrated how working within caregiving organizations can create a harsh reality for employees due to few resources or low budgetary constraints. She explained that job satisfaction "is an important area to study because of the values of the profession, the economic impact of turnover and absenteeism, the concern for client outcome, and the necessity of attracting competent individuals to the profession" (p. 45). Understanding that organizations need to recognize the tenants of the profession in order to retain the best social workers in the field means that policymakers must advocate for their wellbeing and avenues towards job satisfaction through demonstrating their investment in the profession.

Otherwise, when feeling unwanted or unneeded, school social workers' job satisfaction may decline, and there could be less productive services available for students. Emmert and Taher (1992) explained findings of their study about public-sector professionals; they found that "Public professionals seem to derive their attitudes more from the social relations on the job and from the extent to which their intrinsic needs are met" (p. 44). They claim that the work itself could be a "secondary consideration." Gant (1996) made similar assertions and explained that, "Using work-related perceptions as proxy variables for more tangible workplace measures is based on the observation that worker perceptions of the agency environment are often more important than the reality of the environment itself" (p. 164). This means that in order to best ensure high job satisfaction, the school environment and culture must be conducive and open to receiving support the social worker can give. Yet currently, even though school social work professionals have spent time in school, training, practicum, and other studying, they are still working to prove their place within the public school system. Policymakers can have a strong influence to work environment by making active public claims about the importance and significance of practitioners' work within the public education system.

While funding and economic opportunities for growth can help, so can advocacy and discussion within the public arena. There is no doubt that additional funding specifically allocated for school social workers would enhance the scope of their collaborations and contributions within the school system. As Kahn (2005) stated, "[Public-sector employees] are asked to do a lot with too little" (p. 33). However, there are additional ways to successfully enhance job satisfaction for school social workers outside of the provision of direct economic

funding. There are ways to enhance school social workers' perceptions across the domains of their *School Standpoint* by actively investing in the profession.

**Implications for educators
(pre-service and professional training for school social workers)**

Teach future practitioners the meaning and ways of professionalism

Those educating future school social work practitioners must take into account the distinct knowledge and skills they will need in order to successfully navigate the sophisticated demands of the role (D'Agostino, 2013). Findings from this study illuminated the reality that school social workers find themselves having discrepant experiences as compared to their clients (ie: students and families) and/or feeling disconnected from their colleagues. Participants in this study described experiences in which, while they serviced the same student(s) along with their teacher and administrative colleagues, they felt negative influences due to coming from separate personal and professional backgrounds. Such disconnects, such as having a unique, perhaps misunderstood *school-informed professional mindset*, in addition to being in the particular, possibly sole, role of a social worker within the host setting of a school building, can cause barriers in implementing ideal practices.

In this data, I found that professional school social workers approached their work and thought about their professional practices largely due to the external social structure around them. More recent literature about the social structures within organizations additionally shows that competing goals and/or values within an organizational context may lead to disappointment and/or distress for specific employees. For example, Cattani, Ferriani, and Allison (2014) explained:

... peripheral players are more likely to produce work that departs from the field's canons and expectations. Because cultural fields reproduce the power and privilege of incumbent groups, peripheral players have only limited chances of proving their worth... The challenge for peripheral players is that the same social position that enables them to depart from prevailing norms may also restrict their access to resources and social contacts that would facilitate the completion and legitimation of their work (pp. 259-260).

Therefore, preservice training must include supporting students as they consider and experience the implications from the 'School Standpoint' Model, which itself encompasses the tenets that Standpoint theorists as well as Social Identity theorists argue - the notion that individuals create perceptions based on the social structure around them (Han Tapper, 2013; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Hartsock, 1983; Kezar, 2002; Smith, 1987; Tajefel, 1974).

Findings from this study suggest that education for future practitioners should include relevant information related to influences included in the 'School Standpoint' Model. Such knowledge could include, but is not limited to: how to reflect upon one's own 'sense of self' and 'use of self' by making informed, conscious professional decisions, how to collaborate within an interdisciplinary team, and then how to work through difficult collegial interactions in productive ways, how to pursue leadership capacity within the host site of the school building, and/or how to educate colleagues about the scope of the school social work role. In order to successfully attain productive, influential capacity within the host setting of a school, future practitioners must be prepared to encounter and navigate the complexity of the school social work role.

Implications for school social work researchers

Note: This study leads way to further questions and considerations, showing a need for additional research and data analysis. In addition to the following research agenda, future research should also encompass the aforementioned needs related to practitioners, policymakers, and educators.

Model validation

The ‘School Standpoint’ Model was conceptualized based on the findings from the sample of participants in this study. I recognize that this model cannot be used with certainty until it is further tested and validated (Malak & Paredis, 2007; Pignault & Houssemand, 2016). The growing literature about model verification and reliability explains that model validation is an importance process in order to ensure that the theorized concept/model is relevant, accurate, and represents “the real world from perspective of the intended use of the model” (Ling & Mahadevan, 2013). Pignault and Houssemand (2016) additionally explained that because there are numerous different contextual conditions within a work setting, models about organizations (behavior, for example) should be tested within and among numerous relevant elements. Therefore, due to both this study’s limitations as well as the plethora of contextual considerations deemed as important within the model, I recommend that the ‘School Standpoint’ Model be tested for further verification and understanding of its accuracy. While testing this model (and/or in addition to testing this model), researchers should consider the following topics for future studies.

Seek further, enhanced understanding of external influences to practice

Future research can further develop each of the domains within the ‘School Standpoint’ Model in order to strengthen understanding of the effects, influences and interconnectedness of its three domains: personal identity, social structure, and the professional role within a school setting. Because I found that personal identity could shape how practitioners understand theoretical application within the workplace, there is a significant need for more comprehensive and definitive knowledge regarding which personal *standpoints* (ie: personal demographics,

experiences, interests) may influence school social work practitioners' approaches. For example, future research should include a quantitative assessment in order to determine potential significant correlations between specific personal identifiers and approaches to school-based practices.

Though recent movements are attempting to remove practitioners' personal influence through pushing 'evidence-based practice,' (see, for example: Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Kelly et al., 2010a), a plethora of literature also shows that theory continues to be implemented in unique ways dependent upon the interpretation of the individual clinician (see, for example: Bates, 2006; Chan & Chan, 2004; Floersch, 2004; Tyson McCrea & Bulanda, 2010; Witkin, 2012). Therefore, due to methodological limitations of the phenomenological approach used for this study, as well as the unique though limited sample of participants, a broader research approach would provide stronger understandings regarding which personal characteristics may persuade school social work practices. This knowledge would then allow for school social work educators and policymakers to make more informed decisions while supporting school social worker. It would additionally improve the model's overall validity/accuracy.

Seek further, enhanced understanding of the organizational context of K-12 schools

Furthermore, in relation to social structure, the findings from this research showed the importance of power dynamics and interpersonal relationships, which were understood via Standpoint Theory, Positionality, and Social Identity Theory (Acevedo et al., 2015; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harstock, 1983; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; Tajfel, 1974). Yet there is more to know regarding power and authority in relation to school social workers' practices within a school building, which both previous literature and

current findings from this study forecast as having complex factors that practitioners may continue to experience (Cambré et al., 2012; Davies & Ellison, 2001; Jarvis 2012). In alignment with findings from this study, Higgins and Abowitz (2011) also recognized that the bureaucratic nature of public schools creates tension between employees, administrators and other service-users. They further explained that the ‘common public school’ is currently in an important time where “Its very meanings, aims, and legitimacy are under vigorous debate,” (p. 369). This means that it is now time to understand the workings of the individuals within these organizations that play such a prominent role in the upbringing of all children. Future research is therefore necessary in order to focus on how the school as an organizational entity can best utilize professionals coming from various backgrounds (ie: mental health practitioners practicing within the school setting), and especially school social workers.

Because schools are complex organizations that include multiple levels and structures (Kelly, 2008; Phillippo et al., 2017), this study has implications towards the necessity of stronger understanding regarding these organizational and/or systemic forces in order for all employees to practice more effectively and efficiently. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (2005), for example, provided clear and concise guidelines for public-sector employees within general 501(c)(3) organizations. When providing guidelines to the human resources departments about their employees, the Council asserted that “The ability of an organization to make effective use of the energy, time and talents of its employees...is essential to accomplish the organization’s mission” (p. 16). These guidelines are general to all nonprofits in Minnesota, but findings from this study show the need for guidelines that are specific for schools. Furthermore, a study by Wright and Davis (2003) said that public sector organizations need to consider the environment

and how it may influence the workers' perceptions of the job, which is in strong alignment with the findings from this study. However, Wright and Davis (2003) claimed that "the work environment is made up of two components: job characteristics and work context..." though findings from this study showed more than just two components as considerable within the work environment. Additional research with analysis utilizing Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) from the start of the project would also expand upon the findings from this study. There is no sole consensus within the literature, and additional information is needed to enhance understanding regarding the influences of the social structure and overall organizational context of the school setting within school social work practices.

