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**“Integrity matters: an inquiry  
into social workers’  
understandings”.**

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fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

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## Abstract

This small scale study recruited a sample of qualified and experienced social work practitioners to explore the research question: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”* The aim of this research was to capture and reflect the participants’ voices in relation to their perceptions, appreciation and application of the notion of integrity to their work.

The reasons for choosing to interrogate the topic of integrity were three-fold:

- i) I was intrigued with the word ‘integrity’ which I perceived to be much used and rarely defined or contextualised in social work conversations, Codes of Ethics and Codes of Conduct.
- ii) I suspected that the term ‘integrity’ could be a container or integrating concept for a range of values and virtues such as respect, dignity, spirituality, trustworthiness.
- iii) I wondered if in the process of discovering the practitioner voices in relation to integrity we might also reveal factors or processes that could strengthen critical reflection, enhance job satisfaction, and increase resilient practice.

Beginning with an e-survey, participants identified and described some of their definitions and key concepts in relation to integrity. The e-survey provided material that was used in subsequent focus group interviews to further explore participants’ understandings and experiences of integrity. The data collected from the focus group interviews then underwent a thematic analysis and coding process. Findings from this process were distilled and collected under two main headings: Practitioners ‘constructing’ integrity and practitioners ‘maintaining’ integrity. Several themes such as practitioners ‘making meaning’ of integrity, professional and personal integrity, integrity in the workplace, practitioners ‘doing’ integrity and practitioners experiencing challenges to integrity were identified and explored. The discussions and conclusions reached as a result of this study contribute to the advancement of social work knowledge and offer social work practitioners a perceptive framework for enhanced professional reflexivity around constructing and measuring integrity with the possibility of balancing and strengthening integrity in their practice.

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

Integrity demands an ongoing reflective and critical engagement with one's motivational set. (Cox, La Caze, & Levine 2003, p. 25)

### **Integrity Matters**

Is integrity important to social work? Is the nature of integrity definable, or can it only be grasped intuitively as part of one's 'sense' or 'knowing' of self and others? Is it possible to describe and capture integrity in the context of social work by language and story? My curiosity to explore practitioners' perspectives and possibly find some answers to these key questions has motivated this inquiry.

The aim of this research was to explore the concept of integrity, to take it apart and to discover and expand on how it is seen by practitioners and how it impacts or influences their practice. I grappled with how this topic might be 'operationalised' so that I could research it. I chose the topic of integrity as I wondered how fundamental it might be to social work. Without integrity, faith or confidence in the profession is not possible. Like Cox et al. (2003), in the introductory quote above, I was curious to see what might be needed in order to balance and sustain our integrity, must we examine and assess it continuously from both the personal and professional worlds in which we operate?

Integrity contains within it the core elements of honesty, reliability and trustworthiness. These elements are drawn from a strong ethical foundation of deeply held beliefs and values and I was very interested to see if this perception was shared by social work practitioners who participated in this research. My reasons for isolating out the concept of integrity arose from my own explorations and reflection on 'self', and the curiosity I have about integrity acting as an integrating concept. How might integrity be perceived? Perhaps it may be seen as inextricably aligned to values, beliefs, philosophy, ethics and other core components such as respect, dignity and spirituality.

Integrity is variously described as an elusive concept with little agreement on precise definition although recognition that there are clusters of shared intuitions (Cox et al,



2003, p. 1). Carter (1996) defines integrity as a 'virtue', something to strive towards as opposed to something we exemplify. He sees it as first in importance among elements of 'good character' and believes it weaves insights from philosophy, theology, history and law. Carter sees integrity as giving meaning to all other virtues. The idea of social workers having shared intuitions as suggested by Cox is an interesting one and my inquiry and the purpose of this study was to discover how integrity is seen and understood within the current context of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **Research Question**

*"How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?"*

My task in undertaking this research study was to try and find some answers to this question, in order to do this I had to think carefully about my own persuasion and approach.

Andrew Turnell suggests that social work researchers and theorists need to promote inquiry methodologies that foster reverence for those at the frontline and their experience. He states that "In this sense inquiry methodologies can be likened to a spiritual practice, they are a method of directing awareness that could potentially first expect and then elicit and honour practitioners' constructive and transformative work" (Turnell, 2006, p. 146). I understand Turnell as saying the attitude and approach of the researcher are intrinsic to the research. For me the 'spiritual' aspects of research practice is driven by and interwoven with my feminist values and beliefs. I agree with Turnell's assertion, my research question as stated above has deliberately used a feminist research paradigm of letting the voice of participants come through strongly. In choosing to privilege the voice of social work supervisors in this study I have aligned and am congruent with my own feminist understandings and approach. This approach has sought to find, acknowledge and bring to the surface the often unvoiced elements of ourselves; the different ways we bring our authentic self and integrate our heart and soul into our work. Utilising this spiritual feminist paradigm has enabled me to conduct an inquiry into integrity that has offered an opportunity for practitioner reflection on an

individual and group basis, it has 'honoured' practitioners' wisdoms, and on a personal level, it has enabled me to discover, explore and begin to understand more deeply how inextricably linked my spirituality and my integrity are.

### **Significance of the Research**

To my knowledge a study of integrity in a social work context has not previously been undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand. The outcome of searching the literature in relation to the social work profession yielded very little recent specific information or research from social work studies and publications, and I was unable to locate any published research specific to integrity in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. I give a more detailed account of my review of the literature in the chapter that follows. This study has therefore highlighted both a gap in the knowledge base and presented me with an opportunity to partner with practising social workers from several locations and social work practice areas for this inquiry. It has reinforced the potential benefits of undertaking this research in order to make a contribution to building the knowledge base and understanding of how integrity is perceived and used in the context of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This research was undertaken during a time (2006-2010), of increased monitoring and regulation and professionalisation of social work, as will be explored later in this thesis (Corrigan, 2005; Beddoe & Duke, 2009). The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) was established by Government in 2003; its purpose had four core components. The first component was to protect the public by ensuring social workers were competent and able to be held accountable for their practice. Secondly the SWRB was to create a framework for registration and thirdly to establish a tribunal to consider complaints about registered social workers. The fourth and final component was to promote the benefits of registration and enhance the professionalism of social workers (Social Workers Registration Act, 2003). The board immediately focused on the raising and setting of the standard educational social work qualifications. It increased the minimum qualification requirement from a two-year diploma to a three-year degree. The SWRB developed and published a code of conduct and designed a competency framework and process for practitioners and, at the time of writing, registration is still

voluntary. There has been a growth in the membership of the professional association, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW). The regular newsletter Social Work NoticeBoard January 2008 reported 3,549 members but by January 2010 this had grown to 4,207. At this time there are also increasing expectations and demands of social work during the current downturn in the world wide economy. All of these factors contribute to the context in which this study was undertaken.

### **Broad Description of the Approach to the Study**

This research is interpretative and impressionistic. Crotty (1998, p.67) explains an interpretivist approach as one that "... looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world". This study has captured some practitioner examples of their intent, meaning, connections and relations to other concepts that they have identified as characteristic of integrity. A sample of experienced social work supervisors was recruited in order to discover what these practitioners 'believe they know' and 'how they come to know it', in relation to both their personal and their professional integrity. The study has attempted to capture impressions and interpretations of integrity, in order to reveal what may be hidden, unrecognised, stuck, obscured or unvoiced by social workers. It has drawn-out from the internalised competence of practitioners how they 'enact' or 'do' integrity in their daily lives. Morrison has drawn on and adapted the work of Maslow (1940, cited in Morrison, 2001) and Yelloly and Henkel (1995), and talks about 'unconscious' learning a worker picks up in their work environments derived from habits, styles and beliefs in co-operative working relationships. Morrison presents a competence Matrix which draws on four stages of competence, including incompetence. Firstly, the 'unconscious incompetence' stage where a person does not yet understand or know about something. Secondly, the 'conscious incompetence' stage where a person recognises there is knowledge or skills missing that will need addressing. Thirdly, the 'conscious competence' stage where skills and knowledge are known to the person, they are clear transferable skills and can be explained to others, although perhaps to demonstrate them requires a great deal of consciousness or concentration. Finally the fourth stage of 'unconscious competence' where the skills and knowledge appear to have become

‘second nature’ or taken for granted and are integrated into the persons practice, although often not examined or discussed. What a person knows he or she can do without being conscious of how they know it. It is mainly from the third stage of ‘conscious competence’ and perhaps a little from the fourth of ‘unconscious competence’ that this study aimed to explore and extrapolate, to gather practitioners ‘knowing’ and application of integrity.

Using an appreciative inquiry approach this study has also drawn on the work of Schön, who explores the world of the reflective practitioner and draws our attention to ‘theories in use’ or theories in action and ‘espoused theories’ (Schön, 1983, 1987). ‘Theories in use’ refers to the type of reflection that takes place within a practitioner’s daily activity when the practitioner is deciding what to do and how to do it. ‘Theories in action’ and ‘espoused theories’ comprise the reflection and articulation of those theories in action to others who are interested in their practice.

This articulation and subsequent theorization of reflection in action involves an extension and reconfiguring of the original process of reflection (Scott, 2008, p.118).

Practitioners who engaged in this research were invited to examine their relationship to, and with integrity, and to think about their thinking and understandings of integrity. This process took their theories in use into a new realm through the further reflection and discussion with others that occurred in their focus groups and with colleagues, family and friends, this enabled a deeper reflection and another level of understanding of both themselves and others in relation to the topic of integrity.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) originates from social constructionist thinking and theory; “a central premise of AI is that the appreciative process of knowing is socially constructed” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 14). It offers a different perspective and approach to organisational development and in particular, to change management. Fry, in Cooperrider et al. (2008, preface) describes Appreciative Inquiry as more about learning and understanding something and thereby valuing it, than being about expressions of appreciation. Appreciative Inquiry processes are dialogic,

strengths-based, people focused interventions that follow a 4-D cycle by selecting a topic and undertaking the following four steps. Firstly, *Discovery* (appreciating and valuing); secondly, *Dream* (envisioning); thirdly, *Design* (co-constructing the future); fourthly *Destiny* (learning, empowering and improvising to sustain the future), (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 2). My research applied the first step in this cycle by taking the topic of integrity and conducting a *discovery* (appreciating and valuing), engaging in dialogue and meaning-making with participants individually and in focus groups. This enabled practitioners to reflect on their espoused theories to discover integrity, and on the experiences, understandings and valuing of integrity in all its various shapes forms and contexts in relation to themselves, other people and their work.

In this study I drew upon my previous experiences and knowledge of using an appreciative inquiry methodology in a ‘learning lab’ situation at a selected service delivery site within a statutory child protection agency. This earlier project had sought to discover how strengths-based practice could be used in a statutory child protection organisation. The AI approach applied was actively seeking the existing strengths of social work, its core values and functions, and the essence of effective practice. It was an inquiry to discover what was working well in social work at its best in order to build and do more of it into the future (Appleton, 2005; Appleton & Weld, 2006(a), 2006(b), 2006(c)). Appreciative inquiry methodology in the learning lab site was introduced as a strengths-based approach to learning and change. This was based on the belief that change will begin with the first question you ask. Appreciating is all about focusing on and recognising the quality of what you are inquiring about (what you notice, grows). Appreciating raises the value or worth of the item or aspect under inquiry and encourages those engaged in the inquiry to be positively curious, sensitive, alert and aware, and to adopt an attitude of ‘seeking’. Inquiry is all about being engaged in an active process to gather information for the purpose of learning and changing. The task of inquiry is to use the knowledge and insights gained to engage with stakeholders to ‘co-create’ the essence of what social work ‘can be’ and ‘should become’ at its very best for the future. My experience was that participants engaging in this kind of process

found it to be energizing, positive and a creative way to work, therefore I borrowed from its philosophy and adapted some of the AI processes to assist my research.

In selecting and crafting a methodology for this study I was also influenced by elements of action research which Vince (2001, p. 1327) says:

...does not seek consensus, but engages with dialogue and difference...it is a method that explicitly recognizes the interplay between reflections and action.

This approach was consistent with both my understandings and experience of working with social work practitioners delivering services for children, youth and families. I started from the point of action reflection that implies on-going discovery and learning and used qualitative interviews through focus group interactions and discussions to mine for rich descriptions and encourage articulation of their 'knowing' about integrity in order to deepen reflection and thereby the practitioners theories and understandings of integrity. I employed elements of action research, aspects of appreciative inquiry and applied them with my own feminist philosophy which is non hierarchal and listens for and amplifies women's voices. Both action research and appreciative inquiry strongly privilege participation in a non-hierarchal way which fits comfortably with my philosophy and the qualitative approach. I considered these methods would be complementary and integrative. In combining these approaches I increased my research confidence and competence. They provided a robust platform and consistent approach to undertake this study with experienced practitioners and address the research question: *"How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?"*

This study began with seeking and gaining ethics approval. I undertook a literature review and from it defined some of the theory that surrounds integrity as a broader concept and then I looked to narrow this down through further exploration of theory in relation to social work. I included some core components that are identified as contributing to professional social work practice such as ethics in order to identify contributing theory and connections. However, I purposefully left it to the participants

in this research to explore and share their ideas and experiences about integrity in social work practice from which to develop an Aotearoa New Zealand finding.

The fieldwork was conducted during the four month period August to December 2008. Data were initially collected from twenty respondents who completed an e-survey instrument. From this e-survey three sets of data were extracted and used in focus group interviews. Twelve of the original twenty respondents to the e-survey subsequently indicated their availability and willingness to participate in one of the three focus groups planned and held in the locations of Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. Due to a variety of individual circumstances four of the original twelve participants were unable to attend their focus group and therefore a total of eight participants engaged in the focus groups.

### **Overview of Thesis Structure**

In this introductory Chapter One, I delve into discovery and discussion on the research topic and evaluate the relevance of what exists within the literature. Chapter Two, the review of the literature, describes the distinct lack of studies or material in Aotearoa New Zealand that is specific to how integrity has been conceptualised and used in social work. The word 'integrity' however is to be found in many areas of practice and study outside as well as within social work, for example mathematics, medicine and ecology. It is in this chapter the somewhat abstract concept of integrity is interrogated and multiple forms and definitions are examined. Some of the thinking and contributions from other areas of study such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, management, leadership and education are highlighted and some of their offerings are discussed. The current context for the delivery of social work services in Aotearoa New Zealand and the two key professional bodies of Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) are introduced. The documents developed by these bodies as frameworks, standards and guidelines to professional conduct and social work practice being the SWRB 2005 Code of Conduct and the ANZASW 2008 Code of Ethics and Bicultural Code of Practice are explored in relation to their use of the word 'integrity'.

Chapter Three introduces the contributing theories supporting this study. A social constructionist paradigm is used to approach the topic and interrogate the research question: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”* Several other theories and approaches that have shaped this work such as Social Action Theory, Critical Theory, Solution Focused, Appreciative Inquiry and strengths-based are acknowledged. I examine the personal lens I brought to the research and I elucidate my insider perspective along with the influences and philosophical views of my role, which are examined in relation to their impact on the research processes. The selection of a research framework, strategy, methodologies, principles and practices to both steer and complement my study are explored and critically analysed.

Chapter Four a description and explanation of the design, procedures and process of the study are presented. The ethical considerations and preparation of the application for Human Ethics Committee approval, along with the key tasks in the research design are outlined. An e-survey, focus groups and a memorandum of understanding used to gather and validate the material and responses from participants, are explained. Recruitment and engagement of the participants, focus group procedures and processes, tools developed to assist the interviewing and questions formulated to conceptualise the topic are discussed. A profile of respondents, the data processing and analysis of information including data management and transcription are all described. The researcher’s professional roles, transparency and power and authority are discussed.

