THE JOURNEY TOWARDS EQUILIBRIUM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (MSW) STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND INTERROLE CONFLICT

by

Nikol Downing

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education Administration

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the phenomenon of interrole conflict for master level social work (MSW) students in the United States. The two theories guiding this study are role theory and theory of self-care. Role theory allowed a framework for what interrole conflict is and how it impacts individuals who experience it. Understanding role conflict aided in understanding the experience of MSW students during their academic journey. Theory of self-care allowed a framework for understanding how self-care can combat some of the negative results of interrole conflict such as burnout or secondary traumatic stress. This study explored the MSW student's experience with role conflict. To study this phenomenon the researcher engaged participants (individuals who have graduated within the past 5 years) in a survey, interview, and focus groups to obtain details from their perspective on the experience of interrole conflict within the MSW journey. Participants were obtained from two social media groups: VCU School of Social Work-Student and Alumni Network and Black Therapists Rock. The results showed that the majority of the participants (11 out of 12) described their MSW journey as stressful in relation to the interrole conflict they experienced during their academic journey. When discussing how interrole conflict impacted their academic experience, participants reported experiencing negative consequences. Some of those negative consequences included mental health complications consisting of burnout, loss of personal time and time with family and friends, and financial insecurity.

Keywords: MSW student, role, conflict, secondary traumatic stress

Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to my past self. Look how much you accomplished! I thank you for never giving up; even when things were tough and you felt overwhelmed, discouraged, and alone, you persevered. I am so proud of you.

Acknowledgments

I would like to give a big THANK YOU to Dr. Koester. I am so grateful for all of your help. You were always there to provide the perfect amount of assistance. You did not micromanage or baby me, and you also did not make me feel like a bother when I had questions or concerns. I was so nervous when I first embarked on this journey and at times negativity tried to creep in and tell me that I did not belong or that I would not finish, but you were always there with words of encouragement. You're the best chair I could have ever hoped for. I would also like to thank my methodologist Dr. Rebecca Lunde for her kindness and patience with me. There were multiple times when I needed extra assistance or examples, and she always made me feel comfortable enough to ask for help. You two made this less stressful for me, and I appreciate it more than you'll ever know.

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List of Abbreviations

Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

Family School Conflict (FSC)

Family Work Conflict (FWC)

Master of Social Work (MSW)

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

School–Family Conflict (SFC)

School–Work Conflict (SWC)

Work–Family Conflict (WFC)

Work–School Conflict (WSC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Higher education is a tool that is perceived to set individuals up for success by making them competitive upon entering the working force (Norton & Martini, 2017). While this supposed outcome is desirable, more discussion on the stress and other risk factors that students face while pursuing a degree is needed (Wei et al., 2015). While all students face stressful situations while attending a college or university, I have become interested in studying the interrole conflict that Master of Social Work (MSW) students face as they attempt to balance the responsibilities of multiple roles. I believe this study to be critical as there are studies that state social work students are at risk for developing emotional and mental disorders due to the situations they experience within their internships (Benner & Curl, 2018). Although social work students are at risk due to their internships, the internship is still regarded as one of the most significant parts of the social work curriculum (Benner & Curl, 2018; Wei et al., 2015). MSW programs require students to complete a certain amount of internship hours before they are granted a degree, thus adding additional student responsibilities. Within these internships, students work with individuals who have experienced all forms of trauma. In addition to dealing with the trauma of clients, the student is to implement the therapeutic treatment modalities that they learned in the classroom (Virginia Department of Health Professions Board of Social Work, 2019).

At the graduate level, it is not uncommon for students to also be working to support themselves or a family while simultaneously pursuing their degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). With students having substantial responsibility from school and their personal lives, it is not uncommon for role conflict to occur; this causes the student to create a

hierarchal list and decide which roles in their lives should be prioritized before others (Hemy et al., 2016; Kremer, 2016). Students' role conflict is a phenomenon that can have severe impacts on students if not adequately addressed (Kremer, 2016). This chapter offers insight into the background of social work as a profession; the provided information sets the tone for understanding what the profession is about, what students learn in social work programs, and what is expected of them as professionals once they enter the workforce. The chapter also discusses the interrole conflict present for students in graduate social work programs as they attempt to navigate multiple roles' responsibilities. This study's theoretical framework is based on role conflict theory and Orem's self-care theory, which will provide a lens for how this study was approached. I will provide information on the significance of this study and its ability to add value to higher education institutions' current knowledge base.

Background

When aiming to understand how graduate social work programs run, one must understand their significance. Social work is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those who are oppressed (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). To do this, social workers need a specialized skill set consisting of training in human development, human behavior, theory, and psychotherapy (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). To ensure that students gain the necessary tools for success in the field, schools of social work created and implemented what is known as field education, which is the degree program's signature pedagogy (Wayne et al., 2010).

Historical Context

Jane Laura Addams, also commonly referred to as the founder of social work, working with Ellen Gates Starr, created the Hull House in 1889 (Michals, 2017). The Hull House was the

most famous and one of the first of its kind, being a settlement house aimed at assisting those in need by delivering daycare assistance, public education, and meals free of charge (Michals, 2017). Upon the opening of the Hull House, so many people supported the initiative that Jane Addams and other workers were able to purchase 12 large buildings, adding onto the original building, which caused the Hull House to span the length of a block in the west side of Chicago (Thayer, 2012).

The works of Jane Addams led to creating the first full curriculum of social work offered at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy in 1908 (Inagro, 2017). The establishment of a curriculum was a significant accomplishment. Although Jane Addams and others worked to combat poverty amongst other social issues, the question of "Is social work an actual profession?" was still presented, especially by people such as Dr. Abraham Flexner (Flexner, 1915). Having an established curriculum where students could go and be trained in the practice of social work went against Flexner's idea that social work was not a profession because it lacked specialized skills and knowledge (Flexner, 1915).

By 1952, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) was created, which ultimately led to the development of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1955 (CSWE, n.d.; NASW, n.d.). The CSWE is the accrediting body in which social work programs, whether on the bachelor or graduate level, receive their accreditation, meaning that those programs are equipped to provide quality social work education (CSWE, n.d.). The NASW, which is also a professional organization, aims to promote sound practice, establish and maintain professional standards of practice for the field of social work, and assist and encourage social workers' professional development (NASW, n.d.). Through the hard work and dedication of governing bodies such as CSWE, professional organizations such as NASW, and dedicated social workers,

there are 707,400 practicing social workers as of 2018, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated an 11% increase by 2028, compared to the 5% increase of other professions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). With these fast-growing rates, social workers will advance the social climate by advocating against oppression and injustice.

Even with all the noble work that the social work profession aims to do, the curriculum can potentially pose a threat to students who have multiple roles while pursuing an education, as this can cause the students to experience interrole conflict. Interrole conflict can be defined as the following: when an individual holds multiple roles and the needs of one role clash or disagree with the requirements of the other role(s), which can lead to stress or burnout for that individual (Kremer, 2016). The issue with MSW students experiencing interrole conflict while pursuing their degree is that current knowledge states that when people experience interrole conflict, they are more likely to develop conditions such as burnout that can affect their academic performance (Jackson, 2014; Smullens, 2015).

The CSWE is the accrediting body that sets the standard for what social work programs need to consist of and control the learning requirements that students are subject to (CSWE, n.d.). CSWE is the governing body that establishes the requirement for internship hours for social work students and what types of agencies or organizations they are allowed to intern at (CSWE, n.d.). Since the CSWE views the internship experience as the signature pedagogy of the social work curriculum (Wayne et al., 2010), students have no choice but to deal with the role conflict that will come about in attempting to balance coursework and completing their internship hours.

Social Context

The Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the CSWE stated that field education had become the signature pedagogy of the field of social work (Wayne et al., 2010). Thus, it is one of the most anticipated and valued parts of the degree program (Wayne et al., 2010). Students engage in field practice and are exposed to situations with clients that allow them to translate and implement the theory they learned in the classroom into practice. The issue with field placement is that students are exposed to the traumatic client situation while they are still learning (Tarshis & Baird, 2019; Wayne et al., 2010). The student's continual exposure to traumatic situations has put students at risk and led to students developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, secondary stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue (Hemy et al., 2016; Tarshis & Baird, 2019). Aside from the psychological or emotional risk that is a potential threat, social work students are also at risk for experiencing financial instability as their field placement positions are unpaid and require a considerable time commitment, making it hard for them to make time for other responsibilities such as paid positions (Gair & Baglow, 2018). Although students in other majors, such as education, may also have internships, the notion that sets social work students apart is the type of work within their internships (Tarshis & Baird, 2019). While a teaching student may be expected to learn how to engage with children and teach them about a specific subject such as history or English, an MSW student is required to learn how to navigate the trauma of other individuals to help them heal (Hemy et al., 2016). While students are still learning in their MSW program, if they are not adequately trained to implement protective factors, they are more at risk of developing emotional or psychological complications (Hemy et al., 2016; Tarshis & Baird, 2019) than their peers in other degree programs.

Theoretical Context

When looking to explore the MSW student experience and the presence of role conflict, two theories were used to guide the research. The two approaches used are role theory and Orem's self-care theory. These two are relevant because each gives a strong foundation for a specific part of the study. Within this study, functional role theory was used. Functional role theory associated with Linton (1936) and Parsons (1951) is a theory that states that individuals possess roles in which they are expected by society to complete specific tasks. The research also states that within these roles, role conflict can arise while attempting to complete tasks; role conflict is "when there are contradictions between different roles or tasks" (Crossman, 2019). Utilizing role theory and focusing on role conflict will help convey how the many roles that MSW students hold cause conflict amongst one another, ultimately causing additional stress for the student (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013; Kremer, 2016). Although students in other degree programs also experience role conflict, the experience of MSW students is different as the risk factors are different (Smullens, 2015). For example, it is not uncommon for students to be working to afford school at the graduate level, take care of themselves or a family, be married, or have children (Curl & Benner, 2017; Kremer, 2016). With this being said, that student must find time to complete the responsibilities of those respective roles. The student must also attend to the student's role, which consists of attending classes, completing coursework, and studying.

The student must then also maintain an intern's responsibilities, which consists of completing 21 hours per week of unpaid work providing therapeutic services to those in need (Virginia Department of Health Professions Board of Social Work, 2019). One can see how if a student is working a job to have income but must also complete the required 21 hours a week of unpaid work, conflicts may arise. The student cannot choose to complete fewer hours of unpaid

work, so it is common for students to work less paid hours to complete school requirements. Another issue comes into play because when students decide to scale back on paid employment hours, they may experience financial hardship (Curl & Benner, 2017; Kremer, 2016). Balancing paid work, internships, classes, and coursework make it difficult for one also to make time to do other things, such as keeping up with doctor appointments, going to the gym, cooking a healthy meal every night, or hanging out with family and friends. This study examines the role conflict amongst MSW students, which roles cause the most friction, and how students manage it.

The second theory used to create a theoretical base for this study is Orem's theory of self-care. Orem stated that self-care could be defined as any action taken which is geared towards the continuance of life, health, and well-being (Orem, 2001). This theory is relevant because, in many social work courses, students are taught about the importance of engaging in self-care, yet it is not common for them to engage in it (Smullens, 2015). It is believed that engaging in self-care will protect students from developing mental/emotional conditions due to what they will be exposed to during their internships, leading them to experience a more positive collegiate journey in comparison to students who do not engage in self-care (Collins, 2021; Smullens, 2015). The significance of this theory concerning the study is that it helps detail students' perception of self-care in relation to role conflict.

Situation to Self

This study is essential to me as I have gone through the MSW experience. I have also supervised students as they went through MSW programs. I often engaged them in sessions aimed at allowing them to vent and encouraging them to participate in self-care to avoid burnout, anxiety, depression, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and other stress disorders. While going through the MSW experience, I witnessed some of my peers fall victim to burnout leading

them to drop out of the program. I also saw that some of my peers began taking medications for anxiety. I witnessed a change of mood and motivation as we progressed through the program, where students started excited and ready to make a difference, and later on, some of those same students were defeated and doubted their capabilities. I watched as students sacrificed sleep to complete their internship during regular business hours and then find jobs that would allow them to work overnight. The lack of sleep leads to a decline in academic performance, increased feelings of irritability, compassion fatigue, and sometimes withdrawal from courses. Although I have previous experiences, I made sure not to let my experiences produce biased work. I integrated an axiological assumption by managing my biases and preconceived judgments by engaging in bracketing. Bracketing can be defined as setting aside the researcher's personal experience with a specific phenomenon and solely focusing on the participants' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

I approached this study from an ontological assumption as I understood that the participants' beliefs would be different, and I aimed to incorporate everyone's experience. Bryman (2001) described constructivism as a process where the meaning of social phenomena is continually being changed through social interaction, and the researcher's account will continue to evolve as he or she interacts with participants being studied. Utilizing the constructivism paradigm fits suitably with the philosophical assumptions and the phenomenological approach I utilized as the goal of phenomenology is to explore the lived experienced a group of individuals, encompassing the essence or more profound meaning of the phenomenon they all shared (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). To implement an epistemological assumption, I engaged the participants in various ways to get as close to them and the essence of the phenomenon as possible. I allowed participants to provide a written account of their experience

and participate in individual interviews and focus groups. By doing this, I obtained rich and detailed personal accounts of the selected phenomenon.

Problem Statement

Within recent years, researchers have noticed that MSW students have been developing conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), secondary traumatic stress (STS), anxiety, depression, compassion fatigue, and burnout (Benner & Curl, 2018; Wei et al., 2015). There have already been studies conducted on the role conflict between working and being a student, which state that students believe that working restricts the time for studying and completing other tasks related to the role of student, which ultimately takes away from the collegiate experience (Curl & Benner, 2017; Didham et al., 2011; Sicora, 2019). MSW students are expected to maintain a student role, consisting of attending classes, studying, and completing assignments. Next, the MSW student is expected to maintain the role of an intern, which includes dedicating 21 hours per week to obtain 600 clinical hours (Virginia Department of Health Professions Board of Social Work, 2019), providing counseling and case management services to those who are experiencing trauma, oppression, or low quality of life. Next is a healthy individual's role, which consists of getting an adequate amount of sleep, scheduling and attending doctor appointments, eating healthy, and engaging in self-care (Orem, 2001; Smullens, 2015). The role of a healthy individual is so important because since the students are required to engage in an internship where they are regularly exposed to traumatic situations, they need to be able to engage in self-care to combat the negative consequences that could potentially arise (Smullens, 2015).

Finally, the other roles the individual may hold, such as wife, husband, parent, friend, and employee, all come with another set of expected or required responsibilities. While it is not

uncommon for anyone to hold multiple roles, an issue comes into play because some of the roles of MSW students conflict with one another, causing excessive stress (Kremer, 2016). For example, if students are working to support themselves or a family, they may have to work fewer hours at paid employment to make time for the required hours of internship, if they still want to sleep or spend time with family. Also, students may neglect self-care or stress-relieving activities in an attempt to fulfill the roles of student and intern, which can end up causing psychological damage to students (Smullens, 2015). Research talks about the role of conflict between being employed and being a student (Kremer, 2016). There is also research on how social work students are at risk for developing stress disorders, but there is little to no research that has been conducted on the role conflict that social work students go through (Hemy et al., 2016; Tarshis & Baird, 2019). The problem is that MSW programs can potentially cause role conflict for students that can cause many adverse effects.

Purpose Statement

This transcendental phenomenological study explored interrole conflict within the MSW student experience for students in the United States of America. Interrole conflict can be defined as the following: when an individual holds multiple roles and the needs of one role clash or disagree with the requirements of the other role(s), which can lead to stress or burnout for that individual (Kremer, 2016). The following two theories guided this study: role theory and Orem's theory of self-care. Role conflict theory set the foundation for explaining how role conflict comes about and the issues it can cause. In his work, Merton (1968) discussed how, when role conflict is present, it prevents the individual who is experiencing it from putting 100% into any role as they are always conflicted. Last but not least is Orem's theory of self-care. This theory

explains the importance of self-care, stating that self-care is essential and necessary to ensure individuals maintain independence and function as healthy human beings (Orem, 2001).

Significance of the Study

This study has empirical significance and is crucial as it adds to the current knowledge base and give colleges and universities something to consider when it comes to the stressors that MSW students face. By engaging with this population to obtain more information on this phenomenon, I obtained empirical data that can be useful to universities looking to improve students' quality of life. In their study, Harr and Moore (2011) stated that they found that social work students are motivated and committed to the field; however, they are at higher risk for developing compassion fatigue and burnout during their field placement than experienced professionals. Harr and Moore also said that most of the knowledge is based on studies of social work professionals, with very few studies focused on students. This study aimed to address the gap in the literature about social work students and their experiences.

Although there is not much literature on the experience of role conflict for students, few studies speak about the role conflict that does arise for students due to trying to "juggle" field education with other responsibilities (Hemy et al., 2016). The current study aimed to understand the MSW student's experience, see how role conflict comes into play, and discuss the impacts that role conflict has on the student. Schools could take this information and either support or deny the theory that role conflict causes a lack in other areas, consistent exposure with lack of resources will cause burnout for students, and self-care will aid students in having a positive collegiate experience. Since this phenomenon has not been widely studied or addressed, utilizing theories on role conflict provides a strong basis for the study and is relevant. In doing this, the study provides theoretical significance.

This study also has practical significance; with this information, schools can conduct further research, implement interventions, or even engage in curriculum review. This study, combined with current knowledge, can help students understand and prepare for their academic journey if they are going into a social work curriculum. If a university or even just a social work department decides to incorporate interventions to address the interrole conflict and improve self-care practice for students, those interventions could be used to make the school more attractive to prospective social work students, resulting in more revenue.

Research Questions

To ensure that I could encapsulate the phenomenon in a matter that would add vital information to the knowledge base and tell the participants' stories in an organic yet vivid way, I established research questions based on the phenomenon. The research questions and sub-questions acted as a guideline throughout the study as each data collection method aimed to provide information to answer the established research questions. This study aimed to answer the following questions:

Central Question

How do master of social work students describe their experience with role conflict? The central question (CQ) is the study's base and aimed to gather information on the selected phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). This question allowed me to relay details on the essence of what it means to experience interrole conflict as an MSW student (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Kremer (2016) described the idea of interrole conflict, stating that this occurs when the demands of one role conflict with the demands of another role. The answers to these supporting questions will detail how the students balance multiple roles and each specific role's demands. When the participants engaged in this study,

they provided rich information on their experience during their MSW journey, which led to valuable answers for the CQ and Sub-question 1.

Sub-question 1

How do master of social work students manage the demands of multiple roles?

Sub-question 1 (SQ1) is a supporting question aimed at providing even more information about the CQ. This question helped me explore and discover how MSW students are balancing being a student, intern, and their life outside of school, which included roles such as employee or parent (Kremer, 2016). How students balance the demands of their roles is important because if they struggle to maintain a healthy balance, they become at risk for developing conditions such as burnout, anxiety, or depression (Smullens, 2015).