Conclusions

I hope that the findings from this study will prove useful to both school social workers and other school-based mental health clinicians. This invigorating process has shown me the important and impactful effects that we as individuals relay within our professional processes as school social workers. While personal perspectives within professional practices are natural and inevitable, I am hopeful that skills to reflect, monitor, and mitigate potentially detrimental effects related to 'sense of self' and 'use of self' can be explicitly taught in order to improve the quality and fidelity of social work services within schools. The concept of 'School Standpoint' Model is one tool that professionals can use to better understand how to consciously practice with awareness and self-reflection. The model also provides a format for stronger communication and explanation for colleagues and policymakers alike, who may not comprehensively understand the realities of the school social work profession. While additional research (ie: model validation) is needed in order to synthesize and strengthen understanding regarding reasons and ways in which

school social workers make professional practice decisions, I believe that the ‘School Standpoint’ Model provides one basis on which future conversations regarding school social work can occur.

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS AND ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant	School setting	Personal identifiers	<i>Other notes</i>
Denise	<p>Role/title: school social worker for three schools in CPS</p> <p>Type of school: public</p> <p>Grade levels: works in 2 elementary schools and 1 high school</p> <p>Location: south and west sides of Chicago</p> <p>Student population: one school largely Mexican/Puerto Rican with Spanish-speakers and other schools largely African American</p> <p>Other notes: n/a</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: African American</p> <p>Age: not stated in interviews</p> <p>Professional experience: first year in each building; 6 years as school social worker</p> <p>Interests: not stated in interview</p> <p>Other notes from interviews: does not speak Spanish</p>	Participated in all 3 interviews
Helene	<p>Role/title: school social worker</p> <p>Type of school: public</p> <p>Grade levels: k - 5</p> <p>Location: suburbs of Chicago</p> <p>Student population:</p> <p>Other notes: only social worker in building</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interview (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: white</p> <p>Age: in last 2 years of practice; then plans to retire</p> <p>Professional experience: about ten years in current building as the social worker</p> <p>Interests: seeing son and dog</p> <p>Other notes from interviews: said “not bilingual anything”; married</p>	Participated in all 3 interviews
Jahara	<p>Role/title: Dean of Social Emotional Supports (is licensed social worker)</p> <p>Type of school: charter</p> <p>Grade levels: high school</p> <p>Location: southwest side of Chicago</p> <p>Student population: students in poverty; largely African American community</p> <p>Other notes: part of admin team; other social worker and social work interns in building</p>	<p>Gender: female</p> <p>Race: Indian American</p> <p>Age: 35</p> <p>Professional experience: has worked in building for 5 years; second year in admin. position, was previously school social worker</p> <p>Interests: yoga</p> <p>Other notes from interview: Muslim</p>	Participated in first and third interviews
Janice	<p>Role/title: school social worker</p> <p>Type of school: public</p>	<p>Gender: female</p> <p>Race: African American</p>	Exited after

	<p>therapeutic support school</p> <p>Grade levels:</p> <p>Location: Georgia</p> <p>Student population: all students have emotional disabilities</p> <p>Other notes: has a main building but travels across 6 schools</p>	<p>Age: said 'older'</p> <p>Professional experience: has worked in district for 21 years</p> <p>Interests: spiritual</p> <p>Other notes from interview: lives in Georgia; previously from Evanston, IL</p>	<p>first interview</p> <p>No workshop participation</p>
Jillian	<p>Role/title: social worker, specific title unknown</p> <p>Type of school: therapeutic day school</p> <p>Grade levels: k - 5</p> <p>Location: unknown</p> <p>Student population: all students have IEP/receive social-emotional services</p> <p>Other notes: Part of admin. team</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: not stated in interviews</p> <p>Age: not stated in interviews</p> <p>Professional experience: not stated during interviews</p> <p>Interests: sailing, exercise, yoga</p> <p>Other notes from interviews: married</p>	<p>Participated in first and third interviews</p>
Julie	<p>Role/title: social worker; employed through co-op</p> <p>Type of school: public</p> <p>Grade levels: k - 5</p> <p>Location: unknown</p> <p>Student population: unknown</p> <p>Other notes: was part-time previous 2 years; current year is full-time; 2 other SSWs in building who are employed through school district</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: not stated in interview</p> <p>Age: not stated in interview</p> <p>Professional experience: 4th year in current school</p> <p>Interests: not stated in interview</p> <p>Other notes from interviews: has husband and children</p>	<p>Participated in all 3 interviews</p>
Maria	<p>Role/title: school social worker</p> <p>Type of school: charter</p> <p>Grade levels: k - 5</p> <p>Location: southwest side of Chicago</p> <p>Student population: largely African American community</p> <p>Other notes: 2 social workers in building; hired as social worker specifically for students with IEP services</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interview (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: Caucasian</p> <p>Age: not stated in interview; early in career</p> <p>Professional experience: 2nd year in building</p> <p>Interests: not stated in interview</p> <p>Other notes from interview: n/a</p>	<p>Exited after first interview</p> <p>No workshop participation</p>
Melinda	<p>Role/title: school social worker and Social Work Department Chair</p> <p>Type of school: public middle school</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female)</p> <p>Race: not stated in interviews</p> <p>Age: at least 20 more years until retirement</p>	<p>Participated in all 3 interviews</p>

	<p>Grade levels: k - 5 Location: northern suburbs of Chicago Student population: affluent area with high-achieving students/families Other notes: school has 2 full-time social workers</p>	<p>Professional experience: worked 10 years at a different middle school prior to current school Interests: not stated in interviews Other notes from interviews: n/a</p>	
Nathalia	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: unknown Grade levels: elementary school Location: unknown Student population: Spanish-speaking students Other notes: services students with IEPs (about 35)</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interview (assumed female) Race: not stated in interview Age: not stated in interview Professional experience: not stated in interview Interests: not stated in interview Other notes from interviews: n/a</p>	<p>Exited after first interview No workshop participation</p>
Norchelle	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: charter Grade levels: pre-k - 8 Location: southwest side of Chicago Student population: students in poverty; largely African American community Other notes: only social worker in building; turnaround school opened 5 years prior</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female) Race: African American Age: considers self early in career, thinking about desires future years Professional experience: has worked in building for 4-5 years in various roles Interests: cooking, future education Other notes from interviews: has second Master's degree and Type 75 certification; from west side of Chicago</p>	<p>Participated in all 3 interviews</p>
Pam	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: public Grade levels: k - 5 Location: southern suburb of Chicago Student population: from many various countries; many languages spoken Other notes: only social worker in building</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female) Race: not stated in interviews Age: said 'older' Professional experience: social work is second career Interests: not stated in interview Other notes from interviews: has son and husband; grew up in Beverly, IL</p>	<p>Participated in all 3 interviews</p>
Robyn	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: public</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female)</p>	<p>Participated</p>

	<p>Grade levels: k - 8 Location: southwest suburb of Chicago Student population: Other notes: large building</p>	<p>Race: not stated in interviews Age: not stated in interviews Professional experience: about 12 years as SSW Interests: not stated in interviews Other notes from interviews: English-speaking; manages non-profit agency voluntarily</p>	<p>in first and third interviews</p>
Shannon	<p>Role/title: social worker in school-based health center Type of school: public Grade levels: high school Location: southwest side of Chicago Student population: students in poverty; largely African American community; about 25% in SpEd Other notes: works through health center; 2 other Type 73 social workers also in building</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interviews (assumed female) Race: Caucasian Age: not stated in interview Professional experience: in 5th year of position Interests: not stated in interviews Other notes from interviews: from Michigan; does not have IL PEL, does have LSW</p>	<p>Participated in all 3 interviews</p>
Sherry	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: public Grade levels: junior high school (6th - 8th) Location: unknown Student population: many African American students Other notes: n/a</p>	<p>Gender: not stated in interview (assumed female) Race: African American Age: not stated in interview Professional experience: 14 total years in district at elementary school; transferred to junior high 2 years ago Interests: not stated in interview Other notes from interviews: n/a</p>	<p>Participated in first and third interviews</p>
Tamira	<p>Role/title: school social worker Type of school: charter Grade levels: K - 5 Location: west side of Chicago Student population: mainly African American Other notes: works year-round; works with another school social worker; hired to work for general education programming</p>	<p>Gender: female Race: African American Age: said 'older' Professional experience: comes from corporate background; social work is second career Interests: spiritual Other notes from interview: grew up in Michigan and lived in various diverse cities; has grown children</p>	<p>Exited after first interview No workshop participation</p>

APPENDIX B

TERMINOLOGY DEFINED FOR PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY

This table provides terminology found within the paper along with its relevant explanation regarding how the term/concept has been used for purposes of this specific study.