Chapter Five presents the findings from this study. Firstly, practitioners define integrity in words that echo their current understanding and usage of it. Secondly, participants offer the concepts that they associate with integrity and thirdly they submit the meanings they construe from integrity. All three data were subsequently used in focus groups to discuss and further explore the meaning and significance of the concepts identified. Several themes were identified from the interview material, including: recognising integrity, integrity as a process, integrity in the workplace, personal and



professional integrity, practitioners ‘doing’ integrity, practitioners maintaining integrity, and practitioners experiencing challenges to integrity. The importance of integrity in both personal and professional contexts and practitioners’ ability to reflect and be reflexive as an essential element to contribute towards integrity in any given situation was identified. Issues were raised relating to boundaries, context, and the use of supervision to manage the constant balancing of conflicting interests and re-prioritising of commitments in order to sustain integrity on a daily basis. The voice of experienced social work practitioners articulating their understanding and application of integrity is clearly presented.

The Sixth and penultimate chapter presents a discussion of the findings in light of the literature and current context of social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Several of the themes identified in the previous chapters are further analysed and reflected upon. In particular the professional codes of conduct and ethics governing social work in Aotearoa New Zealand are considered. This chapter examines the role of supervision to provide a professional growth and development forum that enables psychological wellbeing for the practitioner and offers a safe environment for examination and exploration of their integrity in practice.

Finally, Chapter Seven draws together relevant themes, discussions, discoveries and opinions relating to practitioners’ ‘knowing’ of integrity. Key success factors in the carrying out of the research are recognised and extrapolated, the limitations and gaps relating to this study are acknowledged. This chapter presents a perceptive framework for possible use by practitioners in constructing and measuring integrity and presents some ideas and recommendations for further research on this topic. The next chapter invites an exploration of the literature in relation to ‘integrity’. It begins by noting the paucity of New Zealand studies in social work and goes on to examine several definitions and many aspects and qualities of integrity that were considered important to this study.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### Integrity in Social Work: An Elusive Concept?

A literature search was undertaken in order to discover what material might be relevant to the research topic question: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”* A variety and combination of search words and phrases that included the key words ‘integrity’ and ‘social work’ were applied. The search was across the full text social work journals and monographs, utilising library data bases including Index New Zealand, Academic Search Elite, Web of Science, JSTOR, Social Services Abstracts, Newztext Plus and Google Scholar. In order to access the most recent research and information, the limit of scope was initially set to material published in the previous five years. When that did not produce the desired results the search parameter was extended to eight years (2000 – 2008). There did not appear to be any particular reason why so few texts were found, other than a lack in the literature of studies in social work specifically relating to integrity. The results returned even less when searching for material originating from Aotearoa New Zealand.

Although the literature review returned very little a decision was made not to extend the search to other professional areas such as Counselling, Philosophy or Psychology, as this would broaden the topic and detract from the focus of this research which was to discover and understand integrity in the context of current social work practice. However some books and articles from the disciplines of Psychology, Philosophy and Management have been drawn upon to assist in framing the perceptions, understandings and discussions of integrity for this study. Websites, newspaper articles, seminal texts (especially in relation to ethics and morals), theses, conference presentations and much use of discussions with colleagues and peers have all contributed sources of information with which to build the relevant knowledge for this literature review. In addition an autobiographical book by Dunphy (2006), drawing upon his fifteen years experience practising social work in South-East Ireland was useful when considering the findings from this study in Chapter Six.

Two main foci for the literature review emerged; the philosophical nature of integrity and the practical ways the profession attempts to prescribe and guide social workers in their application and use of integrity. The literature review which follows, is structured thematically to present aspects of integrity as these emerged from my reading of the literature. As Yegidis and Weinbach (2008, p. 75) state:

A literature review is a recognition that knowledge building is a cumulative process, that goes on over long periods of time, and that each study has (or should have) a unique contribution to make to that process.

Integrity appeared to be frequently used in business articles and publications particularly in relation to leadership, and it was also widely used in relation to the collection, storage and use of data, in Maths, Science and Philosophy. Integrity appears most frequently in codes of ethics, codes of conduct, codes of practice and discussions on morals and ethics.

Two key writers whose work I found particularly useful in relation to thinking about and exploring ethics, integrity and the social work professions were Banks (1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009); and Reamer (1990, 1999, 2006). I have called upon their work in the discussion chapter to link the participants' practitioner experiences of 'integrity' to the further exploration of the professional expectation of social work approaches and services through the ANZASW Code of Ethics and the Social Workers Registration Board Code of Conduct.

In presenting the multiple aspects of integrity in this chapter, I have begun with definitions, moving into two ways of looking at integrity from an objective and a subjective stance. Following this discussion I touch upon the various associations of integrity and other professions use of it. Concepts such as leadership, systems, intellect and philosophy are noted. Personal and social integrity and moral integrity are considered and integrity from a personal and professional perspective is explored. The final part of this chapter focuses on integrity in the current social work context and examines integrity as embedded in social work Codes of Ethics and Conduct.

## Defining Integrity

Integrity is a complex notion; it resists easy definition. As I searched for a ‘working’ definition that I could use to underpin this study, I first consulted the following dictionaries and encyclopaedias to evaluate their explanations, see Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Dictionary Definitions**

The Concise Oxford Dictionary	Wholeness; soundness; uprightness, honesty.
Webster’s Dictionary	Uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic or other values; utter sincerity, honesty and candour, avoidance of deception, expediency, or shallowness of any kind.
The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language	Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code (incorruptibility). The state of being unimpaired; (soundness). The quality or condition of being whole or undivided; (completeness).
Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology	Wholeness, perfect condition, from French <i>intégrité</i> and Latin <i>integritatom</i> , soundness and wholeness. Sense of “uncorrupted virtue”.
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy	People with integrity are perceived to be open and honest and genuine in their dealings with others.

Interestingly, the dictionaries of sociology and social work did not offer definitions or explanations.

A re-occurring theme of integrity consisting of honesty, congruity and consistency with a person’s morals, ethics, principles, values and actions began to emerge.

Hansson (2008, p. 134) defines integrity as a ‘property’ which determines how individuals interact with the world about them. Hansson describes and aligns integrity with a strong sense of personal privacy so that:

Whoever obtains insight into an individual’s personal affairs without permission from the individual concerned is guilty of invasion of their integrity. (Hansson, 2008, p. 133)

There is also a debate about the honesty and integrity of prying into another’s personal information in the form of reading their diary, email or opening their mail as it can be considered (despite their motives), to reflect badly or reduce the integrity of the person who is undertaking the prying. Hansson (2008, p. 134) regards integrity as a property which influences how an individual acts and how others may perceive those actions to have a quality worthy of respect (or not). He determines that integrity is a ‘feature of character’ which calls forth admiration and respect from other people. Certainly in this study when practitioners were asked to recall someone they felt had integrity they all mentioned they were people whom they both respected and admired. In this next section two kinds of integrity are examined through the lens of objectivism and subjectivism.

### ***Objective and Subjective Integrity***

Integrity has been conceived and understood in many ways by different authors. Becker (1998, p.154) suggests that integrity has been confused with other concepts such as honesty and conscientiousness and has been treated as either a “morally neutral or relativistic phenomenon”. The philosophy of objectivism is proffered by Becker as applicable to the term integrity. Becker looks at integrity from an objective stance so it can be separated out from related concepts and defined and therefore measured in a more useful way. Although Becker’s exploration is in relation to business ethics it has relevance and applicability for the social work profession and individuals practising within it because it is useful to unpack the ideas and origins of ethics in relation to integrity. In contrast to subjectivism, objectivism holds that based on our direct experience with reality, concepts are objective. This is because we use ‘reason’ (our rationality) or our cognitive facilities to organise the data we perceive.

Peikoff (1991) takes the approach of 'subjectivism', a philosophy that sees concepts, principles and values as being 'created', as opposed to 'discovered' via inner psychological processes. This is akin to the social constructionist perspective being used in this study. We can see this approach reflected in 'moral relativism' which says that nothing is absolute and all moral and ethical principles are relative to individual choice or cultural norms and therefore socially constructed (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). If this line of reasoning were followed to the maximum it could make the concept of integrity meaningless. It could be argued that a person adhering to any set of principles no matter how lacking in morality, ethically abhorrent or evil could still have integrity. An example of this is Hitler in pursuit of a pure Aryan race; he could be seen as having personal integrity because he was clearly following his principles despite the immoral and unethical deeds that were carried out whilst adhering to them. This is an extreme example and it would clearly conflict with social work values and beliefs which amongst many other principles promote fundamental human rights and social justice.

Returning to objectivism, according to Binswanger (1991, pp. 157 – 158) there are three fundamental truths or metaphysical axioms that underpin this approach:

- (1) reality exists, so the external world is objective and not an illusion
- (2) people possess consciousness which enables them to perceive reality not invent it
- (3) contradictions do not exist in reality as every entity has its own unique identity.

Objectivism also suggests that people act (or not) under their own volition, meaning we have the capacity to think (or not) and to choose amongst alternative courses of action (Peikoff, 1991 and Rand, 1989 cited in Becker, 1998). The ethics of objectivism are based on moral values and virtues that a person chooses and then lives by. Integrity is seen as a virtue which is described by Becker (1998, p. 157) as 'the actions by which one gains and keeps values'. Rationality is identified by Becker as the basic virtue and as such is seen as being the virtue underpinning successful living. Some of the other key virtues he included were integrity, justice and honesty.

Becker (1998, p. 157) states “these virtues are expressions of rationality and, hence, are inextricably linked; one cannot undermine one without undermining the others”.

Through the lens of an objectivist understanding, integrity may be seen as sticking to and acting upon moral values and principles, rationally chosen, based on your knowing of what is best at that time. This understanding allows for personal growth and change as it is based on applying reason to knowledge which is ever increasing, it also allows us to change our views and our values if we find out they are wrong. Peikoff (1991, p. 261) also talks about integrity meaning that we have “loyalty to the conclusions one can prove logically”. As rational human beings we can, with good reason, change our minds. This may mean altering our values or principles but without loss of our integrity, in fact quite the opposite; we are often seen to enhance it.

Becker (1998, p. 159) asserts that “integrity can be measured by the extent to which a person acts on rational principles and values”. Objectivists would argue that not everyone is rational (the greater part of the time) and to act rationally you must know what you are doing and why. If you do not, you are irrational and therefore cannot have integrity. You may lack integrity if what you do to get something is inconsistent with moral values, for example, cheating to pass an exam. With objectivist integrity requiring that reasoning, not emotion, is the rule of thumb the above example would see emotion (perhaps fear of failure) over-riding the rational reasoning that the value in passing the exam is in demonstrating the knowledge or skills required. A common reason for losing integrity is bowing to social and peer pressure. This is particularly evident and testing during teenage years when conformity and group norms often outweigh the rational convictions and independent thinking of young people. Social pressure can occur in work situations coming from colleagues, managers or clients, creating a powerful culture that is hard to combat or resist. This pressure may manifest as verbal and nonverbal disapproval and can take the form of physical intimidation forcing a person to act in ways that compromise their integrity (Becker, 1998, p.159). Indeed social workers in this study spoke of the pressures they had faced in the work context. They referred to climates and cultures that felt unsafe or that challenged and

necessitated their taking action to safeguard their professional and personal integrity. These experiences are subjective because they are being interpreted through our individual and collective frameworks of cultural beliefs, values, emotions and expectations; this does not make them any less valid or true. Subjectivism says we are creating our realities moment by moment and as Gergen (2001, p. 806) states "...There is no means of declaring that the world is either out there or reflected objectively by an 'in here'". In this study subjectivity is acknowledged and validated as it is practitioners' views, understandings and meaning-making of integrity, that has been purposefully sought. The next section introduces integrity from the viewpoint of occupations such as Mathematics, Science and Law to see how they construe integrity. This is in contrast to the subjective approach that has been identified and used in this approach to capturing social work perspectives.

### ***Multiple Integrities***

It is of interest to explore how integrity is viewed and used in different ways by professions other than social work and to note the associations each make that lean more towards objectivity than subjectivity. Integrity constructs and concepts perhaps work better to explain this rather than evaluative definitions. For example within Law and the philosophy of law, integrity is usually equated with incorruptibility (Hansson, 2008, p. 134). The America Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2001) and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2008) refer to several other types of integrity including mathematics, science and medical integrity.

Integrity in mathematics is based on consistency of mathematical proof, which one can test weakly or strongly, as part of the process of differentiating it from folk mathematics. Science integrity is based on a set of testing known as the scientific method. To the extent that a proof follows the requirements of the method, it is considered scientific. The scientific method includes measure to ensure unbiased testing and the requirement that the hypothesis has falsifiability.



Integrity still basically implies the notion of truth, honesty and justice. Scientifically, it is also used as a verb as in “change integrity” to become different in essence, losing ones or its original nature, for example, vaporise, liquefy, solidify, dissolve and disintegrate. Medical integrity can refer to a stable state of affairs and this can be seen, for example, in the integrity of the nervous system. A further exploration of systems follows as we investigate the numerous ways integrity can be applied.

### ***Integrity of Systems***

The idea of systems having and maintaining integrity in order to be a complete entity suggests the essential nature of this concept. The integrity of an eco-system, for example, a wilderness region, is only maintained when it has not been corrupted by development or by the side-effects of development. It needs to remain intact as wilderness to retain its integrity. Likewise, the integrity of an empire or territory is preserved when it is whole or undivided. A computerized database maintains its integrity as long as it remains uncorrupted by error and a defence system maintains its integrity so long as it is not breached.

A musical work might be said to have integrity when its musical structure has a certain completeness that is not intruded upon by uncoordinated, unrelated musical ideas, that is, when it possesses a kind of musical wholeness, intactness and purity. A similar description could be employed to a work of art, implying artistic integrity. When applied to objects or systems, integrity refers to the wholeness, intactness or purity of a thing. When applied to people, integrity can be classified into intellectual integrity, philosophical integrity, personal integrity, moral integrity, leadership integrity and professional integrity. The desirable qualities associated with each of these are of interest as they align and resonate with many of the facets of integrity identified by social work practitioners in this study.

### ***Intellectual Integrity***

This type of integrity is credited with several intellectual virtues, such as honesty, impartiality, courage, fairness, sensitivity, perceptiveness or insightfulness and openness to the view of others. Zagzebski (1996) includes intellectual humility, perseverance, adaptability and communicativeness, all of which align very neatly with the profession of social work, its values, standards and ethics. It is suggested that when there is conflict between types of integrity, for example, when work demands impinge on our personal and moral integrity to be with family (as has been identified by some participants in this study); some of the intellectual virtues found in intellectual integrity can assist us in dealing with these conflicts (Cox, La Caze, & Levine, 2008). This invites us to consider some of the philosophical notions of integrity.

### ***Philosophical Integrity***

In philosophy, integrity relates to a person's general character. Plato asks what is good, what is truth? We may ask; what is integrity, and how is it to be a person of integrity? Hansson (2008, p. 139) offers the following reflection:

The idea of integrity as a result of the individual's striving after a unified self-image, a loyalty to his own fundamental convictions and the maintenance of personal purity and irreproachability – a refusal to dirty one's hands – has been dominant in the philosophical discussion.

Integrity has been described; discussed, explored and debated by many philosophers (Williams, 1973, 1981a; Taylor, 1981; Frankfurt, 1987; McFall, 1987; Halfon, 1989; Benjamin, 1990; Davion, 199; Calhoun, 1995; Putman, 1996; Zagzebski, 1996; Babbitt, 1997; Grant, 1997; Cox et al., 1999, 2003, 2008; Ashford, 2001 Hansson, 2008); between them these writers have identified the following facets:

- (i) integrity as the integration of self; (Taylor, 1981; Frankfurt, 1987; McFall, 1987; Halfon, 1989; Davion, 1991; Calhoun, 1995);
- (ii) integrity as maintenance of identity; (Williams, 1973, 1981a; Calhoun, 1995; Cox et al., 1999);

- (iii) integrity as ‘standing for something’; (Calhoun, 1995);
- (iv) integrity as moral purpose or soundness; (Williams, 1973, 1971; McFall, 1987; Halfon, 1989; Putman, 1996; Ashford, 2001 Cox et al., 2003);
- (v) integrity as a virtue; (Cox et al., 2003);
- (vi) integrity in relation to social and political conditions; (Babbitt, 1997);
- (vii) integrity as an ethical and personal touchstone – ‘heart in the right place’, standards and morals high, (Hansson, 2008).

