A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE CALL TO SERVE AMONG NON-TRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

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The purposes of this study were to explore the narratives of nontraditional social work students who were identified as servant leaders, and to investigate the students’ perception of his or her call to service and the meaning of leadership within their developmental and prior lived experiences. This exploration study examined the phenomena of baccalaureate social work education as a choice for nontraditional students. Three research questions guided this investigation: (a) What is the relevance of self-resiliency and self-efficacy to these individuals and to their self-identification as social work leaders? (b) What can these stories tell us about how we can better structure social work education and curricula for students who are nontraditional? (c) What instructional methods and advising strategies should social work education consider in order to better support and nurture leadership in this group?

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies supported the study of these questions. A survey was administered to 33 nontraditional social work students who were enrolled in an introductory social work class. Six key informants were identified through the survey and interviews were conducted with these informants that identified themes that emerged from the survey and through the conceptual framework of the research proposal. A semi-structured interview with standardized questions was completed with each key informant, and of the key informants also participated in a cognitive mapping exercise in order to elicit more detailed data.

The findings suggested that: (a) key informants validated the concepts of the research framework (b) key informants identified the concept of resiliency as most significant and
relevant in their call to serve through social work, and, (c) key informants provided additional concepts with meaningful connections to their decision to seek professional social work education. The research raised questions to be further explored with nontraditional students can provide additional guidance to baccalaureate social work program directors, support recruitment and retention strategies in social work higher education, and inform standards and policies of the accrediting body of professional social work education.
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This dissertation became my mission far more than an academic requirement for a doctorate. As with any powerful mission, the work took on a life of its own. So many participated in the project, and the dissertation is truly a product of the guidance of this collective of wise and gifted people. I greatly appreciate everyone – friends, students, colleagues, advisors and mentors – who worked with me to sort out concepts and ideas, who read countless drafts of the material, and who joined me in purposeful and passionate discussion that informed the final product.

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much more than data. You provided the opportunity for reflection on the promising future of leadership within the social work profession.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The idea to study nontraditional undergraduate social work students came from my experiences as a social work educator and a community practitioner. In both settings, I met “natural helpers”, those individuals who were consistently identified as powerful leaders by community members. Yet, these natural helpers were not necessarily individuals employed in or appointed to positions of authority or decision-making within formal organizational structure. Each had a strong, positive reputation among community members as an authentic leader with real ability to inspire and work towards change. And, most importantly, each shared similar experiences, language and culture of some community group that “credentialed” their leadership role. This credentialing as a leader with knowledge and skill in that community allowed for a strong engagement in the helping process based in trust and shared experiences. These individuals generally sought social work degrees well into their adult life, and often while remaining employed in some unrelated occupation in order to support themselves and their family. As a casual observer of this phenomenon, I was intrigued by the perseverance, resilience and the call to serve that I noted in each of these natural helpers.

The professional social work literature includes references to “the call” to social work (deMontigny, 1995; Le Croy, 2002, Corey & Corey, 2007) as a meaningful life that people have found and are following. Throughout introduction to social work texts, there are frequent discussions of the rewards of being a helper, and the countless gifts of the profession that provide opportunities to reflect on the quality of one’s own life. As noted by Corey & Corey, “Helping others can provide you (the social worker) with the satisfaction of knowing that you are making a significant difference o others, which in itself enhances the meaning of life ”(p.15).
However, not everyone who seeks a social work degree will assume or enact a leadership role in the profession or in their community. Social workers are expected to contribute to compassion and justice in the world, yet only a few social workers emerge as leaders as identified by their community. Does the call to serve among nontraditional students – “natural helpers” – support avenues by which their leadership can manifest itself in real, sustainable change in those communities? Is the call to serve in social work consistent with the model of servant leadership that is grounded in the belief that hold the needs of the community above self? This study is an attempt to understand what can be learned about leadership from the perspective of these nontraditional social work students. It is expected that this research will inform the policy and practice of social work education in order to increase recruitment and retention of these “natural helpers” who are often overlooked as potential professional colleagues.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods study is to explain the call to serve in nontraditional, adult learners who pursue undergraduate social work education. The research will investigate their prior lived experiences as a significant contribution to their professional social work identity, moral reasoning and spiritual development as significant to their adult learning, and the call to serve that guides and supports their community leadership roles.

Within the study of nontraditional students in higher education, there is much attention to the barriers to retention and academic success of this population (Brown, 2005; Donald, Seay & Bushko, 2004). In their review of research into retention of nontraditional students, Bluestein, Paladino Schultheiss and Flub (2004), found that social indicators such as low socioeconomic status, minority status, trauma, drug and alcohol addiction and chaotic social environments have all been identified as negative predictors of educational and social success. However, why is it
that some people overcome adversity and succeed despite the expected outcomes given the previously identified indicators? The subject of this work is the many forms of discourse regarding self-efficacy, resiliency and leadership through the people who give voice to these concepts. Given that nontraditional students generally experience adversity and negative social indicators of success, it is expected that this study of nontraditional social work students will gain insight into ways that these individuals define leadership and their call to serve.

Research Questions

I will include individuals whose voices are seldom heard in the literature – those who have many of the social indicators associated with failure but who have defied the negative indicators of success in their pursuit of undergraduate education. Using a framework of servant leadership, participants will be selected for case studies that will focus on the research question: In what ways do prior life experience and adult development contribute to and influence a student’s sense of mission and purpose (the “call to serve” of the social work profession)? Within this study, I explore the meaning of leadership to nontraditional social work students and consider themes of leadership identification among key informants.

Data collection strategies are constructed that support the conceptual framework and include attention to prior life experience and adult development themes. What is the relevance of resiliency and self-efficacy to these individuals and to their self-identification as social work leaders? What can this research tell us about how we can better structure social work education and curricula for students who are nontraditional? What instructional methods and advising strategies should social work education consider in order to better support and nurture leadership among nontraditional social work students?
Theoretical Framework

Multiple factors contribute to the individual and social dynamics that impact a student’s decision to seek an undergraduate social work degree with no single focus or deciding factor as explanation (Hodge, 2004). Given the complexity of the lives of nontraditional students, it is expected that inter-, intrapersonal and developmental issues play an important part in their decision-making. Within this perspective, this study will present existing research on adult development, resiliency and self-efficacy, and servant leadership that informs a quantitative evaluation of the students’ leadership, and a qualitative method of inquiry into the backgrounds and current lives of selected participants that will broaden our understanding of each student’s leadership role experiences and enactment.

The integral theories and approaches of person-in-environment that are so vital to social work practice provide a conceptual framework for the study of students’ call to serve. The discipline of social work draws from an eco-system perspective that provides the framework for coherent analysis and interpretation of human behavior. This approach to both the person and the environment integrates theory and practice of intrapersonal, familial, interpersonal, organizational, community, institutional, and societal level support and intervention. Undergraduate social work education focuses on the development of generalist social work practice within this person-in-environment, eco-system perspective: assisting individuals, families, small groups, and larger social systems to work on change which promotes the best possible relationship between people and their environment.

This study is an explanation of ideas and actions that inform our understanding of the process of professionalizing or socializing students to the social work profession (Figure 1: Conceptual Framework, p. 11). It is expected that knowledge, values and skills are transmitted
through baccalaureate education as transformative components of personal conduct and subjective states (CSWE, 2001). Yet, little is known or studied about the individual who seeks this education and transformative experience towards professionalism. The constructivist framework of this study, consistent with an eco-system, person-in-environment approach, uses theories of moral and spiritual development, resilience and self-efficacy, and servant leadership. Taking this approach within this study provides space for the nontraditional social work students’ voices to be recognized as meaningful and distinctive within the framework of study of students of higher education. In addition, this framework acknowledges the restrictions of previous surveys that may have limited the options of response for these students in presenting their lives and their insights into leadership or have limited the participants to only traditional students.

Significance of the Study

The existing data on enrollment indicates that nontraditional students are attending college more than ever before. In 2003, 43 % of college students were 25 years old or older, which is up from 28 % in 1970, and this trend is projected to continue (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). This makes research into the nontraditional student experience a significant contemporary issue in higher education as it is essential for educators to determine potential differences in academic performance between traditional and non-traditional students, as well as the challenges each face in attending college. Many non-traditional students choose to deal with the prospect of balancing school, work, and family, but they also bring a wealth of real-life experience to the classroom, along with an eagerness to learn. As more and more nontraditional students pursue post-secondary degrees, colleges seek to revise their programs and curriculum to better fit the needs of these students in the classroom, as well as through advising and mentoring.
Most recently, studies have focused on differences in academic success between traditional and nontraditional students in various undergraduate programs of study. This research has identified several key differences between traditional and nontraditional students: nontraditional students have higher academic self-efficacy ratings (Geiger, Jones & Weinstein, 2004), and nontraditional students report better academic performance, despite fewer sources of social support (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Nontraditional students tend to choose human service or social work majors based on life events, whereas traditional students tend to choose majors that family members have encouraged, most often those that provide a high income and expected economic stability and upward mobility (Kinsella, 1998). The influencing factors as identified in these previous studies will be considered with this exploration of nontraditional social work students as leaders.

In addition, for the nontraditional student, the recognition and validation of prior knowledge and experience is central to confidence, further learning and career success (Brown, 2005; McMillen, 1999). Much of this prior knowledge gained through life events may be tacit or incorporated into the adult identity as supported by developmental and experiential theories (McMillen & Fisher, 1998). However, Brown (2005) and Norman (2000) noted that prior life experiences have significant impact on the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors that contribute to a student’s interest and commitment to the profession as a way to serve others. In this way, nontraditional students are self-characterized as resilient in that they have the ability to recover from disruptive change, illness or misfortune, and, in most cases, to achieve success as professionals (Begun, 1993; Borden, 1992; Klohnen, 1996). This theme of resiliency and the construct of self-efficacy will be considered in this study in order to build on the idea of prior life experience as a significant influence in the leadership development of nontraditional social work
Although the field of adult learning has been supported by theories which attempt to include voices of “minorities” (women and people of color) in the area of development and learning (Donohue, Robins, Roberts & John, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Ryan & Delci, 2003), there is little in the resilience research that is relevant to educational structures for nontraditional students who experience negative social indicators. This study that identifies individuals who persist and succeed in their calling will fill the gap in the professional social work and leadership literature by identifying those voices not represented in the current literature in order to inform educational programs and policy in higher education. In doing so, this study may support innovative strategies to deliver curricula as well as the consideration of recruitment and retention of these students. How can we create educational environments that foster success and support this calling among this underrepresented population of students?

Definitions of Terms

The definition of terms and concepts of this research are presented within the literature review of Chapter II.

- Resilience
- Self-efficacy
- Moral Reasoning
- Spiritual Development
- Leadership
- Servant Leadership

Delimitations

This study is bound by the target sample, and, therefore, results may not be transferable to other undergraduate social work programs and other disciplines. Participants are students enrolled in the introductory social work class at Lourdes College in fall 2007 and thus the findings may not be valid for social work students at differing levels of their social work
education. The students enrolled at Lourdes College are generally non-traditional college students in age and experiences and these demographic and experiential factors may not allow generalizability to other undergraduate student populations. In addition, a significant identity of Lourdes College is deeply rooted in the institution’s faith-based tradition. Given that students are well aware of the College’s mission and purpose in the Franciscan tradition, there may be significant differences in the student target sample from other public institutions; thus findings may not apply to the public setting of higher education.

Limitations

This study describes the meaning of leadership among non-traditional social work students. No generalizations will be made of a larger population, and findings are solely representative of the sample. Research with a sample selected from different disciplines or other settings may consider a different conceptual framework with emphasis on other process outcomes that define leadership.

As a mixed-methods approach, the qualitative and quantitative methodology of this study each present some limiting factors. The use of the existing instrument, the Servant Leadership Profile (Appendix A), in the quantitative phase of the study to select key informants can be considered as limiting in that this instrument has been applied almost exclusively in the fields of business and nursing, and to those professionals who are currently employed in management roles. The Profile is a relatively new instrument and has not been tested with regard to cultural bias. Given the racial and ethnic diversity of the sample population in this study, the lack of attention to cultural bias can be viewed as a limiting factor.

In advance of this study, I distributed and collected the Servant Leadership Profile to a sample of undergraduate social work students at baccalaureate social work programs throughout the
Midwest region. I found that the results supported the validity and reliability of the Profile’s use as a tool for selection of key informants. However, the convenience sampling for the use of the Profile can be viewed as a limitation to the generalizability of the findings.

The qualitative interview process of key informants may be limiting in that other interpretations of experiences (by the informant and the researcher) may be possible. As noted by Weick (1989), participant memory is retrospective, subject to re-interpretation and serves only its user, not necessarily the ‘truth’ of others or the systems. The two-phased interview process guards against researcher bias but the use of self-reports by the key informants can be viewed as a limitation.

Assumptions

This study includes the following assumptions in the development of the conceptual framework that guides the methodology:

1. Resilience and self-efficacy are complex phenomena that include social, environmental, and structural factors.
2. As reflected by Masten (1994), the rationale for examining resilience phenomena “rests on the fundamental assumption that understanding how individuals overcome challenges to development and recover from trauma will reveal processes of adaptation that can guide intervention efforts with others at risk” (p. 3).
3. Policies and practices of institutions of higher education will be informed and will benefit by hearing the voices of those who have succeeded despite negative predictors of success.
Organization of the Remaining Chapters

This chapter provides an introduction to the concepts and questions to be explored through study of nontraditional social work students who enact a community leadership role through a call to serve. The subsequent chapters will identify and describe the concepts, and analyze the themes and factors involved and interrelated in the study of nontraditional undergraduate social work students.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Prior Life Experiences
- Resilience
- Self-Efficacy

Adult Development
- Moral Reasoning
- Spiritual Development

A Call to Serve
- Servant Leadership

Leadership Role Identity and Enactment of Nontraditional Undergraduate Social Work Students

Social Work Education
- Knowledge
- Values
- Skills

Social Work Leadership
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature will explore: the concepts of resilience, self-efficacy and the related constructs of adult development, moral reasoning and spiritual development; and servant leadership as a framework for considering a call to service.

Resilience

The topic of resilience, its determinants and the formation process, has focused on the effects of trauma on individuals and the successful adaptation or coping ability of those affected. Early conceptualizations of resilience identified mostly individual or individually mediated factors associated with positive outcomes such as a “healthful temperament” and/or psychological well-being (Anthony, 1987; Kaplan, 1999). Currently, within the study of human behavior, resiliency is conceptualized as a combination of innate personality traits and environmental influences that serve to protect individuals from the harmful psychological effects of trauma or severe stress, enabling them to lead satisfying and productive lives (Barnard, 1994; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Harvey, 1996, Luthar & Zigler, 1991; O’Connell-Higgins, 1994; Rutter, 1987). Resiliency is further conceptualized as an ongoing process of self-righting or bouncing back after trauma (Grossman & Moore, 1994; Valentine & Feinauer, 1993). Resilience is, therefore, both a characteristic of the individual and a quality of the environment that provides the necessary resources for positive development despite adverse circumstances.

Although many studies identify factors (supportive environment, compensating experience and adaptable personality) that seem to contribute to an individual’s extraordinary ability to bounce back from traumatic experiences, Rutter emphasized (1987) the importance of considering resiliency as a process rather than simply a compilation of protective factors. As the quality of the environment and the dynamics of that person in that environment are viewed as
mutually dependent, one factor cannot be considered to be universally protective. The process of resiliency formation should be understood as a highly individual experience with research efforts focusing on individual perceptions and definitions of reality.

In addition, recent research (Lerner & Benson, 2003; Luthar, 2003; Rutter, 2005) has focused on the protective factors associated with resilience; these factors are considered relational aspects of positive development under stress with continued emphasis on the ecological interpretation of person-in-environment. Resilience is both an outcome of interactions between individuals and their environments, and the processes that contribute to these outcomes. Outcomes and processes are both influenced by context (the well-being of the individual’s community as well as the capacity of social institutions to meet the individual’s needs) and culture (the values, beliefs and everyday coping) (Sonn & Fisher, 1998; Wolkow & Ferguson, 2001).

An examination of the literature related to resilience finds that the majority of studies focus on children who were “at risk”, especially those who were able to persist and succeed despite negative circumstances, while fewer studies exist for older adolescents and adult learners. Currently, a few studies have connected the academic success of students to resilience with the intent of using the data to structure efforts to support student success in college prep or post-secondary education. For example, at the postsecondary level, a 2004 study by Donald, Seay and Bushko found that college students who were higher in resiliency were more likely to persist to graduation than college students who were lower in resiliency.