Term	Definition / explanation for purposes of this study
<i>Balancing boundaries</i>	<i>Balancing Boundaries</i> is a term meant to describe a process in which school-based practitioners attempt to productively mitigate their perceived understandings of the three conceptual domains of a School Standpoint (see definition of 'School Standpoint' below) in order to utilize their ideal practice approaches. This term was conceptualized based on the findings from this specific study. The findings related to <i>balancing boundaries</i> led to implications evidencing need for pre-service training to teach practitioners how to professionally mitigate problems they encounter; further, because practitioners engage in <i>balancing boundaries</i> individually - in their own ways - policymakers should consider the need for more systematized work tasks and roles.
→ <i>Unbalanced boundaries</i>	<i>Unbalanced boundaries</i> is a term that describes the manifested struggles for practitioners when they could not mitigate their problematic situations successfully. This term was conceptualized based on the findings from this specific study. The term describes the situations in which frustration, discomfort, uncertainty, or other feelings of negativity remains part of practitioners' daily work experiences. <i>Unbalanced boundaries</i> is one factor that could lead to practitioner frustration, and potentially lead to burnout.
<i>Clinical skills</i>	<i>Clinical skills</i> are based on therapeutic techniques and are often employed via small-group and/or individual settings. Examples include psychotherapy or behavior modification support, among other approaches and techniques as well. In schools, <i>clinical skills</i> are most often considered in relation to individual students and/or small groups of students. School social-based workers may be asked to use their clinical skills when supporting students throughout crises or throughout their daily school-related academic functioning. In Illinois, school social workers are often employed to use their <i>clinical skills</i> per legislation that mandates access to social work services for students within Special Education who show related social emotional difficulties (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2018a).
<i>Contextual conditions</i>	<i>Contextual conditions</i> refers to the external elements and influences of a school, including (but not limited to): school geography, surrounding socioeconomic status, organizational policies, resource availability, etc. It is an umbrella term that encompasses the characteristics of a school environment. Using an Ecological Systems Framework can lead to better understanding of the contextual conditions of a school that may influence school-based social work practices (Phillippo, 2016; Roth, Sichling, & Brake, 2015). While <i>contextual conditions</i> could relate to all of the

	domains of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model, the participants in this study most commonly spoke about <i>contextual conditions</i> related to the domain of the professional role (<i>see definitions of ‘domains’ below</i>). Based on this data, I found that <i>contextual conditions</i> are considered within school-based practitioners’ overall ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ (<i>see definitions of ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ below</i>).
<i>Council for Social Work Education (CSWE)</i>	The <i>Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)</i> is a nonprofit national association individuals and for graduate and undergraduate programs of social work education. <i>CSWE</i> is considered the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the United States (CSWE, 2018a).
<i>Cultural competence</i>	Existent literature portrays <i>cultural competence</i> as the integration of knowledge and practice about the culture(s) of individuals and groups of people by appropriately using standards, policies, practices, and attitudes to increase the quality of services. However, the term <i>culturally competent</i> has been criticized within recent literature, and scholars are asserting that cultural humility is an improved approach (Drinane, Owen, Adelson, & Rodolfa, 2014; Kirmayer, 2012; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). As mandated and defined by the NASW Standards and indicators for <i>cultural competence</i> in social work practice (2001); “ <i>Cultural competence</i> refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each... <i>Cultural competence</i> is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals and enable the system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (NASW, 2001, p. 61).
<i>Cultural humility</i>	The concept of <i>cultural humility</i> is an extension to the idea of cultural competency; it brings forth a lifelong process of engaging with others and working towards understanding of differences. It signifies a lifelong process that encourages clinicians to always practice with curiosity and investment in the environmental, social, political, and cultural factors that could influence the communication process(es) with clients. It encourages questions and conversations between the clinician and the client and explains the importance of equity within the clinician-client relationship (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). (<i>For more information about ‘cultural humility’, see, for example: Drinane et al., 2014; Kirmayer, 2012; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; etc.</i>)
<i>Domains (of the ‘School</i>	These <i>domains</i> were created based on the three largest themes within the data from this study. These three themes became the three <i>domains</i> of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model: the surrounding social structure, a practitioners

<i>Standpoint' Model)</i>	personal identity, and the professional role. Throughout the situations that practitioners encounter while at work, the <i>domains</i> continually interact together in fluid and flexible, and positive and negative ways. Each <i>domain</i> encompasses additional thematic findings. These additional themes, or elements, of the <i>domains</i> are important for practitioners to consider while they attempt to construct and understand their overall 'sense and self' and 'use of self' (<i>see definitions of 'sense of self' and 'use of self' below</i>).
→ <i>Personal identity</i> (<i>domain of</i>)	Within the 'School Standpoint' Model, the <i>domain of personal identity</i> exists within the overall domain of the social structure and also overlaps with the domain of the professional role. Based on this dataset, emergent themes within the <i>domain of personal identity</i> included: personal identifying demographics (age and years of experience, language, race) and personal experiences. Future research may discover additional elements that also contribute to the <i>domain of personal identity</i> .
→ <i>Professional role</i> (<i>domain of</i>)	Within the 'School Standpoint' Model, the <i>domain of the professional role</i> exists within the overall social structure and overlaps with the domain of personal identity. Based on this dataset, emergent themes within the <i>domain of the professional role</i> included: 'school-informed professional mindset' and contextual conditions. Future research may discover additional elements that also contribute to the <i>domain of the professional role</i> .
→ <i>Social structure</i> (<i>domain of</i>)	The <i>domain of the social structure</i> is the largest, and overlays the other two domains. In the visual of the 'School Standpoint' Model, it is the 'all-encompassing' circle. Based on this dataset, emergent themes within the <i>domain of the social structure</i> included: interpersonal dynamics, power and authority, and shifts and changes to a school. Future research may discover additional elements that also contribute to the <i>domain of the social structure</i> .
Education (<i>field of education</i>)	For purposes of this paper, <i>education</i> (and, <i>field of education</i>) refers to public <i>education</i> in the United States, including pre-kindergarten (early intervention); kindergarten, throughout high school (12th grade).
Host setting	Social work practice often occurs within a <i>host setting</i> , when services are specialized to specific needs and/or specific populations. A <i>host setting</i> refers to a place in which social work services are provided, yet are not the primary goal of the setting (Broom, Adams, & Tovey, 2009; DiFranks, 2008; Hand & Judkins, 1999; Kahn, 2005; Quest, Marco & Derst, 2009; Wenocur & Reisch, 1989; Whitaker & Arrington, 2008). Currently, there are more social workers employed in <i>host setting</i> (non-social work) than in <i>non-host settings</i> (primarily social work) (DiFranks, 2008). In this study, the school is the <i>host setting</i> in which school-based social workers provide their services. <i>Host settings</i> , including schools, may lead to difficulties and

	<p>barriers that social work practitioners face based on the multitude of factors that could contrast and/or conflict with the goals of the social workers. Some of these barriers may include: working as an ‘ancillary service,’ needing to understand professional goals of the other fields, remembering to align social work services to the other primary needs of the <i>host setting</i>, etc. (Allen-Meares, 1994; Bye et al., 2009; Olsen & Olsen, 1967). For school-based social workers, this may mean that due to conflicting demands of the <i>host setting</i> (school setting), they could struggle to provide best practices, such as culturally competent instruction or expectations, or their role may not be understood correctly, for example (Constable et al., 1996; Kelly et al., 2016; Massat et al., 2016). Participants in this study commonly spoke about the frustrations they experienced due to working in a <i>host setting</i>, such as having a different mindset than their colleagues.</p>
<p>Macro practice (in social work)</p>	<p>Brueggemann (2005) defines <i>macro social work practice</i> as “the practice of helping individuals and groups solve problems and make social change at the community, organizational, societal, and global levels” (p. 8). According to the NASW (2016), all social workers have a double orientation: to individual clients - and to the broader society. Brueggemann (2005) explained that “Even if <i>macro</i> level work is outside one’s day-to-day professional obligation, helping make a better society is not only an expectation of all social workers, but ought to be part of every social worker’s personal commitment as a citizen and member of one’s community” (p. 3).</p>
<p>Micro practice (in social work)</p>	<p>For the purposes of this paper, <i>micro practice</i> refers to clinical skills (See definition of ‘clinical skills’ above)</p>
<p>National Association for Social Workers (NASW)</p>	<p>According to NASW (2017), the <i>National Association of Social Workers (NASW)</i> “Works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies... The <i>NASW</i> is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with 132,000 members.”</p>
<p>NASW Code of Ethics</p>	<p>According to the NASW (2008), “Professional ethics are at the core of social work. The profession has an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. The <i>NASW Code of Ethics</i> sets forth these values, principles, and standards to guide social workers’ conduct. The <i>Code</i> is relevant to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve.” Therefore, the <i>Code of Ethics</i> pertains to school social workers in the same way as it does to all other licensed social workers.</p> <p>The <i>NASW Code of Ethics</i> (2008) explains that it serves six purposes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Code identifies core values on which social work’s mission is based.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. The Code summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that should be used to guide social work practice. 3. The Code is designed to help social workers identify relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise. 4. The Code provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable. 5. The Code socializes practitioners new to the field to social work's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. 6. The Code articulates standards that the social work profession itself can use to assess whether social workers have engaged in unethical conduct. <p>The <i>NASW Code of Ethics</i> reflects the commitment of all social workers to uphold the profession's values and to act ethically... Principles and standards must be applied by individuals of good character who discern moral questions and, in good faith, seek to make reliable ethical judgments" (NASW, 2008).</p>
<p><i>Positionality</i></p>	<p>Numerous philosophers and theorists (see, for example, Patricia Hill Collins) have used Standpoint Theory to further philosophize the concept of <i>Positionality</i>. <i>Positionality</i> theorists have concluded that <i>Positionality</i> refers to an individual's position, (or location, point, setting, etc.) within the complex social structure in which humans live. The concept of <i>Positionality</i> explains that identity may be fluid and dynamic, depending upon one's location in the social structure and current events within society. <i>Positionality</i> allows for movement between the multiple identities a person can carry while positing that outward social changes affect such dynamics as well. It provides a conceptual framework to support understanding of unique roles, beliefs, or perceptions that individuals have (Haraway, 1988; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar & Lester, 2010). For the purposes of this research study, <i>Positionality</i> became a significant addition to <i>Standpoint Theory</i> within the literature because of its more extensive meaning. Scholars have noted the concept of <i>Positionality</i> as an 'addendum' to Standpoint Theory. Researchers (including this researcher for purposes of this study) have used <i>Positionality</i> to gain knowledge about how aspects of identity can affect people's beliefs and actions (Kezar, 2002). Compared to Standpoint Theory, the concept of <i>Positionality</i> encompasses a more expansive meaning of human characteristics while also recognizing that experiences are fluid and ever changing. It should be noted that Standpoint Theory has been philosophized and conceptualized separately and with distinct ideas from the concepts of <i>Positionality</i>. However, for the purposes of this research study specially, the combined use of Standpoint Theory and concepts of <i>Positionality</i> together allowed for participants' voices to be more thoroughly analyzed with purpose and meaning. This study required that the researcher attempted to understand the data about the realities of both the field of social work as well as the</p>