From this philosophical base we move into viewing how integrity can be understood at the personal and social level, how it influences and impacts on the way we choose to live our lives.

### ***Personal and Social Integrity***

Integrity is seen as being able to discriminate between first order desires and then to act discriminately, that is, to make reasonable and rational judgments about the relative importance of a range of desires and commitments, and to choose what to give priority to. Those fundamental and deeply held beliefs, values and commitments which are essential to an individual’s character and identity, things we would live and die for. As Calhoun remarks, “Integrity calls us simultaneously to stand behind our convictions and to take seriously other’s doubts about them” (Calhoun, 1995, p. 260).

This way of thinking and categorising integrity is known as ‘the identity view’ and has been debated and discussed by Williams (1973; 1981a; 1981b). A consequence of his view is that when integrity is defined as identity, it cannot be seen as a virtue. This is he believes, because virtues motivate people to act in desirable ways that are not entirely self or ego centred, such as looking after others, or virtue enables people to act well in difficult or challenging circumstances, for example, the courage to rescue a swimmer in trouble. Williams (1981a) argues that if integrity is only about behaving in ways that reflect your sense of self, then people could do evil and horrific things (fanatics as in previous reference to Adolf Hitler) and still be classified as maintaining their integrity because they are acting in accordance with their core commitments.

In contrast to the view of integrity being primarily personal, Calhoun (1995) describes integrity as primarily a social virtue which is defined by a person's relations to others. She sees a person with integrity as 'standing for something', putting their best judgment forward, contributing to community processes with the aim of discovering and supporting what is valuable and worth doing. Her view is that people with integrity will stand by their judgment but they will also have 'proper respect' for the judgment of others which would separate them out from fanatics who lack respect for others. However exactly how this could be measured is problematic. It may be the combination of good intent and positive outcome. The underlying moral connotations of what drives our intent are examined next.

### ***Moral Integrity***

The concept of integrity and moral theory has been a topic of much interpretation and debate (Williams, 1973, 1981a, 1981b; Lomasky, 1987; Scheffler, 1993). Modern moral theories are derived from Utilitarianism and Kantian moral theory; they do not include virtue and character and are based on categories of morally correct actions such as obligatory, permissible or impermissible. Williams (1973) contends that these moral theories undermine integrity because they do not allow for considerations to be given to personal commitments.

Defining integrity in terms of moral purpose means acknowledging that a person has a determination to understanding and living a good 'moral life' (Halfon, 1989). Just what this moral life might look like will be different for each person, but will be able to be seen and acknowledged by others in the way in which people are treated with respect, by ensuring they do not discriminate on sex-based or age or racial grounds and acting in ways that are promoting of the rights and responsibilities of all citizens. This argument would suggest it is people's judgments of the way in which a person lives their life that meets a moral criteria of 'reasonableness' regarding the principles they live by rather than a shared moral view. In other words, integrity is wider than just a focus on how people approach and deal with their moral concerns. However there are any number of religions, faiths and organisations that require and rely on their followers to adopt and

therefore share a particular moral viewpoint (such as a pro-life, anti abortion stance of the Catholic Church), and to adhere to a moral code that is prescribed and seen as important by their leadership. In the business world integrity was seen as an important trait to be sought and displayed by employees and by the people who led them.

### ***Leadership and Integrity***

As Becker (1998) noted in the late 1980s and 90s literature on leadership, human resource management and organisational behaviour was clearly focused on researching and examining integrity. Human resources interest related to integrity as a predictor of job performance, a central trait of effective business leaders and of trust in organisations. During this era ‘Integrity tests’ (Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989), were devised to measure constructs such as moral reasoning, self restraint, work ethics, dependability, energy level, honesty, commitment to work, depression, thrill seeking and propensity to violence amongst several other variables. The validity of these tests and what they really measured was hotly debated by the theorists and researchers of that time. These writers all acknowledged integrity as being an essential aspect of work behaviour, however the meaning of integrity, how it was perceived and understood, whether it was a composite of personality traits or a distinct concept in its own right was questioned and debated (Bass, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Yukl & van Fleet, 1992; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993; Collins & Schmidt, 1993; Hosmer, 1995; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rieke & Guastello, 1995).

The quest for a way to capture, explain and measure the obscure and desired attributes of integrity continues.

### ***The Umbrella of Integrity – Personal and Professional***

In the reading of all these different facets of integrity the symbol of an umbrella offers us an image to illustrate the gathering together of all the potentially protective characteristics and qualities that have been identified and associated with the many aspects of integrity.

In the quest to unpack and understand integrity Cox et al. (2008) in their contribution to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy suggest that integrity acts as a cluster concept, tying together different overlapping qualities of character under the one term Cox et al. (2003) take ‘integrity’ to be a ‘complex and thick’ virtue term. Some of the many ways people ascribe the term ‘integrity’ can be identified by looking at the conditions that attack or diminish a person’s integrity. They identify there are personal qualities or traits and ways of behaving and thinking such as fanaticism, rigidity, avarice, arrogance, lying, sanctimoniousness, dogmatism, denial, rejection and megalomania that are in direct opposition to having and maintaining integrity. Other characteristics such as self deception, self-ignorance, fabrication, weakness of will, hypocrisy, distrust, lack of self awareness, lack of confidence and indifference; make it virtually impossible to balance the features in your own life and therefore to act with integrity when working with people. Cox et al. (2003, p. 4) suggest that a person of integrity lives in a fragile balance between every one of these all too human traits. This suggests integrity could be seen as integral to identity, a core trait that is learnt and built and maintained over a person’s lifespan, and gives support to Williams (1973) who argues that categories of morally correct actions are insufficient for judging a person’s integrity. Erikson identified eight psychosocial stages of human development, the last being “integrity versus despair” (Erikson, 1968, pp. 139 – 140). Supposedly in that final stage of development we either achieve wholeness, completeness or we give up all hope. This suggests during our life we are on a quest for integrity, a psychological and spiritual journey. James and Zarrett (2005) conducted a study based on this eighth stage of ‘ego integrity’ and were able to demonstrate how this perceived internal feature manifests itself externally. Their research highlighted the implications for relationships, giving and receiving help as well as several dimensions of psychological well-being. It supported Erikson’s theory (1982, p. 8) who conceived of integrity as a way of operating in the world, not just an ideal or aspiration:

Integrity has the function of promoting contact with the world, with things, and, above all, with people. It is a tactile and tangible way to live, not an intangible virtuous goal to seek after and achieve.

If there is a misfit between the type of integrity required in one part of a person's life (for example work) and another (for example home and family), then that person's overall integrity may be perceived as being undermined or under attack. Integrity is broadly seen and described by (Halfon, 1989; Benjamin, 1990; Calhoun, 1995; Grant, 1997) as 'the one virtue', a virtue that you would expect to find in your life partner, a good friend, an employer/employee, minister, teacher, doctor or politician, indeed a social worker. This implies that the integrity you display in your personal life, your 'personal integrity', is what influences and is carried over into your professional life and is recognised as 'professional integrity'. However, the context, job expectations and other circumstances and challenges will impact on how this integrity is both applied and judged.

To act with integrity one must possess the qualities of being able to balance the demands of the work one is in and apply the virtues, both social and personal, to thoughts that will manifest actions in any given situation. Reflection and self knowledge would seem essential ingredients in this mix. It would appear by these interpretations and attempts at definition, that integrity is not something that is absolute, an 'all or nothing' thing. It can vary across people and situations and in intensity; it is fluid and constructed and managed 'in the moment' dependent upon the choices and priorities one gives to their various commitments, beliefs and values at any given time. This is somewhat in contrast to the view of objectivism discussed earlier which suggested that the moral values and virtues are chosen, set and then lived by. If we accept that integrity is not a fixed, immovable feature of day to day living, if different contexts and situations require us to think about how we are using and operating with integrity, then social work practitioners require mechanisms, processes and procedures to enable and support this to happen. One such mechanism used in social work practice is clinical or professional supervision.

## ***Supervision and Integrity***

Supervision in Aotearoa New Zealand in its many forms has been developing and growing an ever increasing body of knowledge and skills as evidenced by the increasing attendance and presentations at Supervision Conferences. There have been three supervision conferences hosted by social work in Aotearoa New Zealand this decade each with published proceedings; the first held in 2000 (*Supervision: From rhetoric to reality*), the second held in 2004 (*Weaving together the strands of supervision*) and the most recent held in April 2010 (*Professional supervision: Common threads, different patterns*). O'Donoghue (2003, p. 14) comments that there are a plethora of definitions of supervision, and many different mandates, modes, styles and methods of delivery in the literature. Supervision in social services work and people orientated professions is generally expected to provide a forum for professional and personal development, ongoing learning and skill building (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; Morrison, 1993 and 2001; Beddoe & Davys, 1994; Carroll, 1996; Davys, 2002; Davys & Beddoe, 2000; O'Donoghue 2003; Carroll & Gilbert, 2005; O'Donoghue, Munford, & Trlin, 2005, 2006; Davys & Beddoe, 2010).

Supervision is mandated within social work as a medium where the primary function is "...the development of professional insights, learning and responsive practice..." (Davys & Beddoe, 2010, p. 57). Supervision is the environment that encourages exploration of how and what it is that we are doing to create, maintain, preserve, enhance or even regain our integrity in the many complex and challenging situations in which social work practitioners are engaged. Žorga (2002) sees that within supervision there is a place to build up professional identity by acquiring new professional and personal insights into our experiences. Žorga describes supervision as "a specific learning, developmental and supportive method of professional reflection..." (Žorga, 2002, p. 265). This supervision forum is one that enables practitioners to enhance and maintain their integrity in the context of the supervisory relationship. High quality supervision provides opportunities for reflection, learning, critical analysis, self care and refreshment (Davys & Beddoe, 2010, p. 21).



O'Donoghue et al. (2005, p. 53) reported on a survey of the supervision practice of 204 members of ANZASW that most of the respondents viewed their supervision:

... as a safe place for discussion of ethical issues and characterised by a constructive relationship, openness and honesty, anti oppression and well managed power dynamics to ventilate emotions.

Supervision of this nature would be conducive to examining and exploring practitioner integrity. This survey was also used to discover what supervisors and supervisees considered best about their supervision. Some key themes that emerged included "...progressive learning and development, human responsiveness, a constructive interactional process, and accountability and safety..." (O'Donoghue et al., 2006, p. 84). These themes all contribute to support both practitioner integrity and the integrity of the social work profession. It is held that good supervision supports practitioner competency. Implicit in this belief, is that the process of supervision develops and sustains practitioner integrity. To maintain one's integrity in social work therefore compels the use of 'supervision' as a forum for reflection.

### **Current Social Work Context**

Just as supervision is an important mechanism by which social work practitioners arbitrate integrity, so are professional Codes. These codes are the means by which the professional social work body the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) organises, sets standards and measures its integrity of practice. The association through the Code of Ethics is prescribing what constitutes good social work practice. The Code strongly guides practitioners to the areas in which they must be robust and practitioners derive part of their sense of integrity from these statements. In The ANZASW Code of Ethics (2008, p.5), the Code recognises 'the unique constitutional foundation of the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. As members of the Association, social workers have a responsibility to promote this Code and ensure it is embedded into professional practice. The cultural context in which the integrity of Tangata Whenua rights are understood and protected, is of particular importance.

Hibbs (2005, p. 36) emphasises the significance of context in every aspect of the social work task and how important it is to her integrity as a Maori social worker in Aotearoa New Zealand. Hibbs comments:

If I am to work from a place of integrity I need to have an intimate knowledge of the context in which this type of action takes place.

For social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, that context includes two key challenges in order to uphold the integrity of the profession by working bi-culturally. The first challenge – ‘working bi-culturally’ was mandated by the report Pua-te-Ata-Tu (1986), which heavily influenced the innovative legislation the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 and called for the development of agencies that could understand and meet the cultural needs of Maori families and other ethnic groups. These needs include understanding and maintaining the integrity of the whanau when working with Maori. The second challenge is how to belong and work effectively in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and to be able to contribute globally to the social work profession. Beddoe (2007, p. 47) describes the current situation as:

...there is a tension between the push for practice and education to become more indigenous, to better serve local service users, and the pull to prepare graduates for the growing international labour market for social workers.

The challenge to the integrity of the social work profession is how to ensure practitioners are well grounded in bi-cultural understandings, honouring and promoting bi-cultural practices in the local context, whilst encouraging social workers to expand and strengthen their abilities to demonstrate multi-cultural practice in a global context. The next section examines registration of social workers and how this has created further expectations and practice standards that social workers must demonstrate as part of their professional integrity and accountability.

Since 2003 when the Social Workers Registration Act came into being, and with it, the establishment of the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), additional guidelines in relation to social work practice standards have been developed. This was part of an international trend towards greater regulation and standardization of social work with

the intent 'to raise standards and enhance the standing of the profession' (Beddoe & Duke, 2009, p. 785).

The primary purpose of the Social Workers Registration Act was to establish a mechanism of public accountability of the social work profession. A secondary goal was to enhance and strengthen the profession in order to achieve a higher and more consistent standard of practice for the benefit of service users/consumers (Corrigan, 2005, p. 22).

From the year 2006, a three-year bachelor degree in social work has been required by the SWRB as the minimum qualification for new practitioners who wish to voluntarily register as social workers. This has highlighted the perpetual debate and struggle eloquently voiced by Nash and Munford (2001) as to how practitioners should be educated, to what level, what should be in the curriculum and how to address the political, academic, cultural and pragmatic expectations of the various stakeholders in the social work scene. By setting the standard at degree level the SWRB has, as a government agent, clearly signalled a change consistent with the Labour-led strategies of that time to strengthen the education systems in Aotearoa New Zealand. The scope and impact of these strategies and changes go well beyond the parameters of this study and can be accessed in further papers by Beddoe (2000, 2002) and Beddoe & Duke (2009).

Suffice to say the creation of the SWRB has been a subject of debate and some ambivalence. It is seen on the one hand by many, as a viable means of raising the standard of social work and ensuring accountability for ethical standards, thereby recognising and strengthening the integrity of the social work profession in Aotearoa New Zealand. On the other hand, registration has been critiqued as supporting and prioritizing academic knowledge at the expense of other more pragmatic work-based ways of acquiring skills and knowledge and creating a power dynamic and an economic barrier that disadvantages and precludes many, in particular, indigenous women with family commitments (Pitt, 2005, pp. 41-42).

Codes of Ethics and Codes of Conduct all aim to guide practitioners in their everyday delivery of services; however they are often aspirational in nature rather than pragmatic. A recent article by Banks (2009) explores the nature of professional integrity. She acknowledges the paucity of published material in this area and specifically examines the construction of professional integrity in social work, in the context of the English system of regulation of professional conduct recently introduced in 2005. Banks (2009, p. 5) notes that integrity “is a key value in many social work codes of ethics” and cites the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) 2002 code and a statement from the USA National Association of Social Workers (1999) that poses integrity as an essential value in the practice of social work with a focus on the actions of the social worker as a professional. My research aimed to uncover the everyday understanding of integrity. I was interested in both the professional and the personal aspects of integrity as understood by experienced social work practitioners. These two aspects were explored and examined in light of the current context for delivery of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand which is newly regulated through the Social Work Registration Act (2003) and the establishment of the SWRB.

### ***Social Work Codes and Integrity***

Sitting alongside the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) (although not always without considerable tension as noted previously) is the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, who until the advent of the SWRB, had been the only professional voice and body for setting professional standards.