In an effort to study the educational and psychological correlation of academic achievement, Martin and Marsh (2006) used a multidimensional factor approach to predict academic resilience and success. A path analysis and cluster analysis showed that five factors predict resilience: self-efficacy (confidence), control, composure (low anxiety), coordination (planning), and
commitment (persistence). This study was conducted on a sample of high school students and the authors expect to re-examine the sample as students progress in postsecondary education.

In Werner and Smith (2001)’s longitudinal study on resilience, many people whose lives had been characterized by adversity, mental health diagnosis and/or learning disability in their teens were able to make positive adjustment by age 40. In this wide-ranging study of nearly 700 children who were followed from birth to adulthood, the researchers considered individual factors as well as social mechanisms that were risk or protective mechanisms or processes that increased the likelihood of individual adjustment. Werner and Smith identify both internal and external influences, and the propensity towards resilience as the ability to function adaptively despite stressful life circumstances. They emphasize processes rather than “factors” which imply a static quality, and they note that these protective factors may counterbalance or buffer against risk. Werner and Smith (1989) point out that there is a shifting balance between stressful events that heighten vulnerability and those protective factors that enhance resilience: risk factors influence but do not predict destiny:

The 2001 study is notable in that the focus is on individual and systemic protective influences versus the more frequently researched topic of psychological factors that create or enhance destructive behaviors or lack of resilience. Werner and Smith characterize resilient people as those who consider their determination to be an effective resource. In their study, Werner and Smith noted that protective influences for positive adaptation among adults who identified stressful life experiences included education at small, community colleges, active participation in a religious faith, and clarity of values and priorities

The concept of resilience or resiliency has deep roots in social work since the profession often refers to “resilience” in the assessment of clients’ strengths. However, social work research
related to resilience is relatively recent. A review of resiliency related publications in social work abstracts between 1978 and 2005 identified 137 abstracts referencing the term, with 23 abstracts alone between 2002 and 2005. Few of the abstracts focus on researching the concept of resilience per se, or on testing an operational theory for producing resilience.

In keeping with the notion of a concept in search of a theory, much of the reported research is qualitative, although several studies do formulate hypotheses testing variables associated with resilience-formation that focuses on answering the questions “what works?” and “why?” In considering the importance of research in this area, Fraser, Richman and Galinsky (1999) note that, “the term ‘resilience’ is reserved for unpredicted or markedly successful adaptations to negative life events, trauma, stress, and other forms of risk. If we can understand what helps some people to function well in the context of high adversity, we may be able to incorporate this knowledge into new practice strategies” (p.136).

An important consideration for this study is the lack of research on the role of culture as an individual and/or cultural resource in development of resilience. The focus on protective factors in the study of children (and to a lesser extent, in adults) has taken place in a western context. Culture has been treated as either a confounding variable or the focus of study in order to understand how cultural minorities vary in their functioning from other groups (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Researchers have contrasted positive outcomes of racial and ethnic minorities with those of white middle-class groups. A narrow set of indicators of positive, “healthy” outcomes such as self-esteem, attachment to family and civic engagement were without consideration of cultural context or interpretation. Boyden and Mann (2005) argue that existing research has not adequately identified or applied the culturally determined indicators of resilience for racial and ethnic minorities in the study of resilience. Ungar (2005) recommends that researchers are alert
to culturally embedded definition of positive development in both western and non-western traditions. Ungar’s work supports the idea that resilience is not only an individual’s capacity to overcome adversity, but the capacity of the individual’s environment to provide resources in culturally relevant ways.

In this study, resilience will be considered as constructed meaning through individual and social experiences that allows individuals to articulate their own understanding of the outcome and process. Cognitive theorists consider the structural meaning of past experiences through a framework of resilience. Cognitive theory is focused on the individual’s thoughts as the determinate of his or her emotions and behaviors. Cognitive theorists such as Taylor (1989) and Stroebe, Stroebe, Hansson and Schut (2001) propose that by reconstructing meaning in our lives in response to life events, we reconstruct ourselves – our identities and our purpose in life. Tedeschi, Park and Calhoun (1998) argue that positive changes can occur in those who respond to loss in adaptive ways. People who experience such growth report developing a changed sense of self, saying they became more resilient, independent, and confident; they also take on new roles, a change in social relationships increasing their capacity for empathy. Tedeschi et al. and Saleebey (1993) note that individuals also often undergo a spiritual or existential growth, deriving benefits from their experience(s) by assigning positive value or significance to the event. In studies of coping strategies, there is a consistent theme of meaning reconstruction and identity change in those who experience adaptive responses. Identity change is often operationalized as having a “purpose” or a “meaning” in life that are associated with greater life satisfaction and newly defined, stronger reasons for living.
Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is concerned with people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives. Beliefs in personal efficacy affect life choices, level of motivation, quality of functioning, resilience to adversity and vulnerability to stress and maladaptive behavior. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major series of actions that include cognitive, motivational, and affective and selection processes (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Damon & Hart: 1992). People’s beliefs in their efficacy are developed by four main sources of influence that include mastery experiences, seeing people similar to oneself manage task demands successfully, social persuasion, that one has the capabilities to succeed in given activities, and inferences from somatic and emotional states indicative of personal strengths and vulnerabilities. The nature and scope of perceived self-efficacy undergo changes throughout the course of the lifespan as lived experiences and adult development support enhanced self-efficacy development (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Grossman & Moore, 1994).

In his social cognitive theory, Bandura (1977, 1982, 1986, 1995) emphasized self-efficacy as a social construct that supports the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and attain success in self-defined courses of action. Throughout his study of self-efficacy, Bandura sharply defines those individuals with high assurance in their capabilities that approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Individuals set challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to the goals. This efficacious outlook involves intrinsic interest and, often, complete absorption in goal directed activities. Bandura (1986, 1995) notes that, when an individual with a high degree of self-efficacy is faced with failure, he or she often
increases efforts and works to sustain a strong role in goal-attainment rather than abandon the task.

Individuals who are efficacious quickly recover after failures or setbacks, and they attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which they can acquire through increased effort and focus. When approached by threatening situations, individuals who are efficacious have assurance that they can maintain control and influence over others and the environment. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishments, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression (Masten, 1994; McMillen & Fisher, 1998).

In contrast, people who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks that are viewed as personal threats. These individuals with limited self-efficacy have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate on how to manage a successful outcome. When faced with resistance, they slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. They fall easy victim to stress and depression, and perform poorly in school with high drop out and failure rates (Martin & Marsh, 2006).

Educational research has centered on efficacy-activated processes that enable children and young adults to create beneficial environments and to exercise some control over those negative influences they may encounter day in and day out. Given that adults are shaped by experiences in childhood and young adulthood, the beliefs of personal efficacy of adults can be considered within those earlier experiences and responses. Beliefs of personal efficacy can shape the course lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose (Norman, 2000; Wachs, 2000). People avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping
capabilities (O’Connell-Higgins, 1994). Yet, they readily undertake challenging activities and select situations they judge themselves capable of handling. By the choices they make, people cultivate different competencies, interests and social networks that determine life courses. Any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development. This is because the social influences operating in selected environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the individual has made a decision based on the efficacy “decisional determinant” (Valentine & Feinauer, 1993, Wachs, 2000).

Career choice and development is one example of the power of self-efficacy beliefs to affect the course of life paths through choice-related processes. The higher the level of young adult's perceived self-efficacy, the wider the range of career options they seriously consider, the greater their interest in them, and the better they prepare themselves educationally for the occupational pursuits they choose and the greater is their success (Ryan & Deci, 2003; Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998). These studies have focused on young adults who experienced significant trauma and their choice of career paths that involved individual financial and personal sacrifice to achieve the goal. Education research continues to follow these students with high levels of perceived self-efficacy in longitudinal studies in order to explore and explain the goal attainment of these groups.

The social cognitive theory construct of self-efficacy has been widely used in educational research outside of social work with an emphasis on risk factors that for the most part predict negative measures of self-esteem as a measure of self-efficacy. Werner and Smith (2001), and Wachs (2000), note that children with positive self-esteem generally held a belief that they can influence their environment and demonstrated effective coping strategies when faced with life
stressors. However, Werner and Smith and Wachs note that the environmental context of family, school, church and other community resources may significantly influence patterns of adaptation. These researchers recommend the development of a schemata about the self, others, and relationships that will inform our understanding of the factors that guide functioning across the life-span when considering the development of self-efficacy as a predictive measure.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in social work education in developing outcome measures that incorporate self-efficacy as predictive of a wide range of future professional behaviors (Greene, 2002; Norman, 2002). As social work and related mental health, behavioral, and social science practitioners transitioned from a deficits/problem focus to a strengths perspective, increased attention was paid to personal qualities and social influence that promote or reflect health and well being. Initial research focused on personal qualities, such as “ego strengths,” “hardiness,” “plasticity,” and “persistence” (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). The literature that focuses on resilience and self-efficacy not only affirms that the concept of self-efficacy encompasses not merely surviving but it also includes both thriving and having benefited from the stressor experience (Fraser et al., 1999).

Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) note that, among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more focal or pervading than people’s perceived self-efficacy. Unless people believe they can produce desired outcomes by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties …Perceived self-efficacy occupies a central role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants. (pp.187-188)
The search for theory development of resiliency and self-efficacy has resulted in dialogue within the social work professional as to whether theory exists or if resiliency best describes a set or series of person-environment interactions. Rutter (1987) emphasized the importance of conceptualizing resiliency as a process rather than as simply a compilation of protective factors. Rutter explained that what might serve as a protective factor for one person in a particular situation may be a risk factor in another situation for someone else. Therefore, the process of resilience is unique to each person dependent on the individual and contextual factors that contribute and strengthen the ability to be effective in their current life. Research conducted by Rutter and Wilkes (2002) examined whether resiliency is an outcome in itself or whether it is a process of conceptual change based in personal experiences. The latter, person-environment context will serve as the construct frame for this study.

Moral Reasoning

In 1969, Lawrence Kohlberg modified and elaborated Piaget's work, and laid the groundwork for the current work on moral development. Consistent with Piaget, he proposed that children form ways of thinking through their experiences that include understandings of moral concepts such as justice, rights, equality and human welfare. Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment beyond the ages studied by Piaget, and determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had proposed. On the basis of his research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels. Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual.

As a general hypothesis, Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) propose that moral behavior is more consistent, predictable, and responsible at the higher stages, because the stages themselves increasingly employ more stable and general standards. For example, stage 3 bases decisions on
others’ feelings, which can vary, while stage 4 refers to set rules and laws. Thus, we can expect that moral behavior, too, will become more consistent as people move up the sequence in adult development and employ differing stages of moral reasoning. Generally, there is some research support for this hypothesis but the evidence is not clear-cut (Blasi, 1980).

Current theorists of moral development look to enhance Kohlberg’s model with attention to moral reasoning and the individual’s construction of morals. Informed by models of adult development, moral reasoning theorists report that individuals reconstruct meaning in their lives in response to developmental stages. These models emerged as a result of efforts to amend Kohlberg’s theory of the development of moral cognition that does not clearly correlate but suggests that there is some relationship between moral judgment and moral action.

Rest, Narvaez and Thoma (1999) and Damon and Hart (1992) have proposed models that maintain that optimal moral reasoning requires the present of multiple social constructs. Rest proposed a more flexible four-stage theory of adult development that incorporates moral reasoning and action while integrating Kohlberg’s principles of development of moral thinking. Working from Rest’s mode, Damon and Hart theorize that an individual constructs a theory of self-understanding that emphasizes psychological and social qualities in progress across these four developmental levels. For Damon and Hart, the development of self-understanding leads to a “consciously systematic conception of self” (p. 67). At the height of self-understanding, the individual chooses important philosophical or moral belief systems, ideological choices and personal goals. Therefore, the self is understood according to these beliefs and plans. As such, moral reasoning in the form of action taken is most likely if action choices are compatible with these goals and choices that are fundamental to the self.
The research of Rest et al. (1999), and Damon and Hart (1992) has been important in reinforcing the theoretical understanding that the development of moral reasoning takes place in the presence of multiple social constructs that are given meaning through individual experiences. In evaluating the differing moral constructs that may be more instrumental than others in suggesting moral action, Wach (2000) used multidimensional scaling to determine the dimensions along which considerations of moral reasoning and moral action are arrayed. In the study of moral reasoning, altruism is considered using various indices that measure values, as well as career and volunteer motivations (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen & Meine, 1998). This research supports a strong index of altruism as an essential aspect of self-understanding. In explaining the role of altruism, Kohlberg and Candee (1984) have noted that moral reasoning is tied to altruistic tendencies, and Youniss and Yates (1997) have described those who have gone to great lengths in advocating the welfare of others as having a heightened sense of moral reasoning, self-understanding and altruism. As portrayed in the conceptual model (Figure 2, p. 31), significant constructs gleaned from the literature are seen as action variables for moral reasoning.

Spiritual Development

A review of the literature uncovers conceptual issues involved in defining spirituality and, by extension, spiritual development. Most of the evidence on the subject comes from the study of individual lives (Bianchi, 1987; Sinnott, 1994) and there is little or no quantitative data that addresses the issue of spiritual development in adulthood. Historically, attempts to offer a more precise definition of spirituality and spiritual growth have generally focused on the self’s existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred (Roof, 1993; Tillich, 1963). In recent years, scholars have offered a more discipline-oriented
definition of spirituality that clarifies the content and boundaries of the construct. Wuthnow (1998), for example, drawing on the tradition of religious experiences in America, emphasizes a practice-oriented spirituality that is based on performance of intentional activities aimed at relating to the sacred. Similarly, Atchely (1997) argues that adult spiritual development involves the integration of personal and social experiences through a practice and process. In this manner, practice-oriented spirituality is framed by a commitment not only to searching for spiritual meaning over time, but a commitment to engage in behavior that reflects this meaning.

This definition of spiritual development shares some basic tenets with Fowler’s concept of faith development. Fowler (1981) emphasized the link between higher stages of faith development and greater social and ethical awareness. He focuses on the developmental shifts in how people construct meaning in life. Although Fowler does not speak to the resulting behavior or actual practices of the construction of meaning, he does consider the positive outcomes of the developmental process as self-efficacy (Wink & Helson, 1997).

Other models of spiritual development conceptualize the connection between spirituality and adult development more in terms of constraints, challenge and adversity than the growth process. Atchley’s 1997 work is based on the premise that discrimination promotes disengagement and the curtailing of life choices. According to Atchley, this process creates opportunities for reflection, and thus fosters spiritual development. For reasons similar to Atchley’s, Burke (1999) suggests that the adverse social conditions and discontinuities experienced by African Americans may explain why Black women interviewed in her study tended to be more spiritual than White women. According to Stokes (1990), changes in the “process of making sense of life’s meaning and purpose” (p.176) occur more frequently during periods of transition and crisis than during times of stability. In a longitudinal study men and women, Dillon and Wink (2000) discovered
that concepts and the search for meaning were amplified at times of crisis. Age, gender and degree of heightened state of crisis were not predictors of spiritual development or formation. Dillon and Wink found that those who were identified as resilient most frequently identified themselves as increasingly spiritual or focused on a higher power that guided their decision making through the transition. Thus spiritual development may be more influenced by changes in social and personal context than chronological age, although the two are frequently related. It is this framing of the concept that allows for personal and social context that informs this study. As portrayed in the conceptual model (Figure 2, p. 31), action variables for spiritual development are viewed as distinct from the process of moral reasoning.

Leadership

Northhouse (1997) defines leadership as “a process where by an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Northhouse notes that some researchers conceptualize leadership as a behavioral trait or personality style, whereas others view leadership as a process dependent on situation or context. Northhouse suggests that, rather than emphasizing the traits and attributes that reside in the leader, researchers should consider the importance of the interaction of leaders and followers. In this way, leadership emerges out of a reciprocal relationship of influence between the leader and those being led; followers shape leaders as well as the agenda towards an outcome. According to Northhouse, “Leadership is directed to making something happen the group being led wants to see happen, and furthermore, believes should happen” (p. 11). This is consistent with the values and ethics of professional social work that include organizing, mobilizing and supporting resources for individuals, groups and communities (National Association of Social Workers, 1996). Within the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics, the principles of self-determination are explicit
and require that professional social work respects and supports work with clients that pursues and achieves mutually held goals and objectives around shared purposes and values. This emphasis in social work on the vision and purpose of the group is highly consistent with the Northhouse’s general principles of leader-follower dynamics.