	<p>field of education. Combining ideas of <i>Positionality</i> and Standpoint Theory allowed for the researcher to consider the thoughts and opinions of participants as distinct and unique, yet also in relation to thematic needs and opinions of the emergent findings overall. As a joint entity (the theoretical lens) these theories provided a way to analyze the interview data by becoming an analytical tool to actively assess how social workers within school settings may have been thinking about, reflecting, and/or practicing with self-awareness. (For further research and literature about 'Positionality', see, for example: Acevedo et al., 2015; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Kezar, 2002; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Milner, 2007; Salinas & Sullivan, 2007; Tarrant, 2014; Zamudio et al., 2009; etc.)</p>
<p>Professional Learning Community (PLC)</p>	<p>In general, a <i>Professional Learning Community (PLC)</i> refers to a group of teachers “sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way” (Stoll & Seashore, 2007, p. 2). For the purposes of this paper, <i>PLC</i> refers to a group of school-based mental health clinicians who agreed to meet together online (and, smaller groups of its members to meet in person) to discuss and problem-solve their professional encounters and activities. This study’s participants were recruited based on their participation in a <i>PLC</i>. Most of the members maintained participation for one school year; some decided to continue participating the next year as well. The participating members of the first year of the <i>PLC</i> constitute the sample for this study.</p>
<p>→ <i>PLC Cohort</i></p>	<p><i>PLC cohort</i> refers to both research participants and researchers as the whole group collaboratively.</p>
<p>→ <i>PLC Leaders</i></p>	<p><i>PLC leaders</i> refers to the researchers and implementers of the 2015-16 PLC Project, including: Dr. Andrew Brake (Assistant Professor, Northeastern Illinois University), Dr. Michael Kelly (Professor, Loyola University Chicago), Ms. Sybil Dunlap (Center for Childhood Resilience, Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago), Ms. Erica Badie (Center for Childhood Resilience, Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago), & Ms. Emily Shayman (Doctoral Student, Loyola University Chicago). This team of professionals worked together to implement the PLC trainings and collect data for the associated research study. The members of this team changed during subsequent years of the PLC.</p>
<p>→ <i>PLC Participants</i></p>	<p><i>PLC participants</i> refers to the research subjects; members of the team not including the leaders/researchers</p>
<p>School-informed professional mindset</p>	<p>For purposes of this study, <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> refers to a way of thinking (a ‘mindset’) for school-based social workers. I conceptualized this term (<i>school-informed professional mindset</i>) based on literature about ‘mindsets’ for purposes of this study. The <i>school-informed</i></p>

	<p><i>professional mindset</i> relates to how social workers, who have different knowledge than most school employees, are interpreting and deciding how to respond to the needs of students in a non social-work school setting (or, host setting). This conceptual idea of <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> emerged from the data based on participants' descriptions of their recognition that they think differently than do teachers and other staff members. Participants described their <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> as creating both unique opportunities to utilize specific training and knowledge but also as a reason for less comfortable feeling of dissonance surrounding some professional responsibilities; it could be a reason or factor of conflict with colleagues. Participants also cited how this <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> may contrast with mandated laws or policies they are required to follow. Regardless of the struggles it caused, participants also described the <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> as being necessary and meaningful to their work and as the reason for having different way of thinking as compared to colleagues in the school. Participants also provided specific examples about approaches and strategies they use due to having a <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> as school-based social workers.</p>
<p>→ 'Mindsets' (more general, pertinent information)</p>	<p>While there is a knowledge base in within social psychology literature regarding the concepts of 'mindsets' and 'attitudes,' (see, for example: Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2005; Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, Steller, & Sherman, 1990; Hamilton, Vohs, Sellier, & Meyvis, 2011; Mackay, 2015; Nolder, & Kadous, 2018; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; etc.), there is no specific definition for what would be a <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> specifically (or, for that matter, nor is there a definition a somewhat more general <i>professional mindset</i>). Based on work by Gollwitzer and his collaborators, Nolder and Kadous (2018) described a <i>mindset</i> to "consist of a collection of judgment criteria and cognitive processes and procedures to facilitate completion of a particular task. Accordingly, <i>mindsets</i> are evidenced by cognitive processing measures, such as those capturing an individual's openness or receptivity to information and the extent to which they seek out confirming or positive information" (p. 2). Hamilton et al. (2011) explained that <i>mindsets</i> have two significant properties: that cognitive processes are relative to more than one specific task, and also that thoughts relevant to the mindset "remain active beyond the initial task, influencing subsequent and even unrelated tasks" (p. 13). While there are qualifiers of what characterizes <i>mindsets</i>, the term continues to be used widely, in a plethora of contexts. The literature about <i>mindsets</i> is widespread. It pertains to all environments, not specifically the workplace; though future literature could acknowledge or determine how the overall concept of a <i>school-informed professional mindset</i> (or, <i>professional mindset</i> more generally) relates to other areas of the social work profession, or even to other professions outside of social work, the terminology for purposes of this study relates specifically to school-based social workers. Furthermore, literature about <i>mindsets</i> has</p>

	depicted numerous characterizations and qualifiers for a type of thinking (see, for example: Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2005; Hamilton et al., 2011; Nolder, & Kadous, 2018; Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995; etc.). For example, as Nolder and Kadous explained, “holistic mindsets” relates to thinking about the ‘bigger picture,’ and “abstract mindsets facilitate making and evaluating decisions in line with one’s principles, while concrete mindsets facilitate attending to immediate problems” (p. 5).
<i>School administrator</i>	For purposes of this paper, <i>school administrators</i> are those who hold prescribed leadership roles, have given authority, and may evaluate school-based social workers’ and/or other school staff members’ professional performance. Administrative roles could include, but is not limited to: school principals, assistant principals, deans, etc. According to Kowalski & Bjork (2005), the role of the superintendent and/or other administrators may be inconsistent and/or continuously changing.
<i>School-based mental health practitioner (SBMHP)</i>	For the purposes of this study, a <i>school-based mental health practitioner (SBMHP)</i> has credentials or licensure to practice as mental-health professional within a school setting. This includes, but is not limited to: school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, etc.
<i>School social worker and School-based social worker</i>	A <i>school social worker</i> denotes a specific position in which the professional holds a license and specific credentialing to be considered as a <i>school social worker</i> . The credentialing of <i>school social worker</i> may vary across states and/or districts depending upon licensing requirements and/or other policies. For example, in Illinois, all <i>school social workers</i> are required to hold a Professional Educator License (PEL) Type 73 (ISBE, 2018b). <i>School-based social workers</i> are social workers who work within the school setting. They may not have the licensure or credentials to consider themselves <i>school social workers</i> specifically. In this study, participants consisted of <i>school-based social workers</i> , who may or may not have held the PEL 73. In this study, all participants were social workers within the school setting; some participants had the licensure to be a <i>school social worker</i> specifically, though not all. (See Appendix A for more information regarding participants’ specific positions and titles.) All <i>school social workers</i> are <i>school-based social workers</i> , but NOT all <i>school-based social workers</i> are necessarily <i>school social workers</i> .
<i>School Standpoint</i>	<i>School Standpoint</i> is the fluid and changing point found in the ‘School Standpoint’ Model (see definition of this Model below) at which the three domains of the Model come together and form a practitioner’s ‘sense of self’ and/or ‘use of self’ (see definitions of ‘sense of self’ and ‘use of self’ below) within professional practices. The specific <i>School Standpoint</i> encompasses the current, unique, and individual elements the school-based social work practitioner is experiencing while making professional decisions. For example, in some situations, the domain of personal identity