The SWRB was required to develop competency criteria drawing upon the International Federation of Social Workers’ definition of social work and the ANZASW Standards of Practice. It also developed The New Zealand Code of Conduct (SWRB, 2005) which is “to be seen as an adjunct to the ANZASW professional Code of Ethics and each has a distinct purpose and is not mutually exclusive” (Beddoe & Duke, 2009, p. 792).

Both the Code of Conduct and the ANZASW Code of Ethics and Bicultural Code of Practice (2008) make many references to the integrity of social work and the integrity of social workers. They are considered key documents in relation to this research and as such, are explored further in this chapter.

The ANZASW Code of Ethics makes no less than nine references to integrity, moving from broad terms to specific. The code is referring to social work practice, Tangata Whenua, family members, clients, and colleagues, self, spiritual and professional conduct. The term integrity is used without explanation until the code examines professional conduct. Here it offers some examples of how social workers need to behave in order to ‘act with integrity’. Table 2.2 below identifies the context within the code of ethics where integrity is called for in professional practice.

**Table 2.2 Code of Ethics – Integrity Notations**

	<b>Page</b>	<b>References to integrity</b>
1	p.6	With regards to the purposes of the code: “inspire professional behaviour which reflects the core values and the <i>integrity</i> of social work practice”
2	p.7 1.6	With regards to responsibility for Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based Society: “Members actively promote the rights of Tangata Whenua to utilize Tangata Whenua social work models of practice and ensure the protection of the <i>integrity</i> of Tangata Whenua in a manner which is culturally appropriate.”
3	p.9 3.8	With regards to responsibility to Tangata Whenua clients, members: “have a responsibility to acknowledge and support the whanau as the primary source of protection of the <i>integrity</i> of its family members.”
4	p.10 3.12	With regards to responsibility to clients: “Client <i>integrity</i> is preserved by maintaining client confidentiality; by members taking care to inform themselves on all relevant aspects of each client situation; and by keeping the client informed.”
5	p.12 5.1	With regards to responsibility to colleagues: “Members relate to colleagues with <i>integrity</i> , respect, courtesy, openness and honesty...”
6	p.12 5.7	With regards to responsibility to colleagues again: “Both the everyday and professional conduct and <i>integrity</i> of members must be beyond reproach...”

7	p.13 7.1	With regards to responsibility for self: “Members act with <i>integrity</i> at all times, and in the knowledge that their standards of behaviour reflect also on the Association and the profession of social work.”
8	p.16 4.1	With regards to principles – Human Rights and Human Dignity: “Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person’s physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual <i>integrity</i> and well being.”
9	p.18 3.	With regards to professional conduct: “Social workers should act with <i>integrity</i> . This includes not abusing the relationships of trust with the people using their services, recognising the boundaries between personal and professional life, and not abusing their position for personal benefit or gain.

The Social Workers Registration Board issued a Code of Conduct (2008) under section 105 of the Social Workers Registration Act, 2003. As discussed earlier this Code sits alongside and is complementary to the ANZASW Code of Ethics.

This Code of Conduct covers the minimum professional standards of behaviour, integrity and conduct that apply to registered social workers and that should apply generally in the social work profession. (SWRB, Code of Conduct 2008, p. 4)

The expectation under this Code is that social workers will “uphold high standards of personal conduct and act with integrity.” The behaviour that contributes to ‘upholding high standards’ and exemplifies ‘acting with integrity’ is spelt out in a series of twelve bullet points, five of these are framed by what a social worker should not do for example “not in any way harass a client, nor encourage or condone any form of harassment by others towards any client or colleague” (Code of Conduct, 2008, p. 5). The other seven points begin with verbs such as provide, act, facilitate, discuss, respond to, advise. These go on to explain how the social worker can deliver a service that is of a high standard and commensurate with demonstrating integrity. For example, “act to redress harassment against a client or colleague in circumstances when this becomes known” (Code of Conduct 2008, p. 5).

The Code of Conduct also provides a description of the services and standards a social worker delivering a competent level of professional practice could be expected to provide. This includes being able to “understand, as far as practicable, and to act to support the client’s cultural identity and integrity, recognising the significance of cultural identification and beliefs...” (Code of Conduct, 2008, p. 6). It also talks about ensuring the quality and integrity of service is maintained in circumstances where a conflict between the social worker and their employer arises in relation to standards of social work practice (Code of Conduct, 2008, p. 7).

The SWRB has published the Code of Conduct Guidelines for Social Workers. These further explain the standards of behaviour established in the Code of Conduct and are referred to as ‘minimum standards of integrity and conduct’ (Code of Conduct, 2008, p. 15). In the guidelines, cultural identity and integrity are further explored with reference to how social workers can ensure they understand and operationalise the requirements in these areas. These two publications along with the ANZASW Code of Ethics provide a strong ethical and professional framework for the delivery of social work services in Aotearoa New Zealand. Both make attempts to describe and draw attention to the importance of integrity at the individual, collective and organisational levels. Together these documents indicate the level of ‘professionalism’ that is required and Banks (2009, p. 5) comments

...that professionals need to be aware of the totality of the aims, values and rules of the profession, ensuring their actions are consistent with these norms.

Challenges to social work integrity may come to notice through complaints to the SWRB and the professional body or through ethical dilemmas encountered by social workers which are often raised in supervision. In their study of ethical issues, dilemmas and problems being faced by social workers employed in New Zealand social services Briggs and Kane (2002, p. 16) identify five very common ethical dilemmas (and by inference, challenges to integrity), encountered in practice. The first dilemma is in regard to the legal obligations as a social worker and respect for a client’s moral or religious beliefs. The second is boundaries with clients, informed consent of clients to provision of services and legal compulsion of clients. The third dilemma is in relation

to self determination of clients and record-keeping, the fourth is client confidentiality and the fifth area is around disclosure of client information. Among these dilemmas Briggs and Kane (2005, p. 54) identified 'boundary issues' as "being among the most problematic and challenging". They found this to be the case in the literature internationally. This was also raised and discussed by participants in this study. Boundaries and ethics in relation to integrity, along with the contribution of supervision, are further explored in this thesis with examples given in Chapter Five Findings.

This chapter has identified, described and discussed the relevant results from the literature search on integrity and highlighted some of the thinking and contributions pertinent to this study. Exploration of the literature uncovered two central themes, the philosophy of integrity and the pragmatic application of integrity. These themes have been pursued in light of the available guidance and prescription available to social workers in Aotearoa from their two professional bodies ANZASW and the SWRB. These bodies have, through constructing the Codes of Ethics and Codes of Conduct, attempted to draw together the philosophical and pragmatic aspects in order to give prescription and firm guidelines for practitioners. From the literature investigation I was able to construct a working thesis statement "integrity in the social work profession is an often cited but not readily described concept, principle or virtue which aligns with moral and ethics theory". This statement recognises the abstract nature of integrity whilst acknowledging the strong belief and values base from which it is derived. It was this statement that I used to guide my inquiry as I attempted to capture thoughts and applications of integrity in the lives of respondents in this survey.

The next chapter will introduce the theory used to underpin this research and how it has enabled the methodological approach taken to answer the research question: "*How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?*"



## **Chapter 3 – Theoretical Orientations and Methodology**

What we see depends on the theories we use to interpret our observations.

Albert Einstein

### **Qualitative Inquiry**

This study employed a predominately qualitative inquiry. Padgett (2008, pp. 2–3) describes a qualitative inquiry as one that has approaches and assumptions that set it apart from quantitative research. Qualitative methods embrace an insider rather than outsider perspective, are person centred, holistic, contextual, and aim for depth rather than breadth. A qualitative inquiry is seen to be inductive and to operate from an assumption of subjectivism, interpretivism and constructivism whilst a quantitative inquiry is based on deductive research and uses the paradigm of positivism and empiricism (O’Leary, 2004, p. 99). It may be useful to contrast quantitative and qualitative methods, however it can also be misleading because they have some shared characteristics. Both are systematic and both use firsthand observation and data collection to guide findings. This study used mixed methods and purposefully collected a small amount of quantitative information through its first instrument, an e-survey (Appendix 4). Crotty (1998, p. 15), advises that rather than setting qualitative and quantitative research methods against each other as polar opposites we need to consider both as being able to serve our purposes. The quantitative information collected by the e-survey in this study related to respondent demographics and qualifications and is reported on in relation to the eight participants who engaged in focus groups (Chapter 4 Table 4.1). The e-survey also contained two open ended questions designed to collect qualitative information. The qualitative information obtained from all twenty respondents in the e-survey was used to construct focus group tools (Chapter 5 Tables 5.1 – 5.3).

In designing and using the qualitative inquiry, I recognised that meanings would be subjective and worked from the premise that there was not one single objective reality to find. Through qualitative inquiry, I sought to reflect the quality of respondents’ thinking in relation to integrity and “to represent the complex worlds of respondents in a

holistic, on the ground manner” (Padgett, 2009, p. 2). The advantages of qualitative research are that while data is being gathered new pieces of information and interpretations can be added, which allows for innovation, creativity and gives the flexibility to follow leads that emerge. Throughout this inquiry I was cognisant of the need for myself, the researcher, to be immersed in the collection of data and to be able to respond and adapt to promising leads and themes as they emerged.

Another aspect of qualitative interviewing noted by Whiteford (2005a) is that it enables the gathering of qualitative evidence. This is done by focusing on a person’s perspectives, views and experiences which allows for continuous discovery and exploration of new and emerging findings and encourages responsiveness to these. It also establishes a platform upon which collaboration and a partnership between the respondents and the researcher is able to develop. Qualitative research methods were also used in this study because they “are intended to generate theoretically richer observations...” and this enabled me to “tap the deeper meanings of particular human experiences” (Rubin & Babbie, 2008, p. 417). A qualitative methodology fitted my research well because my enquiry explored how integrity informs the notion of “professional boundaries”. What these might look like, who decides and do they cover cross cultural situations? It attempts to find out if these are decided by the profession or by a person’s own value judgments, or both? Looking for evidence it asks are professional boundaries and their determinants universal, or does New Zealand have its own interpretation of what these look like. Qualitative evidence is described by Whiteford (2005a) cited in Curtin and Fossey (2007) as focusing on a person’s perspectives, views and experiences, usually occurring in a naturalistic environment and highlighting the role of context. It allows for continuous discovery and exploration of new and emerging findings and encourages responsiveness to these. It also provides a basis for collaboration and partnerships between the participants and the researchers to be developed.

In the previous chapter I explored the paradigm of objectivism which presents the view “that the facts of the world exist independently of us as observers” (Crotty, 1998, p. 57);

however, the lens I chose for this research and data analysis was social constructionism, which challenges this objectivist view. An objectivist approach would not fit this inquiry; the purpose was to use participatory approaches that invited privileging the voice of lived experience each practitioner brought to the study. This made the approach naturally subjective. The selection of a research framework, the methods and theories chosen to best fit this journey, are explained and explored further in this chapter.

## Selecting a Research Framework

Methods extend and magnify our view of studied life and, thus, broaden and deepen what we learn of it and know about it. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14)

As we have seen the main focus of this study was a qualitative inquiry undertaken with social work practitioners about the concept of integrity. The first step in the research strategy was to identify a suitable methodology that would best address the research question: “*How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?*” A major task in the research process is to locate and select methods that fit the research question. My research question centred on phenomenological description. This is because I wanted to explore social work practitioners’ understandings and experiences of integrity. I was not trying to explain the relationship between variables, therefore a question, not a hypothesis, was the most appropriate approach (O’Leary, 2005, p. 35).

Pawson (1999, p. 24) offers four categories of methodologies and their corresponding epistemology and ontology: ethnography; survey research; comparative; historical; cross cultural research; and lastly applied policy and evaluation research. A fifth category of action research, including participatory action research, is increasingly used and this later addition to the types of research methodologies, seemed to offer some potential for this study (O’Leary, 2005; Munford & Sanders, 2003). ‘Participatory learning and action’ is an umbrella term for a creative approach to investigating,

promoting interactive learning, shared knowledge and flexible, yet structured, analysis in order to ‘build greater voice’ ([www.planotes.org/about.html#a](http://www.planotes.org/about.html#a))<sup>1</sup> . The underlying philosophy of this approach is that theory makes sense when combined with practice through a process of critical reflection and action; this explains in part, what I (the inquirer) was interested to find out.

The purpose of this study was to discover how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how they assess it as being relevant in their work. A qualitative inquiry selecting a social constructionist approach acknowledges practitioners understandings will be shaped by their experiences, their personal perspective and the social setting or context within which they practise and live. Cottor, Asher, Levin, & Weiser, (2004, p.xvii) describe social constructionist theory as “the equivalent of yoga for the mind”. It is a skilled way of thinking that allows us to keep an open mind whilst encouraging us “to explore how we make meaning in our careers and lives”. Exploration of understanding and meaning can take place through using qualitative interviewing.

## **Social Constructionism**

In this research, using the perspective of social constructionism I have sought to question a selected group of practitioners in order to discover their personal constructs of integrity and how that has influenced and shaped their social work practice. The focus groups and individual interview held in relation to this research were based on the premise that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed and therefore invited participants to share a critically reflective approach to their ‘knowing’ of integrity. Hair and O’Donoghue (2009, p. 76) their article which explores supervision through a social constructionist lens, notes that:

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<sup>1</sup> *Participatory Learning and Action* is an informal journal on [participatory learning and action](http://www.planotes.org) approaches and methods, since 1988, it has provided a forum for those engaged in participatory work - community workers, activists and researchers to share their experiences, conceptual reflections and methodological innovations with others, providing a genuine voice from the field.

...knowledge and learning happens as ideas are reconstructed through dialogues that invite exchanges of thoughts, opinions, questions, and feelings.

I have conducted an inquiry through the literature into what integrity means. The findings presented later in this study will impart participants' perceptions, thinking, understandings, explorations and critical reflections as they developed and shared, through a social constructionist lens, their own configurations and constantly evolving, interpretations of what integrity in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand looks like.

Burr (1995, p. 3) argues that within social constructionism there can be no such thing as an objective fact. She sees it as taking a critical stance, one that

...invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world.

In this research I was not so much engaged in observing the world, as I was occupied with undertaking an appreciative inquiry with practitioners into their social and psychological inner worlds. I employed social constructionism as a meta theory and broad analytical frame work for this research, which meant working from foundational concepts "that 'we' (human beings) create our social world of norms, roles, responsibilities, expectations and conventions through our shared understandings" (O'Donoghue, 2003, p. 60). A constructionist approach accepts there will be many perspectives, equally valid; that there is no prescriptive truth; and that it is important to seek to understand the multiple influences and the contexts of people from their personal, social and historical aspects. Crotty (1998, p. 42), tells us constructionism is:

... the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.

Payne (1997) describes the social construction process as interactive, whereby individuals participate and contribute to the social meaning and structures of society by engaging in its institutions, and activities which, in turn, legitimise and create social meaning and conventions that govern how we behave. Parton and O'Byrne (2000, p. 2)

describe the theoretical orientations of constructive social work as being based on ideas of power, in particular the power of language, human potential and agency. They state that the orientations of constructive social work include the values of anti-oppressive practice, a commitment to social justice and empowerment. By developing a constructive approach, we focus on dialogue, narrative and prioritise listening to and talking with people. Thus, “constructive social work emphasises process, plurality of knowledge and voice, possibility and the relational quality of knowledge” (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000, p. 2).