Leadership positions in the social services are often occupied by economists, lawyers, and management graduates, among others, rather than social work professionals who are educated in the discipline. Perlmutter (2006) identified some of the barriers that exist both in graduate schools and in the field of social work which impede social workers holding more leadership positions in social service agencies. These barriers include the social work profession’s own distrust the use of power and authority, and social work’s interest in working in partnership with the client system versus “leading” or directing change.

Contemporary leadership theory is non-existent in current social work literature as the profession uses management and supervision to distinguish “leadership” as an authoritative role in practice. The social work profession struggles with the concept of power inherent in leadership although the concepts of authenticity in interpersonal relationships and transformational group and community skills are identified as vital to successful social work practice.

The concept of leadership in social work is generally examined as a management or supervisory task of those in professional practice. In *A Dream and a Plan: A Woman’s Path to Leadership in Human Services*, authors Greenhouse-Gardella and Haynes present the self-described leadership experiences of women of color and of diverse orientations who are in management roles. The book provides the reader with insights into the perception of leadership of human service by women leaders of diverse racial and ethnic identities, the barriers
encountered in executing their roles, and their plans for professional development and advancement. The book is a collection of women’s stories as well as the authors’ experiences and thoughts about leadership culled from a diary kept by Haynes over her many years of her self-described “leadership”. Yet, the stories of the women are centered on management experiences without a consensus regarding leadership roles.

In this study, a constructionist approach to social work leadership is proposed consistent with a mental model of leadership. This approach allows for the exploration of the ways people understand and attribute leadership both as a construct and as a process. The role of cognition (Gardner) and the symbolic nature of leadership are consistent with the practice of social work that is deeply rooted in transformation and the assignment of meaning through individual-based models. Whether direct or indirect, leaders fashion stories: principally stories of identity. It is important that a leader be a good storyteller, but equally crucial that the leader embody that story in his or her life. When a leader tells stories to experts, the stories can be quite sophisticated; but when the leader is dealing with a diverse, heterogeneous group, the story must be sufficiently elemental to be understood by the untutored, or ‘unschooled,’ mind.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf’s (1977) seminal work developed the concept of servant leadership that emphasized the essential “servant first” principle. Greenleaf stated that, “The servant-leader is servant first” (p. 27), as opposed to the “leader first” model that supported the needs and ego centered beliefs of the leader. Greenleaf believed that leadership can potentially become a tool for manipulation that is ultimately focused on serving the leader’s interests over the interests of the followers. In contrast, the “servant-first” model “begins with the natural feeling that one
wants to serve, to serve first” (p. 27). Then out of this natural and authentic call to serve, Greenleaf argues, an individual makes a conscious choice to lead from servant leadership.

Greenleaf’s work on servant leadership has led to a growing body of literature surrounding the construct. While a majority of these works are theoretical in nature, an increasing number of empirical studies such as Dennis (2004), Dennis and Winston (2003), Laub (2005), and Winston (2004) have emerged as well, building on the Greenleaf’s foundational work.

As the construct of servant leadership has developed over the last 20 years, it has been operationalized in several different forms. As an illustration of this, Graham’s (1991) discussion focused on the inspirational and moral dimensions of servant leadership, Buchen’s (1998) discussion focused on the dimensions of self-identity, capacity for reciprocity, relationship building, and a preoccupation with the future, Farling, Stone and Winston’s (1999) discussion focused on vision, influence, credibility, trust, and service, and Stone, Russell and Patterson’s (2004) discussion focused on vision, credibility, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment.

Within his definition of leadership, Northouse outlined a number of themes with particular attention to moral responsibility of leadership. Consistent with Greenleaf’s model of servant leadership, Northouse identifies two domains that contribute to ethical leadership: conduct and character. In their separate examination of leadership, Northouse and Greenleaf each conclude that effective and ethical leadership is based in patterns of leader behavior that includes an examination of patterns of decision-making (conduct) and virtues of courage and honesty (character). Both Northouse and Greenleaf acknowledge that leadership occurs in a group or community context with an emphasis on intentional, sustainable change.
Of the theoretical discussions of servant leadership that have become dominant in the field, Spears (1998), Russell and Stone (2002), and Page and Wong (2000) are frequently cited. These are the models that will be used in the current discussion examining the distinctive characteristics and factors of servant leadership. Building on Greenleaf’s discussion of servant leadership, Spears highlights the following ten characteristics of servant leadership: (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment, and (j) community building. Spears argues that character is central to servant leadership and that this is exhibited by leaders in the ten essential traits.

In their study of servant leadership, Russell and Stone conclude that there is enough consistency to discern characteristics that are distinctive from other forms of leadership and that provide operative qualities and distinctive features. Utilizing Spears writings that incorporate the ten major characteristics of servant leadership, Russell and Stone investigate other attributes in leadership theories that are consistent with Greenleaf’s writings. They identify nine functional attributes that are operative qualities and distinctive features that can be observed through specific leader behaviors in the workplace. These attributes are identifiable characteristics that actuate leadership responsibilities. Each functional attribute is distinct yet interrelated, influencing one another.

Russell and Stone further identify characteristics within leadership theories that support accompanying attributes of servant leadership. These accompanying attributes are supplemental to the functional attributes, complimenting servant leadership or acting as precursors to the enactment of servant leadership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional attributes</th>
<th>Accompanying attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vision</td>
<td>1. Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Honesty</td>
<td>2. Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Integrity</td>
<td>3. Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trust</td>
<td>4. Stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Service</td>
<td>5. Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pioneering</td>
<td>7. Persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Appreciation of others</td>
<td>8. Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teaching</td>
<td>10. Teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page and Wong provide the third core conceptualization of servant leadership that will be utilized in this research. For these researchers, the essence of servant leadership is captured by the following definition: “Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (Page & Wong, 2000, p. 81). The emphasis placed on leadership serving the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader is a distinctive focus of servant leadership, highlighted explicitly by both Laub and Stone et al. Yet, how specifically do servant leaders place “the good of those led over their own interests”? For Page and Wong this is answered by the results of their Servant Leadership Profile studies. In these studies, 62 characteristics of servant leaders were identified and eventually clustered into the following six key areas: (a) valuing people, (b) developing people, (c) building community, (d) displaying authenticity, (e) providing leadership, and (f) sharing leadership. For Page and Wong, these are the essential behaviors that characterize what servant leaders do, and explain the ways in which servant leaders place the good of those led over their own self-interest.

Having noted the primary role that the Spears, Russell and Stone, and Page and Wong models serve in helping to understand the commonalities and distinctions in servant leadership, the distinction is made here that the Page and Wong model will be taking a central role at the
level of research design in this study for two primary reasons. First, Page and Wong’s model has been operationalized into an instrument capable of measuring servant leadership at the individual leader level. Second, this model and the related instrument provide reliable scales for seven traits as foundation for categorizing attributes of servant leaders (Dennis & Winston, 2003).

**Figure 2.** Dimensions of Moral Reasoning and Spiritual Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring the influences on moral decision-making: family, the media, personal beliefs</th>
<th>Exploring the issue of justice and fairness</th>
<th>Exploring beliefs about the value of human beings friends, and living things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring the consequences of making moral decisions</td>
<td>Exploring beliefs about the value of human beings friends, and living things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring moral ‘codes’ and values within differing societies and recognizing that there can be conflicts between differing sets of values</td>
<td>Focusing on issues of prejudice and discrimination</td>
<td>Exploring rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on important questions of meaning and identity</td>
<td>Thinking about special events in life and how they are celebrated</td>
<td>Exploring the relationship between human beings and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing one’s self-esteem and self-knowledge</td>
<td>Explaining how beliefs contribute to personal identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the expression of ‘inner’ beliefs and feelings through the arts or service</td>
<td>Thinking about the value and significance of relationships</td>
<td>Reflecting on emotions and feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

This chapter describes the design and the methodology used to collect and analyze the data. In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative procedure and a qualitative process was used within a single study. A sequential mixed methods approach was used to achieve the aim of exploration of servant leadership and explanation of the call to serve in nontraditional social work students (Figure 3). The study consisted of two distinct phases, one focusing on quantitative survey data collection and analysis, and the second focusing on qualitative interview data and analysis. The rationale for using both types of data was that each tradition would support a more comprehensive and rigorous approach to the investigation of the research questions.

Figure 3. Sequential Mixed Methods Approach.

Phase 1  Quantitative: use of Servant Leadership Profile to select key informants

Phase 2  Qualitative: interviews with key informants and follow-up cognitive mapping
Based on the work of Page and Wong and informed by the results of a pilot study of the Servant Leadership Profile on undergraduate social work students, it is hypothesized that the scores of students in social work will be consistent with the Page and Wong’s measure of servant leadership. A quantitative method was used to statistically compare the responses for each factor on the Profile, generating valid, objective data. Using the scores of the participants as a sample frame, key informants were selected who indicated the most positive in response within the scoring scale. In the second phase of the study, the application of a qualitative method using interviews explored the factors that underpin the responses. It was expected that qualitative inquiry would provide a deeper explanation of the underlying meaning that individuals attach to the measured enactment of servant leadership and would provide insight into the factors influencing the selection of social work as a profession.

The mixed-method approach has the advantage of combining the strengths of each research methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This approach supported strong methodological integrity and an ability to obtain more meaningful complementary data (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Patton, 1990). In line with the philosophy behind the exploratory nature of this quantitative section of the study, it was expected that key informants would emerge based on the selection criteria of the Servant Leadership Profile. The interview and cognitive mapping as the qualitative phase provided an opportunity to explore individual perceptions of leadership, the call to serve, and those concepts that contributed to a decision to seek formalized social work education.

In the initial quantitative phase of this study, the use of the Profile was key to identifying participants’ congruence with the attributes (or factors) of servant leadership. The values that underpin the Servant Leadership Profile are aligned closely to the values of social work. Dennis
and Winston (2003) found that the Profile defined self-efficacy and values of servant leadership that correlate with an individual’s core beliefs and principles. An examination of the literature revealed that the values and servant leadership practices that are enacted are congruent with transformational leadership that addresses personal and moral accountability (Sarkus, 1996; Pollard, 1997). The commitment to moral responsibility, personal accountability and professional ethics in support of social justice is the hallmark of professional social work. Banks (2004) identified the following ways in which moral reasoning is considered within the philosophical traditions of social work. These principal-based codes of moral reasoning take the position that ethics can be reduced down to a number of core principles:

- Kant’s principle of ‘respect for others’;
- Mill’s utilitarianism of ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’;
- Rawls’ principle of ‘to seek the greatest liberty for individuals compatible with the liberty of others, with inequalities arranged to benefit the least advantaged’; and
- Gilligan’s feminist views focused on the human relationships, the duty of caring for others, rather than seeking rights and justice.

It is clear that, within the complexities of moral reasoning, the traits identified through Servant Leadership Profile that include developing and empowering others, and open, participatory leadership are consistent with the social work profession’s emphasis on a commitment to enhancing the functioning of individuals, groups and communities.

In addition, the quantitative analysis using this instrument addressed the factors predicting servant leadership and identified by the concepts of moral reasoning, self-efficacy and resilience. Batten (1998) and Bottum and Lenz (1998) conducted interviews and prepared a list of
characteristics of servant leadership that include altruism, and endurance and growth through adversity. Page and Wong incorporate the 1998 studies into the representation of servant leadership in the factors of the Servant Leadership Profile. These past research efforts support the use of the Profile as a tool in the initial quantitative phase of identifying leaders as key informants of this study.

In the second phase of the study, a qualitative content analysis was used to gain additional insights in order to better understand the processes by which individuals experience servant leadership and the attendant call to serve through social work education and training. It was expected that the qualitative evidence would help to define and refine the conceptual model that guided this study. For example, qualitative data will support efforts to address meanings, expectations, cultural, and contextual issues that related to individuals’ understanding of leadership roles and enactment (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006), and the call to serve. The identified themes or factors of the instrument are closely defined with the concepts of this study.

However, several processes emerged from the literature that are subthemes of the instrument and further qualitative inquiry was needed to identify these processes. These subthemes include altruism, humility, empowerment of others and shared decision-making. Qualitative interviews were used to assess individuals’ perception with a second session with each key informant to develop a cognitive map based in the early interview material. As noted, the first phase of research that is based in a quantitative approach investigated scores from the study sample as averaged for each factor. However, individuals were not likely to interpret their experiences in the same manner, and consideration was given to using an idiographic approach (a description of the individual by the individual) to fully illustrate the individual’s experience and to provide explanation for similarities and differences in the individuals’ responses. It was not expected that
this research would include a case study of each key informant’s life. Rather, the focus of this research was on discerning the essential components of leadership through a focus interview process that allowed for description of experiences reflective of the conceptual framework. The framework provided opportunities for key informants to disclose and discuss experiences, beliefs and values that produced and supported pathways to the call to serve.

The cognitive mapping exercise with each key informant allowed for member checking and validation of the concepts that emerged through the interview process. Through the interview and cognitive mapping method of inquiry, I expected to capture the factors and issues reported by the key informants that contributed to each person’s leadership identity and professional social work role enactment.

The constructivist framework of this study supported that the human experience is framed in terms of descriptions of life experiences because “we live in our stories, not statistics” (Gilbert, 2002). Evoking their experiences in their own words can best access the meaning that is embedded in the experiences of the selected key informants. The qualitative method of the second phase allowed for exploration of individualized adaptation as well as the explanation of social and structural context of each key informant’s background and perspectives with continued input and reflection from the informants (Tashakori & Teddlie, 1998).

**Target Population**

The subjects of this study were 33 undergraduate social work students who are enrolled in an introductory social work class. Students that are new to social work education were targeted because of their limited experience with professional standards; a significant purpose of discipline-specific education is to provide socialization to the profession and this group of students had limited exposure to the expectations of social work values and ideals. The
participants were both males and females with a range of age and of differing race and ethnicity. All of the incoming social work students will be surveyed as a purposive sample.

Six students were selected, based upon the Servant Leadership Profile scores, for inclusion in the qualitative phase of the study. These students were identified as key informants and each participated in an interview that included a cognitive mapping exercise.

Quantitative Phase

The Servant Leadership Profile was selected for use in the initial phase of this study. In the initial quantitative phase of this study, the use of the Profile was key to identifying participants’ congruence with the attributes (or factors) of servant leadership. As discussed, the values that underpin the Servant Leadership Profile are aligned closely to the values of social work. Dennis and Winston (2003) found that the Profile defined self-efficacy and values of servant leadership that correlate with an individual’s core beliefs and principles. In addition, the quantitative analysis using this instrument addresses the factors predicting servant leadership and identified by the concepts of moral reasoning, self-efficacy and resilience. The Profile has been used extensively in business and industry with findings that support construct validity and reliability (Dennis and Winston, 2003; Russell and Stone, 2002). Batten (1998) and Bottum and Lenz (1998) conducted interviews and prepared a list of characteristics of servant leadership that include altruism, and endurance and growth through adversity. Page and Wong incorporate the 1998 studies into the depiction of servant leadership in the factors of the Servant Leadership Profile. These past research efforts support the use of the Profile as a tool in the initial quantitative phase of this study.

In preparation for this research, I completed a comprehensive overview of servant leadership early in 2007 and discovered the instrument through contacts with other investigators of
leadership theory. As an extension of the independent study effort, I spoke with Drs. Page and Wong about the development of the instrument and possible application to the human services and social sector. With permission from Drs. Page and Wong, the instrument was used in a pilot study of undergraduate students in 4 social work programs in the summer of 2007 (Bowling Green State University HSRB Project No.: H07D306GX2). Per the coding developed by Page and Wong, the responses of 31 participants were organized in a matrix of the seven factors.

*Figure 4. 2007 Pilot Study of Servant Leadership Profile.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants N = 31</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1: Developing &amp; Empowering Others</td>
<td>5.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2: Power &amp; Pride</td>
<td>2.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3: Authentic Leadership</td>
<td>5.677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4: Open, Participatory Leadership</td>
<td>5.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5: Inspiring Leadership</td>
<td>5.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 6: Visionary Leadership</td>
<td>6.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 7: Courageous Leadership</td>
<td>6.088</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the responses were consistent with the findings of Page and Wong related to identification of high levels of servant leadership based in the response scores, the mean scores and the Cronbach’s alpha score of .824.

The Profile was distributed in fall 2007 to two classes of social work students enrolled in SWK 111: Introduction to Social Work at Lourdes College. The course Instructor presented the
Profile at one class session of each course section and provided each student with a Survey Information Sheet, a written invitation to participate that included a description of the study, the purpose of the Profile as a data collection tool, and a clear statement of voluntary participation (Appendix B). Students were made aware that if they choose to participate, a code will be assigned that corresponds to a listing of names in the class roster. This coding was required in order to identify and select key informants for the qualitative phase of this study. The written description of the Informed Consent: Survey Data form (Appendix C) included this requirement, and students signed and dated this statement of informed consent in order to proceed with completion of the Profile. All of the students agreed to participate in this quantitative phase for a total of 33 respondents.