Sub-question 2

How does self-care influence role conflict for master of social work students?

The answers to Sub-question 2 (SQ2) also offered details on self-care's influence on interrole conflict for social work students. Studies have shown that engaging in self-care can combat conditions such as burnout, anxiety, and depression (Butler et al., 2017; Smullens, 2015). Self-care has also been linked to academic success, which could be attractive for students or universities aiming to implement an intervention for students (Collins, 2021). All of the established questions helped me obtain rich data detailing the participant’s perspective of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). These three questions guided the study, allowing me to dig deep and request details on specific events, situations, or emotions that arose during the participants’ lived experience and provided raw details. The information obtained helped provide insight into the experience in an emotion-provoking way and helped readers sympathize and understand the participants' experience.

Definitions

1. *Role conflict*- when the demands of one role clash or do not agree with the requirements of another role (Kremer, 2016).
2. *Burnout*- " an individual's stress experience that occurs when work overload of job demands outweigh key resources" (Maslach, 1998, p. 76).
3. *Self-care*- "Self-care is an action for self. It is action through which inputs are made to self or environment- inputs that contribute to the maintenance of human functioning (to think we must eat), to the continuance of life, health, and well-being" (Orem, 2001, p. 5).
4. *Vicarious trauma*- the overall effect of working with traumatized clients, involving interference with the therapist's feelings, cognitive schemas and worldview, memories, self-efficacy, and sense of safety (Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2014).
5. *Secondary traumatic stress*- a condition that is brought about due to continued exposure to trauma, and this condition causes the professional to develop the same emotional, psychological, and or physical responses as the client who experienced the trauma firsthand (Butler et al., 2017).
6. *Compassion fatigue*- the steady decrease of compassion among caregiving professionals who work with traumatized individuals (Decker et al., 2015).

Summary

This chapter discussed the idea that social work students experience role conflict during their collegiate experience, which causes them more stress on top of the strain that comes with the degree program. This chapter also discussed how social work students are at risk of developing mental health issues due to continued exposure to traumatic client situations during their field placements. Some of the mental health issues that social work students are at risk for

developing include burnout, compassion fatigue, anxiety, depression, vicarious trauma, STS, and PTSD. Going through all these challenges also affects students' persistence. To improve students' quality of life, we must first understand their experience, how role conflict comes into play, and students' risk factors. In doing this, we will be able to make adjustments for future generations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A review of the current literature was conducted to explore existing research on the phenomenon of master-level social work (MSW) students' experience with interrole conflict within the MSW curriculum and self-care benefits on the students' experience. This literature review provides an overview of the current research on this topic. This chapter is introduced by providing a theoretical framework that provides a foundation of two theories (role theory and self-care theory) to understand this phenomenon better. Following the conceptual framework, this chapter will give an overview of existing literature available on the MSW student experience, the associated risk factors of the current social work curriculum, and the benefits of self-care within higher education. This chapter provides details on the experience of social work students, specifically how social work students are at significant risk of developing burnout, anxiety, depression, vicarious trauma, or physical conditions as a result of the interrole conflict they face during their academic journey (Curl & Benner, 2017; Kremer, 2016; Smullens, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

This literature review is based on the following two theories: Orem's theory of self-care and role theory. Although role theory is usually associated with Linton and Mead, it has many different perspectives that have been highlighted, influenced, or popularized by many different researchers (Aboulafia, 2012; Biddle, 1986; Linton, 1936; Mead, 1934; Parsons, 1951). Some of the different role theory perspectives include functional role theory, symbolic interactionalist role theory, structural role theory, organizational role theory, and cognitive role theory (Biddle, 1986). Each of these perspectives are discussed for a better understanding. Functional role theory, like other perspectives of role theory, was influenced by the work of Linton but further

developed and popularized by Parsons (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951). This perspective of role theory looks at roles as a set of characteristics or behaviors that an individual must possess or engage in to fulfill a social position (Biddle, 1979, 1986).

The perspective of symbolic interactionalist role theory was popularized by Mead (Aboulafia, 2012; Mead, 1934). In this perspective, the focus is placed on individuals' roles, the social interaction that takes place as people engage in the behaviors or expectations of their roles, and the interpretation of those behaviors (Aboulafia, 2012; Biddle, 1986; Mead, 1934). Since this perspective aims to look at the interpretation of behaviors, the behaviors are seen as symbols exchanged between individuals that hold meaning or try to relay a message (Aboulafia, 2012). Structural role theory has the weakest following out of all the perspectives (Biddle, 1979). The weakness of structural role theory could be because this perspective is mathematically-based instead of based in psychology, sociology, or philosophy like the others (Biddle, 1979; Oeser & Harary, 1962, 1964; Oeser & O'Brien, 1967). Structural role theory aims to explore the concept of social structure's function, specifically, how social positions or people who share the same roles interact with those who hold differing social positions (Biddle, 1979).

Like other perspectives, organizational role theory examines how individuals complete the behaviors associated with their specific roles. However, organizational role theory takes it a step further to explore the influence that each person and how the behaviors that they engage in affect an organization's functioning as a whole (Biddle, 1979; Kahn et al., 1964). Lastly, cognitive role theory is a perspective that primarily focuses on the impact of role expectations on behavior and how individuals engaging in role-playing adjust their actions based on what they have seen others do or what they believe is expected of them (Biddle, 1979; Moreno, 1934).

This study focused on functional role theory, which is most associated with Linton (1936) and Parsons (1951). Linton and Parsons talked about role as a construct or status of society in which people who have specific roles are expected to perform certain tasks (Biddle, 1986). For example, an individual with the role of student is expected to attend courses and complete coursework whereas someone who is not a student is not expected to fulfill those duties. Alternatively, a person who with the role of parent is expected to encompass and complete all child-rearing duties whereas someone who does not have children would not be held to the same set of expectations.

Biddle (1986) stated that within roles, there are expectations that individuals have on their behaviors (how they complete the duties of a role) and the behaviors of others (how others complete the duties of a role). This concept is essential within the current study because MSW students are not exempt from societal expectations, whether external or internal. A student may take on more than they can handle because they believe others think they should (Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). Alternatively, students may choose to make sacrifices to meet the demands of specific roles as they feel the pressure to put their role of student above other roles (no matter the consequences), such as decreasing paid employment hours to complete social work internship hours (Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). Several researchers have found that things may not always go according to plan when it comes to roles, leading to role conflict, which has many different components (Biddle, 1986; Stryker & Macke, 1978). Role conflict can be defined as the presence of contradictions between different roles or tasks (Crossman, 2019) or "the concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible expectations for the behavior of a person" (Biddle, 1986, p. 82). Role conflict can be broken down into four different categories (Biddle, 1986). See Table 1 below for information on four types of role conflict.

Table 1

Types of Role Conflict

Name of Role Conflict	Definition
Role Ambiguity	Circumstance in which expectations are vague or insufficient to guide behavior (Biddle, 1986).
Role Malintegration	Circumstance in which roles do not fit well together (Biddle, 1986).
Role Discontinuity	Circumstance when there are too many malintegrated roles (Biddle, 1986).
Role Overload	Circumstance in which there are too many expectations within role(s) (Biddle, 1986).

Merton, an American sociologist, contributed much work to sociology and psychology and was also known for his work on role conflict, differentiating between interrole conflict and intrarole conflict (Coser, 1975; Merton, 1968). Intrarole conflict arises when the demands of one role conflict with another (Brutvan, 1985). The concept of intrarole conflict can be described using the following analogy: If a parent has multiple children involved in extra-curricular activities, the parent will want to support each child's events, but what happens when those events co-occur? The parent will have to divide their time between the children's events. This conflict means there will be some events where a child will not have the parent's physical support, which can be viewed as conflict within their role as a parent.

Alternatively, interrole conflict occurs when an individual holds multiple roles and the needs of one role clash or disagree with the requirements of the other role(s), which can lead to stress or burnout for that individual (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013; Kremer, 2016). For this study, I focused on interrole conflict as this type of conflict is the phenomenon that I wished to explore.

Role theory is essential to this study as it helped me understand the many roles of MSW students (student, intern, parent, spouse, friend, employee, or healthy adult) that conflict with one another.

Self-care

The second and final theory that will serve as a foundation for this literature review is Orem's self-care theory. Within this study, the main focus of research will be on role conflict, but the influence that self-care has on role conflict will also be discussed. Orem stated that self-care could be defined as the following: “Self-care is an action for self. It is action through which inputs are made to self or environment- inputs that contribute to the maintenance of human functioning, to the continuance of life, health, and well-being" (Renpenning & Taylor, 2003, p. 103). Orem, an American nurse and theorist heavily influenced by the 1951 work of Parsons (who is known for his work in role theory), engaged in research to better define the role of nursing for patients (Orem, 1991, 1995, 2001). Within her work, Orem stated that nursing's goal is to help patients become and remain independent (Orem, 2001; Taylor & Orem, 2006).

As a means of obtaining that goal, Orem focused heavily on the idea of self-care and its importance concerning individuals being well enough to maintain independence and be healthy human beings (Orem, 2001). Orem's self-care theory is comprised of three interconnected theories. The three theories that make up Orem's self-care theory are the theory of self-care, self-care deficit theory, and theory of nursing systems (Orem, 2001; Taylor & Orem, 2006). Each component of this leading theory will be discussed for a better understanding.

Theory of Self-Care

This theory focuses on the actual acts or engagement of self-care, those acts taken independently to maintain health and well-being (Orem, 2001). Within this theory, Orem designated four components: self-care, self-care agency, self-care requisites, and therapeutic self-

care demands (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 1995, 2001). As stated previously, self-care be defined as any behaviors or actions performed independently to preserve life, health, and well-being (Orem, 2001). Self-care agency refers to an individual's capacity or ability to conduct acts of self-care; and whether or not the person can perform those acts independently or with assistance (Kozier, 2008). Self-care requisites are actions performed to engage in or conduct self-care (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001). Self-care requisites are broken down into three categories that detail different areas of self-care; the three categories are universal requisites, developmental requisites, and health deviation requisites (Kozier, 2008).

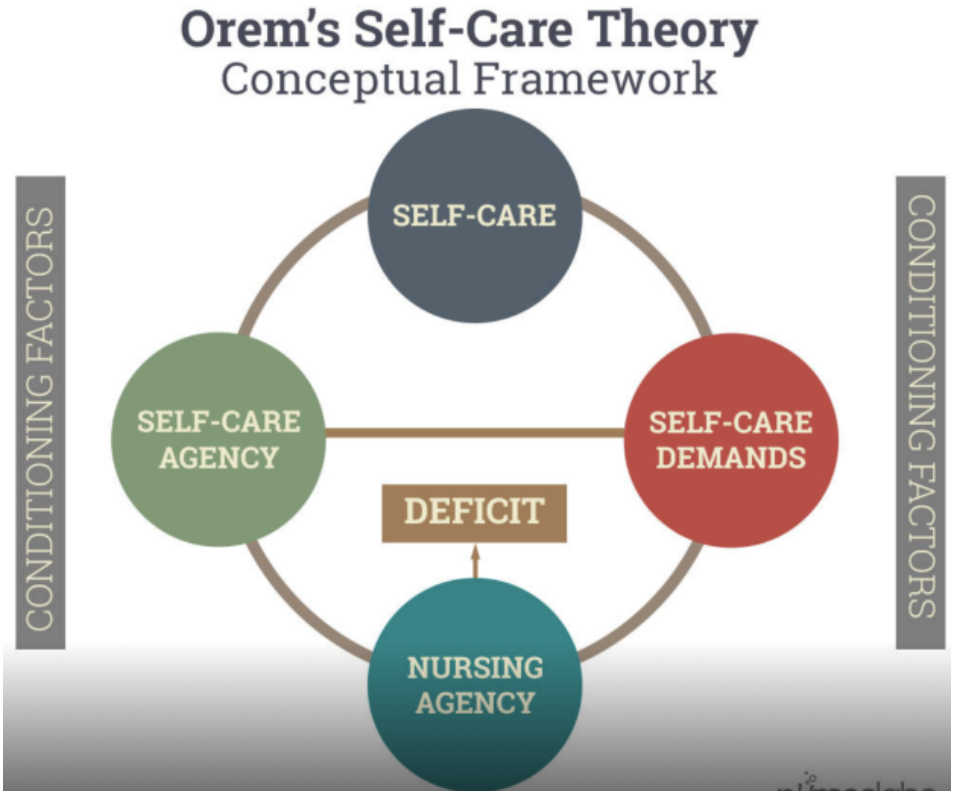
Universal requisites include the simple tasks of everyday living that individuals may not think of as self-care such as breathing, eating, elimination of waste from the body, getting an adequate amount of rest, socialization, and taking safety precautions to avoid injuries such as putting on a seatbelt or locking one's doors (Kozier, 2008). Universal requisites are vital as they aid in the necessary preservation of well-being (Kozier, 2008). For example, although someone may not initially think of something as simple as using the bathroom as self-care, think of all the bodily damage that can be done if someone is unable to use the bathroom, such as bladder infections, an overload of toxin in the body, and kidney failure (Sherwood, 2015). Developmental requisites are associated with developmental maturation connected with things such as conditions or events (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001). For example, developmental requisites would apply when talking about how a mother deals with how she looks during her pregnancy or how an individual copes after losing a job (Kozier, 2008). The last requisite to be discussed is health deviation requisites, taken in response to adverse situations such as the development of an illness or an injury. Health deviations requisites would consist of actions such as seeking out a medical specialist, obtaining a home health aide, and adjusting to the new norm of living with a

medical condition (Kozier, 2008).

The fourth and final component of the theory of self-care is therapeutic self-care (Kozier, 2008). Therapeutic self-care can be described as any self-care actions needed to maintain health and well-being (Kozier, 2008). See Figure 1 below for a visual chart on the different components of self-care theory. When and only when individuals are incapable of performing needed self-care actions for themselves is a self-care deficit noted and intervention set in place (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001).

Figure 1

Orem's Self Care Theory



Note. From *Dorothea Orem: Self-Care Deficit Theory* by A. Gonzalo, 2019, NursesLabs (https://nurseslabs.com/dorothea-orems-self-care-theory/#theory_of_selfcare), retrieved May 23, 2020. Used with permission (see Appendix E).

Self-care Deficit Theory

Self-care deficit theory provides details about when nursing is needed (Orem, 1991, 2001). Self-care deficit theory states that nursing is needed when individuals are no longer capable or are limited in performing self-care actions for themselves (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 1991, 2001). Within the self-care deficit theory, Orem stated that there are five ways in which nursing can help individuals if there is a deficit. The five ways nurses should help are acting or doing, guiding, teaching, supporting, and/or creating an environment that encourages a person's ability to meet current or future self-care (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001). There are different forms of helping, as it is always the goal to encourage an individual to be independent when possible. If n individuals cannot be independent and perform self-care acts independently, it must be decided what level of care they need, leading to the importance of nursing systems theory (Kozier, 2008).

Theory of Nursing Systems

The nursing system is enacted when an individual's therapeutic self-care demands outweigh that individual's capacity for self-care (self-care agency), leading the individual to need additional support (Orem, 1991, 2001). The level of support that each individual will need will vary based on the situation. For this reason, Orem stated that there are three different levels of nursing systems: wholly compensatory, partly compensatory, and supportive-educative (Kozier, 2008). Within the wholly compensatory system, nursing or assistance is put into place as the person is unable to or has been directed to not engage in any activities on their own, making them dependent on the assistance of others (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001; Taylor et al., 2011; Taylor & Orem, 2006). A few examples of individuals needing the wholly compensatory system would be someone who just came out of surgery, someone with developmental delays, or a newborn baby. The partly compensatory system is enacted when an individual requires

significant assistance but is not totally dependent on others, thus completing forms of self-care individually (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001; Taylor & Orem, 2006). An example of an individual requiring the partly compensatory system level of care could be someone in physical therapy who is learning how to walk again but may need assistance with stability while ambulating. The third type of nursing system is the supportive-educative system. The supportive-educative system is enacted when individuals can independently perform self-care acts but still require minimal assistance (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001; Taylor & Orem, 2006).An example of this could be someone who has just been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and requires teaching or education on how to self-administer the insulin shots.

Three discussed theories—self-care theory, self-care deficit theory, and the nursing systems theory—interconnect and work together to create Orem's theory of self-care (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001). Understanding each part's significance is vital in understanding the necessity of self-care to maintain healthy well-being and life (Kozier, 2008; Orem, 2001; Taylor & Orem, 2006). This theory describes why self-care is so crucial for social work students during their academic journey.

Related Literature

The following is an examination of the current literature regarding stressors associated with higher education, stressors specifically associated with MSW programs, the potential risks that MSW students face, and self-care benefits for students. To find current literature for this study, I used search terms such as MSW students, interrole conflict, social work student risks, and self-care for social work students. The research was conducted and implemented until saturation was met.

Demands of Higher Education

While enrolling in a higher education institution seems like the appropriate next step to take to work towards obtaining a successful career in the workforce, for some students, the journey of higher education comes at a cost (Curl & Benner, 2017; Dziegielewski et al., 2004; Kremer, 2016). The cost of higher education can come in the form of financial strain, emotional and or psychological decline, and sacrifice of time, whether it be time to engage in hobbies, time with friends or family, or time to complete personal tasks (Deasy et al., 2014; Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). Williams (2017) stated that in a survey conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) in 2015, a reported 40% of students stated that they suffer from depression. Attending college comes with a lot of responsibility, such as attending classes, studying material, and completing assignments. To meet those responsibilities, the student needs skills such as time management, attention to detail, and organization. This responsibility can be overwhelming for a student, leading to retention or feelings of anxiety or depression (Deasy et al., 2014). The many demands placed on students leave them unable to execute any one task to the fullest extent (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013; Kremer, 2016); this can leave students doubting their ability to effectively and successfully make it through their perspective degree program. In multiple studies, it was found that student self-efficacy (internal factors) and course/family support (external factors) are the two main contributors in determining retention or attrition (Gaytan, 2015; Ormrod, 2011; Park & Choi, 2009).

Emotional/Psychological

As stated above, emotional and psychological issues are a huge concern when it comes to students attending colleges and universities (Deasy et al., 2014; Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). Researchers reported that it is imperative to address students' psychological stress because if left

unaddressed, it will lead to anxiety, depression, and physical illness (Deasy et al., 2014; Horwitz, 2007; Wheaton, 2007). Other studies stated that some of the most commonly reported causes for student psychological and emotional distress are the following: lack of financial certainty, poor employment prospects, increased pressure to do well, technological overload, and programs of study with a substantial practicum component (Deasy et al., 2014; Stixrud, 2012). Dealing with all of the psychological and emotional distress brought about by the previously mentioned factors takes a toll on student academic success (Deasy et al., 2014); for this reason, colleges and universities must aim to implement interventions geared towards relieving or preventing psychological and emotional distress amongst students.