	<p>may be perceived by the practitioner as most influential, whereas during a different situation, the domain of the social structure and/or the professional role may be perceived as more influential. Then, ‘sense of self’ fluctuates depending upon these surrounding elements. Therefore, overall, the term <i>School Standpoint</i> refers to the way in which a school-based social worker perceives herself while working. Note that the figure of the ‘School Standpoint’ Model shows how each of these independent, separate influences continuously interact and impact one another in fluid and dynamic ways; the boundaries of each domain may shift based on the situation and context. The specific point, or place in which the domains of the model coincide create the <i>School Standpoint</i>.</p>
<p>‘Sense of self’ and ‘Use of self’</p>	<p>An individual school-based social worker can feel/perceive these two terms similarly or as contrasting/clashing concepts. Yet this data additionally evidenced that practitioners do not always act based on their specific understanding; sometimes, they allowed external factors to reshape or form how they portrayed their ‘sense of self’ in hopes that their ‘use of self’ would be more productive. Therefore, while ‘use of self’ does not necessarily equate ‘sense of self,’ it is possible that the two can be in alignment with one another. A practitioner is acting according to ‘sense of self’ when the two concepts are in alignment. When the practitioner is acting outside of desired practice approaches, the two terms are not ‘balanced’ or in alignment (<i>see definition of ‘balancing boundaries’ below</i>); in this case, the practitioner may be approaching practices differently than desired or intended and is likely experiencing discomfort within one or more ‘domains’ (<i>see definition of ‘domains’ above</i>). When these two terms (‘<i>use of self</i>’ and ‘<i>sense of self</i>’) are not in alignment, this study found that the practitioner will consciously and/or unconsciously ‘balance boundaries’ in attempt to align the terms as productively as possible. The practitioner can do this by modifying outcomes of either ‘<i>sense of self</i>’ and/or ‘<i>use of self</i>.’ Thus, the process of ‘balancing boundaries’ is the factor that differentiates these two terms (‘<i>sense of self</i>’ versus ‘<i>use of self</i>’).</p>
<p>→ ‘<i>Sense of self</i>’</p>	<p>The phrase ‘<i>sense of self</i>’ was first used when stating this study’s research question. ‘<i>Sense of self</i>’ is an all-encompassing term that incorporates how an individual perceives herself and her environment(s) overall; it includes personal and professional characteristics, experiences, and feelings and then brings together all potential elements within an individual’s life. ‘<i>Sense of self</i>’ is an internal, personal phenomenon.</p>
<p>→ ‘<i>Use of self</i>’</p>	<p>‘<i>Use of self</i>’ is the external behavior(s) produced based on feelings, knowledge, and other personal perceptions (‘<i>sense of self</i>’) as well as due to other significant factors described to influence, change, or otherwise affect behavior; findings for this study showed that this can be advantageous in some situations, yet more frustrating or futile in other situations. Findings evidenced that ‘<i>use of self</i>’ may not demonstrate as one</p>

	actually feels or desires internally, and therefore that <i>'ese of self'</i> requires careful, conscious actions to be productive.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Social Identity Theory</i></p>	<p><i>Social Identity Theory</i> explains that individuals are inevitably part of a plethora of social networks - and inevitably excluded from other social networks as well (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974). Based on the emergent findings from the data, <i>Social Identity Theory</i> became an important philosophical concept to include in this study in conjunction with concepts of Standpoint Theory and Positionality. Han Tapper (2013) explained that <i>Social Identity Theory</i> “maintains that human beings are social by virtue of their relationships with one another, an existence embedded within a vast web of networks that are constructed based on identity-based associations” (p. 417). Tajfel (1974), who is credited as being a creator of this theory, further claimed that “intergroup behaviour must take into account both causal directions: from ingroup processes to outgroup behaviour and attitudes...” (p. 67). ‘Ingroup’ refers to other individuals who share the same trait(s) or characteristic(s) as others in a group and ‘outgroup’ refers to those who do not have the same trait(s) and/or characteristic(s) as the group members. For example, in this study, all members were part of the ‘ingroup’ in that they worked in school settings. Yet participants described feeling as though they had an ‘outgroup’ status within schools due to being a social worker and not part of the ‘ingroup’ of teachers. Thus, concepts of <i>Social Identity Theory</i> allow for understanding that participants’ descriptions and perceptions were not only based on their own identifying characteristics, but also based on social networks around them, which then further solidified understanding of the nuances of the social structure (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974). <i>Social Identity Theory</i> (in alignment with Standpoint Theory and Positionality) supported findings illustrating that school-based social workers live and work within a social structure that shapes how they perceive all experiences, and how others perceive them, both personally and professionally. In other words, the theory supports the notion that it is natural and inevitable that school-based social workers will experience and understand their work within the surrounding social structure. (<i>For more information about ‘Social Identity Theory,’ see, for example: Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Han Tapper, 2013; Tajfel, 1974; etc.</i>)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Standpoint Theory</i></p>	<p><i>Standpoint Theory</i>, which has roots in feminist literature, philosophizes that every individual understands the environment around her based on personal identities and previous experiences. The theory emerged as a feminist epistemology, one in which its philosophers claimed that gendered nuances influenced the perspective and understanding of females within their environments, mostly due to socially constructed barriers associated with female identity. Dr. Sandra Harding, Dr. Nancy Harstock, and other philosophers continued to expand the theory so that it encompassed additional assertions that other personal characteristics and identifiers, such as race, socio-economic class, etc., also contribute to</p>

	<p>individuals' perceptions of social phenomena (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hill Collins, 1986; 1989; Hartsock, 1983). <i>Standpoint Theory</i> explains how personal perspectives are created through lived social and political experiences, and further philosophizes how power dynamics may be uniquely experienced based on the individual and the context (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harstock, 1983; Pawlowski, 2006; Swigonski, 1994). For this study, <i>Standpoint Theory</i> provided a theoretical framework for understanding how participants' identities and experiences may shape their perceptions and decisions. This theory supported understanding practitioners' 'sense of self' while taking into account that school-based social workers come from various personal and professional experiences and backgrounds. For purposes of this specific study, the ideas of <i>Standpoint Theory</i> were combined and used jointly with ideas of Positionality as well. (See definition of 'positionality' above.)</p>
<p>→ <i>Standpoints</i></p>	<p>A <i>standpoint</i> refers to components of personal identity, such as the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other personal characteristics (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Pawlowski, 2006; Smith, 1987). Standpoint Theory asserts that personal experiences shape both behaviors and perception (Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Harding & Norberg, 2005; Harstock, 1983; Hawkesworth, 1999; Hill Collins, 1986; 1999; 2009; Swigonski, 1994). Definitions surrounding Standpoint Theory express that social experiences are shaped and understood via individual lenses based on one's standpoint(s) (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1992; 1998; 2017; Pawlowski, 2006). Standpoint Theory with an emphasis on Positionality provided a conceptual framework for this study in which the researcher could critically appraise behavior and social interactions based on individuals' <i>standpoints</i> (Hawkesworth, 1999; Swigonski, 1994). Therefore, this study sought to understand school-based social workers' <i>standpoints</i> (their professional identities in relation to their personal identities, lived experiences, and other positions) that they perceived as relevant and/or important.</p>

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

This appendix includes all three interview protocols, each one used during a different time period of the school year.

Interview Protocol One

THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PROJECT
 INTERVIEW GUIDE 1 (September / October)
 Loyola University Chicago
 IRB Project # / Application #: 1815/3446

OPENING REMARKS

Thanks again for agreeing to take part in this study. My name is _____. I am very glad to be talking with you today and I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. As we've already discussed, this study examines how school social workers view their roles, responsibilities, and leadership capacities in schools, as well as how their participation in a year long professional learning community (PLC) may facilitate their professional practice. I am sure you will have a lot to share about your experiences and your insights will really help me understand the challenges and rewards of this work.

Remember that we will interview you three different times this year, including today, then again at the end of the first and the end of the second semesters. We'll meet at times and at a location that work best for you. During the interviews I will ask you to reflect on being a school social mental health professional, some of your beliefs about your role in schools, the ways you wish to improve your practice, and impact, and your experiences in this year long PLC.

Let me emphasize that that this interview is confidential. Your name and your school's name will not be revealed to anyone outside this study. I am not allowed to tell your principal, other teachers, parents, or anyone else what we discuss in our interviews. The only time I will break confidentiality is if I have reason to believe someone is harming you or that someone else is being harmed or is in danger of being harmed. If that happens, I am required to take action. Your participation in this study is important but if you want to stop this or any interview at any time just let me know.

Lastly, to make sure I really pay attention to you during our conversation, I'd like to record this interview. Is that OK with you? You can tell me to turn off the recorder at any time during this interview if you like. Does this all make sense? Do you have any other questions or concerns? OK, let's get started.

[Turn on audio recorder.]

The first thing I want to talk to you about today are your experiences in your job at school. Specifically, I'd like to discuss your views about your roles and responsibilities in your job...

I. JOB EXPERIENCES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Tell me how you would describe your job, broadly speaking. Walk me through a typical day or a typical week.
 - a. What are the most important things you do? Why?
 - b. What teams / committees do you sit on? Which are the most / least effective? Why?
 - c. If you had to let go of one task / function of your job, what would it be? Why?
2. How does your work relate to those around you?
 - a. How does it compliment teachers' work?

- b. How does it compliment administrators' work?
- c. How is your work different / unique?
- 3. What are some of the challenges you face as a social worker in your school?
- 4. Tell me about a time when you were ____ about having to do something assigned to you.
 - a. Conflicted
 - b. Confused
 - c. Pleased
 - d. Excited

The next set of questions are related to the survey measures you completed during the PLC orientation session downtown at the Loyola campus. They are questions about how effective you feel at work, your use of evidence-based practices, and how job stress impacts you and your work. The first question is about your sense of your effectiveness at this point in the school year.

II. SELF-EFFICACY AT WORK

1. Now that the school year has begun, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being very ineffective and 5 being very effective) how effective have you been feeling at work?
 - a. Can you explain why you chose the score you did, with specific examples?
 - b. Are there specific things that have been difficult in the early part of the year? Please explain.
 - c. Has this changed in any way since the start of the year? Please explain.