The data from the Profile was analyzed consistent with the scoring using in the earlier pilot study. Within the seven factors of the Profile, I identified eight students whose scores reflect significant congruence with the principles of servant leadership. These students were identified late in the fall 2007 semester and all were registered for courses for the next semester at Lourdes College. Two of the eight students were enrolled in classes that I taught. To protect against any dual relationship, these two students were excluded as potential key informants. Approximately two weeks after the completion of the Profile, these six students were contacted to coordinate their participation as key informants in the qualitative phase of this study.

Qualitative Phase

This phase of the research study examined the way in which undergraduate social work students’ leadership can be characterized as the result of moral reasoning and spiritual development, and self-efficacy and resiliency. In the qualitative phase, the intention was to query key informants regarding the influence on their selection of social work as a career as it has been
demonstrated in the quantitative phase of this study that these students have strong servant leadership characteristics. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research provides the necessary detail of the description of complex human experience. The need to inquire into the key informants’ conceptions and individual experiences led me to adopt a qualitative methodology in this phase.

Initially, interviews with key informants focused on a knowledge-structure approach that originates from within the conceptual framework of cognitive psychology. The use of this approach was influenced by the research traditions of constructivism and phenomenology. Constructivists support that individuals build concepts as the tenets of mental models or “repertoires” of predictability of the world around them (Candy, 1990; Kelly, 1970). This qualitative phase of the study began with an exploration of the concepts and mental models of the key informants related to definitions of leadership, leadership traits, roles and identity. Key informants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences in an attempt to understand the ways in which each constructs definitions and assigns meaning to their experiences.

In phenomenology, the researcher seeks the essence of a human event or phenomenon from individuals with that lived experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schutz, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, I explored the central issues of students’ lived experiences that inform their decision to pursue social work education. This is consistent with an interpretation of Husserlian phenomenology as it seeks to reproduce and articulate the experiences for others to understand. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend the phenomenological approach as this method extracts the “use of words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation: the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting” (p. 15).
Consistent with the phenomenology approach of qualitative methods, this study incorporated cognitive mapping to allow the key informants to provide images as a description of their experiences. This approach has been used in other subject areas (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Cliburn, 1986; Edwards & Fraser, 1983; Trochim, 1989) but these findings have rarely been applied to aspects of adult students’ understanding of leadership roles.

The structure of cognitive maps resembles propositional networks, and their analysis make possible the attainment of various characteristics of a person’s understanding or construction of reality from experience. Knowledge-structure refers to an individual’s propositional knowledge, that is, organized bodies of facts about a given domain. There are three main types of representations of propositional knowledge: as concept hierarchies (Ausubel, Novak & Hanesian, 1978), as propositional networks (Lindsay & Norman 1977), or as schemata (Schallert, 1982). Propositional networks are comprised of the nodes (concepts) and the links between them that convey a person’s ideas. The connections of the concepts of adult development and prior lived experience within this research are considered propositional networks in that each concept is interrelated within the cognitive mapping of each individual.

Cognitive mapping was used as a second source of qualitative data collection in this study in order to confirm, support or revise the data collected through the interview process. In this study, I used a version of concept mapping (Hoz, Tomar & Tamir, 1990) that incorporates Novak and Gowin’s (1984) distinction between two types of maps: concept and cognitive. It is important to make a distinction between maps that represent the common structure of any body of knowledge that Novak and Gowin call “concept maps”, and “cognitive maps” that represent the individual’s psychological structure of knowledge of experience. A concept map is constructed by groups and represents common knowledge or pathways of expertise. An individual constructs a cognitive
map and it represents experiences and idiosyncrasies held by this individual (Cronin, Dekkers & Dunn, 1982).

Given that key informants will be asked to provide responses based in a historical perspective of lived experiences, the sequential nature of these responses may suggest a linear knowledge-structure. Content material from the interviews was analyzed in order to consider the non-linear representation of that material, especially considering the potential diversity of prior experiences and the resultant interpretation of those experiences in leadership development. Allowing the key informants to move from past to present suggested that the data operated from the abstract to the drawing together a number of dimensions (Mink, 1970; Wandersee, 1990). The use of concept mapping strategies did override the translation of text but supported another way of displaying knowledge or the way in which an individual represents their experiences or perceptions. It has been argued that narrative text embodies a concrete reality that cannot be adequately translated into a conceptual schema. These arguments and other similar ones appear to support a powerful case for the application of concept mapping methodologies to historical knowledge (Mahler, Hoz, Fischl, Tovly & Lernau, 1991).

The use of a knowledge-structure approach through concept mapping can be closely tied to leadership theory. Cognitive mapping represents the ways in which knowledge has been structured by psychological or cognitive processes much like Senge’s description of the process of mental models (1990). In his study of leadership theory and concepts, Weick (1989) suggested that, through a process of enactment, individuals create a cognitive schema, or map, that demonstrates their historical knowledge that has informed their leadership style. This study contends that although any individual’s ideas, values and experiences may be articulated and conceived of through symbol and story, it can, like all bodies of knowledge, also be reduced to
elemental propositional components that are organized in cognitive mapping.

As noted, interviews and concept mapping will be two separate data-gathering sessions in the qualitative phase of this study. The qualitative phase begins with the first interview as the key informants reflect on questions developed around the construct of leadership. Prior to the interview, each key informant was provided with an Informed Consent: Student Interview form (Appendix D) developed for this phase of the study. During the first phase, I interviewed each key informant using pre-determined interview protocol, with probing where necessary. These questions were designed to elicit open responses to focused areas representing the concepts. These interviews, informed by the quantitative results and by the conceptual perspective of the research questions, were both standardized and open ended. I framed these interviews as an intent to investigate the key informant’s knowledge and experiences that supported their decision to seek undergraduate social work education. A brief statement as part of the interview script was read to each key informant and each person was asked if there were any clarifications before beginning the recording of the interview.

In preparation for the qualitative interview, I constructed a succinct set of questions to be asked sequentially by the interviewer (Creswell, 1998). The questions were considered as encompassing the broadest topic of leadership and, later in the interviewing, leading to the more distinct questions related to the key informants’ personal experiences. This guided research technique allowed the interviewer and respondent to form a relationship within the interview, and can lead to the process having the feel of a conversation as opposed to a structured academic procedure. This setting allowed the respondent to be more at ease, and therefore more likely to divulge valuable personal information (Weiss, 1994). The semi-structured interview strategy with focused area and open responses had the advantage of ensuring that the interviewer did not
stray from his/her research plan, and that all of the questions were answered (Creswell, 1998). Coupled with the guided efforts of the researcher that minimized anxiety for the key informant, this technique maximized the likelihood of a productive interview (Weiss, 1994).

This study sought to explore a phenomenon and the questions were developed to explore the meaning assigned by the key informants to leadership and related concepts. Within mixed methods research, exploration involves using primarily inductive methods to explore a concept, construct, phenomenon, or situation in order to develop tentative hypotheses or generalizations. As noted by Creswell (1998), qualitative research questions can take the form of grand tour questions (i.e., representing broad or central questions) or specific subquestions. The latter can comprise (a) issue questions, which address the major concerns and complexities to be resolved (e.g., “What do you think it mean to be a social work leader?”) and (b) topical questions, which arise from a need for information for the description of the case (e.g., “What guides and sustains you in your work towards a social work degree?”).

The following questions, constructed as open-ended with ample room for the key informants to discuss the topic and the issue, were used in the interviews with key informants:

1. What was the essential component or experience that made you decide to work towards a social work degree (topical)? Why a degree in social work versus another helping profession (topical)?

2. What leadership role do you hope to have with a degree in social work? (topical)

3. What guides you and sustains you in your work towards a degree in social work? (topical)
4. Do you consider yourself to be a leader? (topical) Do others consider you to be a leader? (topical) If so, what traits or characteristics do you see in yourself or do others see in you that can be defined as leadership? (topical)

5. What do you think it means to be a leader? (issue) How did your previous personal experiences contribute to your leadership identity? (topical)

6. How does one become a leader or become identified as a leader? (issue)

7. What do you think it mean to be a social work leader? (issue)

Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed for accuracy, and content analyzed. The responses of the key informants were analyzed with attention to identifying the subset of concepts and themes that capture the most important experiences of the key informants. I compiled a list of unique and recurrent themes from the interview transcripts. The intent of this process was to enable identification of the most common themes within the key informant group as well as to consider those individual factors that may not have been reflected in the conceptual framework for this study.

In the second session, approximately two weeks after the first, key informants met with me to create an individual cognitive map. Individual key informants sorted and clustered themes based in their varied experiences, and drew connections between the concepts. It was expected that the cognitive mapping allowed each key informant to confirm, refine or expand upon answers from the open-ended interview session. Support for this strategy was found in Hutsebaut and Verhoeven’s (1995) conclusion that open-ended response formats in cognitive mapping “make it possible for each subject to express his or her own answer without feeling restrained by the possibilities offered, imposed, or predetermined by the researcher” (p. 59).

In addition, the cognitive mapping served as a method of qualitative validation. I used one
of the strategies – member checking - available to determine validity. The major themes of the interviews were taken back to key informants, and through construction of the cognitive map, the informants determined whether the findings are appropriate reflections of their experiences. In this process, the focus on validity was to determine whether the account provided by the key informants and reported by the researcher is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006).

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2005) describe several qualitative data analysis techniques that are used in this study: constant comparative/grounded theory, keywords-in-context and classical content analysis. Indeed, Leech and Onwuegbuzie recommend that researchers analyze their data using at least two procedures in order to triangulate their findings and interpretations. This approach data analysis allowed for the reduction, the analysis of specific statements, and the consideration of all possible meanings within the data. In addition, I considered my own bias as the researcher and used the method of bracketing to suspend my own judgment about the data and any findings. The techniques used to insure the reliability and validity of the data will be presented in Chapter IV with data analysis of the research.

Role of the Researcher

In my experience working with students as an advisor and instructor, I have noted through my “practice wisdom” that non-traditional students (over the age of 23) are more likely to reflect on their life experiences and a call to service as informing their decision to seek a baccalaureate degree. I have a personal and professional commitment to the positive educational outcomes of social work education and to the development of strong, community-based social work leadership. Although a study of current students might be considered a limitation, it may be reframed as the ability of the researcher to engage in the research process with individuals that
are not as yet socialized to the culture of higher education or to the social work profession. However, I am aware that this access requires heightened attention to personal and professional boundaries. With this access, I recognize my role that carries a greater responsibility to represent the voices as accurately as possible and to control for researcher bias.

As the researcher, I was patient and diligent in attending to the phenomena; I looked for clarity and the discernment of the true essence of the experiences of the students. Although the key informants provided responses that were consistent with the framework of this research, the theoretical issues of apperception and intentionality should be attended to and elaborated. My faculty role that provided access to the student sample might be construed as a limitation, but in this case, it can be reframed as a strength of the study as my ability to build trust was enhanced by the key informants identification with the researcher as a professional social worker with a similar call to serve. Although I was deliberate in maintaining epoche in my role, the key informants were in a clearly defined role as students, and as such, they may have felt the need to appease me as someone in with power and authority within the social setting of the College.

I have been involved in social work education since 1998, and I have been a social worker since 1977. I am keenly enthusiastic about the potential of non-traditional social work students, and I am keenly aware of the relatively limited resources available to support and guide them. When, in 2002, I first examined the issue of the professional education of non-traditional students, I was very surprised to learn that little or no research had apparently been undertaken into the extent of non-traditional student participation in baccalaureate programs. This was despite a general consensus among the profession that social work enrollment was declining and the demand for professionally credentialed social workers rapidly increasing.
Given this background, it was almost inevitable that I chose this topic for research. I know that I bring to the research a modicum of knowledge and a wealth of opinions. In order to strike a balance that takes advantage of my experience without allowing this experience to dominate the direction of the research, I selected the mixed-methods approach.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

Given that the nature of qualitative observational research requires observation and interaction with groups, anticipation of ethical issues and the management of ethical dilemmas are essential to insure integrity of the process. Miles and Huberman (1994) list several issues that researchers should consider when engaging in qualitative research that involve the following:

- Informed consent (Do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?)
- Harm and risk (Can the study hurt participants?)
- Honesty and trust (Is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?)
- Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Will the data be handled and reported in such a way as to protect the individual’s identity?)
- Intervention and advocacy (What should researchers do if participants report harmful or illegal behavior?)

Within the planning for this research, I have considered each of these issues. The Human Research Subject Review process of Bowling Green State University and the Institutional Review Board process at Lourdes College provided oversight of the consent, harm and risk and privacy concerns. I accepted and acknowledged my role as the researcher in insuring consent and maintaining privacy within this study. However, in my role as program director, student advisor and licensed social worker, I have responsibilities to the participant (key informant), the College, and my profession. I anticipated that key informants might disclosure a history of trauma, and
that, potentially, this disclosure would revictimize the informant. In addition, key informants might disclose or identify personal issues that could barriers for continuation in the social work program at Lourdes College. Although key informants provided honest and often highly personal accounts, no ethical dilemmas were presented in the interview process.
CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents the data from quantitative research that supported the selection of key informants through the qualitative interview process consistent with the conceptual framework. This research sought to address the lived-experiences of nontraditional social work students and the process of the call to serve through professional social work education. The initial use of surveys as a quantitative approach provided a practical method that supports the deeper, more complex qualitative analysis of the experiences and understanding of the key informants. The qualitative interview process of phenomenology allowed for the uncritical acceptance of individual meaning and event-process of identified leaders actively engaged in professional social work education.

The data was gathered from participants who were enrolled in Introduction to Social Work course at Lourdes College in fall 2007. Thirty-three students enrolled in SWK 111: Introduction to Social Work accepted the invitation to participate in the Servant Leadership Profile, and six key informants were selected from this sample of nontraditional social work students. The first section will present the data from The Servant Leadership Profile that was used as participant selection to identify key informants from the sample population. The second section will present the data from each interview with a key informant. The third section will present data from each key informant using a cognitive map of concepts as a profile of the call to serve and leadership identity.

Quantitative Phase

Servant leadership profile and identification of key informants

A sample of participants for this study was drawn from the social work students at Lourdes
College, Sylvania, Ohio. As noted earlier, I felt that it was important to reach students early in their social work education and before students were socialized to the expectations of the profession. In order to do this, I limited this study to only those students enrolled in Social Work III: Introduction to Social Work in fall 2007. A total of 33 students were enrolled in two sections of this course in the fall semester of 2007, and all of the students voluntarily participated in completing the Servant Leadership Profile. Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent: Survey Data form after reading the Information Sheet for Participants thus gaining a complete understanding of study parameters and their level of commitment. Participants were asked to identify their age and race/ethnicity on the survey instrument. Assigning a unique number to each that was cross-referenced to the Instructor’s class rosters ensured the anonymity of the participants at this point in the research methodology. The students’ status varied in terms of completion of other courses, and full or part-time enrollment at Lourdes College. However, given the following identifying factors, the sample (N = 33; women, N = 26, men, N = 7) met the criteria as non-traditional students:

*Figure 5. Participation in Servant Leadership Profile for Key Informant Selection.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-30 years old</td>
<td>White N = 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years old</td>
<td>African American N = 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years old</td>
<td>Hispanic N = 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60 years old</td>
<td>African N = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The instrument for this qualitative phase of the study, The Servant Leadership Profile, has 62 items, with a 1-7 response choice (1 = strongly disagree through 7 = strongly agree). Each item pertains to a principle of servant leadership with each item attached to measure of a characteristic of servant leadership: developing and empowering others; power and pride; authentic leadership; open, participatory leadership; inspiring leadership; visionary leadership; and courageous leadership. In previous use by the researcher with social work students (2007), the Profile demonstrated strong internal reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of .824. Data from the 33 completed Profile surveys was analyzed through the SPSS statistical package that supports factor analysis and regression. Total scores for the sample were considered in the analysis: Cronbach’s alpha for this set of data was .91.