Oko (2008, pp. 7–9) agrees with Parton and O’Byrne and discusses how the notion of social constructionism allows for different world views and recognises alternative ways of constructing meaning through the production of different discourses, she states:

A principal construct in social constructionism is the use of the term ‘discourse’, which refers to a body of ideas and beliefs which become established as knowledge or an accepted world view. We draw upon these discourses to help us make sense of our social world and, in turn, they frame and influence our understanding. (Oko, 2008, p. 8)

It would seem from the literature, and Burr (1995, p. 2) affirms, that many authors use the terms ‘constructionism’ and ‘constructivism’ interchangeably. Crotty (1998, p. 58) discusses the way authors (Giddens, 1976; Gergen, 1985; Blaikie, 1993; Schwandt, 1994) differentiate the two terms. Crotty suggests that constructivism is the meaning-making activity of the individual mind (the unique experience of each of us), whereas constructionism is the collective generation and transmission of meaning (through the way our culture influences the way we see and feel things). Throughout this chapter I have used the terms constructionism and constructivism in the contexts they have been presented by their authors.

My choice of social constructionism theory to best guide this research activity was based on the premise that it would support multiple meanings. It would also be inclusive of various contexts and different experiences and interpretation of meaning and validity, which would support the discovery and development of alternative understandings. Oko (2008, p. 18) believes social constructionism to be a valuable tool

in assisting critical and reflective thinking about social work practice and the ideas that influence it, because it draws attention to the process of interpretation and negotiation. This was certainly in line with the intent of this study.

## **Constructivism and Methodological Stance**

In seek to explore the concept of integrity, a constructivist approach paying attention to language and the way participants conceptualise and relate to the topic and one another's perspectives of it has been useful. Constructivism is a research paradigm that denies the existence of an objective reality, rather as stated by Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 43 in Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006)

...realities are social constructions of the mind, and there exists as many such constructions as there are individuals (although clearly many constructions will be shared).

Constructivism is a stance that holds that each of us constructs knowledge from our experiences, mental structures and beliefs that are used to interpret objects and events. Our view of the external world differs from others because of our unique set of experiences. Theory and practice are therefore shaped by dominant cultural assumptions, power relationships and historical influences from our unique sociocultural context. Constructivism is now well used in social research methodology (Nichols, 2001) and informs grounded theory approaches which have evolved from the early work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990) through to Charmaz (1995) and McCann and Clark (2003) and underpins much qualitative research. I adopted the guidelines of constructivist research to inform my qualitative research; understanding it as a set of principles and practices, flexible as opposed to stringent rules or recipes, and 'a craft that researchers practise' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). A constructivist approach promotes the view that data and analysis are co-created. The researcher and respondents both bring their own interpretations to the table, these interpretations need to be surfaced and explored.

We are however warned not to rely on methodological techniques and tools alone as Charmaz (2006, p. 14) cautions us to be reflexive “about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it”. This caution is echoed by Padgett (2008, p. 18) who advises that the success of a qualitative study relies heavily on the researcher’s personal qualities which include self-reflection (reflexivity) and that reflexivity (the ability to examine one’s self) is a central preoccupation in qualitative research. I certainly found this to be true in undertaking this research study. I used the formal context of supervision, journaling plus the less formal, although still structured, resource of conversation with ‘critical friends’<sup>2</sup> (further discussion of this concept to follow), in order to explore my thoughts. Using these sources enabled me to discover connections between the material I had read, the experiences contributed by participants and wisdoms offered by many additional sources during conversations (including colleagues, family, students).

As this research unfolded I found myself drawn to positions that made me question my assumptions and beliefs. It was therefore important that I approached the task with what Ruch (2002, p. 209) describes as

...an open but not an empty mind, having acknowledged to myself my own personal and professional prejudices in relation to the research topic

Using this approach enabled me to be open to conflict from within and without and to acknowledge contradiction, ambivalence and tension which reside in all critical inquiries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 371). Taking a social constructivist enquiry approach to study the principle of integrity for social workers has allowed the construction of alternative narratives through opportunities to dialogue with others and explore thoughts, opinions, questions and feelings and through this create multiple perspectives. As Hair and O’Donoghue (2009) state this means that all knowledge, including small or grand narratives, can be valued and vulnerable to critique so that the

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<sup>2</sup> The term critical friend is used here in regards to a person (or persons) recruited to fulfill the role of a trusted person who asks provocative questions, clarifies ideas, advocates for the success of the work, and offers a critique of a person’s work as a friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993).



potential is present for dominant beliefs and practices to be challenged and alternative narratives constructed, (Hair & O'Donoghue 2009, p. 76). Undertaking a social construction enquiry engaged participants in a critical self reflection about the meaning and demonstration of integrity that took into consideration different social and cultural contexts as well as personal and professional imperatives.

This appreciative inquiry stance asked participants to reveal their beliefs and values in relation to integrity and to identify how that is demonstrated by their behaviour. It clearly connected to my desire to 'find out more'. I was exploring both the 'what' as in what are practitioners thinking about the key concept of integrity. I also wanted to know about the 'how' as in how this concept is recognized and applied by social work practitioners in everyday practice. Therefore using an approach that recognized social workers as a 'cultural group' enabled me to explore the key concept of integrity from the 'point of view of the participants'. This method accepts multiple realities and ensures cultural empathy, that in turn, guards against 'homogenization' which can fail to recognise the diversity within the group (O'Leary, 2005, p. 120).

As discussed earlier in this chapter the chosen ontology for this research was social constructionist which argues theory is better generated by evidence emerging through the researcher's experienced reality by interacting with the respondents, because reality is what we create together (Creswell, 1994). Therefore my ontological and epistemological stance – what I think the world is and how I know what I know, is related to my own personal values and beliefs and theories about the nature of the social world. My philosophy as described in this chapter has underpinned and influenced my work as a researcher (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; O'Leary, 2005).

We are all products of the social forces that surround us. We carry with us the biases and prejudices of both our attributes and our socialization. (O'Leary, 2005, p. 43)

The axiological assumption and approach surrounding this piece of qualitative research was that it would be value-laden because the very nature of the topic of integrity meant that my study was imbued with values. In choosing this subject my own biases towards

a strong values-led social work practice were made explicit. The enquiry I undertook began with and continued to openly look for the values that practitioners ascribed, identified or aligned with, that sat behind their understanding of the concept of integrity.

Choosing qualitative methods to engage in this study has enabled a demonstration of these traits in pursuit of my topic of integrity. Furthermore Padgett (2008) notes qualitative methods are rapport-driven and do not strive for value-free (or value-minimized) inquiry. They usually focus on participants' experiences and acknowledge the researcher as an active agent in the research process. As D'Cruz and Jones (2004, p. 60) explain they allow "...an exploration of values, processes, experiences, language and meaning...". I found this to be true of the study I have undertaken.

If epistemology is the 'science of knowing' then methodology is a subfield of epistemology and is the 'science of finding out' (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). 'Integrity' to me suggested a process of decision making and judgments about how to act and integrity is therefore something that is continually in motion, dependent upon the context. In this study I wanted to find out if this continuous management of self, and hence, one's integrity in changing circumstances, was a conscious process. In undertaking this research my hope was to elevate and explore some of the less conscious decisions that inform these actions. Gould (2004, p. 141) comments:

...qualitative research describes the holistic function of social systems; explores processes which link variables, identifies the influence of contextual factors on change processes, makes explicit dimensions of practice which are tacit or elusive and through thorough description provides a basis for transferability of knowledge.

Gould (2004, p. 141) further asserts that in exploring social work practitioners' perspectives through qualitative research the process of 'sense-making' in relation to its contextual factors (outer) and worker's personal understandings and meanings (inner) are made explicit. Charmaz (2006, p. 26) recommends that with a grounded theory study you begin with a few broad, open-ended questions, you can then delve deeper and focus the questions to 'invite detailed discussion of the topic'. I was able to do this in my research by using open ended questions that enabled reflection such as "How do you

see integrity being relevant in and to your work – how is integrity lived?” Using qualitative interview techniques that invited reflection enabled me to develop a more detailed understanding of what a group of experienced social work practitioners think about integrity, and to clearly elicit their own description, understanding, definition and experiences of it.

In choosing my methodological approach I was also influenced by my experiences in, and knowledge of, social work as a relational occupation. It is an occupation that strives for partnership and collaboration, focusing on eliciting and understanding a person’s own perspectives, views and experiences in the contexts and systems within which they operate. It is useful to conceive that the journey of inquiry that we undertake with our service recipients can be applied to ourselves as practitioners. As a practitioner who has aspired to work from an empowerment stance with social work clients, and later in my career with practitioners in training, management and education roles, it has been important that the chosen methodology had a good fit with my values.

Employing social constructionism has assisted me to construct a research study that has critically reflected on the word and concept of integrity. It has enabled exploration of social work practitioners’ ideas about what informed and influenced their understanding and interpretation of integrity and what it means to them. Social constructionism as a theoretical orientation has supported my investigation into how contexts and different practice experiences have influenced and produced different understandings and meaning-making of integrity. These meanings can be both complimentary and contested. In addition to social constructionism, a number of theoretical perspectives have shaped the construction of my personal practice framework and have consequently been integrated into this research project.

### **Contributing Theories**

The first of several theories and approaches that have influenced this study is ‘social action theory’. Social action theory is an interpretivist approach that draws on the principles of social constructionism. It is concerned with explanations about action and meaning and how individuals construct meaning about their social life.

This approach views social action as something undertaken by individuals who have given meaning to objects and events within a particular context, and then acted with intent or exercised their agency in relation to their interpretations, expectations or reactions to the norms and values they have perceived. It is a subjective view about the nature of society and seeks to understand the motives and intentions, and to analyse how individuals construct and interpret their social lives, and how these ideas and beliefs then influence their behaviour (Oko, 2008, p. 24).

In considering other congruent ideas and approaches to support this research I acknowledge the alignment with and contributions from Critical Theory. Critical theory is an umbrella term used for an array of theories that examine and critique society and culture, drawing from knowledge across the social sciences and humanities (Gray & Webb, 2009). Critical theorists Max Horkheimer, Jurgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault have contributed to this philosophical approach, using a broad form of inquiry that attempts to understand and help overcome the social structures through which people are dominated and oppressed (Froomkin, 2003).

In more recent times social work practice in Aotearoa New Zealand has been interested in and influenced by the Solution-focused approach (Berg, 1994; de Shazer, 1998; Berg & Kelly, 2000; De Jong & Berg, 2002); Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2008); Narrative (Epston & White, 1992); and Strengths-based practice approaches. Strengths-based practice has been developed by Saleebey (1992, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2006), and extended by Weick et al (1989); Turnell & Edward (1999); De Jong & Miller (1995); Seligman (2002); McCashen (2005); and further by Cowger, Anderson and Snively (2006). New Zealand writers have also experimented, adapted, applied and extended the strengths-based approach (Appleton & Weld, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Munford & Saunders, 2007; Saunders & Munford, 2008; Weld & Appleton, 2008; Beddoe & Maidment 2009). Strengths-based, solution focused and appreciative inquiry concepts are grounded in social constructionism and have had considerable influence on my own practice approach and subsequently, my thinking about how this inquiry would be undertaken. Strengths-based, solution focused premises encourage a research stance of

respectful curiosity that invites and enables practitioners' stories to be shared and heard. It is a philosophical approach to people that was a good fit with the approach for this study and my general approach to social work. It is explored further as I focus on the personal lens I brought to this research.

### **Personal Lens**

In qualitative studies, inquiry is an ongoing process in which the researcher is also a participant (Tsui, 2008, p. 357). As a researcher I realised it was not possible to be totally objective or entirely neutral. I brought to this project the sum of my personal and professional experiences, and needed to be able to recognise the influences, advantages and disadvantages that brought. Nash, Munford and O'Donoghue (2005, p. 24) draw attention to the importance of social workers being able to critically reflect on themselves, recognising that vision and imagination is influenced by the set of lenses we use. This is doubly applicable to a social worker who is becoming a researcher. Tsui, (2008, p. 357) reflects on the importance of use of self in research and being inclusive of the experience and knowledge we bring to the task, as it enables us to interpret information in a meaningful manner. Gilgun (2008, p. 183) highlights the value of incorporating the experiences of the researcher in to processes of doing research. Gilgun values reflexivity in research and draws our attention to how essential it is for researchers to:

... examine and take into account the multiple influences they have on the research processes and how research processes affect them and the persons and situations they research.

My own lenses were magnified by the lived experience of being a white middle-class female professional, educated, comparatively financially secure and widely travelled. I have worked overseas in social services as well as within Aotearoa New Zealand, and I am raising two male children into teenage and young adulthood. Key influences in my life have been the experiences of living with and remaining close to extended family here and overseas; working full-time from the age of 15 years, studying part-time, fostering children, raising my own family, and being active in the Women's Movement during the seventies and eighties. This politicization involved publishing the feminist

magazine 'Broadsheet', helping to establish a Woman's Refuge, working as part of a collective, challenging stereotypes, protesting inequalities, consciousness raising and learning to find our voice as Women. All this and more, has enabled me to identify with a feminist standpoint epistemology which:

...offers both an explanation of the social and ecological destructiveness of modern techno science and posits an alternative form of understanding linked to liberation from social domination, and a new, harmonious relationship with the rest of the natural world. (Benton & Craib, 2001, p. 152)

My social work practice has been influenced by feminist thinking and pioneers in feminism such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Brownmiller, Betty Friedan, bell hooks and Gloria Steinem to name a few, who were committed to women's emancipation and brought about profound change in the ideological construction of relationships of womanhood, power and oppression (Schneir, 1994). From feminist theory Mitchell and Oakley (1986); Swigonski (1994); Trinder, (2000); emphasise the importance of consciousness raising, inviting, listening and giving voice to the personal which in turn is a crucial aspect of the political. Mainstream research has often been subject to critique by feminist writers because feminist methodology arose from the tradition of consciousness-raising which is a collective activity of mutual support and critique.

Feminism encouraged individual women to recognize and explore the ways their thinking supported sex role stereotyping prescriptions about women's nature and role, and resulted in demands for political and economic reform in western worlds. As discussed, my approach to the research focus has been underpinned by my engagement with feminist thinking. In this study my feminist viewpoint supported the development of collaborative, trusting, non-oppressive relationships between myself as a researcher and the respondents. Collins (1990, p. 216) in Denzin and Lincoln (2002, p. 40), notes that

...such an ethic presumes that investigators are committed to stressing personal accountability, caring, the value of individual expressiveness, the capacity for empathy and the sharing of emotionality.

As a feminist researcher bringing to the study an approach cognizant of the use of power, I was able to communicate my strong regard for the respondents, consciously adopting a warm and welcoming ‘professional but conversational’ interviewing manner and tone. This approach conveyed interest and respect to participants, recognising and valuing them as equals thus flattening the hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee and establishing a process of collaboration (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

My social work practice has been philosophically driven firstly by feminist theory and activism, and then through my continuing study and education where I have gained a greater understanding and affinity to strengths-based and solution focused approaches. The strengths-based approach focuses on discovering strengths through cooperative exploration and holds the belief that all environments (internal and external) contain resources and that looking for what is working in any given situation will be more helpful than getting stuck in problematising or pathologising. The origins of this approach lie in the work of Denis Saleebey (1992). Strengths-based practice is neatly described by the St Luke’s Innovative Resources group in Bendigo Australia as:

...an ‘approach’ to people which is primarily dependent upon positive ‘attitudes’ about people’s dignity, rights, uniqueness, commonalities, abilities, and capacity to learn, grow and change and aims to assist people to recognize, value, and mobilize their strengths and solution-finding ability. (St Luke’s Innovative Resources, 2001)

Feminist, strengths-based and solution focused approaches have strongly influenced and underpinned my practice framework and as both Gilgun (2008) and Tsui (2008) suggest it is important that I acknowledge and incorporate the learnings from these into my role as a researcher as they are part of both my personal and professional integrity.