Financial

Another area of concern for students is the economic demand for higher education (Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). Whether students are figuring out how to pay for school or how to maintain daily living costs due to working fewer hours to attend school, the financial strain produces the same results (Eckerson Peters et al., 2019). The cost of obtaining a higher education is expensive and often leads students to make sacrifices, such as losing sleep to work odd hours or taking out student loans, causing even more problems in the future (Elliott & Lewis, 2015). Taking out student loans may seem like a small price to pay to set oneself up for success in the future, but the interest rates add up quickly, leaving students with high amounts to repay (Marquit, 2020). In a study conducted on the effects of student debt, researchers found that students with student loan debt have a lower net worth, compromised ability to accumulate assets, and compromised ability to accumulate wealth (Elliott & Lewis, 2015). With higher education supposedly being a place to increase opportunities for success in the future, it can be

viewed as contradictory, being that it can ultimately set students up for financial strain that will follow them for years to come (Marquit, 2020).

MSW Curriculum

Along with all the struggles of merely attending a college or university, there are the struggles and demands that arise due to each student's prospective degree program (Bettinger & Long, 2009; Guan et al., 2015). The MSW program is one that requires serious dedication as the curriculum calls for excellent time management, emotional stability, and willingness to sacrifice (Beattie et al., 2019; Dziegielewski et al., 2004; Green, 2016). The Virginia Department of Health Professions Board of Social Work (2019) stated that graduate social work students should attend accredited programs that consist of course work in human behavior and the social environment, social justice and policy, psychopathology, diversity issues, research, clinical practice with individuals, families, and groups. The board also requires a 600-hour clinical practicum that focuses on diagnostic, prevention, and treatment services. Demanding or challenging course work is expected as students progress through their academic years; however, requiring students to complete 600 hours of field placement can be demanding when considering the conflicts that may arise due to the responsibilities of other possible concurrent roles (Kremer, 2016).

Demanding Requirements

In addition to standard student requirements, graduate social work students must deal with an internship that presents challenges that differ from internships in other programs (Didham et al., 2011; Sicora, 2019). While other majors may encourage students to participate in an internship, or even allow paid placement, the Virginia Department of Health Professions Board of Social Work (2019) requires graduate social work students to complete 600 hours of

unpaid internship before they are awarded a degree. Although the internship plays a vital role in students' implementation of theory, practice, and skills development, it also causes significant stress for students (Hemy et al., 2016). In order to complete an MSW program, students must be able to manage their time in a manner that allows them to attend classes, complete coursework/study, attend their internship, and balance the responsibilities of their lives outside of school (Beattie et al., 2019). Researchers found that the pressure from internships can cause social work students to have to work less at their paid job (Gair & Baglow, 2018). The lack of paid employment, in turn, creates financial strain; also, it puts students in jeopardy of not completing their degree if they choose to prioritize other responsibilities over their schooling (Gair & Baglow, 2018).

Interrole Conflict

The strain and clashing between the role of student, intern, and adult can be described by the term interrole conflict, which is present when the responsibilities of various roles, held by one person, conflict with one another (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013; Love et al., 2010; Pam, 2013). Unless universities makes it their business to ask, they will not know the other roles held by students, which can consist of parent, spouse, caregiver, and worker. It is essential to know that "student" is not these students' only role; if this concept is acknowledged, institutions and governing boards can begin the work to address the present interrole conflict (Giancola et al., 2009). Universities must attempt to create balance for students because students neglect necessary self-care measures (taking time to decompress, attending health care appointments, exercising) because they feel as though they have too much responsibility; this is a complication of interrole conflict which can ultimately lead to burnout and other harmful complications (Jackson, 2014; Smullens, 2015). While the university cannot control the roles held outside of

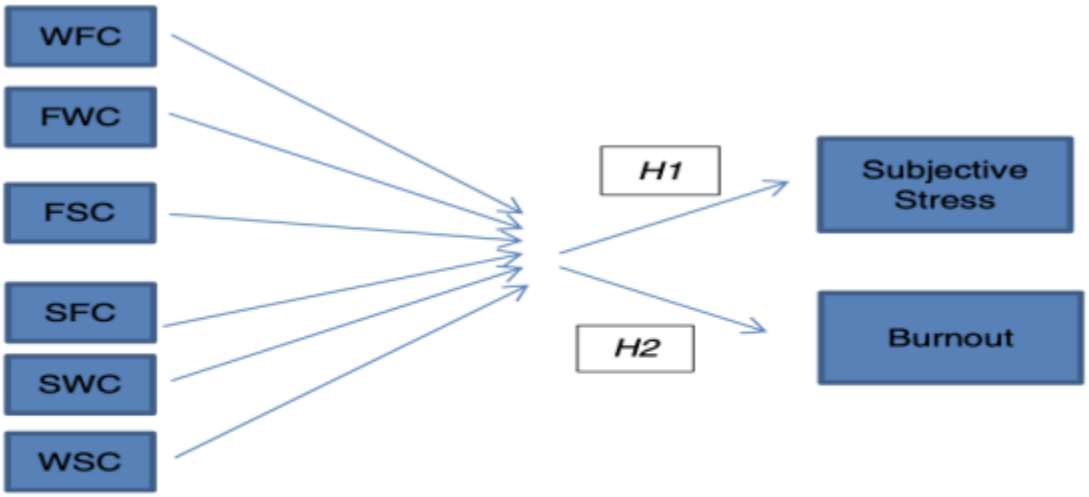
"student," they could do more to advocate for revisions to the responsibilities of the student role. They should aim to minimize the conflict between the role of "student" and other potential roles. For example, the university can connect with the governing boards (CSWE) to adjust the internship's demands or requirements, which social work students are required to complete; this will allow more time and balance for students who have other obligations. Researchers found that more time demands and fewer psychological rewards were associated with more work–university conflict (Creed et al., 2015); this means that the more demands (time and tasks) and fewer rewards (self-care) that students experience, the more conflict that is going to arise.

It is essential to pay attention to the conflict that these opposing roles cause and the implications they can have on students (Giancola et al., 2009). Curl and Benner (2017) conducted a study on the role conflict between working and being a student; the students reported that working limited time to study and complete assignments, caused physical and mental health problems, and resulted in negative academic experiences. The role of intern also causes significant conflict as it requires students to invest large amounts of time, which takes away time from paid employment, causing financial hardship and continuously exposes students to the trauma of the clients with whom they work (Didham et al., 2011; Johnstone et al., 2016; Sicora, 2019). The interrole conflict that arises due to the student's attempt to balance school, work, and family is essential; because all of these separate roles come with much responsibility individually, it usually causes turmoil and stress for students attempting to satisfy each role (see Figure 2 for visual of interrole conflict between work, family, and school). Figure 2 shows that work–family conflict (WFC), family–work conflict (FWC), family–school conflict (FSC), school–family conflict (SFC), school–work conflict (SWC), and work–school conflict (WSC)

can either cause subjective stress or burnout for individuals and should therefore be monitored and have interventions implemented when possible (Kremer, 2016).

Figure 2

Work–Family–School Interrole Conflict



Note. From "The Relationship between School-Work-Family-Conflict, Subjective Stress, and Burnout" by I. Kremer, 2016, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *31*(4), p. 808 (https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-01-2015-0014). Copyright 2016 by Emerald Publishing. Used with permission (see Appendix F).

Kremer (2016) stated that attempting to balance the responsibilities that go along with family, work, and school is an extremely challenging task. In an attempt to balance and manage the responsibilities of these varying roles, research states that the average person will attempt to maintain or obtain new resources aimed at helping them meet that goal; when or if those resources are threatened, lost, or insufficient, the individual will experience subjective stress or strain (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). Exploring the experience of MSW students is vital because researchers state that the impact of interrole conflict is so significant that it puts stress/strain on individuals' available emotional and cognitive resources leading them to believe

that they are incapable of managing or balancing all of their responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 2005). This feeling can lead to students experiencing burnout during their journey, being ineffective when working with clients, developing emotional, psychological, or physical conditions, or leaving the field altogether (Powell, 2018; Smullens, 2015).

Risk Factors of Interrole Conflict Within MSW Programs

MSW programs are strenuous and consist of much responsibility for students, between the coursework and the internship (Didham et al., 2011; Sicora, 2019; Smullens, 2015). The internship is of utmost importance as this is considered the signature pedagogy of the social work program and the phase of the students' journey that has the potential to cause the most damage if not handled properly (Olson-Morrison et al., 2019; Tarshis & Baird, 2019). As stated before, within the students' internship, they are continuously faced with the trauma and issues of various clients in which they are expected to implement the practices and theories they learned in the classroom setting. Powell (2018) stated that the problem with MSW internships is that there is significant role ambiguity in which it is unclear what the role and responsibilities of the intern are. Since the governing boards set and approved the curriculums (CSWE, n.d.), they must keep in mind that MSW students are not yet working professionals; they are still learning. Therefore, they are not equipped with all the tools to effectively take on the emotional demand for dealing with trauma on a repeated basis. Thus, when students are treated like working professionals and expected to provide the same level of services, role ambiguity comes into play, ultimately leading to burnout for students (Powell, 2018). Other possible risk factors for social work students are compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress (Butler et al., 2017; Smullens, 2015).

Burnout

Burnout can be defined as "an individual's stress experience that occurs when work overload of job demands outweigh key resources" (Maslach, 1998, p. 76). Maslach (1998) stated that burnout would occur when the demands of an individual's role(s) outweigh the critical resources needed or available to address those demands and present with three key components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feeling of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). When emotional exhaustion is present, it causes the social worker/student to be enabled to feel compassion for the clients with whom they are working; this can cause issues with building rapport as the social worker can present as cold or distant (Maslach, 1993; Smullens, 2015). Depersonalization is present when the social worker or student has a detachment from the emotional needs of the client or groups with which they are working (Maslach, 1993, 1998; Smullens, 2015). Depersonalization in a social worker or student can present in a manner where the social worker is cynical towards clients and their issues (Lee, 2015; McCormack & Cotter, 2013; Sylvester, 2015). The third component is lack of a feeling of personal accomplishment; this can be presented in situations where social workers feel as though they are not smart enough to help these clients or they feel useless (McCormack & Cotter, 2013; Smullens, 2015). When a social worker is experiencing all these symptoms, it is not uncommon for them to lose hope, and it leads to them choosing to leave the field of social work (Smullens, 2015).

Aside from the different components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feeling of personal accomplishment), burnout is also categorized into four different areas: professional, personal, social, and physical (Smullens, 2015). A social worker may experience burnout, yet it is present in one, a few, or all different arenas (Smullens,

2015). If a social worker is experiencing burnout in the professional arena, it could be presented by the social worker struggling with the idea of even going to work (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Smullens, 2015). In professional burnout situations, social workers can reach the point of burnout due to feelings of lack of support or understanding from the organization they work for, frustration with society, lack of support/understanding from lawmakers, and lack of resources from the government (Smullens, 2015). Lack of the appropriate resources and lack of support from one's supervisor or organization can leave social workers feeling as though they are not adequately equipped to help clients, leading to feelings of uselessness or defeat (Maslach, 1993; Norcross, 2000; Smullens, 2015).

When a social worker is experiencing personal burnout, it can present in a variety of ways. One of the more common ways that personal burnout for social workers presents itself is in the form of psychological or emotional complications (Smullens, 2015). These complications can include changes in a social worker's mood or outlook on life, development of anxiety or depression, or questioning their capacity to provide therapy to clients (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Siebert, 2006; Smullens, 2015; Thomas, 2013). The next arena of burnout to be discussed is social burnout. Social burnout is burnout of an individual's relationships, whether it be a friendship, intimate partner relationship, or familial relationship (Smullens, 2015). If burnout is present within the social arena for a social worker, it is common for it to present in the form of withdrawal or distance or the individual becomes easily agitated and argumentative (Smullens, 2015).

This concept of burnout is essential to understand, as it will help paint a picture of how students being overwhelmed by the demands and responsibilities of competing roles (interrole conflict) and no practical way of mastering all of them will lead to them experiencing burnout.

This burnout can then lead to students deciding to leave the field or trying to self-medicate using substances, which can open the door to a whole other list of problems (Gibson et al., 1989; Smullens, 2015). To put in simpler terms, if students are continuously exposed to client trauma, problems, and needs but are not provided with the tools or resources to make an impact or provide a solution, they can become burned out as the demands are therefore outweighing the resources (Benner & Curl, 2018; Bonifas & Napoli, 2014; Munson, 1984). In a study conducted on burnout within social work students, Benner and Curl (2018) stated that employed college students are at higher risk for burnout as they are experiencing the demands of multiple roles but cannot dedicate the required attention to any particular role. In that same study, researchers stated that working more than 20 hours per week while attending college harms the collegiate experience (Benner & Curl, 2018; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Lederman, 2009), but some graduate social work students are required to dedicate 21 per week to an internship, so if they have paid employment, they are working well over 20 hours per week. Due to the demand of responsibility, it is not uncommon for students to develop cynicism; the issue is that student cynicism has also been found to lead to burnout (Wei et al., 2015).

Understanding the concept of burnout will be beneficial as it will bring to attention just how at risk students are during their internships. While field placement is an excellent opportunity for students to learn before entering the working force, they are still students, and they are still learning. If continuous exposure to traumatic client situations is causing mental health issues in professionals, then students (with less experience and resources) are at the same or even higher risk for developing those same mental health issues (Benner & Curl, 2018; Ben-Zur & Michael, 2007; Lloyd et al., 2002). Researchers found that working more than 20 hours

per week while being in college creates a negative collegiate experience for students and has also led to higher burnout (Benner & Curl, 2018; Kulm & Cramer, 2006; Lingard, 2007).

Compassion Fatigue

Many choose the field of social work because they genuinely care for others, want to save the world, want to improve quality of life for those who are struggling, or want to balance the scales making life "fair" for all; this form of work requires an individual to be able to show compassion and empathy (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2017; Zastrow, 2016). Although social work students may want to assist in saving the world, being exposed to the traumatic situations of others on a repeated basis will take a toll on anyone, especially if proper self-care, experience, or resources are not set in place (Bell et al., 2003; Figley, 1995; Tarshis & Baird, 2019). One way the profession of social work can take a toll on students is the development of compassion fatigue (Decker et al., 2015). Compassion fatigue can be defined as the gradual decrease of compassion among caregiving professionals who work with traumatized individuals (Decker et al., 2015). Compassion fatigue is caused by the lack of resolution or resources in client situations after a social worker/student has implemented the continuous use of empathy to improve their situation (Figley, 1995, 2013; Fox, 2003; Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Compassion fatigue can cause symptoms such as emotional and physical exhaustion, high levels of stress, irritability, helplessness, depression, distrust, negativism, and inflexibility (Decker et al., 2015). Developing compassion fatigue prevents social workers from providing the quality of care that their clients need, so it is vital to set preventative measures to combat the onset of compassion fatigue (Dane, 2002; Smullens, 2015).

Vicarious Trauma

While compassion fatigue is a severe condition that can arise from continuous exposure to client issues and needs, vicarious trauma is also a condition that can be developed within social work students and professionals (Jackson, 2016; Powers, 2019). Vicarious trauma can be defined as the cumulative effect of working with traumatized clients, involving interference with the therapist's feelings, cognitive schemas and worldview, memories, self-efficacy, and sense of safety (Bell et al., 2003; Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2014; Jackson, 2016; Smullens, 2015). Since social work students are trained to use empathy and compassion when dealing with clients, they develop deep therapeutic relationships that allow them to take on the emotions of their clients (Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2014).

While the ability to show empathy is excellent for practice, it puts social work students at risk because they are vulnerable (Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2014). This vulnerability causes social work students to be consistently exposed to the trauma of their clients, taking on all these traumatic emotions with no productive outlet, causing professionals to develop changes to their worldview, beliefs, identity, and psychological needs (Hernandez-Wolfe et al., 2014). Although experienced social workers are not exempt from experiencing vicarious trauma, students are at an even greater risk or disadvantage as they are still in training, making them inadequately prepared to process and manage their feelings as it relates to the traumatic client situations to which they are exposed, leading to the development of vicarious trauma (Humphrey, 2013; Smullens, 2015). While it is common to hear about unspeakable situations on the news such as mass murder, rape, or abuse, social workers and other mental health professionals are tasked with listening to the details and addressing these situations daily in their positions (Smullens, 2015). Being in a position to have to listen to the gruesome details of client or perpetrator stories

daily can cause psychological damage for clinicians, putting them at significant risk for conditions such as vicarious trauma (Smullens, 2015).

Secondary Traumatic Stress

The fourth yet equally important risk factor that will be explored is that of secondary traumatic stress. Secondary traumatic stress is closely related to vicarious trauma but has slight differences (Sudden, 2019). When speaking about secondary traumatic stress, this condition also comes into effect due to repeated exposure to clients and their traumatic situations, but this condition causes the professional to develop the same emotional, psychological, and or physical responses as the client who experienced the trauma firsthand (Butler et al., 2017; Figley, 1995). Some possible secondary traumatic stress symptoms are lack of sleep, intrusive thoughts, forgetfulness, and lack of boundaries between work and private life (Stamm, 2010).

Self-Care

Researchers urge the importance of self-care to combat burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress (Butler et al., 2017). However, if social work students are so overwhelmed or weighed down by the demands of their prospective degree programs and life requirements, they may not have the time to engage in self-care, which ultimately puts them at risk for developing unfavorable conditions.

As stated previously, self-care can be defined as any action taken geared towards the continuance of life, health, and well-being (Orem, 2001). Self-care is necessary and a vital part of life as it aids in providing appropriate balance, which is needed to combat negative situations such as a decline in mental, physical, emotional, professional, or social areas of life (Orem, 2001; Smullens, 2015). When it comes to social workers and social work students, self-care is viewed as an essential practice or necessity as it will aid in effectiveness when dealing with clients and

help in combatting compassion fatigue and burnout (National Association of Social Workers, 2009; Stamm, 2010; Weiss, 2004). Researchers suggest that it is essential for family, friends, and employers to assist in limiting self-care barriers (situations or tasks that prevent an individual from performing self-care acts) so that social workers can engage in self-care as self-care acts are directly related to stress levels and improving professional quality of life (Xu et al., 2019). The concept of self-care is vital for social work students because a study found that while some students may not know what activities to engage in for effective self-care measures, many students believe they have too much responsibility and not enough time to engage in self-care; this ultimately puts them and their professional careers at risk (Jackson, 2014). Self-care can be broken down into various categories, such as physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and professional (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Smullens, 2015). As it pertains to the physical, psychological, emotional, and professional categories, self-care will be further discussed to detail its benefits.