*Figure 6. Data from Servant Leadership Profile as Key Informant Selection.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants N = 33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1: Developing &amp; Empowering Others</td>
<td>6.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2: Power &amp; Pride</td>
<td>2.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3: Authentic Leadership</td>
<td>5.822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4: Open, Participatory Leadership</td>
<td>5.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5: Inspiring Leadership</td>
<td>6.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 6: Visionary Leadership</td>
<td>5.721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 7: Courageous Leadership</td>
<td>6.813</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The individual scores of each participant were ranked from the Profile survey generated data. The individual scores ranged from a total of 213 through 390, with a 6 point gap between the highest 8 individual scores and the lowest 25 individual scores. The gap in the scores provided a natural point of selection of the 8 individuals with the highest scores for the interview phase of this research. The Instructor cross-referenced the identifying numbers to her class roster, and provided me with the students’ names. I noted that 2 of the 8 students were to be enrolled in a class that I was scheduled to teach in the next semester. I eliminated these 2 students from the interview group in order to avoid any conflict of interest while working with the group throughout the next semester.

Each student who completed a Servant Leadership Profile was asked to consider a separate consent in order to indicate willingness to participate in a subsequent interview process. Four of the students selected for interviews based on the scoring on the Profile indicated their consent: 2 of the students noted their unwillingness to participate in an interview. It has been my practice experience that most people are willing to engage in research that is related to their own narrative so I was somewhat surprised by the lack of consent. The surveys were distributed by the Instructor of the courses, and I wondered if she was clear in explaining the intent of the interview process. Initially, I decided that the Instructor would explain and distribute the survey instrument and the consent forms since there was a risk that knowledge of my position in the department as chairperson might influence responses to the quantitative survey. However, after collecting the surveys and noting the consents (and the lack of consent), I decided that I would provide an opportunity for students to ask questions about the interview process. I consulted my dissertation committee members who encouraged me to do so in hopes that students would feel more comfortable with my explanation of the research. I visited each section of the class,
offering my appreciation for the students efforts, and explaining the consent process for the second phase of the research. Students asked questions about the purpose of the research and the interviews. Through this discussion, I became aware that some students were skeptical of the interviews: these students thought that the interviews would be made public and were reluctant to give consent. I reiterated that the interviews were private, anonymous and confidential, and I left blank consent forms in the classroom for anyone who would like to reconsider their response. Within a few days, I received additional signed consent forms for a group of students, including the 2 students who scored within the selection range on the Servant Leadership Profile. I then contacted each of the 6 students as identified through the Profile and each one agreed to continued participation as key informants in this research.

Qualitative Phase

Interviews of key informants

In the second phase of the research, interviews were conducted with each key informant, and the entire interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. In this phase, participants selected for the interview analysis were assigned a fictitious first name, thus keeping the responses confidential. The first pattern of experience explored through open-ended questioning was the issue of leadership, which allowed for different explanations and/or definitions from the various informants. The second pattern of experience explored through the interview questions was specific to the topic of social work as a chosen profession.

The schedule of these interviews was semi-structured with a focus on open-ended questions with in-depth, probing sub-questions that provided clarification or collected more complete information from the key informants. The interviews of each of the key informants addressed the same issues with mostly the same questions, but the order of questions depended on
participants' responses. Also, key informants were asked different probing sub-questions depending upon the need to build on previously supplied information or in order to follow particular leads.

Transcripts were used to study the “talk” of the session consistent with the methodology for analyzing interviews (Spradley, 1979). Consistent with a phenomenological approach, data was arranged with an eye for storytelling. I developed a method to plot out the data in a fashion that allowed the information from the interviews to transition from one concept to another. In the initial analysis of each single transcript, I located categories of meaning that indicated some connection to concepts related to the research. From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences were coded and sorted for analysis. This process came from direct quotes or through the paraphrasing of common ideas.

I adapted Giorgi’s (1985, 1992, 1997) and Benner’s (1985) method of analysis that involves a multi-stage procedure for phenomenological research as it applies to the social and behavioral sciences. The method as outlined by Giorgi and Benner includes:

Stage 1. Gain a sense of the whole as an intuitive overview of the transcripts by reading the interviews and understanding the key informant’s point of view in order for the data to “speak for itself”.

Stage 2. Construct a profile for each key informant that included identifying information

Stage 3. Construct a thematic index file from the key informant profiles

Stage 4. Search the thematic index file for interpretive themes

Stage 5. Synthesize the data into main concepts that are represented in a succinct and coherent manner.

In adapting this model, I applied the interpretive themes to the conceptual frame and emphasized
the concepts of the research to sort the themes. In addition, I applied the use of a cognitive map in order to determine relationships between themes and concepts as well as an exercise in cognitive mapping to validate the responses of the key informants. Through the model of Giorgio’s and Benner’s method, I applied a staged process of data analysis in the qualitative interview phase of the research.

Stage 1: Overview of the transcripts

Aware of the need to address any bias or pre-conceptions, I also placed importance on the step of bracketing in order to remain open to identifying experiences, values and event-processing. I noted the struggle to maintain a researcher role instead of the role of social worker and professional helper. As a professional helper, I chronicled the past traumatic experiences or current struggles of each key informant through the interviews, and my initial reaction was to diagnose and intervene. Yet, in my role as a researcher, I hoped to remain dispassionate and uninvolved, allowing the stories to unfold and present without my professional bias. In noting my own feelings, beliefs and attitudes in a journal after each step of the process, I bracketed out my own experiences in order to see the phenomena and the implications in the experiential context of the key informants (Ashworth, 1996; Gergen, 1988).

My own ideas, intuitive feelings, and interpretations were kept in the journal. I was very deliberate and committed to the journal, and I took the responsibility for creating the narratives and themes of the key informants’ experiences very seriously. In an effort to focus solely on the experiences of the key informants, I reviewed my own journal entry, written after the interviews. Each time a person articulated a response that was unexpected or different from prior responses, I noted my surprise or interest. I noted my own struggle to utilize a hermeneutic methodology when challenged with interpreting the transcribed interviews. How was I to determine what was
important enough to discuss and what was not? I studied the transcripts trying to identify signs, indications, or symbolism in the content that supported major themes. At times, themes differed from my presuppositions, prejudices, and biases; and differed from what was discussed and interpreted in previous literature. However, my efforts at bracketing were essential in order to gather what the interviewees determined to be common understandings of their experiences.

Phenomenological research requires that the researcher “bracket” his views of the phenomenon under inquiry. Although sense-making (Weick, 1995) and the ordering of meanings (Mezirow, 2000) are ongoing in the research process, it was necessary to properly bracket the experiences of the researcher to lessen researcher bias (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1990). I believed that many of the experiences of the key informants were traumatic, and the content of the interviews challenged my ideas about individual and family identities and functions. My bias was that I would find the call to serve based in the conceptual framework that I developed, and I found that I was increasingly challenged to accept an alternative view of the key informants’ journeys in their call to serve.

As I journaled this experience, I began taking on an increased respect and understanding of the lives of the key informants that others might view from a pathologizing, negative, and hopeless perspective. I listened more closely to all of the language, and carefully noted the many strengths based concepts as identified by each key informant that informed their decision to seek professional social work education. I found that each key informant utilized unique coping mechanisms to pursue his/her career goal. As I took the position of qualitative researcher, I noted the strengths that were embedded in the interview with each key informant that were consistent with the conceptual framework. I could connect the concepts to the servant leadership identity through each key informant’s description of his/her life experience and adult development.
Stage 2: Profiles of key informants

As previously noted, each of the students who participated in the Servant Leadership Profile survey was enrolled in an Introduction to Social Work course. Participants volunteered for this study with the understanding that its intent was to investigate their experience as nontraditional students who chose to pursue an undergraduate social work degree. In consenting to the survey, each student was asked to provide his or her name, gender, age, and race or ethnicity. No additional demographic or biographic information was collected through the survey. Throughout the interview process, key informants disclosed historical information as they answered questions or addressed issues that emerged during the interview. However, since additional demographic information or personal history was not systematically collected through the interview, I chose not to report any biographic information of each key informant. The information collected on the key informants through the quantitative phase included the following data: median age of the key informants was 32 (SD = 26.2) with a range of 25-56, and gender was equally balanced, with three women and three men. I assigned pseudonyms to the key informants, and these identities were used for them throughout the qualitative phase of this research.
Figure 7. Key Informant Identifiers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 3: Construction of the Thematic Index File

I constructed a thematic index file with categories and subcategories of concepts related to the research question. As I reviewed and re-analyzed each transcript, I added categories. I also identified a category of issues that were identified in the interviews with no correlation to other concepts in the framework. This category was designed as a catalog of concepts to be considered within this research and, perhaps, explicated in a later stage of research. This classification of the data compared identified themes of the transcripts as compared one against another and as the data appeared to pertain to a similar explanation of experience by key informants. The concepts were grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Within the data, I identified themes as concepts within the categories of the conceptual framework: resilience, self-efficacy, moral reasoning, spiritual development, call to serve, leadership identify and enactment. In this manner, the Thematic Index File provided a presentation of the data as a comprehensive content analysis that noted the connection of interview content to research concepts.
**Stage 4: Search of Thematic Index File**

Themes were identified utilizing these various steps of analysis of content (Kvale, 1983):

1. Repetition within and across interviews. This included ideas, beliefs, concerns, and issues that key informants discussed repeatedly throughout the interview or/and were brought up by two or more key informants at least once in an interview.

2. Levels and nature of affect. This included emotion that was evident through nonverbal cues such as a sudden rise in vocal volume, change in facial expressions and other bodily movements all noted concomitantly with particular content that lent significance to that content or theme.

3. Historical explanations, descriptions, and interpretations. This included stories of the past that explained and justified present behaviors, and provided meanings that are considered significant in exploring the research concepts.

4. Explicit and implicit interpretations. These included connections between thoughts and activities and meanings ascribed to them whether they were obvious and direct or implied and metaphoric.

5. Serendipity. This included behaviors and expressions of the participants that were different from what was expected from the review of the literature and conceptual framework of this study.

The initial step in the thematic analysis was to identify all data that related to the already identified conceptual framework. All of the narrative that fit under the specific concept was identified and coded. For example, each key informant somehow named his/her past experiences while they were interviewed, and these experiences were also coded as related to resilience, self-efficacy, moral reasoning, spiritual development, the call to service, and leadership identity and
enactment within the conceptual framework. Several features of significance were used here to determine the importance of the data in the interview transcriptions. Repetition was obvious in the comment “As I said before” and “Let me explain again” and also in rereading the entire transcript noting similar comments repeated by key informants in individual interviews. Levels and nature of affect were noticeable in the transcriptions where words were capitalized to indicate the rise in vocal volume that added emphasis to the key informant’s discussion.

Historical explanations were another feature of significance that was used in connecting the present behaviors and meanings to the themes of development and change over time. For example, “In the past I was”, “Now I find myself”, “That’s the way my life used to be” were used by key informants to reference the past and to support their narratives of change over time.

The next step to this thematic analysis was to combine and catalogue related patterns into sub-themes. Themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989, p. 131). Themes are identified by “bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone” (Leininger, 1985, p. 60). Themes that emerged from the informants’ stories were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. The “coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together” (Leininger, 1985, p. 64). In connecting themes I was careful to refer to those structures that applied not simply to the experience of one individual but to all of the key informants as a universal essence within the experience.
Stage 5: Data synthesized from Thematic Index File

As I received the completed transcripts, I read each one carefully. I listened to the tapes again and continued referencing the transcripts. Where I noticed items of interest, I placed notes of themes in the margins. Transcripts were photocopied and data that was seen as very significant was cut out and attached to index cards. Index cards were coded for identification and location in transcript. The marginal notes and the index cards served as building blocks for central identified themes. The interview transcripts were extensively annotated with identification of features of significance, as well as descriptions of my reactions to what was said by the key informant and what I said. I thoroughly examined each transcript for statements of ideas and experiences that seemed to add voices to the discussion on themes of the conceptual framework as well as other concepts that emerged. I found that the material sometimes contained a single reference to an event or an experience, but often contained multiple references to intersecting or connecting events or experiences.

Next, I took the identified themes from the index cards and created a new file of each interview, adding concept coding from the Thematic Index File to the specific contents of the transcripts for each key informant. The numeric coding for categories allowed for a graphic depiction of the quotes from each key informant that connected to a theme or provided support for a concept in the framework. All of the content that reflected a concept or connected to the conceptual framework was coded for each interview. The completed Thematic Index File included 107 specific quotes from the six interviews. The constructs that were not noted within the conceptual framework of this study were also collected and identified. After sorting through all of the coding in the reference guide, I decided to focus on the quotes that directly connected to the concepts: those interview statements most clearly and directly connected to the conceptual
framework. These select concepts appeared to have an invariant and primary referential character to the conceptual framework of this research. This data is presented without any specific hierarchy or meaning placed on the connection of one concept to another. Although each quote or response is idiosyncratic, much of the interview material did emerge around the concepts given the focused nature of the interview questions.

This methodology allowed for the key informants to describe their experiences within the questions of the interviews that were drawn from the conceptual frame. The interviews did not seek autobiographical or case study material: in keeping with the purpose and intent of the mixed-methods approach to the research questions, the data was analyzed relevant to the conceptual framework of this study. In exploring the research questions, I selected this approach that focused on the conceptual framework, not on the life histories of the participants. The data that was identified within the coding of the responses is presented relative to the concepts of this study and without reference to other identifying information for each of the key informants. This method of data collection is less narrative and more summative, focusing on the process of exploring the themes and meanings of the key informants relative to leadership development. The data was no less rich or essential than that collected through life histories. The presentation of the data – although distinct and without narration – organizes the aspects and concepts of the interview transcripts relative to the conceptual framework.

Interviews with the key informants yielded the following data as identified in the Thematic Index File.
Data presented through Thematic Index File

1. Resilience

1.1 focus on long-term goals

“I never worry about my current situation because I stay focused on how I imagine things down the road” (Susan)

“I kind of live in the present but I know that the future is really where I am going” (Mike)

“I don’t care how hard I have to work right now since I know that I am moving closer to my dream” (Francis)

1.2 separation from maladaptive behavior

“I am not my family” (Mike)

“I used to be someone else but now I am on the right path” (Mary)

“The people around me were really bad – doing bad things – but I knew that I could be different” (Joe)

“I put all the drama and misery and heartache behind me” (Bill)

“I refuse to accept the victim role” (Francis)
“Some people carry their tragedies on the outside where it shows and everyone can see. I just carry my story to myself.” (Joe)

1.3 high aspirations and commitment to goals

“I never set limits on myself even when other people set them for me.” (Joe)

“All my life, I knew I would do better than everyone around me – I just knew it” (Susan)

“My goals have always been to help my community.” (Mary)

“Someone can tell me again and again that I will never make it – you can tell me 100 times that I will never be a social worker – and I guarantee you that I will work harder to prove to myself that I can do what I set out to do” (Mike)

2. Self-efficacy

2.1 sense of self as responsible to facilitate change for the betterment of others

“My work has included … being responsible for making things better for others – my family, my neighborhood, for everyone.” (Bill)

“Even as a kid, I knew I was responsible for my brothers – I mean, I just accepted that I was in charge and I could to that – take care of them, guide them, teach them – because I expected that from myself, expected that I would be in charge and that was OK with me.” (Mike)
“People actually listen to me but I rather have my actions speak louder than my words. I know that I can talk and talk but that would be irresponsible. And, I want to act responsible when I act for others, to help others.” (Mary)

2.2 confidence in life choices

“People tell me that I am brave to do the things I do – work two jobs, take care of my kids, go to school. Some say I am stupid. I just know that this is what I do – I have always known that this is what I want to do.” (Francis)

“I have done a lot of things to pay the bills and I kept putting off going to school because I had a lot of responsibility for my mom but I was always sure that I was doing the right thing and that my time would come.” (Joe)

2.3 sense of goal attainment

“When I came to campus, I was scared. When I came to register, went to class I was scared – still am - but I never doubted that I could make it.” (Francis)

“I set my own goals early on (in my life) and I never stop working towards that goal, whatever that goal may be. Every goal is different (for me) but as long as I accomplish it
but in the process take the time to follow through and make sure everything is implemented … I go to the goal, regardless of what that goal is.” (Mike)

3. Moral Reasoning

3.1 ‘codes” and values: set of personal principles

“I knew that there was the right way to go, that this is right and that is wrong” (Mike)

“It was definitely a knowledge that this is right, this is the right way, the correct way to behave and treat people… to treat myself, to lift myself up to the place where I was behaving in a good and decent way.” (Joe)

“I don’t just believe that there is a right thing for me to do – I know it!” (Francis)

3.2 consequences of making moral decisions

“There is no hard work or work that is too much for me… it’s just work that gets me to a better place to be a better person for my neighbors, my work” (Mike)

“No one needs to rescue me from myself. I know all about the obstacles in my path. I put a lot of them in my way and some have been put down by others. But I am strong – morally and spiritually – and I can be tested and grow stronger” (Susan)