III. USE OF EBP

1. Now I'd like to talk about your use of evidence based practices in your work
2. First, can you describe what Evidence Based Practice (EBP) means to you in your job?
3. Next, can you talk about that what you've learned so far in your work to understand EBP as (NOTE to Interviewers: Please give an example to help them understand each of these if they seem unsure):
 - a. a *process*? Can you provide an example?
 - b. a *noun*? Can you provide an example?
 - c. as *practice-based evidence*? Can you provide an example?
4. How often are you using interventions and practices that are evidence based?
 - a. What interventions / kinds of interventions are you most often using / likely to use EBP?
 - b. When are there opportunities to do so? What are the barriers to doing so?

IV. BURNOUT AT WORK

1. How stressful would you describe your job at this point in the school year?
 - a. Is this different than other years? Than other times this school year? Please explain.
 - b. What helps to manage the stress?
 - c. Do you see colleagues around you that you would consider "burned out?"
 - d. How would you describe symptoms of burnout in your school setting?

V. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The following two questions are about your personal traits and characteristics in relation to your job performance. We're wondering how you see yourself within the school-wide system and general community.

1. On a scale of 1 - 10 (ten being the strongest), how would you generally rate your relationships with the (a. teachers, b. administration, c. parents) in your building?

- a. Why do you give it that number?
 - b. What are the strengths?
 - c. What are the barriers or challenges to these relationships?
2. What personal qualities or characteristics do you have that enable you to do your job? What qualities do you want to improve?
- 3.

Next, for this set of questions I want to look ahead at the goals you have for improving your practice this year and next year, as well as the goals you have related to the PLC this year. Finally, we'll close with some questions about the Sakai site and the tools we're building and gathering this year in the PLC.

VI. GOALS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING PRACTICE

1. Looking ahead, what skills / areas of practice do you want to improve upon in your job in the next year or two?
 - a. Why these?
 - b. What could help you get there?
 - c. How do you want to grow professionally over these next five years?
2. Are there opportunities for you take leadership in your school to develop Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions? Explain why or why not.
3. Is there strong support by school leadership and / or with your colleagues to do so? Explain.

VII. GOALS & EXPERIENCES IN PLC

1. Now let's talk about the PLC project this year. Why did you decide to participate in the PLC Project this year?
2. What is the primary goal you are trying to work on in the PLC this year? Why did you decide to take this on?
3. What are your hopes for this experience? What are your concerns / worries?

VIII. SAKAI SITE

1. What ways do you intend to use the Sakai site this year?
2. Are there tools that you're hoping to acquire or share? Explain.

CLOSING REMARKS

Is there anything that we have not discussed that you think is important for me to know? Please explain.

FINALLY, is there anything that we've discussed today that you do not want discussed during our PLC workshops? If so, I'll make special care to keep it in our conversation here.

OK, that's all the questions I have today. Thanks again for meeting with me, I really learned a lot. Do you have any questions for me? Remember that we'll meet again for another interview at the end of the first semester. I will get in touch with you when it gets closer to remind you of the appointment.

Also, if you have any other questions or things that come to mind about our interview today, feel free to call me or email me. My contact information is on the consent form I gave you. Also, if you have any other concerns, you can contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services. Their contact information is also on that form. Thanks again!

[Turn off audio recorder.]

Interview Protocol Two

THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PROJECT

INTERVIEW GUIDE 2 (February / March)

Loyola University Chicago

IRB Project # / Application #: 1815/3446

OPENING REMARKS

Thanks again for agreeing to take part in the PLC Project this year. Again, my name is _____. I am very glad to be talking with you today and I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. As we've already discussed, this study examines how school social workers view their roles, responsibilities, and leadership capacities in schools, as well as how their participation in a year long professional learning community (PLC) may facilitate their professional practice.

Remember that we will interview you three different times this year. Today is our second interview, and I'll interview you again at the end of the second semester. During the interviews I will ask you to reflect on being a school social mental health professional, some of your beliefs about your role in schools, the ways you wish to improve your practice, and your experiences in this year long PLC.

Let me remind you that that this interview is confidential. Your name and your school's name will not be revealed to anyone outside this study. I am not allowed to tell your principal, other teachers, parents, or anyone else what we discuss in our interviews. The only time I will break confidentiality is if I have reason to believe someone is harming you or that someone else is being harmed or is in danger of being harmed. If that happens, I am required to take action. Your participation in this study is important but if you want to stop this or any interview at any time just let me know.

Lastly, to make sure I really pay attention to you during our conversation, I'd again like to record this interview. Is that OK with you? You can tell me to turn off the recorder at any time during this interview if you like. Does this all make sense? Do you have any other questions or concerns? OK, let's get started.

[Turn on audio recorder.]

Today's interview will primarily focus on two things: 1) how your year has been going on the job now that the first semester is over, and 2) your experience in the PLC Project so far this year.

I. SELF-EFFICACY AT WORK

- 1) Now that we are halfway through the school year, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being very ineffective and 5 being very effective) how effective have you been feeling at work? (NOTE TO INTERVIEWERS: Please *compare the interviewee's numbered response to their Round 1 interview and probe WHY it is either higher, lower, or the same.*)
 - a) Can you explain why you chose the score you did, with specific examples?
 - b) Are there specific things that have been particularly difficult (or particularly successful) in the first half of the school year? Please explain.

II. BURNOUT AT WORK

- 1) How stressful would you describe your job at this point in the school year?
 - a) Is this different than other times this school year? Please explain.
 - b) Describe and explain thoughts about colleagues you believe might be 'burned out'.
 - i) And what do you believe are the reasons they might be burned out?

- ii) Are you able to help them improve motivation?
 - (1) Do you want to?

III. USE OF EBP

Now I'd like to return to our conversation last time about your use of evidence based practices in your work.

- 1) Has your understanding/thoughts/opinions about or use of EBP changed at all from the start of the year? Please explain.
- 2) How often are you using interventions and practices that are evidence based?
 - a) What interventions / kinds of interventions are you most often using / likely to use EBP?
 - b) Have there been opportunities to do so this year? What are the barriers to doing so?

IV. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Now let's revisit some of the questions about your personal traits and characteristics in relation to your job performance.

- 1) At this point in the year, on a scale of 1 - 10 (ten being the strongest), how would you generally rate your relationships with the (a. teachers, b. administration, c. parents) in your building?
 - a) Why do you give it that number?
 - b) What are the strengths of these relationships?
 - i) *Probe after participant gives first-thought answer:* Think about your personal characteristics (age, gender, race) and how these may impact your relationships (either positively or negatively).
 - c) What are the barriers or challenges to these relationships? Are they unique to things that have happened this year?
 - i) *Probe after participant gives first-thought answer:* Think about your personal characteristics (age, gender, race) and how these may impact your relationships (either positively or negatively).

V. GOALS & EXPERIENCES IN THE PLC PROJECT

Now let's talk about the PLC Project at the halfway point this year.

- 1) On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not very helpful and 5 being very helpful), how helpful have the monthly online PLC workshops been for *framing the goals of the PLC Project* this year?
 - a) What have been the most useful aspects of the monthly online PLC workshops so far? The least useful aspects?
 - b) Do you have any suggestions for improving the monthly online PLC workshops?
- 2) What has been the primary goal you have set for the PLC this year? And how has the process been going in working towards this goal? Please explain.

CLOSING REMARKS

Is there anything that we have not discussed that you think is important for me to know? Please explain.

FINALLY, is there anything new that we've discussed today that you do not want discussed during our PLC workshops? If so, I'll make special care to keep it in our conversation here.

OK, that's all the questions I have today. Thanks again for meeting with me, I really learned a lot. Do you have any questions for me? Remember that we'll meet again for another interview at the end of the second semester. I will get in touch with you when it gets closer to remind you of the appointment.

Also, if you have any other questions or things that come to mind about our interview today, feel free to call me or email me. My contact information is on the consent form I gave you. Also, if you have any other concerns, you can contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services. Their contact information is also on that form. Thanks again!

[Turn off audio recorder.]

Interview Protocol Three

THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PROJECT

INTERVIEW GUIDE 3 (May / June)

Loyola University Chicago

IRB Project # / Application #: 1815/3446

OPENING REMARKS

Thanks again for agreeing to take part in the PLC Project this year, and for conducting this final interview with us for this academic year. Again, my name is _____. I am very glad to be talking with you today and I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. As we've already discussed, this study examines how school social workers view their roles, responsibilities, and leadership capacities in schools, as well as how their participation in a year long professional learning community (PLC) may facilitate their professional practice.

Since today is our last interview for this, I am going to ask you a number of questions that ask you to reflect on the whole year on the job, and in your experience in the PLC this year. I'll ask you questions about being a school social mental health professional, some of your beliefs about your role in schools, the ways you have tried to improve your practice this year, and your experiences in this year long PLC.

Let me remind you that that this interview is confidential. Your name and your school's name will not be revealed to anyone outside this study. I am not allowed to tell your principal, other teachers, parents, or anyone else what we discuss in our interviews. The only time I will break confidentiality is if I have reason to believe someone is harming you or that someone else is being harmed or is in danger of being harmed. If that happens, I am required to take action. Your participation in this study is important but if you want to stop this or any interview at any time just let me know.

Lastly, to make sure I really pay attention to you during our conversation, I'd again like to record this interview. Is that OK with you? You can tell me to turn off the recorder at any time during this interview if you like. Does this all make sense? Do you have any other questions or concerns? OK, let's get started.

[Turn on audio recorder.]

Today's interview will primarily focus on three areas: 1) how your year has been in your job, now that second semester is over, 2) your experience in the PLC Project monthly workshops, and 3) your experiences in your PLC mentor group this year. We'll also make time for you to discuss any other issues or ideas that you think are important to know about your year this year.