Emotional/Psychological

Engaging in self-care can provide many positive emotional and psychological benefits for individuals that make it a priority to engage in it (Smullens, 2015). Practicing self-care is essential for social workers because research has found that self-care can even improve emotional resilience, which would be a benefit as the nature of social work presents social workers with much emotional stress (Alexander et al., 2015). The research found that emotional and psychological self-care helps combat burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Andreasen, 2018; Bloomquist et al., 2015; Lewis & King, 2019). Engaging in emotional self-care, such as spending time with family and friends, or psychological self-care, such as seeking counseling, both produce positive benefits and serve as protective factors for social workers (Bloomquist et

al., 2015). Self-care can provide positive benefits like improving quality of life/perspective, lowers levels of stress, positive affect, and higher levels of compassion satisfaction (Butler et al., 2017; Colman et al., 2016; Goncher et al., 2013; Zahniser et al., 2017). Researchers also state that in order for mental health workers to maintain mental wellness, they should aim to incorporate self-care into their routine (Posluns & Gall, 2020). Mental health workers must maintain mental wellness, which will help them be proficient in providing therapy to clients (Posluns & Gall, 2020; Smullens, 2015).

Professional

Social workers' most vital instrument in practice is themselves, so they must take every action for preservation to continue to function in a sufficient and professional capacity (Jackson, 2014). As stated previously, researchers found that engaging in self-care behaviors can improve the professional quality of life for social workers or social work students (Xu et al., 2019). The same study suggested that if supervisors and employers (in addition to family and friends) work to provide adequate work–life balance for social workers, then there will be fewer barriers to self-care, which allows social workers to engage in more self-care practices, ultimately improving their practice or work with clients (Smullens, 2015; Xu et al., 2019). Self-care in the professional arena can also include attending workshops, conferences, or keeping current on the literature regarding topics such as burnout, current laws that affect clients, and local resources (Smullens, 2015). Although the task of attending workshops, conferences, or reading up on current literature may seem like just another tiring task, honing one's craft and knowledge in the field of social work has proven to act as a form of self-care, alleviating symptoms of burnout for practitioners (Alkema et al., 2008; Bell et al., 2003; Smullens, 2015).

Professional self-care can also consist of mindfulness and self-reflection (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011; Napoli & Bonifas, 2011). Mindfulness can be described as being and remaining in the present, blocking out all internal and external distractions (Napoli & Bonifas, 2011). Self-reflection can be defined as attempting to make sense of one's social world and attempting to understand one's own beliefs, behaviors, and feelings (Furman et al., 2008; Hixon & Swann, 1993). The practice of mindfulness and self-reflection can provide benefits in the professional sector as both practices may aid the social work student in learning their triggers, realizing when they are on the brink of burnout, and engaging in self-assessment; these actions will ultimately aid the social work student in handling client interaction better (Napoli & Bonifas, 2011).

Physical

In a study, researchers suggested that lack of self-care can lead to physical complications such as skin ailments, obesity, hypertension, and diabetes; for this reason, self-care is vital for students to combat physical decline (Burke & Cooper, 2008; Smullens, 2015). Physical self-care includes behaviors such as engaging in physical activity, eating balanced meals, and attending regularly scheduled doctor appointments (Smullens, 2015). All of the before-mentioned forms of physical self-care are important for social workers as they aid in creating longevity and physical well-being for social workers who often hold positions that require them to sit for long periods (causing them to be mostly inactive) or be consistently on the go, which may cause them to opt for quick versus healthy food options (Smullens, 2015). As stated previously, the type of work social workers do continuously exposes them to clients and situations that can harm their emotional and psychological well-being (Jackson, 2016). With this being said, research has shown that physical activity, whether going for a walk, doing yoga or pilates, running, swimming, or being active can improve an individual's mood and combat conditions such as

anxiety or depression (Chan et al., 2019). Research also shows that physical activity or exercising positively correlates with high self-esteem (Asmundson et al., 2013; Reed & Buck, 2009; Reed & Ones, 2006). Having high self-esteem or confidence can positively affect the social worker's capacity to assist clients as these emotions will combat the feelings of lack of capacity that are symptoms associated with vicarious trauma (Jackson, 2016; Smullens, 2015).

Student Success

If engaging in self-care can improve social workers' quality of life by protecting them from developing compassion fatigue, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, or vicarious trauma, the benefits would also extend to the collegiate realm (Decker et al., 2019). Multiple studies focused on social work students, self-care, and academic pressures found that the more students engaged in self-care, the less academic stress they experienced (Collins, 2021; Decker et al., 2019). Another study reported that as social work students progressed through their educational journeys and demands became more prevalent, the more they engaged in self-care, the less stress they experienced, ultimately leading to a successful collegiate experience (Collins, 2021). All of the previously mentioned areas or types of self-care (professional, emotional, psychological, and physical) will positively benefit social work students (Jackson, 2014; Smullens, 2015). Engaging in self-care can prove beneficial for students, as some research has found self-care to lead to higher grade point averages (Keating et al., 2013).

While self-care has proven to impact the collegiate experience positively, an issue of social work students engaging in self-care persists (Diebold et al., 2018; Smullens, 2015). Since social work students are sacrificing self-care in order to complete the demands of the degree consisting of course work, time for studying and assignments, and internship hours, universities should explore the idea of implementing self-care into the social work curriculum (Benner &

Curl, 2018; Hemy et al., 2016). The idea of implementing self-care into the curriculum is one that should continue to be explored since research shows it can have positive impacts in the emotional, psychological, professional, physical, and academic areas (Collins, 2021; Diebold et al., 2018; Smullens, 2015).

Current Interventions for Social Work Students

The stress that can be brought on by attending college is not a new concept; research shows that a high percentage of students suffer from psychological distress (Eckerson Peters et al., 2019; Prince, 2015). To combat the stress that students may face during their academic journeys, universities offer student counseling services free of charge (Prince, 2015). The International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS, 2019) is an accrediting body for counseling services on college and university campuses that aims to advance student mental health care quality and improve students' quality of life. Although not all higher educational institutions are accredited through IACS, most still follow the standards that IACS established (Prince, 2015). Research also shows that there has been an increase in students having conditions such as major depression, anxiety, personality disorders, and suicidal ideation, which has led to increased demand at college or university counseling centers (Prince, 2015). Even though there has been an increase in the need for counseling services, research shows that there is limited staff, which means that universities have set limitations on receiving services (Gallagher, 2013; Prince, 2015). Some of the limitations consist of things such as longer wait times, shorter counseling sessions, and referrals to off-campus providers; all of these things can deter students from obtaining the help they need or even seeking help in the first place (Gallagher, 2013; Prince, 2015). Many campuses have implemented peer-to-peer groups that focus on raising

awareness of student mental health and reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health services to improve mental health and counseling services (Prince, 2015).

Another form of intervention implemented to assist MSW students is teaching or encouraging self-care within social work courses (Griffiths et al., 2019; Napoli & Bonifas, 2013). Although self-care utilization to combat burnout, stress, and emotional/psychological risks have been encouraged, research shows that students stated they were taught the importance of self-care but not how to implement it (Griffiths et al., 2019). Therefore, more detailed information should be provided to students.

Finally, higher education institutions' student affairs departments work to provide students with access to many extracurricular activities (Kilgo et al., 2016). Research also shows that engagement in extracurricular activities can positively impact student psychological well-being (Bowman, 2010; Kilgo et al., 2016). The activities available consist of things such as student organizations (psychology club and Latin club), Greek organizations (sororities and fraternities), and intramural sports (basketball, volleyball, and soccer). Even with these three different forms of interventions that colleges and universities are already offering, students are still struggling with mental health complications and distress during their academic journeys (Kilgo et al., 2016; Prince, 2015). With student mental health still a very relevant concern, the topic of interrole conflict should be studied as there is a gap in the literature regarding this topic. Studying this phenomenon can help colleges and universities understand the experience of social work students and the distress they experience as well as improve or create new interventions to combat the conditions (burnout, vicarious trauma, anxiety) that social work students are at risk of developing (Jackson, 2016; Powers, 2019; Smullens, 2015).

Summary

This literature review provided a foundation for understanding the phenomenon of interrole conflict for graduate social work students. This chapter began with a thorough account of role conflict theory and self-care theory, as these two theories combine to create a theoretical lens through which to view the phenomenon. After providing a theoretical background, this chapter provided an overview of the current literature available on interrole conflict, the possible risks associated with interrole conflict, and how self-care can provide relief for individuals experiencing the negative impact of interrole conflict. This chapter then provided a thorough account of what interrole conflict is, how it is relevant in social work students' experience, the potential risks associated with interrole conflict, and how self-care can help combat those potential risks.

After discussing role conflict, this chapter discussed the positive impacts that self-care can have on students. The research found that engaging in self-care can improve psychological well-being, improve professional/academic performance, and provide positive physical and emotional outcomes (Kilgo et al., 2016; Prince, 2015). The research also found that engaging in self-care can combat the risk factors that social work students are exposed to, such as the development of burnout, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression (Jackson, 2016; Powers, 2019; Smullens, 2015). Even with all the current knowledge on student distress, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the topic of this study as there is little to no research that explores the social work curriculum, interrole conflict caused by the curriculum, and MSW students' perception of this phenomenon. This literature review provided an overview of the available literature on interrole conflict, the social work curriculum's demands, MSW student experience, and self-care benefits.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of master of social work (MSW) students and their stories of dealing with role conflict within their academic journey. This chapter provides information on the purpose and relevance of using a transcendental phenomenological approach and gives insight into the step-by-step process used to engage in this research. This chapter provides details on how the participants were obtained and the specific procedures used to obtain data, such as interviews, focus group interviews, and a survey. This chapter also details the measures I took for data analysis and ethical concerns. It is hoped that this chapter's information can be used to replicate this study in the future.

Design

In order to explore the lived experience of MSW students navigating the phenomenon of role conflict during their academic journey, I used qualitative research as this type of research provided a more in-depth description of the selected phenomenon (Sofaer, 1999) from the participant's point of view (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because where quantitative research tests theories and looks at relationships amongst variables, qualitative research aims to explore and understand an individual's or a group of individuals' perspectives on a specific issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenology was the selected research design for this study, as phenomenology is rooted in philosophy and psychology and geared towards exploring a specific group's lived experiences, making phenomenology the most appropriate form of qualitative research for the selected topic (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moustakas (1994) defined phenomenology as knowledge as it appears to the consciousness, or describing an individual's perception, sensing, or knowing

as it pertains to a specific situation. Phenomenological research aims to explore and understand the lived experience of a group of individuals who have experienced exposure to the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). This type of research helps scholars to obtain and relay rich information on the essence, perception, and meaning of a phenomenon from the participant's (person who experienced the phenomenon) point of view (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2016) versus the perception of those who are merely studying the phenomenon. In this specific study, the group of individual participants were the MSW students, and the phenomenon in which they have a shared experience was role conflict within the MSW program. There are many different types of phenomenology, but for this study, I used transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental phenomenology can be described as phenomenological research that focuses less on the researcher's perspective and more on the participants' (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Transcendental phenomenology is an applicable form of phenomenology for this study as it is heavily focused on implementing *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is a term that means to abstain from judgment or the customary way of perceiving things (Moustakas, 1994). This practice is a necessary and mandatory step for researchers engaging in transcendental phenomenology as it assists them in putting aside their opinion or bias and solely focusing on the experience of the participants in the study. To put aside previous opinions or knowledge, researchers can engage in bracketing. Bracketing is a process in which researchers address their current perceptions or experience with the studied phenomenon and then work to put those aside; this process allows researchers to be open to new ideas and knowledge of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

I chose transcendental phenomenology to avoid bias in the writing as I have also experienced the selected phenomenon. Transcendental phenomenology is appropriate for the study on the MSW student's experience with role conflict because this method allows the researcher to obtain a rich and detailed account of the participants' lived experience. Through epoche, the researcher engages in bracketing and putting aside all personal judgments and ideas of the phenomenon and strictly focuses on the participants' accounts. This method is best suited for the study as it allows the researcher to go beyond the surface level and obtain details on the essence and meaning of the participants' experience, which could lead to improvements in the higher education field or merely understanding of the issue which can be the first step towards change. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher engaged participants in individual interviews and group interviews and asked them to complete a survey to gain insight into their role conflict interpretation during their MSW journey.

Research Questions

CQ: How do master of social work students describe their experience with role conflict?

SQ1: How do master of social work students manage the demands of multiple roles?

SQ2: How does self-care influence role conflict for master of social work students?

Setting

For this study, the setting was two separate social media Facebook groups entitled Black Therapists Rock and VCU School of Social Work-Student and Alumni Network. Black Therapists Rock is a social media group consisting of more than 21,000 individuals. This group was created for students or professionals who are in the counseling field. Within this group, there are professionals and students in the following areas: social work, mental health counseling, marriage and family counseling, and behavioral health. VCU School of Social Work-Student and

Alumni Network is a Facebook group consisting of 413 members. Members in this group are current or past students of Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Social Work. Although I am part of both groups, I do not hold any influence within either. I chose to utilize both of these groups as the setting to create a more diverse research population. Utilizing both groups allowed me to obtain participants of varying genders and races.

Participants

For this study, I attained 12 participants; this amount was selected because, in phenomenology, the minimum for participants is 5–10 (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants included 12 individuals who all identified as female ranging between the ages of 18 and 54. The participants consisted of individuals who had completed their MSW journey within the past 5 years. The participants were selected from two Facebook groups: Black Therapists Rock and VCU School of Social Work-Student and Alumni Network. I obtained a purposive sample as the participants needed to have more than one role and be able to speak to role conflict in order for me to gain useable data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The sampling procedure used for this study was criterion sampling, as this set requirements for individuals to participate in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To participate in this study, the individual had to have graduated from an MSW program within the past 5 years, live in the United States of America, and express experience with some interrole conflict (during their MSW journey) while maintaining all held roles. The sample consisted of diverse individuals since I recruited participants from social media groups, and both females and males of all races were encouraged to participate.

Procedures

To conduct this study, I first submitted documentation to Liberty's Institutional Review Board (IRB) detailing my envisioned study and how I intended to engage in this study, including

information on the process for obtaining participants and how I planned to engage with those participants. Upon IRB approval (see Appendix C), I began working with a social work professional to pilot the interview questions and gauge the questions' ability to generate quality data and assess the participants' comprehension. After the piloting trial, I posted a description (see Appendix B) on the Black Therapists Rock and VCU School of Social Work-Student and Alumni Network page giving information about the study and the requirements to participate in the study, and how to contact this researcher if interested. I continued to post the excerpt until enough participants were obtained. Once enough participants were gathered, I asked those participants if they had any questions. After addressing any questions or concerns the participants had, I followed up with questions such as how old they were, if they experienced role conflict, and if they had graduated within the past 5 years to ensure they were qualified to participate. Once it was certain that the individuals were eligible to participate in the study, I obtained the individual's email address and emailed her a link to a survey (see Appendix A). The survey had information on the purpose and relevance of the study, a place to secure informed consent, demographic information, an open-ended component geared towards allowing participants to provide details on their experience, and a place for them to secure a time slot for one-on-one interviews and focus group participation.

At this time, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant that would be used to identify them throughout the study. After the participants completed the surveys and selected a time to engage in the interviews, I conducted the interviews and transcribed them after completing each interview. I recorded the interviews using the record function on my phone and transcribed them using Google Docs. When it came to the focus group, the first four people who completed the survey, expressed interest in participating in the focus group, and agreed to the confidentiality

terms were selected to participate. Both the individual interviews and the focus group were held via Zoom, a virtual platform used to allow individuals to connect through video chat or audio if they cannot meet in person.

The Researcher's Role

Within this study, the researcher's role was to explore, gain valuable and rich information on the phenomenon of role conflict for MSW students, and detail that information in a straightforward and easy to understand way for potential readers. I acted as a human instrument but did not have any authority over the participants so that there was no pressure to participate in the study. I am also a member of both the social media groups that were used to gain participants yet held no administrative or authoritative role within those groups. I engaged participants in activities that aimed to help them recall and discuss, in-depth, their experiences and the emotions that went along with those experiences. Since I fit into the criteria required to be a participant, I had to engage in bracketing not to produce any biased information. Creswell and Poth (2016) described bracketing as setting aside the researcher's personal experience with a specific phenomenon and solely focusing on the participants' experience. To achieve bracketing, I continuously worked with an open mind and allowed the participants to lead the conversation during one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussion. By allowing the participants to lead the conversation, I avoided implementing suggestions that might sway participants' responses. I also engaged in bracketing by asking participants for clarification on their statements; by doing this, I obtained the correct meaning from the source rather than allowing my perspective or bias to interpret or form meaning.

Data Collection

In order to gain rich and thorough information, I used three different forms of data collection. Within this study, I used a survey, interviews, and a focus group. During the initial interaction (when I reached out to participants who expressed interest in participating), I discussed the purpose of the study again to ensure comprehension, the tasks of the study, how I would provide confidentiality, and how the information would be reported once the study was completed, and sent the link to participate in the survey (Appendix A). During the one-on-one interview, the participants had the opportunity to engage with me one on one and state anything they may have forgotten to post in the survey and anything they may not have felt comfortable relaying in the focus group. During the focus group, the participants were able to discuss the shared experience with other individuals.

Survey

During the initial interaction (when I answered any potential questions and then emailed the link to the survey), the participants were tasked with completing a survey that began with giving the purpose of the study, details on the tasks of the study, and then participants were asked to give informed consent. Following that portion of the survey, demographic information was asked of the participants, specifically their age, gender, race, and the year they graduated from their MSW program. Next in the survey was a section for the participant to provide an open-ended written response (see Appendix A). The participants were given a prompt (see Appendix A) and encouraged to give an account of their MSW experience. The participants were free to express themselves however they wanted to in this document; it could be a narrative, poem, or song. Van Manen (1990) stated that besides interviews, other forms of data collection, including written responses, poems, and journals, can also be used in the transcendental

phenomenological study. This assignment within the study held multiple purposes, with the first being to see how the participants recalled their experience and then to see if there were any similarities between the participants. At the end of this survey, participants were asked to select a time for their interviews and then state whether they wished to participate in the focus group.

Interviews

Moustakas (1994), credited as the influencer of transcendental phenomenology, stated that multiple interviews must be conducted within a phenomenological study. For this study, participants engaged in one-on-one interviews. The individual interview took about 35 minutes to 1 hour and consist of 13 questions. The interview was conducted via Zoom and was recorded using the record function on my phone. The questions for the interview were the following:

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. Please detail your reasoning for participating in this study.
3. Please explain to me your understanding of interrole conflict.
4. Please explain to me your understanding of self-care.
5. Please explain to me the roles you held while in your MSW program and some of the demands or responsibilities of each role.
6. How did you balance or complete the responsibilities of each role?
7. How did you prioritize the importance or relevance of the roles in your life during your MSW journey?
8. How would you describe the role conflict that was brought during your MSW journey?
9. How did you manage this role conflict?
10. How did this means of management influence quality of life for you?

11. Tell me about your experience with self-care during your academic journey. This could include how often your professors encouraged you to engage in it if you had time to engage in it. Or how you feel about it.
12. Tell me about how self-care impacted your experience with role conflict.
13. Please take this time to reflect on the interview as a whole and provide any additional comments you may have.