4. Spiritual Development

4.1 reflection on important questions of meaning and identity
“I’m learning and pushing myself to find my own truth and my own way.” (Bill)

“My whole being is on a constant search for what all of this means, why am I here, who am I to help?” (Susan)

4.2 explanation of how beliefs contribute to personal identity

“I figured out that you may never have the answers to your questions in this life, but I trust in the Lord to provide the answers.” (Francis)

“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps - Proverbs 16:9 (Mike)

4.3 expression of ‘inner beliefs’

“God speaks peace to me through my conversations with Him” (Susan)

“God made Himself known to me through reading the Bible and listening to Him” (Joe)

“I turn myself over to God in my prayers” (Francis)

5. Call to Service

5.1 energetic seeker

quoting Ammons, *He Held Radical Light* (poem):

“He held radical light

as music in his skull: music
turned, as

over ridges immanences of evening light

rise, turned

back over the furrows of his brain

into the dark, shuddered,

shot out again

in long swaying swirls of sound” (Joe)

“Everyday, I think about new and different ways to solve problems with others” (Mike)

“I am always searching – looking – for ways to make things better” (Susan)

“I have been searching all of my life” (Bill)

5.2 community interests above self interests

“I am exhausted coming to school, going to work, taking care of my family. I never get
tired of this work (helping others) – I am pulled towards it. I guess I am a
‘born helper’ and I have to keep at this for others.” (Francis)

“There are a lot of people who I feel are leaders like Cornell West. He’s a really, really
deep thinker. I read a couple of his books and I follow it - what he says. I am interested
in what Cornell West says about accomplishment because accomplishment is important to
me. Because Cornell West connects community, lifting up community is a big part of his
thing. I think the community needs to be helped, pushed up a little bit – well more than a
little bit. But what he (Cornel West), it’s inspiring. I am all about making money to
support myself but I don’t want to take anyone for their money. Neighborhoods need the
money and they need my help.” (Bill)

5.3 person-in-environment perspective

“Someone told me that social work is a process of self-discovery and I always think of that as I am in class. How does everyone fit in their own world? If people are different from me and I guess most people are different then I should pay attention to what they tell me about who they are so that I can help.” (Susan)

5.4 service as expression of faith

“I know that my life can be a joyous testament to acts of faith” (Francis)

“I am blessed in whatever work that I do” (Mary)

“I don’t think God will let me rest if I do anything other than help others” (Joe)

6. Leadership Role and Enactment

6.1 self-identity versus identified by others

“I know that I can lead but look at who calls themselves a leader? Someone with the power to FIRE me? NO WAY! I can lead without that fear from others. I have the respect of others and that’s all that matters to lead people to the right place.” (Joe)

“I don’t look for anyone to call me their leader, I just step into that role as needed”

“Lots of times, people call themselves leaders but I know I can lead … because I have
done this and I expect it of myself … I don’t need anyone to call me their leader” (Mary)

“Every time something happens, people look to me for a response – Hey Joe, what do you think we should do about this? People are always looking to me to show them the way so I guess I am a leader to them but I don’t think of myself as their leader.” (Joe)

6.2 vision and focus

“I can set a work group in the right direction and keep them working on that goal – keep encouraging and reminding them of that goal” (Susan)

“I never lose sight of my own goals and I help my friends and coworkers to keep on the same path because you never lose when you stay focused” (Francis)

“You got to keep the long-term goal – I’ve demonstrated my vision of who I want to be … the need to keep concentrated on the entire process of helping others, not just helping myself to a better job and a better life.” (Mike)

6.3 team building

“I can really bring people together to work on something or fix something … people work better on a project when I give them a job … they don’t fuss about the work when they know we are all in it together” (Mary)

“I always make it clear that we are a group – not just different people – and that they can
make a difference through our combined efforts” (Francis)

“I don’t allow my co-workers to lean on me – I teach them to lean on each other.” (Bill)

6.4 change agent/ transformation

“Not just making a difference but making REAL change – that is what I think is possible and I can make that happen” (Mary)

“Leaders show that they are responsible and the take care of business. They do what they need to do in order for their community to – if you want to say like – I feel I want to use the word ‘succeed’ but more than that – to become different, better. I want to do that – I can do that” (Mike)

Issues not identified in the conceptual framework:

- Humility
- Idiosyncratic worldview
- Lifelong learning and critical thinking

Data analyzed from Thematic Index File

Each of the six primary concepts was extracted from the data through the Thematic Index File and analyzed. Thus, the initial conceptual framework of the research did provide an accurate explanation of the concepts as evidenced by the shared definitions of the key informants. As I had no data about what the key informants’ career aspirations were in the past, the direction of
the causal link between call to serve and social work education was not clear. The correlation between being called to serve as a social worker could be interpreted in two ways: either key informants with high servant leadership profile scores tend to chose social work or the choice of social work education heightens an awareness of servant leadership. Given that these key informants were non-traditional students with considerable lived experience who are pursuing a career that is neither prestigious nor well-paid, it is notable that each made such a costly, time-consuming decision to enroll in a baccalaureate program.

In the interviews, none of the key informants showed disappointment or regret with their decision, and some of them reported that they planned to continue their education through graduate school. Each key informant spoke passionately about the call to serve as “a beacon” (Mary) or “a constant pull” (Bill) that drew them to a social work career. All of the key informants had a biographical orientation to helping, each with a history from a very early age of helping others. The identity of helper was consistently a part of each key informant’s historical description of himself/herself. Helping the community was a crucial domain in each life as well as a means of self-fulfillment. The decision to pursue a social work education was universally expressed as a way to optimize opportunities to continue to help others.

_Cognitive mapping of key informants_

I used cognitive mapping in the second interview stage of the interview, working with each key informant to construct his/her own map as a method of validating the data collected through the interviews (Ackerman & Eden, 2004; Bougon, 1983). These second semi-structured sessions were completely participant-focused and driven by the concepts as identified by the key informants. Each key informant met with me in a second interview to sort the note cards according to importance, relevance and connection to the conceptual framework of the research.
The purpose of the second interview was not only to grasp the most important themes and concepts, but also to allow each key informant to describe the meaning of each concept as an individual construct within the research framework.

Using the identified categories of concepts from the Thematic Index File, I wrote each category on a note card. At the second interview with each key informant, I presented each participant with the entire stack of note cards and I explained that the information collected through the interview process was used to develop the concept categories on the note cards. I asked him/her to stack the concept cards into themes. Each key informant was a willing participant, carefully reading the note cards and moving the note cards around in a thoughtful process of sorting. When the key informant felt confident that the concept cards were appropriately sorted and stacked, I asked each to identify the common theme for each stack of cards. All of the key informants sorted the subcategory theme cards into stacks of concept categories that were nearly identical to the concepts of the framework. For example, “faith” was frequently identified as opposed to spiritual development and “personal ethics” or “code of conduct” was used to identify moral development. This exercise was purposeful in that it served as a member check of the meaning of each concept. Each concept from the conceptual framework was identified through the subcategories extracted from the interviews and supported by the key informants’ review and sorting of the note cards.

At this second interview, I presented each key informant with a stack of note cards clearly labeled with the themes collected from the interviews. I asked each key informant to stack the cards into similar or like ideas; and then, I asked each key informant to “label” each stack of cards. This additional step allowed the individual a retrospective look at the constructs of the meanings of the event under inquiry. In sense-making terminology, this step is a revalidation of
meaning for the individual (Mezirow, 1990; Schutz, 1967; Weick, 1989) and the step supports
the rigor of the research methodology.

Participants sorted through all the note cards, made corrections and additions and labeled each
stack. This material was the basis for creating the individual cognitive maps. Key informants
were integral to identification of data as reflected in the following statement by Bougon et al.
(1990):

Participants are the experts of their own personal knowledge (a static structure) and on the
basis of their own thinking (a dynamic process) about the situation they are questioning.
Thus, the events, objects, and concepts they use to express their questions not only reveal
their tacit and explicit knowledge but also expose their construction of their understanding
of the social system (p. 319, parentheses in original)

After identifying common themes, each key informant was provided a graphic to draw
connections and list the importance of the concepts of the experience under study. Each key
informant noted the major themes and drew connections between the themes as a map of his/her
experiences. These self identified themes form the cognitive map for each key informant - a
graphic representation of the individual’s meaning schema for the experience of being called to
serve through social work. The cognitive map helped the participant revalidate and re-construe
meaning and provides linkages between themes. The map represented the structure of the event
for the participant. The concept mapping from this second interview provided the basis of
analysis for the experiences, that is, the basis of connections between the more important
concepts for the each key informant. Any concepts of lesser importance or non-relevant
concepts as identified by the key informants were disregarded in the concept-mapping exercise.
In this second interview, key informants also indicated the order of the concepts and the relative
importance of the concepts while providing the links between the concepts. In this way, the key informants made explicit the implicit connections between the concepts as the constructed meaning in their experience(s). The identification of strengths of the concepts and the meaningful connections between the categories provided me with additional information about the phenomenon of call to service.

At this point, I shared the conceptual framework of this research with each key participant. I noted the various concepts and asked each key informant if they had any questions about the framework. To my surprise, each of the key informants had a strong reaction to the framework as it related to their own experience or perception. Every key informant pointed to one or more of the concepts that was not “right” or correct and/or placed within the framework that he/she believed as flawed as a process model. Each key informant and I discussed the similarities and differences between his/her cognitive map and the conceptual framework of the study. The key informants explained and verified the ordering of the concepts and their perceptions on the graphic concept map that each had created. Each key informant considered the sequencing of the concepts and validated the process of their own cognitive map. I adopted a critical perspective in interviewing, examining the issues underlying this data with more probing questions for clarification. During these cognitive mapping sessions with key informants, I asked each informant (in plain language) to offer their own analyses about the framing of the research, the ways in which the concepts were connected, the role of the concepts in their leadership identification, and how they explained their choice to pursue a baccalaureate degree in social work in their call to serve.

This step provided additional participation validation to the construction of meaning of the maps. Each map served as a means of performing the verification and validation, or the member
check, of the data (Creswell, 1994, 1998; Maxwell, 1996). Within the process of member checking, I also revisited the bracketing and application of *epoche* that supported the suspension of my own conclusions. I looked for new aspects or insights into the phenomenon as the individual key informants expressed themselves within the fundamental structural concepts. In this way, their experiences were considered as personal but not necessarily unique. The process allowed me to respect the individual responses while linking the collective responses to the research framework.

*Data analyzed from cognitive mapping*

After identifying the concepts with each key informant, the analysis shifted to examining the structure of the map as a whole. What did this configuration mean? What was being conveyed through the spatial placement and arrangement of these concepts? Over the course of discussion concerning the spatial and temporal placement of the concepts, the key informant began drawing lines and arrows to indicate the connection(s) between the concepts. In addition, the key informants explained why concepts were placed in order and why one or more concepts were emphasized in importance.

As each key informant drew meaning and connection between the concepts, the data became heuristic – a pattern of his/her story that included meaning and construction of reality. I considered the ordering of the events and the meaning of the concepts as the initial perspective (Mezirow, 2000) since internalization of beliefs is made through the connection of former beliefs and the present situation. Weick (1995) explains that phenomena can be considered in an interpretive paradigm; the truth for that person lies in the matching of what has been meaningful to what is extracted from the experience.
The concept mapping of each of the key informants is found in Figures 8-13 with explanations of the map as provided by each informant. The concepts labeled on the map are identified as consistent with the conceptual framework of this study although the placement of the concepts and the ordering of the concepts is reflective of the sorting responses of each key informant. The concepts identified in capital and bold-faced type are those assigned by key informants as significant or most often contributing to the process.
Figure 8. Cognitive Map: Bill.

Moral Reasoning  →  Spiritual Development

RESILIENCE

Self-efficacy

Call to Serve
Figure 9. Cognitive Map: Francis.

Moral Reasoning

RESILIENCE

Self-efficacy

Leadership Identity Role

SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

CALL TO SERVE
Figure 10. Cognitive Map: Joe.
Figure 11. Cognitive Map: Mary.

- Moral Reasoning + Spiritual Development
- RESILIENCE
- Call to Serve
- Service to Others
- Leadership Role Identity
- Sense of Accomplishment
- Others
Figure 12. Cognitive Map: Mike.
In each cognitive map, the key informants provided general application of the concepts of the framework and their explanations of the call to serve. As the researcher, I also considered the final cognitive maps and interpreted the maps through informed conjecture about the possible structure participants imposed on the concepts in their sorting. The consistent themes of key informants’ concepts suggests that there is a generalized association between resilience and the call to serve among this group. Within the discussion of resilience and the presentation of the concept in the cognitive mapping, each key informant spoke of perseverance (Susan), overcoming adversity (Joe and Mike), determination (Steve and Francis), firmness of purpose and mission (Mary). The narratives do not indicate an easy or predictable pattern of sense-
making or resultant decision-making behaviors. Most of the key informants reported being poor and hungry at times in their lives (and often throughout their lives), witnesses to violence and neglect within their families and in their communities. Some had individual or family histories of drug dealing, prostitution or other criminal activity. Three of the key informants were raised in a succession of foster homes and one of the key informants was repeatedly institutionalized as a young person for mental illness. Two of the women were victims of battering marriages.

There are undoubtedly complex and interrelated events, structures, relationships and opportunities that contributed in positive ways to their lives. I did not explore the protective factors that influenced resilience or the experiences of overcoming adversity as named by the key informants. This research did not encompass a comprehensive investigation of the concepts, and, given the reports of the key informants, a more thorough consideration of resiliency as an influencing concept of servant leadership should be considered.

These key informants consider themselves to be “fortunate” and “blessed” and they want to contribute in meaningful ways to change that encompasses community. The interviews of the key informants generally focused on a collectivist vision of helping and opposed to an individualistic view of the helping process. Not a single key informant spoke of helping “just one person”. Rather, each key informant referenced their neighborhood and/or the community when they spoke of their intent to practice social work. “Lifting up communities” was a common theme articulated throughout the interviews and made explicit in the key informants’ narrative of their call to serve. Within the process of helping from a collectivist perspective, each of the key informants referenced ways of connecting systems through process and outcomes. This systemic thinking reflected a leadership perspective that, although not clearly articulated as leading, suggested that each key informant acted as a leader in connecting
resources towards an agreed upon collective goal of a group.

Although key informants in this study produced a list of concepts with considerable overlap to those of the Servant Leadership Profile, each informant rarely used the word ‘leader’ in description of self. The use of the term ‘leader’ or ‘leadership’ within social work is an interesting area for further study. Social workers are so clearly socialized to disavow the use of power in the helping relationship: more often, social work concerns itself with guarding against the abuse of power in the helping relationship. In advocacy for social justice – a strong role for social work – we often support speaking truth to power as we challenge social systems and promote the principles of human rights. Although the key informants, as introductory students, were not socialized to the profession, each articulated his or her discomfort with the leadership designation. Yet, the tasks and functions of leadership were implicit and explicit in the qualitative phase of the study within the interviews and cognitive mapping of each key informant.

Other concepts of leadership resonated with the key informants and were reflected in the interviews and mapping. Of the items in the Profile, key informants spontaneously included developing and empowering others, visionary leadership, inspiring leadership and authentic leadership in their interviews with no specific references to power and pride or courageous leadership. It is encouraging that these quantitative based constructs appear to correspond reasonably well to the qualitative data of the key informants’ interviews.

To the extent that these results are generalizable to other setting, key informants have identified their experiences in rich and diverse ways as well as other constructs that suggest significant relevance. It is interesting to note that items were sorted similarly as benevolent rather than malevolent concepts: all of the key informants identified call to serve as a positive concept
and acknowledged the developmental theme of the conceptual framework of the research. Every key informant reported that resilience was the key factor in sense-making in the call to serve, and each key informant identified resilience as the significant factor in decision-making and a move towards a professional social work career.

It is significant that no mention was made of power and authority as a positive characteristic of leadership among the key informants. Throughout the interviews, several of the key informants struggled with the concept of leadership as an identified role that, to him or her, implied coercion or manipulation. Throughout the interviews, these same key informants could cite examples of their role in leading others, guiding others, directing others to a common goal. As the key informant reflected on his or her experiences, the concept of leadership was made clearer through their own process, not through any intrusion of my own ideas or definition. As noted in the interview transcripts of Mike, Joe and Susan, these key informants initially denied that he or she was identified as a leader, yet each one came to speak of themselves as leaders by the end of the interviews. In arguing that leadership was not based in power and authority, the key informants – as a whole- indicated a level of humility consistent with servant leadership.