Ethics, morality, beliefs and values are the cornerstones of integrity which is both a personal and professional concept and an essential key attribute when working with people in the social and human services (Calhoun, 1995). The strengths-based approach epitomised for me a highly principled approach and it aligned well with the key concept of integrity, which I undertook to explore. As well as sitting comfortably with my personal and professional beliefs and practice framework, the strengths based approach

was an appropriate method for this research study. It enabled 'productive relationships with research participants' (evidenced by the positive responses from respondents in many exchanges of emails and a rapid engagement and building of rapport upon face to face meeting). The method produced 'honest and candid responses' from the participants, (shown in the transcription of interview data), reflected 'a diversity of experiences and perceptions' and the data reflected 'richness' (as demonstrated in Chapter Five, Findings). All of the above aspects of measurement are identified by Yegidis and Weinbach (2008, p.23) as contributing to conducting good qualitative research. Mafire'o (2005) talks about her position as a researcher being pivotal to the cooperation and support she received from her respondents. This in large part may be attributed to her 'insider' status, which is also important to explore in relation to this research study.

### **Insider Perspective**

My interest in pursuing a research topic that would contribute to my own, and hopefully others', skills and knowledge base in the social services field, meant I would be 'working with my colleagues and peers' and therefore approaching the topic from an emic perspective. This perspective occurs when an insider view of the culture is presented in accord with the perceptions and understandings deemed appropriate by the insider's culture, as opposed to an etic perspective, which involves a description of a behaviour or belief by an outside observer. I identified as an 'insider' in relation to the research as I am a registered social worker and I share an understanding of the social work profession, its Codes of Conduct, values and ethics.

The term 'insider research' is used to describe projects where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting (Robson, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Being an insider and member of my professional body, Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) gave me the advantage of direct access to potential participants. The national executive advertised my request for participants interested in this study in their newsletter NoticeBoard and the Auckland and Wellington branches of ANZASW emailed a further request out to its regional membership. Rooney (2005) believes researching from the inside has the potential to



increase validity of the research due to added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired. As an insider I believe I had an increased understanding and empathy with respondents through a shared professional language, frameworks and principles. I anticipated it would enable me to have an intuitive understanding and sense of the respondents' work and I believe it made me able to be more attuned and alert to subtleties of body language and speech.

Padgett (2008, p. 20) brings to our attention the two main advantages of studying the familiar; the first being easier development of rapport, higher acceptance levels leading to cooperation that is smoother and comfort levels that are higher. The second advantage is that insiders have a head start in knowledge about the topic either through personal or professional experience. There were other familiar and shared dynamics such as use of jargon - for example, 'shorthand' expressions or abbreviations in the work, and the place of 'black humour' as a stress reliever that only an 'insider' would recognise. These factors may have enabled trust and rapport to be established rapidly, and along with a purposefully collaborative researcher attitude and approach, could also have been mitigating factors in reducing and addressing any issues of power imbalance. The disadvantages of an insider emic perspective are recognised and discussed in the following chapter exploring the methodology chosen for this research and how it was applied.

This chapter has explained the thinking behind the theoretical orientations and explored the methodology chosen for this qualitative study. In the following chapter I introduce the design of the research. I discuss the context in which this study has taken place and I specify the process of recruitment and engagement of participants. A profile of respondents' demographical data is given and ethical considerations in relation to the research are taken into account. My role as a researcher is explored and focus group processes and procedures including the management of the data are presented and discussed.

## Chapter 4 – Research Design

Qualitative inquiry is steeped in choices and decisions – a qualitative study can be seen as a series of critical junctures in which the decision trail is rarely, if ever, foreordained. (Padgett, 2008, p. 41)

### The Research Context and Design

The question posed by my inquiry: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”* was tested with colleagues, supervisors and friends who fed back to me that they believed it was relevant and of interest to the field of social work. Using this question I was able to explore and identify ‘how we know what we know’; distinguish the epistemologies (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; O’Leary, 2005), theories, knowledge, current thinking and perspectives around the concept, and test and explore these with current social work practitioners.

My study was a descriptive and explanatory piece of research. Punch (2006, p. 54) notes that descriptive questions ask ‘what’ and explanatory questions ask ‘why’ and interpretive questions ask about the meanings of things for the people involved. I asked how participants define the concept of integrity, and what they perceive it to mean. I have explored with them why it is important and how they understand and apply integrity to their work and personal lives. This interpretive approach “is the foundation for social work research techniques that are sensitive to context, that use various methods to get inside the way others see the world” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 82).

This study used a mixed-method design and triangulation strategies (data, researcher, method) as described by Curtin and Fossey (2007). This enabled a combination of both quantitative (e-survey) and qualitative (focus group interviews) approaches. Respondents were involved in checking and affirming their interview data (through a memorandum of understanding), and therefore there was a high degree of collaboration between myself the researcher and the participants. Curtin and Fossey (2007) suggest this can help determine the trustworthiness of the qualitative research.

## **Ethics Considerations and Procedures**

Any research must take into account the 'ethical-political factors' and any implications that may impact upon the people involved. This involves thinking about any subsequent publication of the material and giving consideration to identifying and resolving moral-ethical issues. When designing and carrying out the research process Punch, (2006, p. 56) reminds us that: "a researcher's ethical responsibilities include the overarching principles of academic integrity and honesty, and respect for other people."

An application for approval of the proposed research was first submitted on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2008 to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B and approved for a period of 3 years from 21<sup>st</sup> July 2008 (Appendix 1). The ethics application required me to outline my research approach, methods and step by step procedures, (see Box 4.1, Summary of Research Procedures). This included designing an information sheet, consent forms, a confidentiality form and the e-survey (see Appendices 3-6). The ethics application covered the physical locations where research would be undertaken, and my experience, including previous research. It detailed the peer review process, intended participants, numbers and the reasons for this, how they will be identified, recruited and to what criteria, time estimation, data collection, and benefits/risk of harm. Consent, privacy/confidentiality issues including storage of the data, conflict of role/interest, and Treaty of Waitangi and cultural issues were all contained in the application.

One of my priority tasks was to establish a group of 'critical friends' who test drove the e-survey, monitored me and my performance as a researcher, acted as a sounding board, and offered challenges, ideas and encouragement. They contributed to the integrity of the research process through questioning me, my processes, my interpretations and findings, and by ensuring I engaged in critical reflection, (see discussion on the role of critical friends later in this chapter). The critical friends did not sign a consent or confidentiality form because they were not privy to any of the data I collected nor did I discuss any identifying details regarding participants with this group. I advertised in the ANZASW Social Work Notice Board for ANZASW Social Workers who met the stated criteria (Appendix 2) and were interested in taking part in the study. The information sheet I sent to prospective participants (Appendix 3) covered the research intent,

requirements of participants, their rights and responsibilities including anonymity and confidentiality and possible benefits in contributing. It also clearly stated the research criteria which was to be a member of ANZASW with five years practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and be employed by someone other than Child Youth and Family (CYF). This latter criteria was to ensure no conflict of interest was likely to occur as at the time of starting the research I was employed as a manager within CYF.

**Box 4.1 Summary of Research Procedures**

1. Prepare application for Human Ethics Approval.
2. Establish a team of 'critical friends' & design instruments for data collection and consent.
3. Establish a time-line with proposed supervision times and targets to meet.
4. As soon as ethics approval received advertise for respondents.
5. Send respondents the information sheet.
6. Obtain written consent from selected respondents and send out pre-tested e-survey.
7. Undertake a further selection of participants to interview, design interview instruments and set up focus groups.
8. Conduct the focus groups, and transcribe recordings.
9. Organise and analyse the data.
10. Send Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to respondents.
11. Write up and submit draft thesis to my supervisors for their critical feedback.
12. Complete the final write up of thesis and submit for marking.

A high level of detailed and careful planning went into the ethics application. Even so, the application was only provisionally approved subject to the committee receiving further clarification in some areas. The first query from the ethics committee concerned how, in the event of oversubscription, I would refine the selection of applicants. My strategy response was to select from as many different agencies and different geographical locations as possible. The second area sought clarity and assurance about

the access limitations of the 'critical friends' group to any identifying information (they did not have any), and there was minor modification to documents such as the information sheet. This robust process ensured transparency, protection and anonymity for respondents and the researcher support persons and created the foundation which supported the building of relationships of honesty and trust. In fact, gaining ethics approval, created a base for research integrity.

Two months into the study I found that the geographical location of my respondents was so widely dispersed there were no natural or logical places to base and conduct focus groups. In consultation with my supervisors I made a further application to the Human Ethics Committee seeking a variation of method that would allow me to access respondents in order to hold focus groups in three target locations. The variation was granted (Appendix 7) and this required a further advertisement via branch email to recruit participants in the three main locations of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. In addition the variation gave me permission to interview applicants in other locations by phone and email to capture their contributions if required.

I did not pursue the option of individual phone and email interviewing, as in consultation with my supervisors, the quality and quantity of information from the e-survey and focus groups were considered sufficient for this study. There were also logistical concerns that would have occurred if I had chosen to undertake further interviews with individuals. A description of the participants is found in Table 4.1 (p.71) Focus Group Respondents profile later in this chapter.

Three key tasks were established in the research design. Firstly, an e-survey was designed to collect some quantitative data in the form of demographic details and initial qualitative information on integrity (Appendix 4). Secondly, focus group themes were distilled from the information provided in the e-survey and discussion tools in part derived from the two qualitative questions asked were designed and used in semi-structured focus group interviews. These tools consisted of interview guidelines that reiterated participant rights, safety and outlined processes. A part of the interview guideline tool was a suggested 'group agreement' (Appendix 9) and three laminated

concept prompt cards completed the discussion tools (refer tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in next chapter). These cards captured from the e-survey responses all the words, concepts and meanings that participants had associated with integrity. An additional tool was a set of seven questions (see box 4.3 this chapter) which were displayed on a whiteboard at each location and acted as peripheral prompts to participants. Thirdly, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was compiled from each focus group participant's transcribed contribution. The MoU enabled me to go back to each person to express my appreciation and understanding of their focus group contributions and to invite their verification or clarification of content. Each of these tasks will be further addressed to elucidate why they were selected and how I chose to apply them in the execution of this study.

### ***The E-Survey***

I designed an e-survey drawing on my previous experience in learning and development evaluation. The survey asked participants to provide information on their gender, ethnicity, social work qualifications, fields of practice and years in social work practice. The first question invited participants to give a brief description (of 50 words or fewer) of what integrity meant to them and question two asked respondents to list the key concepts or words they associated with integrity. This e-survey questionnaire was pre-tested with peers to ensure it was 'fit for purpose' and met ethical standard requirements. It was then administered electronically via email to twenty-three social work respondents who had replied to the call for interest to participate in the research project. (Appendix 4). The e-survey instrument exposed respondents to the research topic of integrity and elicited an initial response from them about their perceptions, concepts, and the words they associated with their understanding and definition of integrity. I used this material, as described, to create three focus group tools or concept cards that were helpful focus and discussion prompts for participants before, during and after their participation in the discussions. It was useful and necessary to administer the initial e-survey instrument as this provided both quantitative and qualitative information from participants. It enabled me to construct a profile that identified the respondents' experience, fields of practice, geographical location, ethnicity and gender, and gave an

overview of some of their concepts of integrity prior to undertaking focus groups. The e-survey also served as a filter or selection tool for the focus groups as of the twenty who returned their e-survey, five respondents identified for varying reasons that they were not available or did not wish to participate in a further interview. Furthermore some respondents were so geographically dispersed it was not feasible or practical to bring them together in a convenient location for a focus group. This is what led to my application to vary the ethics approval to hold focus groups in the three main centers and to seek permission to carry-out individual telephone or email communications with some respondents if required.

### ***The Focus Groups***

I convened three focus groups, in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. I had organised to have four participants in each the focus groups (a total of twelve people), however five people were unable to attend on the day. In total eight people took part, one person only in Wellington (this became an in-depth interview), two in Christchurch and five in Auckland (where a participant who had originally signalled they were not available was able to attend). I chose to go ahead with the interview of one person in Wellington and the two people in Christchurch because these people were present and eager to engage, I had flown down specifically to conduct these groups, and I wanted and needed the material. Toner (2009) in her article arguing for the validity of very small focus groups (two participants) recommends that when a contingency such as ‘no shows’ arises, that the sample size be adjusted and to proceed, keeping an awareness of how this might compare with an ideal sized group. I was interested to discover that themes from the individual interview (such as impact of the work culture and use of supervision) were also discussed in the pair grouping and arose again in the focus group containing five participants. My journal entries highlight the satisfaction and excitement I felt after each of the meetings and comments on the depth of the material gathered from both the interview and very small focus group. Similar to Toner (2009, p. 184) I experienced that the small size of the focus group did not in any way inhibit or restrain the discussion on perspectives of integrity and I also noticed more ‘intimate interaction’ occurred in the small focus group.

At each focus group participants were given a précis of the information gained from the e-survey. This was an inductive approach which explored the research and identified common themes. The e-survey information contributed to my thinking and preparation of a semi structured interview format and the creation of focus group tools/aids. It also warmed respondents up to the topic. These aids reflected the words, concepts and meanings respondents had identified in relation to integrity. This information has been reproduced in the form of tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 and can be found in the next chapter on findings.

The qualitative focus group interviews that followed the e-survey utilised the respondents' initial material to allow in-depth exploration and 'mindfulness' or attention and awareness, (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007, p. 212) on the topic of integrity and various related aspects. As recommended by Engel and Schutt (2005, p. 104) it was an example of capturing social life as participants experience it, rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher. By using the material generated by respondents it also gave group members instant recognition of their data and therefore acknowledgement of their own contributions in addition to the stimulation of reading other peoples' offerings. My experience was that this process fostered engagement and curiosity with the topic of integrity and a collegiality and sensitivity to the multiple perspectives and understandings people brought to the discussion. As identified by Toner (2009, p. 180) focus group methodology has been emerging in recent years as a feminist research method (Wilkinson, 1999; Madriz, 2000; Poorman, 2002; Pollack, 2003). From my feminist standpoint the use of focus groups with female social workers has been a strength, creating a forum whereby their shared stories, experiences and unique perspectives have been heard and validated. A further way of reinforcing and respecting these personal contributions was my choice of the memorandum of understanding.

### ***The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)***

In deciding to use a memorandum of understanding I was cognisant of wanting to abide by my feminist philosophy, the principles of appreciative inquiry and strengths-based



practice that would honour reciprocity, respect and amplify the unique contribution made by each participant and demonstrate how they have enriched the research data. This MoU took the form of a letter of appreciation written to individual members of the three focus groups. In the letter I was able to thank, acknowledge and reflect back to each person my understanding of their exploration, key ideas and contributions to the study of integrity. I reiterated the prior permission gained, confidentiality, use of pseudonyms and invited each person to review, clarify or correct my understandings of their conversation as conveyed in the letter. I was able to advise the contributors of six key themes I had identified at that point in the information coding and analysis and I specified the contributions each individual had made. I invited feedback and any further contributions within a three week period and indicated my intended completion date for the completion of the thesis. Respondents took the opportunity to reflect on their material and to confirm the authenticity of it as well as affirm permission to use it for publication. An example of an MoU is attached as Appendix 8.

### ***Recruiting the Participants***

Respondents for the focus groups were recruited through an initial invitation in the ANZASW monthly newsletter 'Social Work Noticeboard'. My invitation asked prospective participants interested in exploring the topic of integrity, to make contact with me via email or phone. In the advertisement the ideal respondent was described as a "qualified practising social worker with a minimum of five years experience in the social services field in Aotearoa New Zealand. An additional criterion was that they were not currently employed in the statutory child protection agency Child, Youth and Family (Appendix 2). My reasoning behind setting these criteria was my sense that people who fitted this profile would be likely to have an affinity with the topic, whilst a minimum of five years practice would indicate sufficient experience and longevity in the work to enable robust exploration. Lastly, at the time of planning the research I was employed by Child Youth and Family in a managerial position and I believed it was important to minimise any possible perceived 'power' issues with people whom I may have supervised, taught or otherwise been in a hierarchical relationship. The research sought eight to twelve respondents as I had determined this number would be sufficient

to run two or three focus groups of three to five people and was manageable within the time allowed for completion of the thesis. This would provide a reasonable sample from which to offer some insights and wisdoms into the topic in order to contribute to social work reflective practice.