I. SELF-EFFICACY AT WORK

1. Now that we are at the end of the school year, tell us one last time, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being very ineffective and 5 being very effective) how effective do you feel at the end of this year overall?

(NOTE TO INTERVIEWERS: Please compare the interviewee's numbered response to their Round 2 interview and probe WHY it is either higher, lower, or the same.)

- a. Can you explain why you chose the score you did, with specific examples?
- a. Are there specific things that have been particularly difficult (or particularly successful) in the first half of the school year? Please explain.

II. BURNOUT AT WORK

1. How stressful would you describe your job at this point in the school year?
 - a. Is this different than other times this school year? Please explain.
 - b. Describe and explain thoughts about colleagues you believe might be 'burned out'.
 - i. And what do you believe are the reasons they might be burned out?
 - ii. Are you able to help them improve motivation?
 1. Do you want to?

III. USE OF EBP

Now I'd like to return to our conversation last time about your use of evidence based practices in your work.

1. Has your understanding/thoughts/opinions about, or use of, EBP changed at all since our last interview? Please explain.
2. How often did you use interventions and practices that are evidence based throughout this year?
 - a. What interventions / kinds of interventions were you most often using / likely to use EBP?
 - b. Have there been opportunities to do so this year? What are the barriers to doing so?

IV. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Now let's revisit some of the questions about your personal traits and characteristics in relation to your job performance.

1. As of the end of this year, on a scale of 1 - 10 (ten being the strongest), how would you generally rate your relationships with the (a. teachers, b. administration, c. parents) in your building?
 - a) Why do you give it that number?
 - b) What are the strengths of these relationships?
 - i) *Probe after participant gives first-thought answer:* Think about your personal characteristics (age, gender, race) and how these may impact your relationships (either positively or negatively).
 - c) What are the barriers or challenges to these relationships? Are they unique to things that have happened this year?
 - i) *Probe after participant gives first-thought answer:* Think about your personal characteristics (age, gender, race) and how these may impact your relationships (either positively or negatively).
 - d) Thinking back this year, what has this PLC helped you discover about yourself as a person that helps you or restricts you in doing your job?
 - i) *Probe after participant gives first-thought answer:* Think about your personal characteristics (age, gender, race) and how these may impact your relationships (either positively or negatively).

V. EXPERIENCES IN THE PLC PROJECT

Finally, let's talk about the PLC Project this year overall.

1. The first question is about the big takeaway from this experience in the PLC Project. After this year, what stands out to you as the most important lesson from being in the PLC project this year? Please explain why you chose this lesson.

Now let's discuss the monthly online PLC workshops.

2. On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not very helpful and 5 being very helpful), how helpful have the monthly online PLC workshops been for *framing your goals with the PLC Project* this year?
 - a. What have been the most useful aspects of the monthly online PLC workshops this year from start to finish? The least useful aspects?
 - b. Do you have any suggestions for improving the monthly online PLC workshops as we move forward with the PLC Project into next year?
3. What has been the primary goal you have set for the PLC this year? And how was the process working towards this goal? Please explain.

Lastly, let's discuss your experience with your PLC mentor group this year.

4. On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being not very helpful and 5 being very helpful), how helpful have your PLC mentor groups been for *framing and reaching your goals with the PLC Project* this Year?
 - a. What have been the most useful aspects of your PLC mentor group this year from start to finish? The least useful aspects?
 - b. Do you have any suggestions for improving the groups as we move forward with the PLC Project into next year?

CLOSING REMARKS

Is there anything that we have not discussed that you think is important for me to know?

Please explain.

FINALLY, is there anything new that we've discussed today that you do not want discussed during our PLC workshops? If so, I'll make special care to keep it in our conversation here.

OK, that's all the questions I have today. Thanks again for meeting with me, I really learned a lot. Do you have any questions for me? Remember that we are also interviewing the administrator at your school that works most closely with you about their observations working with you this year.

Thank you for your help in getting these interviews coordinated.

Also, if you have any other questions or things that come to mind about our interview today, feel free to call me or email me. My contact information is on the consent form I gave you. Also, if you have any other concerns, you can contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services. Their contact information is also on that form. Thanks again.

[Turn off audio recorder.]

APPENDIX D
EXCERPTS FROM ANALYTIC MEMOS

Qualitative research requires that the researcher recognize and reflect on personal experiences and personal biases that may be related to the data. This idea is highly relevant to me, as I myself have been a practicing school social worker throughout the course of this study. Therefore, throughout data analysis, I utilized a reflexive approach by engaging in the process of ‘analytic memoing’ as a technique to recognize and extract my personal biases and/or Standpoints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Schwandt, 2015, p. 268). This process was continuous throughout data analysis so that my personal influences were “checked and set aside” with as much fidelity as possible in order to increase the rigor of findings in this study.

This appendix includes excerpts from six of 15 total analytic memos.

The following figures contain excerpts from some of the analytic memos written throughout the course of analysis for this study.

Memo 1 of 15	Date of memo: <i>December 21, 2017</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p>... I wish every transcript could be so detailed, emotional, understanding, and impactful [as this one]. This participant spoke about how her professional self has various attitudes throughout the year depending on whether those around her have similar values. But then she spoke about how her personal self came from a point of access. She spoke about how she is a woman of color, how she worked hard to get where she is, how she attributes her successes to her mother, and how she has access points that many of the families with whom she works do not have. She talks about “checking herself” when she is speaking with parents. As a white clinician myself, I often have to “check myself” due to my color, my white privilege, my language privileges. I have to remember that families come from various points of view and understandings. [This participant] spoke about her biases towards mothers who do not send their children to school. It is heartening to learn about these difficult biases from others, and it makes me wonder how much race and/or color really does affect the relationships with our clients. It makes me wonder how much language affects our relationships. Also, [this participant] seems to have a strong relationship with many of the teachers with whom she works. Are these teachers also African American? Do they have strong relationships with the families as well?</p> <p>Then, [this participant] provided insight into her professional goals due to her personal standpoints. It is exactly what I want to know about various participants. She says she does not share her standpoints with her colleagues, but she does share them with her students. If we as social workers recognize that everyone around us is our client, then should she share the same information with everyone around her? What difference does it make? Why does she choose to not share the information with those around her? Further, [this participant] naturally spoke about her standpoints; she was not directly asked about her race, culture, points of access, social capital, etc. Yet these factors came into her interview because they are important to her. Similarly, she speaks about a colleague who became a friend, who so happens to be another participant in this research. This other participant was the one other person who also naturally spoke about her cultural capacity - how language and race affected her at work - without being asked about her standpoints from the researcher. Does standpoint have more effect when the participant is aware of it? Does the extent of this awareness lead to more positive effects rather than negative effects? Are the answers to these</p>	

questions true regardless of what a person's standpoints are (ie: white vs. person of color vs. non-native English speaker, etc.)?

Memo 2 of 15	Date of memo: <i>December 22, 2017</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p>... During the interview, [this participant] mentioned at least 4-5 times that her age was a factor in her thought process. She is struggling because she is too old. She believes others think she will retire. She thinks the principal uses ageism. She thinks the resource teacher is too young. She thinks she cannot do EBP because she is too old... [and] no other demographics were mentioned except for age.</p> <p>... My father was recently speaking about the problem he is facing with his age of 59 years old. He thinks he cannot get hired at a new job due to his age.</p> <p>... I am always worried that my young age is a problem during meetings. While I need to remember that age is a factor, I suppose I must remember that it is not the numerical value of the age so much as the influences that various ages could have.</p>	

Memo 5 of 15	Date of memo: <i>February 9, 2018</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p><i>Note: This memo was written after initially revising codes and then re-reading through specific codes for reflection and analysis</i></p> <p>... I noticed that participants often used the word 'passion' or 'fulfillment' when speaking about their professional interests. In fact, the unclear interests (when person or when professional) were often difficult to distinguish due to the fact that fulfillment is a personal emotion that can come from any environment. So if a practitioner feels fulfilled personally, is the professional interest still simply professional or could there be bias/positionality playing into the approaches taken? Can personal passion or fulfillment be considered an interest in and of itself?</p> <p>... Many participants explain that they enjoy their professional work interests with reasoning that it leads to fulfillment. They say it is their passion because of the outcomes they see. This could be due to natural human feelings and responses of liking work when it is successful. Therefore, would there be more interest in evidence based practices if more practitioners saw the success that comes from it? How can the tricky parts of the job be correlated with fulfillment? How can school social workers learn to like and find interests in the more difficult aspects of their jobs? I myself have a hard time with this as well.</p> <p>... Are professional interests correlated with personal interests due to the inner emotion of feeling fulfilled? I think this is true for me, but perhaps not for everyone.</p>	

Memo 6 of 15	Date of memo: <i>February 19, 2018</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p>I recently changed around the nodes because so many were overlapping, I was struggling to define one node compared to another. Today is the first day working with these new nodes and definitions.</p> <p>Now, I am noticing that ‘approaches/strategies to doing work’ is very similar to professional beliefs and values. However, I do not believe this is a coincidence and/or a problem with the definitions of the codes. I believe this is the root of the dissertation. Each practitioner does her practice based on her beliefs/values. Therefore, the approaches and strategies discussed truly do stem from professional beliefs and values.</p> <p>Now I want to better understand - why have these professional beliefs and values formed in such a specific way? What personal and/or professional life events have helped to shape these values? Once understanding how the values come to be, practitioners can then work to rectify biases that may enable or restrict ideal practices/approaches to doing the job.</p>	