Although all of the questions were geared towards answering the research questions (see Table 2), they also have specific purposes within a phenomenological study. Questions 1 and 2 were opening questions, designed to ease the participant into the interview, lighten the mood, and build rapport; this is all a part of an effective interview protocol, which is a skill that comes with continued practice (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). If the researcher effectively engages the participant, the participant should feel more relaxed, leading to the interview feeling more like a conversation, and therefore, flowing smoothly (Moustakas, 1994).

Questions 3–12 are questions aimed at getting the participants to open up and divulge information on their experience with the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) stated that generally, two broad questions are asked, but more can be implemented if necessary. These nine questions built upon one another, urging the participants to dig deeper into the recollection of their experience. These questions provided the information necessary to answer the central research question and the sub-questions. The questions were thought- and emotion-provoking in the sense that when the participants answered these questions, I was able to document not only words but body language and observed emotion. These questions detailed information on what interrole conflict looks like for MSW students, which is lightly discussed by other researchers (Benner &

Curl, 2018; Cheng & McCarthy, 2013; Curl & Benner, 2017; Kremer, 2016). In addition to gaining information on the participants' experience with interrole conflict, the interview questions also provided details on the participants' experience with self-care and the influence that self-care had on their interrole conflict (Andreasen, 2018; Butler et al., 2017; Decker et al., 2019).

Question 13 is what Patton (2015) calls a one-shot question. This question allowed the participants to add any additional information they felt was relevant to their experience or the study's purpose. After the question was answered, the interviewer took the time out to thank the participant for participating in the interview. Once all individual interviews were completed, I looked at all of the submitted dates and times and selected a time that worked best for the focus group if the preselected time did not work for at least four participants.

Table 2

Relevance of Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question	Supporting Theory
	1. Please introduce yourself to me.	
	2. Please detail your reasoning for participating in this study.	
CQ	3. Please explain your understanding of interrole conflict.	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
SQ2	4. Please explain to me your understanding of self-care.	Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
SQ1	5. Please explain to me the roles you held while in your MSW program and some of the demands or responsibilities of each role.	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
SQ1	6. How did your balance or complete the responsibilities of each role?	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
SQ1	7. How did your prioritize the importance or relevance of the roles in your life during your MSW journey?	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)

Research Question	Interview Question	Supporting Theory
CQ	8. How would you describe the role conflict that was brought during your MSW journey?	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
SQ1 SQ2	9. How did you manage this role conflict?	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951); Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
SQ2	10. How did this means of management influence quality of life for you?	Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
SQ2	11. Tell me about your experience with self-care during your academic journey. This can include how often your professors encouraged you to engage in it. Or how you feel about it.	Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
SQ2	12. Tell me about how self-care impacted your experience with role conflict.	Theory of Self Care (Orem, 2001)
	13. Please take this time to reflect on the interview as a whole and provide any additional comments you may have.	

Focus Group

Focus groups are a great tool that is often used in qualitative research to gather detailed information from a group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Nyumba et al., 2018). Although all of the questions within the focus group were geared towards answering the research questions (see Table 3), they also have specific purposes within a phenomenological study. The focus group consisted of four participants, and the interview did not have a specific time restraint as the interviewer left this open to how the group responded to and interacted with one another. The focus group participants were selected by asking who was available during a preselected time; the first four people to respond to the time were chosen. The focus group interview was conducted via Zoom and recorded using the record function on my phone and consisted of the following six questions:

1. Please go around the room and introduce yourselves (using your pseudonym) and give us a little background on the roles you held while in your MSW program.

2. Please discuss with the group your experience with role conflict during your MSW journey.
3. What are some of the common roles that everyone noticed? For people who held some of the same roles, please share how you prioritized those roles?
4. Now that we have discussed how prioritization occurred, please explain how you managed the responsibilities of each role.
5. Please explain your experience with self-care during your MSW journey.
6. Please take this time to provide any additional thoughts or comments on your experience in this study.

Question 1 is an opening question designed to break the ice, get the group acclimated with one another, and create the feel of a relaxed conversation (Jordan & Haines, 2017). If this works successfully, the participants form a bond and build rapport with one another through being able to relate to one another pertaining to experiencing the same phenomenon. Once participants feel a sense of community, they begin engaging with one another more freely and feel more comfortable answering the interviewer's questions in front of the group.

Questions 2–5 are questions that aimed to elicit rich and meaningful data on the phenomenon and obtain a sense of the group's interpretation of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As the participants answered these questions, they noticed and talked about the similarities between their experiences and formulated a shared meaning of the phenomenon. These three questions provided the most information for the interviewer and provided answers to the central and sub-questions. The last question gave the participants a chance to relay any additional information (Patton, 2015). It also allowed them to share their thoughts on the study as this was the last assignment they completed. Although only six questions were utilized during

the focus group, compared to the 13 used during the one-on-one interviews, I believe that these six questions acted as a guiding factor but ultimately led to the participants opening up and disclosing a wealth of information.

Table 3

Relevance of Focus Group Questions

Research Question	Focus Group Question	Supporting Theory
	1. Please go around the room and introduce yourselves and give us a little background on the roles you held while in your MSW program.	
CQ	2. Please discuss with the group your experience with role conflict during your MSW journey.	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
CQ SQ1	3. What are some of the common roles that everyone notice? For the people who held some of the same roles, please share how you prioritized those roles.	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951)
SQ1 SQ2	4. Now that we've discussed how prioritization occurred, please explain how you managed the responsibilities of each role.	Role Theory (Linton, 1936; Parsons, 1951); Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
SQ2	5. Please explain your experience with self-care during your MSW journey.	Theory of Self-Care (Orem, 2001)
	6. Please take this time to provide any additional thoughts or comments on your experience in this study.	

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) stated that the researcher must conduct horizonalization and clusters of meaning in a transcendental phenomenological study. Horizonalization is the process of member checking, combing through the collected data including transcripts from the interviews, focus groups, and the written information from the survey, and making a note of or highlighting any significant statements that express the participants' interpretation of their experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were transcribed using Google Docs. When engaging in horizonalization, I also implemented memoing, which is a process that consists of jotting down short phrases or notes as they occur to the researcher in an attempt to synthesize

data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Memoing helped with descriptive coding to create themes (Saldaña, 2013). After I combed through all of the data, I then clustered similar statements together and developed codes that best described the clusters of statements or meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Once codes were created, I then established themes, detailing the ideas or information that reoccurred within the data (Moustakas, 1994). The codes and themes were used to relay vivid detail on the experience of the phenomenon. After horizonalization and clusters of meaning had occurred, I established textural and structural descriptions and then merged them for an overall textural-structural synthesis.

After thorough examination of the transcripts, from the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interviews, I then examined the required written reflection (within the survey), highlighting significant statements on each. Once meaningful statements were found, I grouped similar statements; from those, I placed the statements into categories or codes. Themes were created by grouping relevant and repetitive participant statements together. The same process of horizonalization, cluster of meaning, textural description, structural description, and then textural-structural synthesis were completed for all three data collection methods. I then combined the information from all three collection methods and repeated the analysis process. I combined and analyzed all of the information from all three data collection methods into one purposeful and thorough document. Once that was done, I created a written account of the textural and structural descriptions gathered from the data. In doing this, I conveyed how the participants experienced role conflict within their MSW journey and the factors that influenced it. The last step was to present the essence of the phenomenon, also providing correlation to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). I aimed to achieve triangulation by utilizing a survey, interviews, and a focus group. The information obtained from these different data collection

methods provided a rich account of the participants' experience during their MSW journeys. In order to ensure that I was not implementing my biased ideas, values, or beliefs into the study, I engaged in bracketing by detailing how I relate to the study, meet the requirements to be a participant, and my experience within my MSW program. By writing down this information, I was able to set aside my bias and focus on the information provided by the participants.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness within a study is a vital component (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within this study, the concept of trustworthiness was prioritized, and I aimed to achieve credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability through triangulation, member checking, and consultation of an expert in the field. By ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, I proved to have a credible study that is able to be followed and conducted by other researchers. I also provided a detailed methods chapter which outlined each step I took to conduct this study so that it can be easily replicated if needed. Trustworthiness was also achieved within this study by placing the focus on the participants; therefore, the findings were based on their perspective and not mine. Each step that I took within this study, from conducting a thorough literature review, providing the background for the problem, and utilizing multiple data collection methods, was to ensure that this study provided accurate and relevant information.

Credibility

Credibility was achieved by using practices such as memoing and coding, which aid the researcher to uncover thick, rich details as they continuously comb through the data and gain new insight (Janesick, 2013). Credibility in this study was also obtained by the researcher engaging in member checking, which can occur during the interviews when the researcher asks the participants to give feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I engaged in member checking by

sending the transcriptions to each participant after their interview and asking them to read over it and provide feedback. Lastly, my study had triangulation as I utilized three different data collection methods; by engaging in thorough analysis, I provided an accurate and realistic account of the phenomenon.

Dependability and Confirmability

The use of the piloting interviews by a social work expert in the field at the beginning of the study helped with reliability and dependability, proving that the study would draw out the intended information (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Having field experts check over the data and compare results also aided in establishing confirmability. Dependability was achieved by the use of bracketing and consulting with a social work professional. I engaged in bracketing by stating how I met the criteria to be a participant but decided to select a phenomenological study to allow the participants' perspective be the main focus of the study. By following the phenomenological process and engaging in bracketing to omit any personal bias, I was able to establish an audit trail ensuring that the findings were based on the participants' responses. Once I had collected all of the information, I went over it with a social work individual to gain their perspective.

Transferability

The process of detailing the essence of the phenomenon aided in transferability. This process showed that the information gathered can be applied to any MSW experiencing or having experienced role conflict despite the roles they held (Moustakas, 1994). Although the information has transferability within the phenomenon and the specific group of MSW students, the information should not be generalized or applied to other majors.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the participants of this study, I assigned pseudonyms for the participants to be referred by for the study duration. The original consent forms that have the participants' government names will remain locked away on my personal laptop. Any other electronic information containing any identifying information is on my laptop, locked and protected by a passcode that only I know. Extra precautions were taken by placing all information about the study in a specific folder and putting a lock on that folder, which requires passcode entry (only I have access to the passcode). Regarding the focus group, I had no control over what the participants chose to talk about outside of the meeting, but I made a disclaimer asking all participants to respect all participants' privacy and not share any information divulged during the focus group. I will also keep this information in a locked file on my personal laptop, to which only I have access; I will delete and discard of the data after 5 years.

Summary

To obtain information on the phenomenon of role conflict for students in MSW programs, I utilized multiple data collection methods, including document analysis, interviews, and focus groups. Each of these data collection methods produces different benefits within transcendental phenomenological research and allowed me to obtain a detailed picture of the participants' lived experience with a specific phenomenon. To minimize bias, I engaged in bracketing to set aside my experience with the phenomenon and focus solely on reporting the participants' experiences.

After all data were collected, I engaged in data analysis consisting of horizonalization, clusters of meaning, memoing, and coding. These processes helped me organize and analyze the data to ensure that I reported the most accurate, honest, and detailed description of the

participants' lived experiences. This chapter provided a detailed account of each step I took to complete the study. The information was presented in a manner that was clear and concise, making it easy to be followed or replicated by future researchers.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter offers answers to the research question and sub-questions which will be supported by direct quotations from the participants. Specifically, this chapter provides readers with a description of participants, the themes that were generated from the data, and how the data provides answers to the stated research question and sub-questions. Thus, this study provides a look into the academic experience of multiple MSW students in order to obtain greater understanding of the phenomenon of interrole conflict within the MSW journey. I decided to conduct this study after combing through the current knowledge and finding that there is a gap in the literature pertaining to interrole conflict and the MSW student journey.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used for this study in order to set requirements for individuals to participate in the study. To participate in this study, participants had to have (a) graduated from a Master of Social Work (MSW) program within the past 5 years (2015–2020), (b) live in the United States, and (c) express dealing with interrole conflict during their MSW journey. Utilizing these guidelines ensured that I was able to obtain rich information to answer the research questions. The participants for this study consisted of 12 individuals who all identify as female. Of the 12 females, nine were African American, two were Caucasian, and one was Latino (see Table 4).

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age Range	Race	Income	Grad Year
Megan	25–34	African American	$10k–$30k	2018
Andrea	45–54	African American	> $50k	2018
Jasmine	25–34	African American	< $10k	2018
Stephanie	35–44	African American	$30k–$50k	2019
Leah	25–34	African American	> $50k	2018
Alyssa	18–24	African American	$30k–$50k	2018
Denise	35–44	Latino	$30k–$50k	2019
Jane	45–54	Caucasian	$30k–$50k	2019
Ebony	25–34	African American	$10k–$30k	2019
Sally	25–34	Caucasian	$10k-$30k	2019
Laura	25–34	African American	< $10k	2020
Joy	35–44	African American	$30k–$50k	2018

Megan

Megan was an African American female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018 and during that time, her annual income ranged between $10,000–$30,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, and full-time employee. Megan described her MSW journey as being "the most stressful journey" of her life. She stated that the demands were so overwhelming and difficult that it left "very little room for a personal life." She provided details on her emotional status during her MSW journey, expressing that she experienced symptoms of burnout and feelings of hopelessness.

Andrea

Andrea was an African American female between the ages of 45–54. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018, and during that time, her annual income was over $50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, employee, parent, and romantic partner.

Andrea initially described her MSW journey as being a "very positive one." She stated that all her teachers and faculty were very supportive and that she was able to graduate with a high GPA. Andrea was the outlier within the study. Although she stated that she experienced interrole conflict and that some parts of her academic journey was stressful, she still described the overall experience as positive.

Jasmine

Jasmine was an African American female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018, and during that time, her annual income was below $10,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, full-time employee, and romantic partner. Jasmine described her MSW journey as being very difficult and stressful. Throughout the interview she kept referring to her MSW journey as a game of survival. She reported that her internship field instructor had no compassion and made her experience that much worse. She also attributed a portion of the stress during her MSW journey to the relationship she was in at that time. Jasmine stated that the relationship was "toxic" and that when she decided to end things, although school was still difficult, she felt as though a weight had been lifted.

Stephanie

Stephanie was an African American female between the ages of 35–44. She graduated from her MSW program in 2019, and during that time, her annual income ranged between $30,000–$50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, parent, spouse, and employee. Stephanie stated that she found it very difficult to juggle her responsibilities as a spouse, parent, student, intern, and employee. She provided accounts of missing holidays and quality time with her family in an attempt to complete assignments from school or her internship. She described herself as being emotionally exhausted during her MSW

journey and also feeling guilty. Stephanie reported feeling guilty as she stated that her husband had to take on a lot of responsibility on his own as it pertained to housework and parenting as she had to dedicate more focus to school. She also experienced feelings of guilt related to not being able to spend time with her child.

Leah

Leah was an African American female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018, and during that time, her annual income was over $50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, and employee. Leah described her MSW journey as being very rigorous. She stated that due to the demands of school and her internship, she had to resign from her full-time job which in turn lead to financial crisis. Leah also stated that the MSW journey greatly impacted her mental and emotional health as well as her relationship with her child as she was a single parent during that time but had to dedicate the majority of her time to school.

Alyssa

Alyssa was an African American female between the ages of 18–24. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018, and during that time, her annual income ranged between $30,000–$50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, employee of three jobs, and caregiver. Alyssa described her experience as both enjoyable and stressful. While she was in her MSW program, she worked three part time jobs while also being a nanny. She reported it as being enjoyable because she formed a close bond with the family she was nannying for but as for her internship and schoolwork, she described it as very time consuming and stressful.

Denise

Denise was a Latino female between the ages of 35–44. She graduated from her MSW program in 2019, and during that time, her annual income ranged between $30,000–$50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, parent, and employee. Denise described her MSW journey as being stressful. She reported experiencing difficulty and emotional disturbance from her internship as she worked with domestic violence victims, sexually abused persons, and the homeless population. She reported frustration over being taught about self-care in school but not being taught how to implement it and being so overwhelmed with work that there was no time to engage in self-care. Due to the stressful nature of her MSW journey and lack of self-care, Denise reported experiencing burnout and insomnia.

Jane

Jane was a Caucasian female between the ages of 45–54. She graduated from her MSW program in 2019, and during that time, her annual income was $30,000–$50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, romantic partner, parent, grandparent, and caregiver. Jane described her MSW as being an "emotional rollercoaster." Jane expressed that while school and the internship were already very time consuming and difficult, the things she was going through at home made things even more unbearable. During her MSW journey, Jane reported dealing with infidelity and being a caregiver for multiple grandchildren who were experiencing serious health complications.

Ebony

Ebony was an African American female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2019, and during that time, her annual income ranged between $10,000–$30,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, employee of three

jobs, eldest sibling with expectation of family mediator and occasional stand in parent. Ebony described her MSW experience as “one of the singlehanded most brutal cluster of life lessons.” During her MSW journey, she was a student, intern, and held multiple part-time jobs. She stated that self-care was nonexistent during that time to the point where she reported losing an unhealthy amount of weight due to not having the time for proper nutrition or rest. Ebony also reported dealing with the death of three family members, which aided in the emotional distress she experienced during that time. Ebony credited the stress she experienced during that time for making her the resilient social worker she is today but still recalls that time as being unpleasant.

Sally

Sally was a Caucasian female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2019, and during that time, her annual income ranged between $10,000–$30,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, employee of two jobs, spouse, pet mom, and caregiver for two individuals. Sally described her MSW experience as difficult. She explained how it was hard trying to keep up with all the required coursework, internship requirements, housework, and two paid positions. She stated that the MSW journey took a toll on her both emotionally and financially. She stated that her MSW program was so stressful that she had to take time off from her program at one point. Sally also stated that her academic journey took a toll on her marriage, which ended shortly after she graduated. She reported that between all of her responsibilities, there was no time for self-care, so it was frustrating being encouraged to engage in it and then not having time to do so.

Laura

Laura was an African American female between the ages of 25–34. She graduated from her MSW program in 2020, and during that time, her annual income was below $10,000. The

roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, parent, and employee. Laura also emphasized her roles of daughter, sister, and friend. Laura described her MSW journey as stressful. She stated that due to all of the demands of the different roles she held during that time, she experienced "burnout before even graduating and entering the profession." She reported that "the same professors that would encourage us to engage in self-care would then turn around and pile on the work and assignments."

Joy

Joy was an African American female between the ages of 35–44. She graduated from her MSW program in 2018, and during that time, her annual income was $30,000–$50,000. The roles she held during her MSW journey were student, intern, parent, and employee of two jobs. Joy described her MSW journey as being "draining." She described the difficulty of raising three sons alone, working both a full-time and part-time job, and attending classes/internship. She reported that she had no support as she did not have any family or friends in the area at that time but she was able to push through and obtain her degree.

Results

Of the 12 participants, all 12 completed the written response section within the survey. Overall, the survey provided an overview of the purpose of the study, researcher contact information, informed consent, demographics, a space for participants to detail their experience with role conflict, and a space to schedule their interview and focus group time. All of the participants provided in-depth details of their perception of their MSW journey. These responses provided great information to be applied to the research questions. Participants were allowed to express themselves in any way they wanted within the written response. All participants provided information in a narrative format.