Social workers who contacted me had either read about the research in the ANZASW newsletter or via another social worker who had read the advertisement. As soon as I received an email or phone call indicating interest after an initial discussion I sent a description of the study contained in the 'Information sheet for prospective participants in research project' (Appendix 3). The information sheet fully described the purpose of the study, its parameters, criteria and methods beginning with an e-survey, consent forms and the commitment required to participate in a focus group.

The initial response to the ANZASW advertisement returned 12 respondents who completed the e-survey and had considerable diverse experience from a range of fields of practice, geographically spread throughout Aotearoa, and steeped in social work experience. The nature of this broad geographical spread was that no clear central location emerged as viable for the conduct of the focus groups. As already noted, the approval of the Ethics Committee was sought at this point for variation to the methodology in order to recruit more participants and undertake individual interviews if necessary, using slightly different criteria. Approval was given to hold three focus groups: one each in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland, and to use respondents unable to attend from outside of those areas, to conduct further in-depth interviews using themes arising from the focus groups, if required. In order to generate more interest from social workers in the three main centres for the focus groups ANZASW branch conveners were contacted and asked to send out the advertisement again to their regional membership. This generated a further 11 respondents who completed an e-survey which made 23 potential participants in total. Of the 23 respondents, 21 were female and two were male. All participants in the final focus groups held were female.

Further correspondence with several potential participants saw the sample group reduce as both work and personal commitments and ability to travel impacted on their availability and interest in following through with the focus group interviews. Focus groups were set up and negotiated to be undertaken over an extended lunch hour in a convenient and neutral university setting in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. I had confirmed times and days with four respondents in each main city, (potentially 12 social workers). As mentioned previously, due to some unexpected work and personal events, the respondent actual numbers on the day were reduced to two in Christchurch, one in Wellington and five in Auckland where a person who had previously indicated they would not be able to attend, was available on the day and just arrived. Therefore a total of eight social workers participated in focus groups which were four less than originally expected.

One of the common challenges in organising focus groups is finding a time and place that will suit the majority of potential participants. Coordinating a meeting date involves much communication and negotiation via both email and phone and in the end there is still no guarantee that all who have indicated their intention and willingness to take part will be able to attend.

### ***Engagement of Participants***

In focusing and shaping the researchable question for this study: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”* an interpretive approach was taken which invited the practitioners themselves to define and explore the word integrity. In order to capture in respondents’ own words their understanding of integrity they were engaged initially on a one to one basis through the e-survey instrument. A mixture of open and closed questions was used to capture limited quantitative data to enable demographic description and to capture brief qualitative data from the respondents who were invited to articulate in their own words, their understanding of integrity. Therefore the e-survey contributed to the construction of

useful focus group tools or aids through the words and definitions of integrity participants recorded and it provided demographic information about the participants.

The social workers who volunteered and became participants in the focus groups in this study were mature, experienced qualified women (ages ranged from 46 years to 60 plus years). They were practising social work in a range of settings, statutory, health, NGO, and private practice. Within those settings they held roles in management, as senior social worker, practice leader, fieldwork educator, consultant, and service coordinator. Their social work practice experience ranged from five years to 46 years. They all indicated a willingness to participate in focus groups to contribute their knowledge and understanding of integrity in social work practice. Although as noted previously, both the participants and the researcher found that the logistics of getting people together was challenging.

## **Researcher's Professional Roles**

### ***Power and Authority***

As Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 98) so unequivocally state “Ethics begin and end with you the researcher”. Kreuger and Neuman make the observation that a researcher’s personal moral code is the best defence against unethical behaviour. My high priority therefore, was to understand ways in which I would be able to maintain and enhance my own integrity and that of the integrity of the research processes. Issues of power and insider epistemology as raised in Chapter Three were the first to be addressed by me in my ethics approval.

I acknowledged the sources of my power, their possible impact, and discussed ways to be transparent about the strategies I put in place to manage it wisely. As O’Leary (2005) points out, the mere fact I am able to conduct research, my age, education, gender, ethnicity and social status, all confer varying degrees of power and authority. Working collaboratively and interactively with the voluntary participants in my research project was a mitigating factor in the consideration of the use and balance of power. I knew it was highly likely that my research participants would come from a variety of ethnic and

cultural backgrounds. As I am from a dominant European culture it was important to ensure I adopted a culturally sensitive and empathetic approach as Smith (1999, p. 176) recommends to “recognize the power dynamic which is imbedded in the relationship”. Although women make up the majority of social work practitioners, two men were engaged in the initial e-survey. ANZASW membership as at 10 February 2010 showed that out of 4,207 members 3,457 were female and 750 were male<sup>3</sup>. Although the two male respondents were unable to attend a focus group they were invited to contribute via the e-survey and further e-discussion with the researcher, however this did not occur. As it transpired, the final participants in my research were all female so I did not get the opportunity to explore any issues that may have arisen with male social work participants. I ensured I was open to engaging, listening, learning and eager to understand others constructs which enabled me to create a mutually beneficial research partnership with all respondents at each stage of the research process.

### ***Transparency***

I acted to minimize and manage the power differential by being transparent about my ideological framework, as appropriate, and by emphasising that the purpose of my research was to obtain their perspectives and understandings as experienced practitioners. I engaged the research participants in checking my interpretations of their contributions in two ways, to ensure I had not imposed my own perspective. Respondents were assured they had access to the material I gathered from them individually, and were invited to check their own contributions to transcripts for my accuracy in recording and reflecting their views. In addition, I was available both by phone and email to respond to any queries or questions respondents had, at all stages of the research process.

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<sup>3</sup> Information supplied through personal email correspondence with Jacqui Christian Administrator, National Office, ANZASW on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2010.

May (2001, p. 46) talks about the significance of supervision for those undertaking research projects. Supervision in many forms has played an important part in enabling me to reflect on and explore any assumptions, value judgments, exaggerations, bias or blind spots that I may bring to this research. I was able to maintain regular supervision sessions with my university thesis supervisors and found the notes I kept from these sessions most helpful in guiding my thinking about the topic, and for prioritising and working through issues as they arose. Their reassurances that I was making progress, their ability to disentangle me when I became side-tracked or absorbed in some aspect of the study, and their suggestions for further readings were most helpful. In addition to the regular research supervision, I was engaged in professional supervision for my work at the university and received supportive challenge and encouragement to balance my commitments. To further ensure that I maintained a reflective and honest approach in this research, I engaged a group of ‘critical friends’.

The strategy and concept of ‘critical friend’ was used by Redmond (2004) to develop a reflective model of practice. The role of critical friend has a history of use in education (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Kember et al., 1997; Hill, 2002; Koo, 2002; Swaffield, 2004; Towndrow, 2007). I adopted the model of critical friend and adapted it to my research. This entailed using skilled peers to support and monitor my performance as a researcher. “Instead of perceiving the role as an advisor or consultant, the ‘critical friends’ see themselves as the ‘friend’...” (Kember et al., 1997, p.464). Although Kember et al. were applying the concept of critical friend to project teams, many of the roles they identified for a critical friend to play such as rapport builder, coffee maker, mirror, teaching consultant and deadline enforcer, I found to be both applicable and valuable. Towndrow (2007, pp. 5–6) proposes a framework for critical friendship exchanges that sees the critical friends listening, asking questions for clarification, offering interpretations, raising further questions and offering critique. Costa and Kallick (1993, p. 50) see the role of a critical friend is to be an advocate for the success of the work, to ask provocative questions, to critique the work as a friend and to offer to examine the data through another lens.

The five critical friends I selected and engaged in this role were first and foremost friends with relevant professional skills and experience whom I respected and trusted. Four were qualified and registered independent social workers engaged in service delivery across several different agencies and organisations and the fifth person was not a social worker. Her experience was drawn from working in the fields of counselling, mediation and design and delivery of workshops with clergy that facilitate working with boundaries and ethics. These were all people who believed in my abilities to successfully undertake this research, who were both personally and professionally interested in the topic of integrity, and who were committed to meet and talk with me regularly. I used bi-monthly group meetings, weekly phone conversations and regular emails to draw on the broad expertise in this group. Some members I used more often than others and to different degrees, (depending on my perceived need for emotional and intellectual support,) to mull over my interpretations of my role and task, and to ask for feedback.

Redmond (2004, p. 7) describes critical friends as people who act as “a sounding board and a source of ideas and encouragement”. They are able to help “question the validity of research explanations and help maintain a critically self-reflective outlook on findings”. This was true of the critical friends I recruited and used in this study. All this needs to take place in a context of honest dialogue, where critique can be received and not seen as a personal attack. The critical friends I chose were empathetic, understanding and willing to hear and explore my feelings, both positive and negative. They had a ‘can do’ attitude to support my research and they were sensitive to and skilled in ‘noticing’ (Mason, 2002) the things that were going well. My critical friends also took me out to lunch, normalised my insecurities and panic, made me laugh, amplified my achievements, offered their unconditional support and commiserated with me when I experienced blocks or times of frustration.

Throughout the research process I have used a large hard-covered exercise book for the purposes of capturing research notes, supervision comments, and journaling. This has proved a very useful technique both to stimulate and track my early thinking, and to

allay my fears of forgetting or misplacing information, although I have also amassed countless odd pieces of paper with discoveries, reflections and interesting words quotes and references to follow up. Having my main book with journaling material to refer back to, helped me make sense of the sometimes overwhelming amount of information and expectations that researching this topic presented.

An illustration from a journal entry in March 2008 reads:

*Thoughts triggered by reading Lorraine Hardingham's article 'Integrity and Moral Residue in nursing'. The term moral distress (p.128) arises when we can't maintain our integrity because there is a disconnect between our beliefs and our actions. This must happen often for social workers e.g. removing children? .... Compromised integrity comes from moral distress and results in moral residue.....*

From these musings I have been able to further extrapolate the experience of compromised integrity and where that might lead. Regular contact and bouncing ideas around with my critical friends as well as journaling my thoughts and experiences provided invaluable tools to augment regular supervision. They helped balance and restore my motivation when it waned, and when my faith, enthusiasm and feelings of competency were challenged at many points during the research planning and subsequent processes.

The dangers of insider research are really the flip side of the strengths I identified in Chapter Three. Wenger (1998) cautions that we pay attention to what we expect to see, we hear what we can place in our understanding and we act according to our worldview. I needed to be wary of focusing on listening and identifying 'sameness' and I was alert to the possibility that I could potentially over-identify with the respondents. It would be possible for me to make inaccurate assumptions and leap to conclusions based on my own knowing and interpretations of the concept I was wanting to research and my familiarity with the context within which the investigation was occurring. This awareness and acknowledging of researcher suppositions is making use of a concept called 'bracketing'. According to Fischer (2009), bracketing is a continual process that



ensures the researcher identifies and sets aside, vested interests and assumptions or hunches in relation to the research and its emerging findings.

Gearing (2004, p. 1435) in his detailed typology of bracketing in research describes six types of bracketing ... ideal (philosophic) bracketing, descriptive (eidetic) bracketing, existential bracketing, analytical bracketing, reflexive (cultural) bracketing, and pragmatic bracketing.” This inquiry has used reflexive (cultural) bracketing, by recognising and putting aside the assumptions and values of researcher knowledge, experience and idiosyncrasies, to make transparent, overt, and apparent the researcher’s personal values, background, and cultural suppositions in order to minimise their influence on the research process (Ahern, 1999, p. 407). In suggesting the ability to put aside personal feeling and preconceptions as a function of reflexivity, Ahern (1999, pp. 408–410) has offered ‘ten tips for reflexive bracketing’. These tips support the development and demonstration of the skills of reflexive bracketing anchored by a process of reflexive journaling which is used to capture issues, clarify value systems, identify potential role conflicts, recognise feelings, identify reactions and biases, pose questions, and gain insights.

In addition to journaling I ensured I engaged the non-social work critical friend in my team who was able to act as a ‘naïve enquirer’ and a ‘check and balance’. Part of this critical friend’s role was to ensure my inside research position was positively challenged. Rooney (2005) reminds us that we must ensure we make research processes transparent and honest so the reader can construct their own perspective. Bracketing, critical friend critique, journaling and use of supervision allowed me to reflect critically on my research so that I did not become too blinkered or enmeshed in the process.

### **Focus Group Procedures and Process**

Many handbooks have been written on the process of setting up and running focus groups. They identify, among other things, that obtaining high-quality focus group data depends upon a well-prepared session (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 179). In preparing for each of the focus groups, I arranged comfortable seating around a table. I had separately set

out some fruit juice, water and a variety of fresh and dried fruit and snacks such as crackers, humus and pate, grapes, strawberries and chocolate Santas, reflecting a Christmas theme as it was nearing that time of the year. People were welcomed individually and invited to partake of some food and drink prior to the start of the focus group. Wilkinson (2004) and Krueger and Casey (2000) draw attention to the important role of ‘the moderator’ (usually the researcher) in setting up and running focus groups, in order to obtain high quality data. My knowledge and experience in facilitation skills (creating a welcoming and safe environment, building rapport, sensing and responding to non-verbal cues, attention to timing and use of prompts and probes, moderating group discussion etc), was an advantage in undertaking the planning and execution of these groups. I had devised three simple tools that contributed to the smooth running and ensured integrity of the process. The first of these was a ‘focus group interview facilitation guideline’ (Appendix 9) which I used to officially start each interview after a period of rapport building and familiarisation with process. The idea for this tool came from supervision and critical friends’ discussions and my previous experience as a training manager and facilitator. This guideline acted as a checklist to ensure the ethical and safety aspects of the research were transparent, highlighted and addressed and included a suggested ‘group agreement’ which participants were invited to add to or clarify and critique. As Snowden and Boone (2007) comment, a group agreement promotes building relationships of trust, ground-rules and understandings that encourage candidness, openness, acceptance and offering of constructive criticism, building confidence and inviting contribution. It contributes to creating a climate that affirms the value of self worth and wisdom of the contributor. The group agreement was used to guide the way in which we worked together. It was well received by participants, some of whom took copies for their own future use.

The second tool came about through a process of exploration and refinement of using a ‘concept map’. In my early thinking about how to generate material and discussion around integrity I used a ‘concept map’ approach (O’Leary 2005, p. 34) to brainstorm many questions, thoughts and ideas in relation to the topic of integrity (see Box 4.2 below for the general approaches and questions I initially thought I would like to explore).

**Box 4.2 Concept Map - Possible Questions for Focus Groups**

- How can I elicit a description of integrity from practitioners and tap into their understanding of their own and other people's integrity?
- What is meant by integrity- what sorts of social practices or values does it entail?
- Is integrity a contributor or sustaining factor to surviving and thriving in social work?
- Is integrity relevant to their own social work practice and if so why?
- Does having and using integrity increase practitioners capacity to manage their own and others emotions more positively?
- Does it enable and encourage proactive and creative work – if so how?
- Is it able to act as a buffer or aid to manage stress?
- Is integrity something you draw on from 'within'?
- How can you tell if someone is using integrity in their work?
- What happens if integrity is not present?
- How do practitioners preserve their own integrity?
- Is integrity aligned to other concepts such as spirituality, dignity, honesty, compassion and respect – might it be the integrating concept or container for them?
- Does integrity operate on both a personal and professional level?
- If so, is it possible to have integrity in one area without having it in the other?
- How might the cross-over of personal integrity to professional life be evidenced?
- If a crime or ethical breach occurs with a practitioner can they redeem or rebuild their integrity?

In light of the plethora of interesting issues and ideas resulting from the above concept map it was necessary to narrow them down and focus on a more manageable sub-set. As I further developed my ideas and thinking the list was refined to seven questions or prompts. These questions were written up on a whiteboard in each of the focus group locations for participants to see and I used them myself to track and monitor what areas we had traversed in the conversations that followed.