My decision to use cognitive mapping as a visual display may have supported the collapsing of some of the more complex dimensions of the concepts and not provided an opportunity to locate latent constructs. For example, key informants had varying responses to the connection or interconnections of moral reasoning and spiritual development. Each recognized an ethical foundation based in right versus wrong. This is consistent with the core value system of social work that articulates a professional acceptance of moral responsibilities. Making value judgments in social work often means making complex judgments in ambiguous situations. This, of course, suggests that the rules of professional codes of ethics are not clearly applicable
in all settings and that professional practice requires flexibility about suitable approaches to
dilemmas. This study did not explicate ethical decision-making within the conceptual
framework but within the interviews and the cognitive mapping, each key informant articulated a
clear sense of personal code of ethics. However, the concept map as a qualitative approach to
this area of study provided a qualitatively anchored visual representation of the process an
interrelation of the concepts.

Summary

All individual comments and categories from the key informants coalesced on the six
concepts: Resilience, Self-efficacy, Moral Reasoning, Spiritual Development, Call to Service,
and Leadership Role and Enactment. Although the key informants independently agreed on the
concepts, they were markedly different in their presentation of the concepts in a framework.
Each was idiosyncratic in their ordering of the concepts, placing each in a time order that
reflected his or her individual experiences and beliefs. Although each key informant noted
different systems and process, resilience was the strong, constant factor in each cognitive map.
Underlying the experiences of each key informant there rested a number of subthemes that
contributed to his or her worldview and that strongly connected the narratives. Each of these
subthemes related to self-identified points in the lives of the key informants that described their
inward acknowledgement or innate knowledge of their resilience. Each key informant spoke of
the elevation of themselves above or beyond their experiences in a very matter of fact manner
despite the extraordinary circumstances of their lives. Although each key informant clearly
chose a social work degree program as a clear path to a profession, none spoke of education as a
measure of success, a way of “making it” in the world or the promise of a better life. Rather,
higher education was another dramatic, pivotal point in their lives that shifted them closer to a goal consistent with their long-standing self-determination.

The certainty of the narratives that included this transcendental attitude indicated higher order knowledge of one’s own knowing and self-awareness. The dramatic crisis of each experience in his/her life did not seem to impact his or her ability to transcend and move into a higher order of thinking. Each key informant spoke of his or her goal of a social work career as an accepted pathway to service. The challenges or transitions in each life were viewed as critical junctures, not as limitations. The key informants articulated their journey towards a professional helping career in a very prescient and prophetic manner: each felt compelled to accept a call to serve.

The two phases of this study underscored the leadership development among social work students as experiential with the strong indicators of individual felt experience and construction of meaning that can be connected through shared concepts.

The interviews were much more than a mere process of information exchange; the interview was dependent on the ability of the key informant to interpret questions, and to understand and accept reciprocal expectations of the research process. Obviously, the level of mutual trust and understanding between the interview partners (the key informants and me, the researcher) was crucial for the quality of the data. The interviews in this study allowed for detailed narratives and presentation of self from the key informants in a way that was not supported by the first stage of survey use. I was able to use probing questions to encourage the key informant to report further details and reflections. The second interview and cognitive mapping exercise was an especially effective style; two of the key informants reported that these experiences gave them a feeling of being taken seriously and all of the key informants indicated a positive comfort level with the exercise.
Additional issues or concepts identified through the interviews of humility, idiosyncratic worldview, and lifelong learning and critical thinking were not explored and should be brought to the foreground for deeper methodological analysis. The methodology of this research involves important compromises between accurate description of a phenomenon in context and the generalizability of this explanation of findings to other settings. This research captured the narratives of the key informants and illuminated the concepts and processes as identified by these participants. The relevance and descriptive value of these findings for other populations is, however, unknown. Although in many ways, the findings of this research can inform educational standards and practices, there is much to be gained by additional sample-specific perspectives or comprehensive, large sample extensions of this research.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The author, Michael Eric Dyson (2004), provides an insightful examination of important issues that affect people who are most often seen as on the edges of society, often excluded from full and meaningful participation in the major institutions that foster success in this country. Dyson’s thoughtful consideration of race, ethnicity, power and class as related to higher education earned my respectful attention early in my consideration of a dissertation topic. Dyson calls all of us to reexamine ingrained beliefs that often spring from cultural myths with no basis in fact. His work suggested that there was merit in this research that could illuminate the narratives of nontraditional students.

Although I have yet to write a memoir, I have at times written about my life as it relates to my work. I do this, in part, because I believe that intellectuals and academics who have been poor or working class must testify to our experiences and struggles, and perhaps inspire others to emulate, even exceed, our efforts. I also find that the personal voice, when its tones rise above grating narcissism, can emphasize truths that sound needlessly abstract in the academic’s mouth. When enough of these stories get out, perhaps folks who, on first blush, might seem unlikely to succeed in higher education will get a fair chance. (p.ii)

Heeding Dyson’s words and paying attention to the personal voice in this research, I found that the words most frequently used by the key informants in this study to describe the call to serve included “we”, “us”, and “community”. None of the key informants referred to themselves as courageous or “better than someone else”. Yet, each reflected on the significance of respect and dignity of encouraging others over celebrating themselves.
The key informants in this study who self-identified as resilient also placed their definition of
the call to serve within the context of their experiences. The data in this study supports that the
definition of resiliency can be examined within the framework of adults who persist and
persevere in defiance of negative predictors of educational success.

**Findings Related to Research Questions**

The sequential mixed-methods design of this research provided important tools that supported
the exploration of the research questions of this study. In this sequential methodology, the
quantitative survey guided the selection of key informants in a relatively small N study. Results
from the qualitative interviews provided undocumented data such as the consistency of key
informants’ identification of the call to serve and definition of concepts as well as previously
unidentified variables and critique of the conceptual framework. Despite the range of
applications of self-efficacy and adult development theory, remarkable consistency of resilience
was established through the interview and cognitive mapping process. Quantitative measures of
self-efficacy, moral reasoning, spiritual development and resilience were not applied to the
interview transcripts. However, the identifying factors of each concept resonated within the
transcripts as were identified through the Thematic Index File.

Results from interview process helped me to sort through the complex interaction effect of
the concepts that were consistent with the phenomena relevant to the research question of this
work. For example, the literature suggests that high self-efficacy increases the ability of
individuals to cope with adverse life situations. Yet, the transcripts strongly linked the key
informants’ experience to more than coping strategies: the ability to overcome, thrive and persist
(resilience) was a far more powerful message in the transcripts than self-efficacy. The cognitive
mapping exercise proved to be a vital step in checking the reliability and validity of the data.
This was an important and practical approach that linked the methodology to the theory based or research based conceptual framework.

A key feature of this methodology was that it provided a structured approach within which data, gathered during the survey and the interviews, shaped the exploration of the research questions. The goal of the research methodology was to maximize the diversity of perspectives with a relatively small sample so that responses and cognitive maps would reflect the expanse of this particular conceptual research framework. To that end, the purposive sample did speak to that framework. The sequential methodology provided rigor and substance that allowed for identification and validation of key concepts that are consistent in the process and outcome of leadership among nontraditional social work students.

Within the conceptual framework of this study, I explored the following research questions:

- What is the relevance of resiliency and self-efficacy to these individuals and to their self-identification as social work leaders?
- What can the research tell us about how we can better structure social work education and curricula for students who are nontraditional?
- What instructional methods and advising strategies should social work education consider in order to better support and nurture leadership within nontraditional social work students?

The sequential mixed methods approach in this study allowed for exploration of these questions. The findings can contribute to an understanding of the prior experiences of nontraditional students that informs the call to serve, as well as the policy and practice of social work higher education.

From this analysis, a new conceptual framework emerged that highlighted the essential
concept of resiliency as interpreted from the key informants’ experiences and responses. As noted, the first wave of resilience research found that different personality characteristics were found to be associated with resilience in children and adolescents. Recent studies (Richardson, 2002) involving difference populations (adult children of alcoholics, college students, working women in several states) suggest that the most important characteristic promoting resilience is purpose in life or existential meaning. Klumpfer and Summerhays (2006) note that creating meaning for one’s life through goals, dreams, and a desire to use one’ talents to make the world a better place are frequently cited by adults who have been resilient survivors in times of severe adversity. This research supports a strong connectedness of social work students who are servant leaders to a purpose in their life and the call to serve. Within that analysis is the inference of the resiliency of these adult students who participated as key informants in this study.

An interesting finding of this study is the lack of self-identification of the key informants as leaders. The enactment of leadership roles was found through the use of the Servant Leadership Profile. Yet, as a whole, the key informants did not accept a leadership role that included a differential in power and authority over others.

While interviewing the key informants of this study, rich complexity and depth of experience became apparent. Despite chaotic pasts and complicated current lives, the key informants never doubted their commitment to education and training. One key informant said it clearly when she (Maria) advised: “I tell myself that you know that you can only achieve your goal by working and going to school. So then you have to look at what you’re going to give up and how you’re going to handle it – you can’t have it all”. In fact, numerous times, key informants offered their advice to the younger students that, in spite of what one may hear in the media or general culture, there are sacrifices and “you can’t have it all,” or at least not all at once.
As social work educators, we can hear this important message and resist the inclination to compartmentalize the lives of adult students. The lived experiences should be supported – and celebrated – rather than separated, one part of life from another. The student role is often seen as bound by age and limited experiences, and, too often, the curricula reflect that pedagogy instead of the andragogy that engages adult learners in the structure of the learning experience.

These key informants accept that they have the opportunity to have significant influence on people who are coping with tragedy or painful life experiences. The parallel experiences potently illustrate the many dimensions of the lived experiences that the adult nontraditional student brings to the study of social work. The research provided a powerful overview of the dynamics of individual leadership development and the remarkable shared meaning of the key informants on the concepts of resilience, leadership and the call to serve. In the final analysis, the validity of the conceptual model that includes a focus on resilience has potential application to each of the research questions.

Developing a better understanding of the relationship between resiliency, sense-making and the call to serve promises to deliver numerous practical benefits to social work, including adding a fresh perspective on the role and task of leadership, helping to deepen understanding of the fundamental needs and expectations of various key stakeholder groups, and providing insights into how to maximize the purpose of social work education.

Adversity and life challenges can produce extremely debilitating emotions and nonproductive behaviors. Yet, the key informants of this research have framed their adverse life experiences in a way that has turned into a motivating force for constructive and collective action. As noted, resilience has been defined as achievement or success despite conditions that are adverse or that challenge adaptation. Early in resiliency research, different personality characteristics were
found to be associated with resilience. In the literature reflecting this research, purpose in life was often cited as an indicator of resilience and existential meaning was frequently linked to the development of resilience. Within this study, the key informants frequently reflected on the meaning and purpose of their lives within spiritual development: 4.1 reflection on important questions of meaning and identity, 4.2 explanation of how beliefs contribute to personal identity, and 4.3 expression of ‘inner beliefs’.

In addition, the learning strategies of nontraditional students were explicated through the research of this study. The lived experiences and cognitive structure of sense-making and resilience inform a different approach to learning and study for these students. Adult, nontraditional learners are most successful when discussion is a significant part of the classroom process (Mezirow, 1990). Instructors who champion the cognitive view through discussion ensure a learning atmosphere of trust, respect and safety for adult learners. The key informants of this study – all adult, nontraditional learners – are prepared to learn and share their experiences. This process of applying classroom concepts to life situations is consistent with the construction of knowledge through active participation. The formation of leadership in the key informants is a valuable experience – “teachable moments” – in which learners are most receptive to new information. This contextual approach to adult learning is grounded in the perspective that adult development cannot be understood apart from the sociohistorical context in which it occurs (Blumer, 1969). The contexts in which people live and the attitudes, skills and behaviors of adult students influence who people become.

The key informants of this study connect their individual lived experiences to their call to serve: collectively, they were unanimous in highlighting their resilience as the influence on their call to serve and decision to seek social work education. Teaching and instruction to these
students can best be accomplished through educational psychologist Vygotsky’s “guided learning” (Kozulin, et al., 2003), that supports active partnership of teacher and learner. Guided learning – based in sociocultural theory and its role for contemporary education - requires that the teacher adjust the instructional level based on the learner’s socio-cultural relevant skills. This approach allows for the dynamic assessment of students’ lived experiences as relevant to the formation of learning activity.

Recognizing the richness of culture, life experiences and the attachment of meaning to these experiences, guided learning can be applied to the instruction of nontraditional students. This theory of adult learning – andragogy – is significantly different than the pedagogy of much of the current focus in social work education. Andragogy supports that adults seek out opportunities to learn and view learning as a means to an end, not an end in itself (Knowles, 1990). The key informants of this study bring a wealth of information and experiences to the learning process. Each key informant reflected on their life experiences as a foundation that connected them to their current education and career goals within the call to serve. The successful instructional process should allow these nontraditional students to participate in the classroom through problem solving exercises or case studies that promote discussion relevant to their lived experiences. In this partnership, the instructor can integrate these experiences with new information, connecting the learners to the purpose of learning.

Implications for Practice

In this research, I presented the ways in which key informants understood and made meaning of their experiences that inform and support their call to serve. As I review the research efforts as a whole, I recognize these understandings and meanings as consistent with Mezirow’s transformative learning theory (1990, 2000). All of the six key informants expressed or indicated
transformative learning as defined by Mezirow to include meaning structures, common themes, and also different kinds of learning. The key informants described their learning as becoming more reflective and critical, being more open to the perspectives of others and being less defensive and more accepting of new ideas. I found that the higher education experience for five of the six participants was positive and involved personal learning and growth. For all six of the key informants, their life experiences and contemporary lives were characterized by Mezirow’s “appreciative inquiry”, genuine reflection on the content of the problem, the process of problem-solving, or the premise of the problem. This research may contribute to increased understanding of how appreciative inquiry can affect individual learning experiences in the classroom and in the pre-professional program experiences. The findings of this study may catalyze new ways of teaching and learning for programs of nontraditional students.

The education of social work students is generally focused on younger students with little attention to the recruitment of older students or those who are considered nontraditional. This is a confounding situation given the wide-ranging services and practice of social work. The profession struggles with its own identity, and there is considerable disagreement about what social work is and social workers often find that they cannot describe what is involved in a way that others can understand. Yet, social workers themselves can articulate that, as professionals, they are between the social and the personal arenas of human interaction (Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2005). This disagreement and uncertainty about the nature of social work comes from the profession’s central claim to connect individuals, groups and communities with social change. Since so many human and social factors – in constant flux – are connected through social work, professional practice requires flexibility, dedication and perseverance. If this is so, people who become social workers must internalize a particular approach to knowing and thinking about
human beings and the world. Instead of defining social work as one “thing”, the profession can be viewed as a social construction of meaning, influenced by others, by social need, and by its own professional discourse on knowledge, values and ethics (Berger & Luckmann, 1971).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of nontraditional students who are currently a substantial and increasing subgroup of social work students (Lennon, 2002). Information about their personal experiences and educational needs is of interest to social work programs. The results of this study suggest that despite general perceptions that older, nontraditional students are “set in their ways” and not open to classroom learning, the key informants were positive about their educational experiences and passionate about their learning. The key informants brought realistic expectations based on their lived experiences and effectively articulated their self-identified strengths and weaknesses as learners.

Nontraditional students may, in fact, more quickly learn to think and act like a social worker because of their ability to connect the learning objectives to their experiences. Preparatory coursework may be a challenge, yet the key informants expressed high value of these learning opportunities. Data analysis through the Thematic Index File identified a consistent theme of life-long learning and commitment to continued education that was not a part of the conceptual framework of this study. Given the strength of the key informants’ comments, social work programs may effectively and positively engage nontraditional students in co-creating a learning environment. Perhaps having had life experiences in which they dealt with multiple systems prepared the key informants for the generalist practice roles of advocate and broker. Or, for example, locating available services and assistance for others requires establishing working relationships. Skill and knowledge from lived experiences greatly enhances the success of the key informants in the generalist practice role that requires relationship- and team-building.
The conceptual, interpersonal, and leadership skills of nontraditional students suggest implications for social work education programs in structuring educational experiences to meet their needs. These students with family and work responsibilities need the flexibility to spread out their degree plan over time. Additional accommodations could include more evening courses and weekend and inter-session courses. Field education could support those students already working in human services to complete an undergraduate degree or the field education could be tailored to build on the strengths (and schedule) of the nontraditional student. Based in the strong potential contributions of nontraditional social work students in the program, along with the increasing numbers of these students, social work programs can be more responsive to nontraditional students through new and different advising and recruitment strategies.