Of the 12 participants, 10 participated in the interviews. The interviews consisted of 13 questions but were conducted in an open-ended conversational format to allow for ease of conversation and comfortability for participants. The interviews allowed participants to expand on the information they gave within the written response. All of the interviews flowed smoothly and turned out to be more of an informal conversation where the participants took the lead in the interaction, and I documented the accounts they provided. As for the focus group, four participants volunteered to take part. The participants interacted with each other and found that they faced some of the same struggles. The participants engaged with me and each other, building upon their individual stories and finding similarities between their experiences; I took account of the information disclosed.

Theme Development

Multiple themes emerged during the data analysis stage pertaining to the research questions. During the data analysis stage, I combed through each of the three data collection methods, reviewing them multiple times, looking for significant and/or repetitive statements. After reviewing all of the information from each data collection method, I was able to create six codes. See Table 5 for a listing of the codes created during data analysis.

Table 5

Description of Codes

Code Shorthand	Code Longhand	Description
EMS	Emotional Status	This code was created for content related to emotional being. This code correlates with the CQ.
TM	Time Management	This code was created for any content related to how participants organized their tasks to manage their demands. This code correlates with SQ1.
SCE	Self-care Experience	This code was created for any content related to the actions that participants engaged in to alleviate stress or maintain psycho/social/spiritual wellbeing. This code correlates with SQ2.
IC	Internship Complication	This code was created for any content related to difficulties that participants experienced within their internships or with their internship supervisors. This code was unexpected and does not correlate with any research question directly.
RC	Role Conflict	This code was created for any content related to issues that arose due to conflict between various roles. This code correlates with the CQ.
RI	Relationship Issues	This code was created for any content related to relationships such as infidelity, abstinence, unemployment, or parenting duties. This code was unexpected and does not correlate with any research question directly.

After my codes were created, I grouped similar statements together and was able to create relevant themes to describe the findings. The information from each data collection was analyzed together after being analyzed separately. When grouping the similar statements and clusters of words together from all data collection methods, I was able to create five themes. See Table 6 for a description of themes.

Table 6

Description of Themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Mental Health Complications	Burnout Distress	This theme was created using any content provided about how participants felt during their MSW journey. This theme correlates with the CQ.
Hierarchy Between Roles	N/A	This theme was created using any content provided about prioritization of roles or duties. This theme correlates with SQ1.
Sacrifice	Loss within family/friends Loss of personal time Income	This theme was created using any content provided about what participants sacrificed in order to obtain their MSW degree. This theme correlates with SQ1.
Organization	N/A	This theme was created using any content provided about how participants managed the demands they held during their MSW journey. This theme correlates with SQ1.
Impossible Attainment	Lack of time Insufficient education	This theme was created using any content provided about participants' experience with self-care. This theme correlates with SQ2.

Development Process

In order to establish relevant themes, once the codes were created, I went through the interview transcripts, focus group transcript, and the written responses from the survey multiple times. When combing through the information, I highlighted similar statements made by the participants. I also made note of recurrent statements or phrases. Once the statements were grouped together, I created themes that encapsulated the premise of the statements. As we move through this chapter, you will see that I attached the themes to specific research questions. I did this to show not only how the themes are relevant to the study but also how they relate to and provide answers to the research questions. Below I will provide brief insight into each of the themes before moving on to more in-depth explanations in the research question response section.

Mental Health Complications

This theme was created to capture the mental/emotional struggle that the participants reported experiencing throughout their MSW journeys. When speaking of mental health complications, 11 out of the 12 participants described their MSW journey as stressful or difficult and reported feelings of being overwhelmed or burnt out. Participants reflected on their emotional states during their MSW journeys and provided detailed accounts of their experiences. Megan, Laura, and Ebony described their MSW journeys as being one of the most stressful experiences they have ever faced in their lives. Other participants such as Leah and Stephanie stated that their emotional and mental health were greatly impacted, leading to them constantly feeling drained.

Hierarchy between Roles

This theme was created to capture the idea that each participant, in some way or another, provided details on how they had to prioritize roles and demands in order to successfully complete their MSW journey. All 12 of the participants mentioned having to prioritize roles but the prioritization varied amongst participants. For example, Leah stated that she decided to resign from her full-time paid position in order to focus on school although it caused her financial strain, whereas Stephanie prioritized her role of paid employment stating, “Work comes first; that’s what’s paying the bills.” Also, all 12 participants spoke about building their schedules around the demands of their school and internship assignments.

Sacrifice

This theme was created to relay how the participants spoke about the different things they had to go without in order to obtain their MSW. Sacrifice came in many different forms for the participants, but 11 out of 12 reported having to sacrifice in some form during their MSW

journey. Megan, Ebony, Jasmine, Stephanie, Leah, and Joy all report sacrificing their social life in order to complete the demands of school and their internship. Stephanie reported feeling guilty due to constantly sacrificing time with her child and family in order to complete coursework assignments. Denise spoke about sacrificing personal and family time and then setting boundaries because she did not want her relationship with her children to suffer. Ebony provided details about sacrificing sleep, meals, and personal time in order to meet the demands of school, which ultimately took a toll on her health.

Organization

This theme was created to capture all the statements where the participants spoke about having to utilize schedules, planners, alarms, or any other method to be strategic with time or the completion of assignments or the demands of school or personal life. Organization came up heavily with five of the 12 participants. They all spoke about the use of paper planners, highlighters, and setting alarms in an attempt to effectively manage the demands of the various roles they held during their MSW journeys. Ebony stated that if she wanted to have lunch with her friends, she had to schedule it 3 months in advance to ensure that it would not interfere with her classes, internship, or three paid positions. Sally stated that she kept separate paper planners for her personal life and her school/internship responsibilities. Stephanie spoke about how she created a set schedule with her husband so it was understood who would pick up or drop off their child at daycare, who would cook dinner, and who was responsible for other tasks; this helped her plan time to complete assignments related to school.

Impossible Attainment

Lastly, this theme was created to relay the perception of the participants and shed light on their experience with self-care. The majority of the participants (11 out of 12) reported that

carving out time for self-care was impossible. Those same participants gave accounts of the importance of self-care being taught in their courses but that they were never taught how to actually engage in self-care. Laura noted that her professors would encourage her to engage in self-care and then assign numerous tasks which made it impossible to designate any extra time for self-care measures.

Research Question Responses

Within this study, there was one central research question and two sub-questions. Utilizing three different data collection methods (survey/written response, interviews, and focus group), I was able to obtain detailed descriptions from the participants that provided answers to the three stated research questions. Below I will further discuss the themes that emerged during data analysis, breaking them down by the research question they applied to. Quotes from participants are used to solidify themes and provide additional information to answer research questions.

Central Question

The central research question asked, "How do master of social work students describe their experience with role conflict?" This central research question observed the MSW student experience with role conflict. When describing their experience with role conflict during their MSW journey, participants reported (a) mental health complications and (b) hierarchy between roles.

Mental Health Complications

Eleven participants in the study reported feeling many undesirable emotional complications during their MSW journeys. While some participants reported suppressing feelings leading to emotional breakdowns during inconvenient situations, others reported

feelings of hopelessness with a desire to quit their program or leave the field of social work. While the majority of the participants spoke about the importance of maintaining good mental health, those same participants also report struggling to maintain a healthy emotional disposition. As the participants discussed the mental health complications they experienced during their MSW journey; the most prevalent complications were (a) burnout and (b) distress.

Burnout. This subtheme emerged as participants reported their MSW journey being so complicated and strenuous that they wanted to walk away from the field of social work and no longer cared about graduating. Ebony stated:

> I was a full-time student, full-time intern, part-time sales consultant, and part-time mental health counselor for adults for two separate agencies. The light seemed dim during my grad school term and at times I questioned if I would make it to the finish line. It was very difficult, and I had a lot of crying spells.

During the focus group, Jasmine spoke about the conflict between all of her various roles, but specifically how her role as romantic partner negatively impacted her roles as student; she stated, “Trying to balance everything was very difficult. Like, honestly I could have probably just quit the whole program because of how much stress I was going through,” to which Sally replied, “When we’re falling apart, we can’t help other people. So, like, the more we feel unbalanced, we can’t do our jobs. So, making sure we find that balance is so important for social work.” Within the written response in the survey, Denise stated,

> Balancing time and self-care were not even considered for interns which lead to burn out. This burn out feeling impacted my free time, family time, and personal life. I really felt like I took home all the workload and not sleep because my mind could not stop thinking of how to improve their lives.

The latter section of Denise's statement referred to the domestic violence population (adults and children) she worked with at her internship.

Distress. While some participants reported feelings of burnout and wanting to quit their MSW program, others just reported experiencing massive amounts of stress with no relief during their journey. The reported that distress was often emotional/mental, but a few participants also reported experiencing distress in the physical/health category. Ebony stated:

> I worked for two separate mental health agencies, was a full-time student, worked as a graduate assistant, worked at a local hospital for my internship, and was also the mediator for issues that arose within my family. I was spreading myself thin; I found myself exhausted a lot. My sleep was limited and as a result of all the stress, I lost a significant amount of weight. I entered my MSW program weighing 140 pounds and graduated weighing 115 pounds.

Ebony also reported averaging less than 5 hours of sleep per night and snacking for nourishment due to having such limited time to sleep or prepare full meals.

Within the written response on the survey, Megan stated,

> Obtaining my MSW was probably the most stressful journey I've been on thus far in life. The demands of classwork, personal life, working full time, and completing my internship was a lot. Doing my MSW program online made it even more difficult when I needed help.

Leah stated, "My MSW program was very rigorous. My mental and emotional health were greatly impacted and as a single parent, my time with my son was strained." Laura gave her take on being burnt out before even entering the field due to stress. She stated,

> My experience with getting my MSW was stressful. I had to maintain my home on little to no income. I was expected to work 24 hours a week free at my internship, on top of completing research projects, papers, reading, etc. What made it worse was how much I had to do for school but at the end the day, if I'm not working, I'm not going to be able to live and provide for my child, myself, or eat; so that's another demand. I didn't handle it very well; I was breaking down.

Laura provided insight into her perspective at that time, stating that she felt overwhelmed and like the professors did not really care about how strenuous the program was for students or that students were really struggling to maintain. Alyssa stated:

> During my MSW journey, I was a student, intern, working full time and part time, and also nannying for a military family. I have no idea how I did all of that. I was drained; I felt like I was running on fumes. It was a lot to balance, I was up at 6 every morning and most times I wouldn't get to bed until 4 am the next morning, just to have to do it all over again. So, it just felt like my body was always on go and mind was always rolling.

Hierarchy between Roles

When providing an account of the different roles they held during their MSW journeys, participants provided detail on their perception of the importance of each of their roles. How participants chose to prioritize their roles varied across the group. For example, when speaking about how she prioritized her roles (student, intern, mother, employee, sister, daughter, and friend), Laura stated:

> Of course, being a mother comes first. I had to make sure my child was taken care of while I was in school or interning. So, like school and interning kind of came second and

> then my job came third. My responsibility as a mother is the most important thing; I can't neglect that at any time.

Even though Laura spoke about her role as a mother being most important to her, she spoke about her struggle balancing her roles and the interrole conflict that arose. She added,

> It was very stressful and frustrating, to be honest. My role as a mother and then like trying to go to school, and then trying to work to make sure that I could take care of my household; those were the roles that competed the most. It was so stressful trying to prioritize like, what come first because at the end of the day, If I'm not working, I'm not going to be able to love and provide for my child, myself, or eat.

Multiple participants had children or were caregivers to others during their MSW journey but had a difference of perception as it pertains to hierarchy between their roles. For example, when asked about how she prioritized her roles (student, intern, spouse, parent, and employee), Stephanie stated,

> Work always came first because, you know, that's what pays the bills. So, you know, that was at the top. I feel like my family and school were probably running neck and neck, but I feel like I was often making the decision to do my schoolwork. Even during the holidays, like Mother's Day, we would probably go out to get a meal or order in but that was it. After that I'd be kind of off to myself doing what I do.

Stephanie also shared that she experienced remorse due to her situation and feeling that she had to put employment and school over family. Stephanie stated,

> I started feeling kind of selfish in a way. My daughter would want to cuddle and do stuff with me and there were days when I would tell her that I couldn't do it. I was like wow

she's so young and I won't be able to get this time back. It was stressful. I'm not gonna lie, I probably cried more during that time than I've ever had.

Sub-question 1

The next research question asked, "How do master of social work students manage the demands of multiple roles?" This research question observed how MSW students managed the demands of their multiple roles. Participants managed the demands of their roles by (a) sacrifice and (b) organization.

Sacrifice

Multiple participants disclosed that they felt as though they had to give up something in order to get through their MSW journey. Participants expressed feeling extreme stress due the interrole conflict present between the student and intern roles alongside the roles they held in their personal lives which consisted of spouse, partner, employee, parent, and caregiver. The subthemes for sacrifice are (a) loss within family/friends, (b) loss of personal time, and (c) income concerns.

Loss within Family/Friends. When asked how they managed the demands of all their roles, some of the participants expressed sacrificing family time to either complete coursework or obtain their internship hours. Stephanie stated,

> I would often feel exhausted at work. I do believe my daughter suffered some as well. I recall consistently telling her I couldn't cuddle or play games because I had work to do. My husband definitely carried the bulk of the weight at home; like household chores and helping daughter with homework. I found myself emotionally drained often and just emotional in general trying to keep up with everything.

Like Stephanie, Sally also mentioned that the demands she experienced caused some strain on her partner. Sally stated,

> The MSW program not only challenged my mental health, causing me to at one point have to take a break, but it also put strain on my marriage, which ended completely shortly after graduating. Throughout the program it was difficult to discern which role to prioritize.

Denise shared an interesting perspective about her experience at her internship in relation to her duties as a mother. She stated,

> I also found it hard it comply with the nighttime sessions for the parents while my child had not seen me all day. Some time I would feel guilty for spending 8–10 hours with the children at the internship when my child could not get much of my time or attention because I was exhausted from the internship.

Joy also spoke about her experience of balancing the demands of her MSW program with her role as a mother of three sons. She stated, "I was still able to maintain my household; however, my sons had to learn to be self-sufficient. It was a sacrifice for us all."

Leah, another one of the participants who also held the role of parent, spoke about how taxing the interrole conflict was for her: "My mental and emotional health were greatly impacted and as a single parent, my time with my son was strained."

When asked, Ebony spoke about the struggles of balancing the demands of multiple roles and how it caused her to sacrifice having a social life:

> I didn't really have time for a social life. I'd probably be able to try to coordinate with my friends maybe once every three to four months, but it was really hard to be able to have a social life during that time; with all the responsibility I had at that time.

Loss of Personal Time. A few of the participants also spoke of loss of personal time, whether it was having to cancel a vacation, going on vacation and not being able to enjoy it because they were doing coursework, lack of personal time, and feeling overwhelmed due to lack of personal time. Megan stated, "Each day after work I would spend hours completing discussions and assignments. Most of my weekends were spend completing papers or other assignments. This left very little room for personal time and self-care."

Denise spoke about the sacrifice of time and how it impacted her emotionally and physically:

> Balancing time and self-care were not considered for interns. This burned-out feeling impacted my free time, family time, and personal time. I really felt like I took home all the workload and could not sleep because my mind could not stop thinking of how to improve their [clients at internship] lives.

In addition to Megan and Denise, Ebony also provided information pertaining to lack of personal time. Ebony stated that she spent so much time balancing her jobs, internship, and school that sometimes she would have to work overnight. When she did get to sleep, she stated,

> I would have a caramel macchiato from Dunkin Donuts with like three espresso shots and I will probably stay up until like 2 am or 3 am completing work. I would then get a few hours of sleep and then wake up at 7 am to begin the cycle again. I worked on weekends also. I had to sacrifice.

Ebony experienced loss of time in multiple areas; she also spoke about not having time to have a social life and having to schedule meeting up with her friends 3 months in advance.

Income. A majority of the participants provided information related to the financial category. Participants spoke of having to work multiple jobs, experiencing financial difficulty

due to not having enough time to work, or not being able to alleviate interrole conflict related to work–school balance because they could not afford to stop working. To share a few examples, when asked about her experience, Leah stated,

> Due to the demand of the program and internship requirements, I had to resign from my fulltime job. This caused me to have to live off of excessive student loans as well as do a fundraiser to address financial crisis.

Alyssa was a participant who held three jobs on top of completing time at her internship in order to support herself. She reported, “I was drained. I felt like I was running on fumes. It was just always something.”

Stephanie spoke about prioritizing her role as employee above her other roles because “that pays the bills.” Although Stephanie felt as though that income was detrimental to her family, she expressed remorse over working so much and feeling like she was “missing out” when it came to her family.

In Sally’s case, letting go of employment was not an option for her so she decided to stop going to school for a brief period of time. She stated,

> So, I was an intern, and it was unpaid. So, I was also working two jobs when I wasn’t interning or in class. I was also married at that time, so I had the role of being a wife, and taking care of the house. Balancing all the demands was just kind of madness. It was very difficult. At one point, I had to take a break from school because I was not managing everything well. And that was kind of a big awakening that even though I was doing all these roles, I wasn’t really doing them at 100%.

Organization

When talking about how they managed the demands of multiple roles, participants also expressed having to establish some form of organization and maintain it in order to successfully complete their MSW program. Participants expressed establishing organization in a variety of ways. When speaking about dealing with the demands of her roles, Andrea stated,

> So, I had to prioritize, like look at what's coming up and figure out how I'm gonna do it. Even though my children were independent, I still was doing two jobs and running a household; so, I had to plan.

Jasmine spoke to the importance of organization by stating, "It was a lot to figure out. Honestly, I was one of those ones that actually tried to prioritize by putting things in my planner; and I would check off my goals and things as I got through them." She explained, "My planner and highlighter were my friends."

Another participant that held a mindset similar to that of Jasmine was Sally. When speaking about organization, Sally stated, "I'm old school and I love my paper planner. So, I would write out literally every frickin thing. I feel like I had one for work and one for my personal life." Jane also reported using planners and highlighters as a method of staying organized but also reported that color coding her different tasks helped her remain organized during her MSW journey.

Sub-question 2

The last sub-question asked, "How does self-care influence role conflict for master of social work students?" This research question observed how self-care impacted role conflict for MSW students. All participants were able to provide a definition of what self-care meant to them personally. All participants also spoke to being taught during coursework that self-care was a

necessary tactic, but students also reported not having time to engage in it or not being taught how to engage in it. The theme found within the data for Sub-question 2 was impossible attainment.

Impossible Attainment

Not only were the participants in the study able to give definitions of what self-care was to them, they also reported self-care measures that they would either like to partake in or self-care measures they had been implementing. Two issues arose when speaking about the impact of self-care on role conflict for students. The two issues became the subthemes for this section and are (a) lack of time and (b) insufficient education.