Memo 7 of 15	Date of memo: <i>March 3, 2018</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p>During coding/analysis today, I’ve noticed that overall, beliefs and values more naturally come to conversation when prompted/asked about demographics. So, while the demographics may have had to be prompted by the interviewer to the participant in order to appear in the transcript, the statements following these prompts were generally a more natural reaction that showed values and beliefs. I wonder if this is due to MSW training regarding personal biases personal reflections, and/or if this is a more natural reaction of trained clinicians. I also wonder if I would follow this same tendency.</p> <p>... Is ‘being reflective’ a skill/ability or a characteristic of someone? Is self-reflection a skill? Being a reflective person could be a characteristic, but being able to reflect about specific traits/ideas/competencies should be a skill. If Standpoint Theory posits that humans understand the world around them based on their lived experiences, then social workers should be able to learn the skill of being reflective. However, some people will more be more naturally reflective than others based on personalities.</p>	

Memo 15 of 15	Date of memo: <i>March 25, 2018</i>
<i>Excerpt(s):</i>	
<p>... My co-worker, Joan*, stresses me out and affects my self-efficacy every single day I am at work. She is older. She has many years of experience within the school I work. She has knowledge about how to interact with students in Special Education. She has the buy-in of the other veteran</p>	

teachers around her. She knows the culture of the neighborhood by perfectly fitting within it - living and working in the neighborhood herself. She is the epitome of the culture of the area. She has strong knowledge to appear superior in her abilities as a Special Education teacher. However she uses this appearance to affect those around her. When she doesn't like you - watch out.

I've been thinking about how this shows how the social structure really affects the work that gets done in the school. There are many emerging concepts, many new social emotional tricks that I would like to share and like to see. But I am younger. I don't have the experience she has. And if she doesn't like the ideas I am putting forth, or does not like the way I am completing my job, then she will not allow my job to function well - and therefore my self-efficacy levels decrease... This is perhaps related to my age. This is perhaps related to my slightly haphazard appearance and non-dyed hair. Perhaps it is because I am female. Perhaps it is because I stand my ground. Perhaps it is because she knows I am enrolled in a doctoral program. Regardless, for whatever reason, the clash and tension between us exists profoundly.

... The participants in this study similarly voiced that administration and other teachers highly influence the work that they can and/or cannot do. The social structure in a school setting is highly pertinent.

... Standpoint Theory philosophizes about social structure. It says that people with power are able to more easily set and then implement their agendas. Standpoint talks about this in relation to race, age, gender, etc. But what about years of experience in the school system rather than age specifically? What about the various nuances of the geography and/or culture of the neighborhood? ... I am sure this has implications in future research - and I am intrigued to continue considering it.

**Name changed for purposes of confidentiality*

APPENDIX E

CODEBOOK

<u>Code</u>	<u>Definition of Code</u>	<u>Sub-codes</u> <i>and other notes</i>
Approaches / Strategies / Ways to do job	Professional mindset, thoughts about how to do job, doing job in a specific way for a various reasons, named/described strategies for efficient work, etc. Can include beliefs and values about doing the job; these beliefs must then be backed up by a specific actual and/or desired approach/strategy to implement it	
Beliefs and Values	Statements that express opinions, not facts, about school social work practice; statements that express reasons and/or desires to be more aligned with ideal/best practice (even if practitioner is not currently using said beliefs or following path of her opinion)	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - <i>Personal Beliefs/values</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked* and unprompted/natural*</i>); - <i>Professional Beliefs/values</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural</i>) - <i>Unclear Boundaries between personal/professional</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural</i>)
Characteristics - Others	Statements that describe the personality of others (either as an individual and/or as a group of people); Statements that talk about others' beliefs/values	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - Prompted/Asked* - Unprompted/Natural*
Characteristics - Self / Participant	Statements that describe participant's own personality and/or character traits and/or areas of strength/need. Includes both personal and professional traits. Use this code when the participant is generally speaking about herself, even if she mentions another person in passing/when intent of phrase is meant to be about participant herself	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - Prompted/Asked - Unprompted/Natural
Others' demographics <i>(demographics of</i>	Demographics of others. Includes demographics of one other person as well as demographics of another group/community of people. Demographics includes: age, gender/sex,	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - Prompted/Asked - Unprompted/Natural <u>Note:</u>

<u>Code</u>	<u>Definition of Code</u>	<u>Sub-codes</u> <i>and other notes</i>
<i>other people)</i>	race, SES, geographic location, professional histories, health status, family members (marriage, kids, etc.)	If the statement is about the neighborhood where the practitioner works or the SES of the school community where practitioner is employed, then it goes in 'workplace demographics' code. If the statement is about a smaller group of people (rather than the workplace as a whole), then it is 'demographics - others code'
Demographics of practitioner	Demographics of practitioner herself. Demographics includes: age, gender/sex, race, SES, geographic location, professional history, health status, family members (marriage, kids, etc.)	<u><i>Sub-codes include:</i></u> - Prompted/Asked - Unprompted/Natural
Demographics of the workplace <i>(workplace demographics)</i>	Workplace includes: demographics of the school, school community, student population, school neighborhood); includes only the current place of employment (not previous districts/schools) The demographics of the workplace refers to: organizational policies/rules of the workplace, how social work services are set-up/divided/organized, descriptions of caseload numbers and intensity, and employee demographics	
Interests	Statements about activities/tasks and other hobbies in which participants would choose to engage. Includes statements that express explicit interest and also includes statements that shows excitement about a specific task/activity.	<u><i>Sub-codes include:</i></u> - <i>Personal Interests outside the workplace</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural</i>); - <i>Professional Interests</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural</i>); - <i>Unclear Boundaries between personal/professional</i> (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural</i>);

<u>Code</u>	<u>Definition of Code</u>	<u>Sub-codes</u> <i>and other notes</i>
		<i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural)</i>
Outside influences to practice	Statements about external factors that affect the way a practitioner does her job and/or influences the outcomes of her work. These can be both negative and positive influences. These can be related to people and to logistical problems.	
Previous Experience(s)	Statements about the previous events and activities. Previous experiences can be negative or positive. They can be about one-time or recurrent situations. It does not include events in the future.	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - Professional previous experiences , defined as: Previous experiences directly related to previous professions, careers, professional development in past, schooling (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural)</i>
Relationships outside of the workplace	When participant speaks about people outside of the workplace (ie: family, personal friends, etc.)	
Relationships / Collaboration	Mentions of working (or attempting to work / inability to work) with people through the workplace. Includes coworkers of all professions, students, families, and anyone else who may create interactions within and/or associated with the workplace. Includes both positive and negative examples of relationships and collaboration. This does not include statements about relationships occurring outside of the workplace.	
Skills and abilities of practitioner	Skills and abilities that practitioner has, including both professional and personal skills. Includes mentions of having the skill as well as NOT having the skill.	<u>Sub-codes include:</u> - Personal skills/abilities (and includes additional sub-codes: <i>prompted/asked and unprompted/natural)</i> ; - Professional skills/abilities (and includes additional sub-

<u>Code</u>	<u>Definition of Code</u>	<u>Sub-codes</u> <i>and other notes</i>
		<i>codes: prompted/asked and unprompted/natural); - Unclear boundaries skills/abilities (and includes additional sub-codes: prompted/asked and unprompted/natural)</i>
Stress	Statements and phrases about feelings of stress. Could include statements about feelings related to stress, or using synonyms of the word 'stress.' Could include statements about participant (self) as well as well as about other people, such as colleagues. The stress can be due to workplace demands, workplace setting, or due to relationships, interactions, or due to outside personal influences.	

***Explanation of sub-codes:**

- **Prompted/Asked**
When the interviewer specifically asked [about the overarching code]. When the participant is directly answering a question [about the overarching code] or making the statement because the interviewer is urging her to speak about this concept, then the statement is prompted.
- **Unprompted/Natural**
When the interviewer asked about a separate, unrelated topic but the participant responded in relation to the overarching code. For example, if interviewer asked about job approaches and the participant gave a follow-up statement explaining that the reason for the approach was due to beliefs/values, then it is unprompted. For beliefs/values.
- Sometimes, it is difficult to determine during reciprocal conversation if the statement was prompted or if the individual decided to make the statement apart from the interview. Those statements should not be coded as either prompted nor unprompted; those statements remain in the overarching code rather than in one of these sub-codes.

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VITA

Emily Shayman has been a practicing school social worker in Illinois for six years. During her time as a school social worker in multiple school districts, she has supported students through individual, small-group, and classroom push-in services, as well as via self-contained programming. She has also provided school-wide programming for schools in various forms, such as implementation of social emotional programming for general education dual language (English/Spanish) students, via provision of professional development for staff members, by participation in PBIS committees and other problem-solving teams, etc.

Emily decided to simultaneously pursue a doctoral degree while continuing her work in schools. As a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago, she worked as a researcher in the areas of school social work, social emotional learning, and immigration/migration. Emily has presented her work at several state conferences and has traveled internationally to collaborate with researchers. Before pursuing a doctoral degree at Loyola University Chicago, Emily earned a Bachelor of Arts from University of Wisconsin in Madison and a Master of Social Work from Loyola University Chicago.