These ideas seek to provide the basis for highlighting how undergraduate social work education can reach and empower nontraditional students who can take more control over their learning. It is intended to open up for discussion a crucial but poorly documented area of social work education, i.e. the place for nontraditional students in social work education. Adopting a new approach to teaching and work with students challenges our own past experience and learning styles and requires us to identify and understand the process of our work, from the students’ perspective (Coulshed, 1989). It means that educators may have to take calculated risks about relative roles and responsibilities within the instructional process. It is not just the students who have to develop their skills and confidence in relation to the process. This approach implies that educators may not be the sole authority on social work services. In addition, encouraging and developing the process also requires additional and different skills, such as facilitation, a particularly skilful and demanding task.

However, the potential gains for social work education and practice from adopting this
approach could be significant. Nontraditional students, as active learners, are able to build on past knowledge and experience to develop current skills (Fisher & Somerton, 2000) within a critical framework that creates the basis for more assertive and empowering practitioners. The strong focus of this research on the resiliency of the key informants suggests that these students are likely to achieve their goals and to provide inspiration and wisdom in their professional practice. These experiences will certainly influence professional practice in ways that can contribute to the key informants’ community of choice and scope of practice. In addition, the lived experiences may shape recruitment and retention efforts to embrace, support and mentor nontraditional students. The outcomes of this study demonstrate the opportunity to incorporate new and different types of students who bring valuable lived experience to the social work curricula and to the communities they are called to serve.

This research provided a clearer understanding about the causal processes that produced the close statistical association between key informants and the Servant Leadership Profile scores. Furthermore, by using the qualitative interview data, I can add three additional context concepts that were not considered in the research framework: humility, idiosyncratic worldview, and lifelong learning. These concepts may improve the explanatory power of the framework. In addition, attention to culturally specific knowledge and the operationalization of concepts and the development of measurement instruments should be considered. The Servant Leadership Profile, although meticulously constructed, may yield an invalid or misleading picture if research participants understand a question in a different way from the researchers, or if the topic addressed through the interviews are not relevant to the participants.

Additional questions that were generated by this research include: Are certain concepts expressed or understood within this specific sample? Are concepts as identified in this research
generally accepted by other students? Is inquiry focusing on non-traditional students as limited wholes conducted in a setting with heterogeneous norms and patterns of action or are there universal social concepts among all social work students? The methodological implications of this research raise important questions: What, if anything, is different about the result obtained in this study as compared to findings I might have obtained with a different method? Did the choice of the topic that is entirely consistent with the researcher’s own perspective provide alternative views or opportunities for opinions of the key informants to be included? Are there other issues or identifiers within the sample population to consider (e.g., full-time versus part-time students, male versus female)? Nontraditional students vary in many ways other than age and those factors were not considered in this research.

The basic idea behind generalization in qualitative methodology is that some sort of general social process or social structure is at work in any single case. A thorough qualitative analysis may thus determine essential characteristics that do not depend on the number of cases but on the strength of the theoretical reasoning. Given the context-bound nature and purposiveness of this sample, it is difficult to support generalizability. The application of qualitative methods carries the danger that the researcher may focus on distinctive or remote phenomena and marginal cases (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). However, the investigation of this group is a research goal justified in itself – an opportunity to explore the experiences of a specific target population.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

The data from this research confirmed the relationship of the concepts within the framework for the target population. I suggest the continued exploration of the transferability of the concepts to be considered within the larger social work student sample of nontraditional students. This recommendation is based in the several limitations to the current study. First, the nature in
which the participants were selected may affect the generalizability of the findings. The participants were recruited from a Catholic university, and their responses may not represent the attitudes and beliefs of other college students or members of the general public. Individuals who decide to attend a university affiliated with a particular religion may do so because they share similar beliefs and values of that institution. A second limitation may be related to the within-group differences inherent in ethnic group categorization. For example, the identification of “Hispanic” fails to consider the vast cultural and ethnic within-group differences among people from this population. Differing class positions, differences in age, race and ethnicity should be considered, as critical theory (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) suggests that differing responses – and the creation of those responses – are based in culture. In order to enhance and strengthen the research that I began in this dissertation, I recommend continued exploration of the features related to culture within the study of nontraditional social work students.

Last, it is important to note the limitations inherent in self-report measures of the cognitive mapping. Participants may respond to items in a way that they deem socially acceptable and not the way they actually feel. Hence, social desirability is an important limitation of the current investigation.

Future studies should continue to examine the role of adult resilience in the sense-making and call to serve of nontraditional social work students. The research strongly contradicts the “individual correlates” definition of resiliency in psychiatry and, through the narratives of the key informants, expands it in a definition that is much more complex, involving moral reasoning and spiritual development. This is a much broader, interconnected process than described in literature related to resilience. As brought forward in this research, the relationship of adult resilience to contextual factors or the overcoming of adversity as adults in the context of moral
reasoning and spiritual development deserves further investigation. Developmental theory that examines individual behavior across the life span is lacking in the examination of resilience as related to age-related stages and tasks. The adaptation and competence of the key informants was articulated through their own definition of leadership role and enactment: 6.1 self identity versus identified by others, 6.2 vision and focus, 6.3 team building, and 6.4 change agent/transformation. The key informants of this study illustrate the larger context in which people live, thrive and learn new skills in career development. This suggests a strengths-based perspective versus a deficit or pathological definition of individual experiences that can inform our efforts to recruit, advise and educate future social workers who are older, nontraditional students.

The qualitative phase of this research indicated that self-efficacy and leadership identity were imbedded in the interviews and the cognitive mapping of the key informants. Although not explicit or clearly articulated, all of the key informants’ generated statements that linked their consistent belief in their successful helping abilities to leadership traits. As previously noted in this research, although all of the key informants were uncomfortable with the identity of leader, they consistently referred to themselves as role models, team builders, organizers, change agents, and servants. Ongoing research that examines the relationship of leadership identity and the call to serve may provide a better understanding of the complex interconnectedness of these concepts. This structured, intentional exploratory study gave shape to the idea that older, nontraditional social work students have qualities and characteristics of resiliency that are distinct and formative in their call to serve. This study provides a theoretical basis and data to influence a more comprehensive examination of the leadership formation with students who are strong servant leaders. Replication of this work with a wider, more diverse sample would
provide additional material in the investigation of sense-making and the call to serve.

Summary

Each of the key informants of this study responded to a call to serve with a sense of responsibility: a responsibility to self, to his or her talents, and to the community. The key informants – Bill, Francis, Joe, Mary, Mike and Susan – were all passionate about their education and highly engaged in building skill and competency as social workers. Even though their pursuits and choices brought conflict and sacrifice, each man and woman was undeterred. Their commitment to service was genuine and grounded, not a put-on intensity. The call to serve was a lasting conviction to accomplish his or her goal of becoming a professional social worker despite incredible obstacles both present and in the past.

Resilience is no easy personal accomplishment, and a social worker entering a community beset by continual failure and frustration may be well suited to transfer that personal resilience into a motivating force for action. Acting as a change agent in this way is, of course, acting as a leader. Life experiences and resilience, when directed towards social justice, can be a powerful force. Exploring and testing these implications provides a rich agenda for future research.
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APPENDIX A. SERVANT LEADERSHIP PROFILE
**Servant Leadership Profile**

Please use the following scale to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements in describing your own attitudes and practices as a leader. If you have not held any leadership position in an organization, then answer the questions as if you were in a position of authority and responsibility. There are no right or wrong answers. Simply rate each question in terms of what you really believe or normally do in leadership situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (SD)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree (SA)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, if you strongly agree, you may circle 7, if you mildly disagree, you may circle 3. If you are undecided, circle 4, but use this category sparingly.

1. To inspire team spirit, I communicate enthusiasm and confidence.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I listen actively and receptively to what others have to say, even when they disagree with me.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I always keep my promises and commitments to others.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I grant all my workers a fair amount of responsibility and latitude in carrying out their tasks.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I am genuine and honest with people, even when such transparency is politically unwise.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I am willing to accept other people’s ideas, whenever they are better than mine.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I promote tolerance, kindness, and honesty in the workplace.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. To be a leader, I should be front and center in every function in which I am involved.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I create a climate of trust and openness to facilitate participation in decision making.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. My leadership effectiveness is improved through empowering others.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I want to build trust through honesty and empathy.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I am able to bring out the best in others.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I want to make sure that everyone follows orders without questioning my authority.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. As a leader, my name must be associated with every initiative.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I consistently delegate responsibility to others and empower them to do their job.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I seek to serve rather than be served.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. To be a strong leader, I need to have the power to do whatever I want without being questioned.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I am able to inspire others with my enthusiasm and confidence in what can be accomplished.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. I am able to transform an ordinary group of individuals into a winning team.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I try to remove all organizational barriers so that others can freely participate in decision-making.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. I devote a lot of energy to promoting trust, mutual understanding and team spirit.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. I derive a great deal of satisfaction in helping others succeed.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I have the moral courage to do the right thing, even when it hurts me politically.  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I am able to rally people around me and inspire them to achieve a common goal  
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I am able to present a vision that is readily and enthusiastically embraced by others.  

27. I invest considerable time and energy in helping others overcome their weaknesses and develop their potential.  

28. I want to have the final say on everything, even areas where I don’t have the competence.  

29. I don’t want to share power with others, because they may use it against me.  


31. I am willing to risk mistakes by empowering others to “carry the ball”.  

32. I have the courage to assume full responsibility for my mistakes and acknowledge my own limitations.  

33. I have the courage and determination to do what is right in spite of difficulty or opposition.  

34. Whenever possible, I give credit to others.  

35. I am willing to share my power and authority with others in the decision making process.  

36. I genuinely care about the welfare of people working with me.  

37. I invest considerable time and energy equipping others.  

38. I make it a high priority to cultivate good relationships among group members.  

39. I am always looking for hidden talents in my workers.  

40. My leadership is based on a strong sense of mission.  

41. I am able to articulate a clear sense of purpose and direction for my organization’s future.
42. My leadership contributes to my employees/colleagues' personal growth.
43. I have a good understanding of what is happening inside the organization.
44. I set an example of placing group interests above self interests.
45. I work for the best interests of others rather than self.
46. I consistently appreciate, recognize, and encourage the work of others.
47. I always place team success above personal success.
48. I willingly share my power with others, but I do not abdicate my authority and responsibility.
49. I consistently appreciate and validate others for their contributions.
50. When I serve others, I do not expect any return.
51. I am willing to make personal sacrifices in serving others.
52. I regularly celebrate special occasions and events to foster a group spirit.
53. I consistently encourage others to take initiative.
54. I am usually dissatisfied with the status quo and know how things can be improved.
55. I take proactive actions rather than waiting for events to happen to me.
56. To be a strong leader, I need to keep all my subordinates under control.
57. I find enjoyment in serving others in whatever role or capacity.
58. I have a heart to serve others.

59. I have great satisfaction in bringing out the best in others.

60. It is important that I am seen as superior to my subordinates in everything.

61. I often identify talented people and give them opportunities to grow and shine.

62. My ambition focuses on finding better ways of serving others and making them successful.

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Dear Social Work Student:

My name is Joyce Litten, and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership Studies at Bowling Green State University. You are invited to participate in a survey, “Servant Leadership Profile”. The purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of servant leadership among social work students. Your participation in the survey will contribute to a better understanding of leadership in social work students. You may also gain insight into attributes that make a servant leader. Your participation will also help social work program develop curricula and improve recruiting, advising, and retention.

Whether or not you participate in this study will not affect your status as a student in this class or your relationship with the university, the instructor, or the researcher. There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. The identifying information will be used only to contact those students who will be selected for follow up interviews. By completing this survey, you imply consent for me to use your responses as research data. The entire survey should take no more than 20 minutes for you to complete. You may decline to answer any question and you have the right to withdraw from the participation at any time without penalty.

So that your instructor will not know which students actually completed the survey, please place your survey in the business envelope given to you. If you decide not to complete the survey, please place your blank survey in the envelope as well. You should place your survey in an envelope and return to your instructor – whether or not you actually complete the survey. There should be no identifying information written on the envelopes themselves. Your instructor will return all envelopes to me and will not know whether or not you participated in this study.

This study is being conducted as part of dissertation research through Bowling Green State University. You are free to contact the investigator to discuss the survey if you have any questions or concerns. In addition, you may also contact my advisors for this study, Dr. Judy Jackson-May (judyjac@bgsu.edu) or Dr. Judith Zimmerman (judithz@bgsu.edu) or the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at 419-372-7716 or at hsrb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a participant.

Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Joyce P. Litten, M.S.S.A., L.I.S.W.
APPENDIX C. INFORMED CONSENT: SURVEY DATA
INFORMED CONSENT FORM – SURVEY DATA

Principal Investigator (PI): Jorge Litien, NSSA
Phone: 419/824-3708

Project Title: Examining Servant Leadership in Undergraduate Social Work Students

I would like to invite you, with no obligation, to participate in a study designed to investigate the traits and characteristics of servant leadership in students who are pursuing an undergraduate social work degree. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study.

If you choose to participate, I would like you to complete a survey called The Servant Leadership Profile. The survey will take no more than 20 minutes each time to complete.

I will keep the information obtained from this study confidential, and I will only report this data in statistical and/or qualitative analyses with no specific connections made to you. At no point will I reveal your identity. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only to me, the principal investigator.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not interfere with your current or future relations with me, your instructor, your department, or Lourdes College. Your instructor will not know who is and who is not participating in this study. Choosing whether or not to participate will not impact your course grade in any way. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and the investigator may choose to cancel your participation at any time.

Do you have any questions? (Circle one)  NO  YES

If yes, please contact me at the above phone number or by e-mail at jlitten@lourdes.edu before signing this form. You may also contact my advisors for this study, Dr. Judy Jackson-May (judyjac@bgsu.edu) or Dr. Judith Zimmerman (juditha@bgsu.edu) or the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at 419-372-7716 or at hsb@bgsu.edu. Do not sign this form until I have addressed these questions to your satisfaction. Please retain a copy of this form for your records.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY FROM WHICH DATA WILL BE USED FOR RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION PURPOSES ONLY, BASED ON THE FACT THAT ALL OF YOUR QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED TO YOUR SATISFACTION. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO INDICATES YOU ARE 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER.

I  AGREE  DO NOT AGREE (please circle one) to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature:________________________________ Date:________________

Participant's Name (please print):__________________________________________
APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT: STUDENT INTERVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT FORM – STUDENT INTERVIEW

Principal Investigator (PI): Joyce P. Litten
Phone: 419/824-3708

Project Title: Examining Servant Leadership in Undergraduate Social Work Students

I would like to invite you, with no obligation, to participate in a study designed to investigate servant leadership among undergraduate social work students. Specifically, I am exploring the ways in which nontraditional social work students describe social work leadership, and the traits and characteristics that identify their leadership role. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study.

If you choose to participate, I would like you to join me for one 30-minute interview. During this interview, we will look over the Servant Leadership Profile survey you completed. We will specifically discuss the survey questions and your opinion of them. I will ask questions related to your survey response and your life experiences that informed your response to the survey questions. With your permission, this interview session will be audio-taped and transcribed for further analysis.

I will keep the information obtained from this study confidential, and I will only report the data in statistical and/or qualitative analyses with no specific connections made to you. I will identify any quotes used in research presentations (oral or paper) by a fake name, not your actual name. At no point will I reveal your identity. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet accessible only to me, the principal investigator. I will destroy original audiotapes after I complete the transcriptions.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not interfere with your current or future relations with me, your instructor, your department, or Lourdes College. Your instructor will not know who is and who is not participating in this study. Choosing whether or not to participate will not impact your course grade in any way. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and the investigator may choose to cancel your participation at any time.

Do you have any questions? (Circle one)  NO  YES

If yes, please contact me at the above phone number or by e-mail at jlitten@lourdes.edu before signing this form. You may also contact my advisors for this study, Dr. Judy Jackson-May (judyclarke@bgsu.edu) or Dr. Judith Zimmerman (judithz@bgsu.edu) or the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at BGSU at 419-372-7716 or at hsrc@bgsu.edu. Do not sign this form until I have addressed these questions to your satisfaction. Please retain a copy of this form for your records.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN AN AUDIO-TAPED INTERVIEW, FROM WHICH DATA WILL BE USED FOR RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION PURPOSES ONLY, BASED ON THE FACT THAT ALL OF YOUR QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ADDRESSED TO YOUR SATISFACTION. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO INDICATES YOU ARE 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER.

I  AGREE  DO NOT AGREE  (please circle one)  to participate in this study.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________  Date: ________________

Participant’s Name (please print): ____________________________

550 Education Building
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0246
Phone: 419-372-7350
Fax: 419-372-9511
www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhl/LPS