Lack of Time/Insufficient Education. When it came to self-care, there was a general consensus among participants that if they had adequate time to engage in self-care, they believed managed role conflict would have been less stressful. Jane reported engaging in self-care techniques such as meditation, using binaural beats, and journaling. Although she engaged in some self-care, she reported not doing it enough for it to have a positive impact on the stress she experienced. When asked why she did not implement self-care more, Jane responded,

> Yes, I could have engaged in self-care a lot more than I did but I had no time. There's so much pressure, there's so much push from every class and from every professor, not every professor is as empathetic as others are. They don't care. They just want you to push through the program.

Stephanie provided details on what self-care meant to her and how at first, she thought she needed days for self-care but throughout her program she became thankful to have 5–10 minutes to herself because she felt as though all of her time was accounted for. Even though she stated she was grateful for a few minutes of self-care, when asked how often she engaged in self-

care, she reported, “If I’m gonna go off of a percentage, I don’t even know if I’d say 20% and I’m speaking for across my whole MSW journey. Because I was always doing something.”

When asked about her definition of self-care, Laura stated that self-care was “something that people encourage you to do but no one really tells you how to do it or how to prioritize doing it.” When asked to give detail on her experience with self-care, she stated,

> I didn’t engage in self-care enough because I was so stressed, so frustrated, and I was breaking down a lot. That’s how I know I wasn’t taking care of myself. You know how when you first started school and professors taught on how self-care is so important? But then outside of school they pile on all this work, all these assignments, all this stuff you have to do in order to graduate.

Textural Description

The textural description of a transcendental phenomenological study describes the “what” of a study from the perspective of the participants. Using the participants’ words and experiences, I created a textural description of the MSW student’s experience with interrole conflict during their academic journey. When describing their MSW journeys, participants used words such as “a lot, conflict, and pressure.” Participants stated that they were told to engage in self-care but were then given so many assignments and papers to complete in addition to having to dedicate a significant amount of unpaid time to an internship. Participants who were also parents spoke about having to sacrifice precious time with their children in order to complete coursework or obtain their internship hours. Participants who were married or had partners spoke about the program putting strain on their relationship; one of the participants stated that it led to divorce shortly after she graduated.

The participants also stated that they were taught in their programs that engaging in self-care was necessary, but they were not afforded adequate time to sufficiently engage in self-care. Multiple participants also reported not being taught the proper way to engage in self-care or how to build and prioritize it amongst their other various roles. Participants spoke about the conflict between finding balance as they struggled to work to support themselves and their families as well as dedicate multiple hours at their internships. Overall, participants described their MSW programs as rigorous.

Structural Description

The structural description in a transcendental phenomenological study describes how participants experienced a certain phenomenon. Reflecting on participant data, I have provided a structural description of how the participants experienced their MSW program. When describing how the participants experienced their journeys, the participants used words such as "stressful, strenuous, anxiety, traumatic, survival, and frustrating." When participants described how they experienced their MSW programs, all except one described their experiences as stressful, with a few even stating that they considered quitting and one actually suspended her enrollment at one point to take a break from the program. Multiple students reported having to "pull all-nighters" and running on 4 to 5 hours of sleep each day during their program due to all the role conflict they experienced.

One participant reported being so stressed that she lost a significant amount of weight during her program due to not having enough time to eat properly while three other participants reporting feeling so overwhelmed that they began to have "numerous breakdowns." Participants reported feeling like they could not even properly rest at home because their minds were either "thinking about some assignment they had to complete or the clients they worked with at their

internships." Although participants reported their experience as stressful, when asked how they got through it, the majority of them talked about how they planned, by using planners, highlighters, and color coding their tasks. Organization was a major theme that presented from the data when exploring how participants managed the demands of multiple conflicting roles.

Textural-Structural Description

Overall, participants reported that it was extremely stressful trying to balance attending classes, completing coursework, spending multiple hours a week at an internship, working to support themselves and their families, spending time with their children and partners, dealing with the emotional stress from their internship, and engaging in self-care. Participants still reported high regard for their field and are passionate about the work they do as social workers but expressed that their MSW journey was one of the "most difficult points in their lives." I also found that while participants described the MSW journey as being extremely "stressful, frustrating, and traumatizing," they did whatever was necessary to complete it, whether it was sacrificing quality time with family and friends or sacrificing time to engage in self-care measures. Some participants described their MSW journey as a period of survival and spoke about having to take things step by step in order to make it through. When speaking about taking things step by step, one participant spoke about having to encourage herself to do everything from "waking up, putting her feet on the floor, brushing her teeth, taking a shower and getting dressed" due to how mentally exhausted she was. Since graduating, the participants report being "glad" that their MSW experience is behind them and stated they have obtained a sense of perseverance from it.

Summary

In this chapter I provided an account of the data obtained from the three data collection methods. I also presented the data in a manner that provided answers to the established research questions. From the data I relayed relevant themes and subthemes that emerged during data analysis. The themes and subthemes that emerged within the data were mental health complications (subthemes: burnout and distress), hierarchy between roles, sacrifice (subthemes: loss within family/friends, loss of personal time, income concerns), organization, and impossible attainment (subthemes: lack of time and insufficient education). Through these themes and subthemes, I provided participant quotations to relay the essences of the participant experience through their own words. Textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions were provided to further portray the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. In the following chapter, I will provide an interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the master of social work (MSW) students' experience with interrole conflict. Within this chapter I provide a brief summary of the findings. I then provide a discussion of the findings from my perspective. After the discussion, I detail implications, delimitations/limitations, relevance of the findings in relation to the literature and selected theories, and lastly, I also provide recommendations for future studies.

Summary of Findings

This study consisted of 12 participants. All 12 participants completed the survey portion of the study, 10 completed the interviews, and four participated in the focus group. All of the participants identified as female. Of the 12 participants, nine identified as African American, two identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Latino. Data from the study showed that the majority of the participants (11) viewed their MSW journeys as stressful and rigorous. Participants spoke to the role conflict they experienced as they attempted to balance their roles as student and intern with other roles such as employee, parent, spouse, partner, and caregiver. Below I will provide a brief summary of the findings as it pertains to the research questions.

The central research question asked, "How do master of social work students describe their experience with role conflict?" The majority of the participants (11) described their MSW journey as stressful. Other words that participants used to describe their MSW journey were strenuous, frustrating, anxiety, and traumatic. Some participants (4) spoke about experiencing financial crisis as a result of not having time to work due to how demanding the MSW program was while other participants (6) spoke about experiencing turmoil within their families due to not

having enough time to spend quality time. When it came to spending quality time with their families, participants expressed remorse over missing out on family time but stated that they were so overwhelmed with schoolwork or trying to secure their internship hours, they felt as though they had no other choice.

The first sub-question asked, “How do master of social work students manage the demands of multiple roles?” The data revealed that participants (5) managed the demands of their various roles by utilizing organization tools such as planners, prioritizing certain roles, and sacrificing. Participants (8) reported prioritizing their role as intern and therefore deciding to spend less time at paid positions in order to complete the weekly requirement of 21 hours per week at their internship. Participants (6) also reported sacrificing quality time with their children, family, and friends in order to complete assignments, or dedicate more time to their internship demands.

The second sub-question asked, “How does self-care influence role conflict for master of social work students?” The majority (11) of the participants stated that while they were taught in multiple courses that self-care was vital to longevity and a successful academic journey, they were not taught how to implement self-care amongst the vast range of tasks they already had to complete. A Majority (11) of the participants also stated that although their professors encouraged them to engage in self-care, those same professors would assign them so many assignments that they would not have time to engage in self-care activities.

Discussion

This study supports the current literature that speaks about the difficulty of balancing multiple roles (Curl & Benner, 2017; Kremer, 2016) and also the impact that self-care can have on stress for students (Smullens, 2015). The current study goes further to bridge the gap in

literature as it pertains to the interrole conflict experienced by MSW students. In this section, I will discuss how the current study ties into current literature.

Theoretical

Functional role theory is attributed to the work of Linton (1936) and Parsons (1951). Role theory states that role is a construct of society in which people who hold specific roles are expected to perform certain tasks (Biddle, 1986). A component of role theory is the concept of role conflict, which can be defined as "the concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible expectations for the behavior of a person" (Biddle, 1986, p. 82). Further, role conflict can be broken down to specifics types. For the purposes of this study, I focused on interrole conflict. Interrole conflict occurs when an individual holds multiple roles and the needs of one role clash or disagree with the requirements of the other role(s) (Cheng & McCarthy, 2013).

Interrole conflict was chosen because I wanted to explore the lived experience of MSW students during their academic journeys and how they managed the responsibilities of multiple roles. The results support the current literature which states that the impact of interrole conflict is so significant that it puts stress/strain on an individual's available emotional and cognitive resources, leading them to believe that they are incapable of managing or balancing all of their responsibilities (Netemeyer et al., 2005). Ebony, Sally, and Jasmine reported they were overwhelmed due to the role conflict they were experiencing and therefore considered dropping out because they did not believe they could handle it. Sally then stated that she did end up leaving her MSW program for a period of time because she "was not handling it well." Existing literature states that attempting to balance the responsibilities that go along with family, work, and school is an extreme task that is very challenging (Kremer, 2016). Accounts from participants like Laura support the current literature as she stated her MSW journey was stressful

as she was trying to juggle being a mother, going to school, and working, but she knew that she could not sacrifice work: “If I’m not working, I’m not going to be able to live and provide for my child, myself, or eat.” The literature also states that in an attempt to manage the responsibilities of varying roles, a person will attempt to maintain or obtain new resources to assist them in meeting that goal; when those resources are lost or threatened, the individual will experience stress or strain (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). The current study not only supports this but adds onto it by detailing the experience of MSW students and providing accounts of the experience from their point of view. A majority of the students reported being extremely stressed out during their academic journey. When analyzing the data, one of the main things I noticed is that none of the students reported their tasks as difficult to perform; it was the amount of tasks, lack of time, and conflict that made the situation overwhelming and stressful for the participants.

Dorothea Orem’s theory of self-care (2001) focuses on the actual acts or engagement of self-care, with self-care being those acts taken independently to maintain health and well-being. Orem (2001) discussed the importance of engaging in self-care in order to maintain being a healthy human being. The current literature also states that engaging in self-care protects students from developing mental/emotional conditions and leads to them having a more positive collegiate experience than students who do not engage in self-care (Collins, 2021; Smullens, 2015). All participants reported being told or taught by professors that self-care was vital for longevity and that they should prioritize self-care as they progress through their program; however, a majority (11) of those same participants also stated that with all the demands they had to meet, they did not have time to engage in self-care. Participants also stated that they were not taught how to engage in or prioritize self-care measures during their MSW journeys. This study confirms the current literature that states that individuals who do not engage in self-care

are more prone to negative collegiate experiences and developing mental/emotional complications; as noted in Chapter Four, multiple students reported feelings of burnout, being overwhelmed, and being stressed.

Empirical

This study provides a deeper look into the prospective of MSW students and how they perceive the graduate social work academic journey. The information provided by the participants expands on the current literature that talks about the interrole conflict for students who work and also how self-care can impact their collegiate experience (Griffiths et al., 2019; Napoli & Bonifas, 2013; Smullens, 2015). Furthermore, this study begins to narrow the gap in literature that provides specific details on the interrole conflict that graduate social work students experience and how it impacts them and their families. The data from the study shed light on how the interrole conflict impacted the participants, how they managed the demands of their various roles, and how the participants felt as though it were pointless to be "taught about the importance of self-care by the same program that then piles on so many assignments, papers, and internship hours."

A majority (11) of the participants reported feelings of anxiety, stress, burnout, and being overwhelmed. Participants provided details on the hardship of trying to balance the demands of all their different roles and the emotional turmoil it caused as they felt as though they had no free time. The participants' responses supported the current literature which states that some of the most commonly reported causes for student psychological and emotional distress are lack of financial certainty, poor employment prospects, increased pressure to do well, technological overload, and programs of study with a substantial practicum component (Deasy et al., 2014; Stixrud, 2012).

Another interesting theme that emerged from the data was the participants choosing to prioritize certain roles over others; hierarchy status varied by participants. While some participants stated that their role as parent came first, others chose to prioritize their role as paid employee, intern, or student. The emotional response that participants had based on how they chose to prioritize their roles also varied. While some participants reported feeling like they were doing what needed to be done to support their families, others reported feeling stressed and remorseful over having to prioritize other roles over their families. Kremer (2016) provided information on the struggle of trying to balance all the responsibilities that go along with family, work, and school, stating that it is an extremely difficult task that can lead to stress or strain if not handled properly. This study supports the current literature and adds to it, providing a deeper look into the mindset of why individuals choose to prioritize certain roles over others and the impact that decision can cause.

Along with prioritizing certain roles over others, the participants stated that they also had to sacrifice in order to manage the demands of their multiple roles. Participants expressed choosing to or feeling as though they had to sacrifice different things in order to make it through their MSW programs. For example, some students sacrificed sleep in order to be able to work, complete their internship, attend classes, and complete their coursework; with this sacrifice, participants reported running off of 4 hours of sleep per day for extended periods of time. Other participants reported sacrificing quality time with their families and friends in order to complete the responsibilities of their academic roles. Lastly, there was one participant who decided to quit her paid position of employment and take on additional student loan debt in order to support herself through school but expressed remorse for having to do so. Within this theme of sacrifice, topics of financial insecurity, physical consequences, and loss of quality time also emerged. This

is consistent with current literature such as that of Elliott and Lewis (2015), which states financial situations often lead students to make sacrifices such as losing sleep to work odd hours or taking out extra student loans, which can cause even more problems in the future. Current literature also states that physical self-care consisting of physical activity, eating balanced meals, and attending regularly scheduled doctor appointments are vital for student well-being (Smullens, 2015).

The idea of organization is one that was not widely discussed in the current literature as it pertains to dealing with interrole conflict; therefore, the current study can be used to add to the literature. Multiple participants stated that being organized helped significantly with them progressing through their MSW journeys. Participants provided details on how using planners, highlighters, color coding, and creating daily schedules proved beneficial in helping them complete all tasks required of them.

Last amongst the themes that emerged within the data is the idea of feeling like adequate self-care was unattainable. As stated previously, self-care is a necessary step in becoming and maintaining a healthy functioning individual (Orem, 2001). Orem (2001) also stated that when there is a deficit in self-care, it can cause adverse effects; these effects can be physical, emotional, mental, or professional (Smullens, 2015). Participants in the study voiced resentment over being taught the importance of self-care in courses and being urged to engage in it but then also having their curriculum require so much of them, leading them to feel as if they have no extra time for self-care. All participants stated that they would have liked to have had more time for self-care but they felt as though engaging in self-care was not truly an option for them during their academic journey. Participants also noted that if they did take time to engage in self-care, it

was something that had to be scheduled months in advance or they would have to sacrifice in other areas such as quality time with children or spouses in order to engage in it.

Implications

The current study provides beneficial data whether it be for current students, prospective students, researchers, or colleges. The data obtained from this study add to the current knowledge base by filling in a gap in the literature and also expanding on current literature that relates to interrole conflict or self-care for students. Below you will find the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study.

Theoretical

The findings in this study are important for theory because it can be used to support what is currently available as it pertains to the topic of role conflict. Although there is information available for role conflict in general, there is little to no information available on how role conflicts impacts students and more specifically graduate social work students. Benner and Curl (2018) stated that employed college students are at higher risk for burnout and that working more than 20 hours per week while attending college harms the college experience. With this in mind, all of the participants had to complete an internship (21 hours of unpaid work per week) and all of the participants also reported working to support themselves or their family during their MSW journey, which was in addition to the 21 hours of internship work per week.

Empirical

As stated previously, there is little to no literature that addresses role conflict experienced by graduate social work students. The information provided by the participants can be used to add to the current knowledge base, allowing readers or other researchers the opportunity to dive deeper into what it is to be a graduate student in a social work program. This information is vital

because it offers a look into the social work field from another perspective: that of the graduate student. Since graduate students are expected to do some of the same tasks as working professionals, it is important to note what that experience is like for them. As stated in Chapter Two, there is information out about how there can be conflict between work–family, work–school, and work–family–school (Kremer, 2016), but there is no information that ties all of those areas together and makes it specific to the field of social work, yet there should be. Graduate social work students are introduced to a plethora of new situations and expected to simply adjust and maintain. The participants spoke of having their internships at domestic violence shelters, homeless shelters, and mental health facilities and the struggles of trying not to take work home with them but being worried about their patients even after leaving their internships. The participants also spoke about how the demands of their MSW journeys caused strained on their financial and familial situations.

Some participants spoke about sacrificing sleep and functioning on 4 hours of sleep per night just so they could work to support themselves, while others spoke of taking on additional student loans to support themselves. Whether students chose to sacrifice sleep or take on additional debt, the participants spoke of the experience in a negative light. As for the familial impact that occurred, one participant spoke of going through a divorce shortly after graduating, while other participants spoke of feeling guilty for sacrificing family time to fulfill the demands of being a student and intern. This information is important to know for prospective graduate social work students and/or their families so that they can have a glimpse into what to expect during the academic journey.

Practical

The information provided by the participants can be used to support the argument of the need to implement interventions for MSW students. The information can also be used to call for program evaluation or curriculum review. A majority (11 of 12) of the participants in this study described their MSW in a negative light when speaking about the role conflict that they experienced while trying to obtain their MSW. If colleges and universities are able to take information from MSW students, like the information offered in this study, and conduct further research into how to make the experience more tolerable for students, it could prove to benefit not only the students but also the colleges. Taking the time to listen to and consider the hardship that MSW students report and then implementing interventions to assist them can make schools more attractive to prospective graduate social work students. The information in this study can also be used by prospective MSW students as a warning of what to plan for. Prospective students can take the information provided in this study and speak with advisors about how best to plan classes in order to avoid being overwhelmed with work. Those students can also work on establishing self-care measures that can be easily implemented or continued when they start their MSW program. Self-care measures can be as simple as speaking with loved ones about what to expect or how to divide tasks to lessen the impact of role conflict for the prospective student.

Delimitations and Limitations

When it came to obtaining participants for the study, I placed the following eligibility criteria: (a) graduated from a MSW journey within the past 5 years, (b) live in the United States, and (c) express experience dealing with interrole conflict during their MSW journey. I excluded individuals who met the criteria but were under the age of 18 in order to avoid the complications that may arise with working with minors. The reason I set the criteria in place was because I

wanted to obtain recent information and I wanted participants to be able to adequately recall their experience, hence the 5-year stipulation. I placed the criterion of living in the United States to make engaging with the participants easier for myself and not having to worry about major conflicts between time zones. Lastly, although all students have multiple roles during their MSW journey (student, intern, adult) they may not be aware of the term interrole conflict and therefore not able to provide rich information on the concept. For this reason, I also implemented in the eligibility criterion that prospective participants express experience with interrole conflict during their MSW journeys. As for participant recruitment, I utilized social media, specifically two Facebook groups (Black Therapist Rock and VCU School of Social Work-Student and Alumni Network). I utilized these two Facebook groups because they house individuals who are social workers or who know social workers. I believe that this allowed me to obtain participants easily.

As for limitations of my study, the first one I will note is that all of my participants identified as female. This impacts transferability because there was no participant that could provide information from the male perspective. The majority of the participants (all except one) attended graduate school in Virginia; while I do not believe there would be much difference if participants attended programs in different states, it would have been nice to have participants from different states to rule that out. It would have been nice to have more of a mix of traditional and online students as well to be able to note if there is a difference in experience due to program type. There was only one participant who attended her MSW program online.

Recommendations for Future Research

For future research, I would first suggest completing the same study but aiming to obtain a larger participant pool to include all genders, a mix of traditional and online students, and students who attended MSW programs across different states. I believe that in doing so, we will

be able to obtain data that are more transferable. Once we get a more diverse population, I think future research should explore if role conflict differs based on the type of internship the student has. For example, do MSW students who completed their internship at a psychiatric facility report more distress than students who completed their internship at a school? Or do students who completed their internship at a hospice facility report more distress than students who completed their internship at a homeless shelter? For this type of study, I believe the researcher should engage in a quantitative or mixed methods study as it would be interesting to not only obtain details of the participants' different experiences but also be able to quantify the stress levels between the different participants.

There are so many different directions that the research can go when looking at the MSW experience; for example, what factor is most likely causing the distress for students? Is it the amount of work, the type of internship, or lack of self-care? Regardless of what the cause is, future research should also aim to discover if there is any intervention that can provide relief. This type of research would need to be quantitative, and specifically, experimental. All of these potential research opportunities will be beneficial to future social work students and higher education institutions.

Summary

This study explored the lived experience of graduate social work students, paying specific attention to the interrole conflict they experienced during their academic journey. Participants provided details on how they felt emotionally, mentally, and physically throughout their MSW journeys. Participants also provided information on how the MSW impacted their financial status and relationships with family and friends. Overall, participants described their MSW journeys as stressful and overwhelming, yet they had so much dedication to the field that

they pushed through in order to graduate. In conducting this research, two things stood out to me above all. The first is that some of the participants were willing to sacrifice whatever it took in order to obtain their MSW degree; students sacrificed basic necessities such as sleep and food in order to obtain their degree, which led one of the participants to experience a major weight decrease due to lack of proper nutrition. Other participants stated that although they felt guilty for doing so, they sacrificed quality time with their children and families in order to complete other school or intern related tasks. With the participants choosing to sacrifice these different things, the common factor was that they felt as though they had no other choice and thus dealt with the stress that came along with the situation.

The second thing that stood out to me is that all of the participants stated that they were taught in multiple courses that self-care was important, that they should engage in it to ensure longevity and success in the field, and that they should prioritize it while going through their academic journey; however, they were not taught how to engage in self-care or how to implement it amongst everything else they had to do. It amazed me that participants stated that if they had more time for self-care they believe the stress from the role conflict would have been less overwhelming, yet they continued on through the experience without it. As stated earlier, colleges should find some way to implement interventions for the students in order to provide some form of relief, especially since the importance of self-care is being taught in so many courses. It is my hope that the information provided in this study will be used as part of the beginning stages of curriculum review followed by revision for future social work students.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

The consent form is embedded in the survey that can be seen at the link below
[Link removed for publication purposes]

The survey components have been copied and pasted below for easy viewing purposes.

Section 1

You are being asked to take part in a research study of social work students' perception of interrole conflict and self-care within graduate social work programs. I am requesting that you take part because you have graduated from a MSW program within the last five years.

What the study is about: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore graduate social work students' experience with interrole conflict and self-care during their graduate academic journey.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an one on one interview with you, ask if you would like to participate in a focus group, and ask that you complete a short document detailing your academic experience. The interviews will include questions about your experience with interrole conflict during your graduate academic journey, how you managed the responsibility of all your roles, and how (if any) self-care influenced your experience. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview. The short document will have a 200-word minimum (one paragraph) with no maximum guideline asking that you provide details on your experience.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.
There are no benefits to you other than learning more about teacher perceptions of the value of homework for children in primary grades.

Compensation: There is no compensation provided for participation in this study.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the recording after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Nikol Downing. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Nikol Downing at ngarcia22@liberty.edu or at [redacted].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 434.592.4309 or access their website at http://www.libertyuniversityonline.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study. In consenting to participating in this study, you are also agreeing to being tape recorded during the interview and focus group.

Section 2

Demographics

Please list your age

Please list your gender

Please list your race

Please list your household income (during your MSW journey)

Please list the year your graduated from your MSW program

Section 3
Open ended survey

Please provide detail in your own words of your MSW experience. You may talk about anything that you deem relevant to your experience. You may speak about your emotional status and attending courses and working in the field during your internship impacted you. You may speak on how your personal relationships (romantic partner, children, friends, family, or employment) were impacted during your MSW journey.

Section 4

Scheduling

Please provide me with four different days and times you will be available to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will be conducted via zoom and should last approximately 30-40 minutes.

If you would like to participate in the focus group interview (consisting of four participants and conducted via zoom) I will ask that you respect all participants by not sharing their identity and linking any information relayed in the group directly to them. This is a safe space and I am working to maintain confidentiality for all participants. Do you wish to participate in the focus group?

Do you agree to the terms of the focus group that were presented in question 7?

Are you available on 11/15/2020 at 11am (place holder)? If yes, please type yes below. If you are not available during that time, please provide me with three different times you will be available.

Section 5

End of Survey

Thank you for participating in this study. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time by emailing me at ngarcia22@liberty.com and stating you wish to withdraw. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me.

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Hello All!

Are you a social worker? Have you graduated from an MSW program within the last five years? During your MSW program did you also have to work to support yourself, take care of children, or maintain your duties as a spouse? If so, I would love to have you participate in my study.

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. My research study is entitled The Journey Towards Equilibrium: A Phenomenological Study of the MSW Student Experience and Interrole Conflict. Through conducting this study, I hope to explore the experience of balancing the responsibilities of being a student (attending classes and completing assignments), being an intern (dedicating numerous hours to unpaid work), and maintaining other roles such as parent, spouse, employee, etc. It is my hope that the information obtained through this study can be used as a first step in schools engaging in curriculum reviews and implementing changes to address the struggles this population faces.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey (approx. 30 mins), engage in a one on one interview (approx. 35-60 mins), and participate in a focus group interview (approx. 30-40 mins). Interviews will be recorded and conducted through zoom. During the study, you will be assigned with a pseudonym in which you will be referred to throughout the study; the pseudonym will also be used when reporting findings.

If you would like to participate in this study, please email me at ngarcia22@liberty.edu or respond to this post and I will send you more information.

Appendix C

IRB Approval

January 22, 2021

Nikol Downing
Jeremiah Koester

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-231 The Journey Towards Equilibrium: A Phenomenological Study of the Master of Social Work (MSW) Student Experience and Interrole Conflict

Dear Nikol Downing, Jeremiah Koester:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:
101(b):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix D

Sample Interview Transcription

Me:
All right, so my name is Nikol. I am conducting this research for my doctorate. If you can, please start off by introducing yourself to me, that would be great.

Interviewee:
Okay, my name is ***. So. I am medical social worker at a local hospital in ****area. I went to my undergrad and I obtained my bachelor's in psychology. And then I pursued my master's in clinical social work with a military concentration at ***. And I have also worked at a behavioral home within ****, as through a company called East villages. So, I've been in the social work field, probably, since about 2016.

Me:
Can you tell me your interest in participating in a study?

Interviewee:
So, I'm very passionate when it comes to the role of a social worker. So, I always desire and am willing to assist and help others. So in regards to the study, it's like my interest in wanting to participate, is so that you can see the range of just the normal, you know, social worker, and what they may encounter with the challenges they may face. But despite the personal challenges, they still persevere to also assist others.

Me:
Okay, good. Can you tell me your understanding of the term interrole conflict?

Interviewee:
My understanding of interrole conflict could range from so essentially, with me, I am, again, I'm a medical social worker. So a huge part of my role as a care coordinator within the hospital is formulating discharge plans for patients that are sent to discharge or, you know, assist them with the family, and coordinating and doing assessments and getting background information. So with that, it could take a toll and of course, dealing with the families and the different dynamics, but yet, how I can involve in regards to the interrole conflict is my personal life and if that's not balanced, and, you know, having challenges within that it could it could become more challenging and being able to be successful in my role.

Me:
So, going along with that, and thinking about interrole conflict. Can you tell me about some of the different roles that you held while you were in your MSW program, and then some of the responsibilities of each of those roles?

Interviewee:
So originally, I am I was born in ***. And then I moved to *** after 9/11. So, from 9/11 going until about 2001, up until about three years ago, I've lived in ***, I'm the oldest of two, but I

have a total of 11 siblings total. My primary role while I still resided in ***, with my family, with me being the oldest, the role of the oldest have the highest responsibility. Essentially, you you can wear the hat of a mom, you can wear the hat of a dad, you have multiple hats that you wear, on top of, you know, whatever you may have going on personally. So a huge factor in me moving and wanting to pursue my Masters out of state was due to the numerous responsibilities that I held, while being at home and it almost stunted my ability to flourish and grow within my own, you know, my own desires and needs. So when I started my master's program, Here at *** back in 2017. At that, at that point, initially, my role was just to adapt to adjust. Because essentially, I would moving miles miles away, no family, no anything and starting over. Yet, going into the second year of my roles where I worked for two mental health agencies as a qualified mental health professional for adults. And then I also was full time as a, as a, you know, student for my master's program, I also was the graduate assistant for the program as well. And then I also was an intern at the local hospital that I ended up receiving the job once I concluded once I had received my degree. I was required to do 21 hours within that, as an intern within that hospital, on top of being full time, on top of also having two full time jobs within mental health agencies. So it and then I also had another part time job that I eventually ended up having to lower my load, because I was I was essentially doing too much. And I was spreading myself thin. I found myself, you know, exhausted a lot, I did a lot of overnight, just working on my work and having to catch up. So my sleep was limited. And as a result, I lost a significant amount of weight, just due to just you know, going going and going. And despite, you know, me going and going and despite, you know, the numerous roles that I did hold, I still maintained to, you know, have straight A's per semester, but it was very difficult. And it took a level of discernment, for sure to be able to do that.

Me:
Well, you definitely have a lot going on during your graduate study. So how did you balance all of that responsibility? Like, how did you prioritize what to do first? Or what was more important? Like what was how did you get through that?

Interviewee:
So how I will go about balancing? Essentially, My typical day to day. You know, of course, you know, waking up. The way I have my classes, I will probably have classes at least three or maybe four days a week. But then I also had my internship that, you know, of course, I would have to spread out four to five days a week, to ensure I got my 21 hours. So on the days that I had classes, you know, essentially it was start with me going to classes, getting off from classes go into both jobs. Well, I had clients, of course going to see my clients for both the agencies that I was with, and doing that. And then of course, coming home, reassessed and see what work I had to complete. And going from there. On the days that I just had, you know, classes. Then of course, you had the days where I had the internship, where it would start off with being at the internship, then leaving the internship, then go to see my clients for work, and then leaving my clients going home and assessing my work. So essentially, on average, I would probably be like, I would have a caramel macchiato from Dunkin Donuts with like two three espresso shots. And I will probably stay up overnight until about maybe two or three, and try to get at least a couple of hours of sleep before waking up around seven or eight to actually start my day. And that that was it. It was a rotation and the cycle that I continuously did. And so of course, when I had the additional role where I became the graduate assistant for the program, I also had to set aside

time, which oftentimes, I had to sacrifice, you know, my weekends because I would have to meet with the program director, we have to go through plans, coordinate, you know, of course, you know, coordinating events and reaching out to people and essentially, even you know, assist them with additional faculty and staff because, again, I was a graduate assistant for the whole program. So factor that in, you know, I didn't really have time for social life. I probably I'll probably be able to, like, you know, try to coordinate with my friends maybe once every three to four months, but it was really hard having to be able to have a social life during that time. With all that all the responsibility that I had at that time.

Me:
So how would you describe? How would you describe that experience when dealing with all of those roles? Like emotionally? Like, how did that impact you? emotionally?

Interviewee:
It was very difficult, I had a lot of crying spells. And then the thing about it is, I also had losses of significant family members during my time pursuing my master's, like the first month of me getting there, you know, started grad school, my grandmother passed away, and my grandma essentially had raised me, and I was very close to her. So that was hard. And, you know, I didn't really allow myself to address her passing. And so it was interesting, because I remember, like, the first semester, it was so many changes going into the grad school program, because of course, you know, we had new faculty, they started having this rule, where if you didn't have a doctorate, then you were unable to teach on a master's level. So of course, that caused like classes to change. But, you know, we started off with one professor, but ended up with a different professor. And it was so many, you know, significant changes in such a short amount of time. So having to adapt to that. It was interesting that at the end of that semester, we did this activity, where we essentially, had to summarize our first semester in grad school, and, you know, we had colors to identify how or, what was , the mood? Or how do we feel at that time, what were some of the feelings we had, and so initially, in doing activity, you know, just doing activity, not really thinking about it. But then, of course, when it came time to present, I actually broke down in front of the class, because, you know, when I addressed that I lost my grandmother, and then that later on, I had lost my aunt, as well, who I was also close to, I didn't realize how much it had really impacted me and how much it really affects me, because I never allow myself to truly heal or to truly grieve both those passings. And because I was so focused and tunnel vision in regards to, you know, I'm here, you know, I gotta get this done, I gotta do this, I got to do that. So for me, I almost, you know, I forgot how to live. And I forgotten how to truly, you know, be be at peace. Because, you know, my only goal was, I have to get this degree by, you know, by any means necessary, and it cost sacrifice, but it also causes emotional turmoil that I, you know, I think, as a result of after me getting my master's, I traveled a lot that next summer. And, you know, I was thankful to secure a position at the hospital that I was interning at a month after I graduated. But, you know, I was inclined to feeling like I had to, you know, get back to me and figure out who I was post grad, because, you know, essentially, I didn't really have any little of a social life during that time.

Me:
So in talking about everything that you endured, while you were in your graduate program. Where did self-care come into play? or What is your definition of self-care? What does that look like for you?

Interviewee:
So self-care to me was having the ability to even rest and not have to worry about anything. Or simply just taking the day of maybe practicing like, face masks and just trying to zen out and just, you know, enjoy that peace and quiet and not having a task to complete because that came rare. And, you know, sometimes taking the time to, you know, every once in a blue moon meet with my friends to to not feel like I was constantly concerned and not you know, not feeling alone. That was a huge thing because I feel like you know, it was interesting because despite me being in the program, there was one thing a professor that I had during the time at grad school said, you know, you can't be an effective social worker, if you don't clean your own backyard. And I think that was a huge, that was a huge challenge for me during that time, because, you know, I have so much baggage in my backyard in aspects of my family responsibilities, because I was still held to a certain responsibility. And, you know, if family dynamics arrived, where they needed mediation, or they needed to discuss, I was still held as the person to facilitate that, despite everything I had going on. So for me, it was very difficult. And I truly, really didn't practice self-care, to the capacity that I probably should have. And it took a while actually even post grad for me to realize what that looked like, in the small things, as you know, taking the day to go get a massage or taking the day to get a Mani and Pedi or, you know, just taking the day to, you know, truly center with self. Because I didn't truly practice that. And as a result, you know, I stressed out a lot and, you know, found myself again, in those numerous crying spells and just feeling like, you know, defeated oftentimes.

Me:
So, from listening to what you said, Would you say that that lack of time for self-care impacted your experience, like, did it make it even more difficult because you didn't have that time to unwind?

Interviewee:
Yes, and no, I will say impacted me negatively, because I wasn't truly taking care of myself in my diet. And my eating probably wasn't the best either. So it did affect me when it came to my overall health during that time. And it brought concerns because, you know, when I first arrived to *** I probably weighed about 140. But by the time I graduated, I was 115. So I lost a lot of weight. So in that aspect, yes, absolutely negatively. But then, when it's a matter of perspective, when you look at things and in a positive way, you know, it requires certain sacrifices and a certain level of focus, to truly be able to maintain having straight A's every semester, during my grad school career, on top of everything I had going on, and that required me to, to not have a social life, because, you know, it will be difficult with all the roles that I was playing, and I still be very as just as active when it came to interacting socially, as well.

Me
that's all the questions that I had for you. Do you have any questions for me? Or is there anything else that you feel like, it'd be important to add?

Interviewee:
I think a huge thing is, of course, the mental health piece. Because oftentimes, you know, even as a therapist, social worker, just in, in the social science field, it, you know, we're looked at, as, you know, wanting to just have everything together. And oftentimes, it you know, it gets forgotten that we are, you know, humans as well, we do go through things. And I think a huge piece is, you know, creating a support, even throughout the social sciences, so that, you know, you don't feel alone and don't feel like you have to shy away from also maintaining that balance for you. Because I think the for the longest I felt like being a social worker, I didn't need a therapist, you know, I'm a therapist. So why do I need a therapist? You know, of course, with time you realize that it is, you know, it's okay, for you to have balance in your life and what it requires.

Appendix E

Permission to Use Figure 1

From: Nurseslabs <hello@nurseslabs.com>
Sent: Monday, November 1, 2021 4:19 PM
To: Downing, Nikol <ngarcia22@liberty.edu>
Subject: [External] Re: Permission to use figure

Hi Nikol,

Yes, please go ahead.

If it wouldn't be much of a bother, please do let me know if you have published your dissertation. I would love to have a copy and learn from it.

Best regards,
Matt Vera

On Mon, Nov 1, 2021 at 8:15 AM Downing, Nikol <ngarcia22@liberty.edu> wrote:

Hello,

I am again reaching out to confirm that I have permission to publish my dissertation containing your figure in my university repository. Also permission to publish in a journal if I choose to seek publication.

Kind regards,
Nikol Downing

Appendix F

Permission to Use Figure 2

From: Becky Taylor <btaylor@emerald.com>
Sent: Monday, November 1, 2021 7:28 AM
To: Downing, Nikol <ngarcia22@liberty.edu>
Subject: [External] FW: Permission to use figure

Hello again,
Thanks for your email.

We would consider publication as your research being accepted by a journal or book publisher. If your dissertation is to be printed and deposited in your university library, then you have our permission to do so, subject to full referencing. You also have our permission to use the figure if your dissertation is to be deposited electronically in the university repository.

If you have any further queries, please let me know.
Best wishes,

Becky Taylor
Rights Executive I Emerald Publishing

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From: Downing, Nikol <ngarcia22@liberty.edu>
Sent: 30 October 2021 2:12 PM
To: Subscriptions <subscriptions@emerald.com>
Subject: Permission to use figure

Hello,

I received permission to use figure 2 Model of work-school-family conflict which is located in the article titled The relationship between school-work-family conflict, subjective stress, and burnout. Although i was granted permission to use the figure in my dissertation, i was told that i would need to obtain separate clearance to publish it. I am reaching out once again to ask permission for publishing through our university library is a part of the requirements for my degree program.

Kind regards,
Nikol Downing