See Box 4.3 below for the focus group questions I chose to explore. I have since applied both sets of questions to help analyse and tease out themes in the data collected from respondents.

**Box 4.3 Questions or Prompts for Focus Group Facilitation**

- What are your ideas, knowledge, understandings and experience of integrity in social work?
- What values do you identify or align with that sit behind your concept of integrity?
- How do you recognize and apply integrity in your professional role?
- How does integrity contribute to your self-awareness?
- Does integrity support/strengthen you in your practice – does it contribute to your resiliency, if so, how?
- How do you see integrity being relevant in and to your work – how is integrity lived?
- Think of a person whom you consider to have integrity – what are the hallmarks of it?

The third tool I designed and used came from responses to the two questions asked in the e-survey. Question one in the e-survey asked respondents to describe in 50 words or fewer what integrity meant to them and question two asked respondents to list the key concepts/words that they associated with integrity. I extracted and collated the information from these two questions under three headings “Concepts Associated with Integrity are”, “Words associated with Integrity are” and “Integrity means” as displayed in tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in Chapter Five Findings. I produced three typed A4 cards (one for words, one for concepts and one for meanings) which were laminated allowing participants to pick up and peruse them. Participants recognised their own words captured on the cards, as well as identified and thought about the material offered by others. Wilkinson (2004, p. 179) refers to this technique as presenting ‘stimulus materials’ and validates it as one of a range of activities along with video clips, or case studies and advertisements, that may supplement or replace the use of a set of questions.

The cards I presented engaged respondents and worked well. Several participants commented on how useful it was to see this information and how it triggered further ideas during the interviews. The focus groups had been negotiated with participants to be run over a lunch period (times varied from 55 to 80 minutes); and were recorded digitally, and then transcribed as verbatim by a contracted transcriber (with the financial support of a Massey Graduate Research fund). See Transcriber Confidentiality Form (Appendix 6). Wilkinson (2004, p. 179) comments that data transcription can range,

...from simple orthographic transcription, which just preserves the words spoken, to the 'Jeffersonian' form of transcription used by conversation analysts ... preserving a range of linguistic and para-linguistic features, such as restarts, overlapping talk, pauses, pitch volume, and intonation.

I took extensive notes during each of the focus groups to indicate who was speaking, their posture, affect, influence, and interaction the speaker had with others in the group. This processes is discussed further in the data analysis section.

These focus groups enabled eight practitioners to participate and contribute to a face to face dialogue, discussing and exploring a variety of aspects and perspectives on integrity, building and strengthening each other's and their own understandings of its application to practice. Padgett (2008, p. 103) remarks on the advantages of focus group interviewing to a qualitative study "... including savings in time and resources and the elicitation of insights from individuals stimulated by the group dynamic."

As mentioned earlier in this report, 20 responses were received from the initial e-survey, however the demographical information extracted here represents the eight respondents who engaged in the next stages of the research. The profile of these eight practitioners can be seen in Table 4.1 below showing the range of social work service delivery areas, qualifications, number of years in practice and within this figure is a table indicating approximate age of participants. All eight respondents held current ANZASW competency as a stipulated pre-requisite to be able to participate in the research. Three of the eight indicated they were also registered social workers, although I had not requested this information. In hindsight it may have been a useful question to have

included in the e-survey. The age of the respondents varied from 46 years to 60 plus years. Years in direct social work practice ranged from five to 46 years with an average of 22.5 years.

Respondents were practising in a range of positions and contexts Governmental, NGO and private practice. The service delivery focus included Health, Justice, Care and Protection, Child and Family, Management and Supervision. This wealth of experience, knowledge and application in a variety of practice settings contributed to in-depth exploration and contextualisation of the topic as can be evidenced in the findings and discussion chapters that follow.

**Table 4.1 Focus Group Respondents' Profile**

<b>Areas of Service Delivery</b>	
Non Government Organisation – Management (x2)	Self employed with a focus on provision of Supervision
Agency with Care and Protection focus	Agency with Child and Family focus
Agency with Justice focus	Agency with Health and Community Mental Health focus
Agency with Primary Health Social Work focus	

<b>Qualifications</b>	
PGDip Social Work, Med Counselling	Post Grad Dip SW, Post Grad Dip SS Supervision
Cert S/W (Dist), Grad Diploma in Not for Profit Management Provision	MSW (App) (Hons)
Diploma in SW	Diploma in App SS, CQSW, Cert SW Supervision

<b>Age Range of Respondents</b>			
46-50	51-55	56-60	61+
3	2	1	2

## **Data Processing and Analysis**

As Pagett (2008, p. 132) observes, qualitative data analyses are steeped in choices and decisions and require management of the raw data to enable the researcher to interact with it systematically. I used a mixed methods approach, thematic analysis, inductive analysis, categorisation and identification of other concepts and philosophical issues underpinning social workers perceptions, understandings and interpretations of integrity.

There was a potentially overwhelming amount of data to manage alongside relationships with participants, critical friends and supervisors. Some specific strategies to support multi-tasking and keeping track of the material was therefore essential. In addition to audio-recording the focus group discussions and having them professionally transcribed, I took notes that indicated who was speaking and, where relevant, any facial expressions, body-language and voice intonation, rhythm or volume that added to the emphasis and understanding of the discussions. After each focus group I wrote up a reflection on my impressions and learnings and noted anything that puzzled or challenged me which I shared with my supervisors and incorporated into the supervision process. Keeping awareness of confidentiality, I also had some further conversations with people in my critical friends group that deepened my analysis and understandings of the conversations offered.

Sources of data may vary, and means of accessing and gathering it may differ, but all methodologies are reliant on data and the basic methods and tools used to collect it. (O'Leary, 2004, p. 150)

The transcribed data collected from the focus group participants were processed through thematic analysis and coding and analysed and combined with data from the e-survey to produce the findings and discussion material contained in this thesis.

My analysis of the data began with ‘open coding’ and I loosely followed a four-step process recommended by Kreuger and Neuman (2006, pp. 438–440) as described below:

### **Step 1**

Consisted of three parts – firstly, I read through each transcript and re-orientated myself to the discussion. I located key themes, (such as ‘values that underpin integrity’), assigning an initial colour code to each theme. Secondly, I scanned the transcripts for critical terms or possible quotes and noted key meanings (such as ‘can be trusted’ and ‘it’s when core values line up with behaviour and choices of action). These were labelled and noted. Thirdly, I wrote preliminary codes/theme headings and extracted the data from all of the transcripts arranging them under each of the codes/theme headings.

### **Step 2**

Was the second pass through the data - axial coding. I looked at the data in light of the codes/themes already identified and reviewed and examined them to see if they were representative of the discussions and responsive to the research questions posed. Additional codes/themes emerged and were noted (for example ‘integrity in the workplace’). I looked for ways of organising the ideas and themes, how did they relate to one another, what categories and concepts could be clustered together? What was divisible into sub-dimensions or subcategories and was there an ordered sequence.

### **Step 3**

Selective coding was a further pass through the data, keeping in mind the major themes which had been identified in step two. The data was scanned for previous codes and I looked more selectively for examples that illustrated the themes and could be used to make comparisons and contrasts.

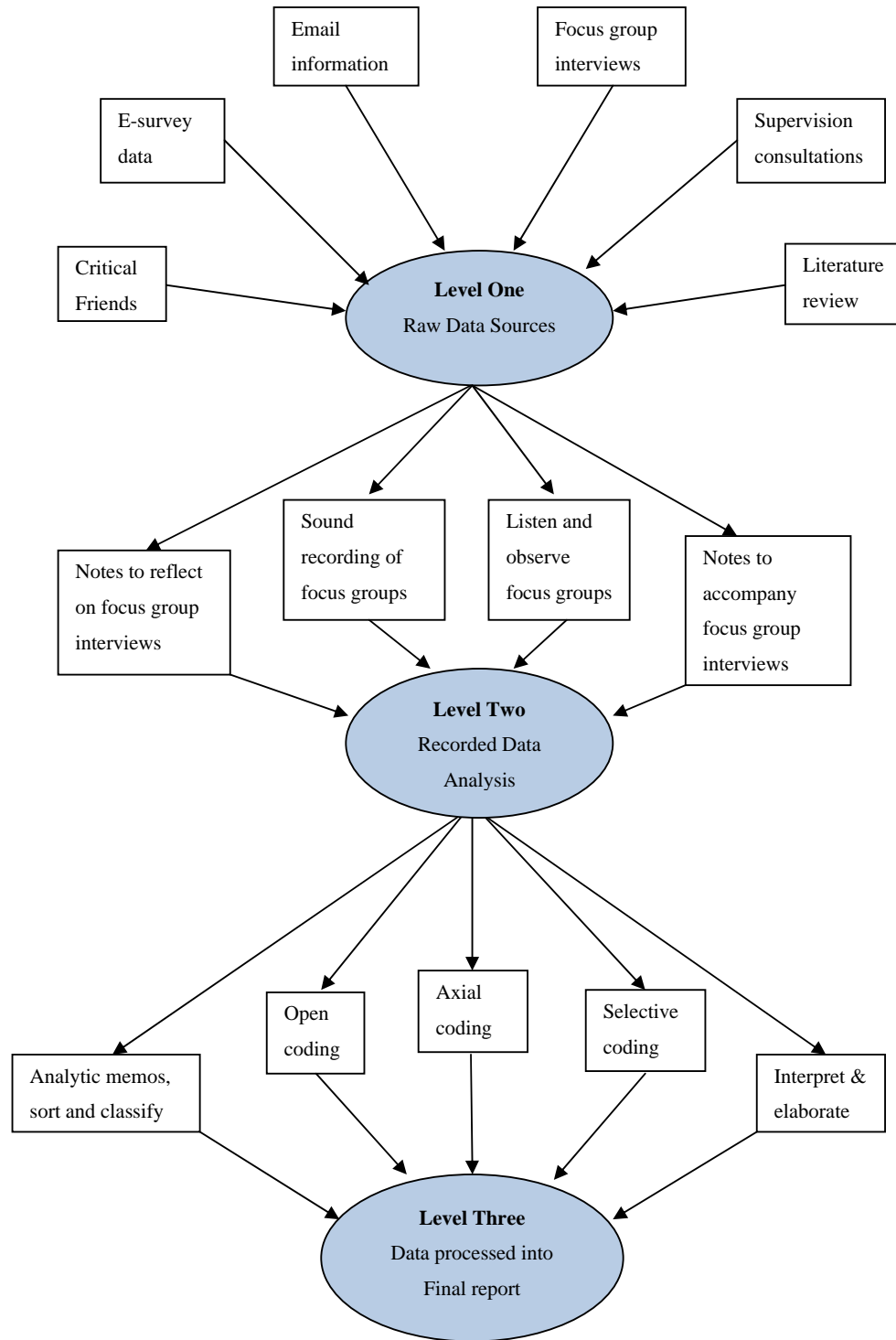


This round of engagement with the data was to secure and confirm the major concepts/themes and look at what critical information from participants would contribute to elaborating on these themes. ‘Doing integrity’ was one such theme and I was able to search and locate several participant examples of how they demonstrated carrying out and exemplifying integrity at a personal and individual level in their work. These are captured and displayed in the next chapter on findings.

#### **Step 4**

Analytic memo writing. This piece consisted of the notes and discussions of thoughts and ideas I had gathered about the research and throughout the coding process and written to myself or discussed with my critical friends and supervisors. Some of these memos/notes were an attempt to link process to theory, some of them were reflections on my thinking about participant comments and the data coding. Many of them were reminders to link to material articles and notes that had occurred earlier in the process. All were useful in analysing the data in the research report as they captured insights and ideas that proved valuable leads to follow in linking participant thinking to the literature and theory.

Figure 4.1 Data Processing on the following page, illustrates the three levels from which data was sought, captured and processed.



**Figure 4.1 Data Processing**

## **Data Management – Transcription and Storage**

Initial information regarding the recruitment of participants, information to prospective respondents about the research, the distribution of the e-survey instrument, its completion and receipt, was all handled electronically. I set up new systems on my home computer that allowed me to create folders and files within which I stored all the thesis material developed, including every piece of mail correspondence sent and received. I did not use all the qualitative information gathered, as previously noted of the demographic data from the initial 20 respondents to the e-survey, only the demographics from the eight people who attended focus groups has been reproduced in this study.

I duplicated the new filing systems created on a portable data storage device (a USB flash drive) that allowed me to have a back-up of the latest versions of data separate from the main computer in case of damage to one or the other. I also periodically printed and filed a hard copy of material into one of several A4 lever arch files I had set up in my study. This room contained a lockable filing cabinet to keep hard copies of any participant or university material, confidential and secure.

Care was taken to date each version of material reviewed and earlier drafts of material were deleted from the main computer and kept on a USB portable storage device. In this way the integrity of the information was preserved and managed by the researcher to afford maximum protection of both confidentiality and possible loss or corruption of data.

The following chapter presents the key findings from this research study using the voices of the practitioners to express the themes identified that related to the recognition and use of integrity in personal and professional social work practice settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Chapter 5 – Findings

### Practitioners ‘Giving Voice’ to Integrity

*Integrity - “It’s much less about a whole lot of words that I would give and so much more about a life that I would live” (focus group participant).<sup>4</sup>*

Three focus groups were the proposed means of conducting a further in-depth inquiry with experienced practitioners, into the research question: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”*

This chapter presents the many themes that arose from the twenty participants’ exploration of integrity. It captures practitioner definitions and understandings of a multi-faceted integrity and presents their views from both the e-survey and further explorations through one in-depth interview and two focus groups.

### The Process

The initial information sheet received by prospective participants (Appendix 3) informed them of the broad aims, objectives and intent of the research which covered four key areas:

1. “To investigate the concept of integrity, to see if and how it contributes towards being a sustaining or ‘protective mechanism’ that might enable practitioners to weather the extremes of working with human pain and grief in an often hostile and critical milieu”.
2. “To explore the concept of integrity to see whether this concept acts (or could act), as a mitigating factor against the forces that appear to deter and disillusion practitioners in the social work profession”.

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes from participants are displayed in italics.

3. “To discover and understand how ‘integrity’ is perceived, interpreted and applied by social work practitioners’ and how this might contribute to self awareness and resilient practice. It signalled the intent to “explore practitioner wisdom and ‘tacit’ knowledge about the concept of integrity and give it voice.”
4. “To heighten awareness for practitioners that would enable deeper reflective practice, thereby enhancing professional reflexivity, knowledge, hope and capacity.”

It was hoped that the study would attract practitioners who might wish to extend their examination of ‘self’ and to explore further contributing factors to insightful sustainable practice. This did indeed prove to be the case and focus group participants and the one in-depth interviewee expressed their appreciation at being able to take the time to engage with the concept of integrity and identify just how it has shaped, influenced and continues to impact, their personal and professional lives.

Twenty participants contributed in the e-survey their description of integrity and words they associated with integrity. After removing duplications, these words and thoughts were captured on laminated cards to enable multiple handling, and became a resource to the eight participants in the two focus group sessions and the individual interview that followed. Card one was entitled ‘words associated with integrity’ collected from the e-survey. It captured all the words respondents had associated with integrity. Similarly, card two captured the concepts respondents had associated with integrity. The card sheet entitled ‘integrity means’ offered respondents definitions and interpretations of what they personally thought of integrity (refer to tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). These cards were ‘stimulus material’ and acted as prompts and visual aids in the individual interview and the two focus group discussions. Participants commented on their usefulness to challenge, stimulate and clarify their thoughts and feelings on the topic. In addition to these resource cards, I wrote up on a whiteboard at each interview venue, the seven questions I had conceived of as useful to explore the topic as previously discussed (Chapter 4, Box 4.3).

## Practitioners Defining the Word Integrity

Participants' overall definition of integrity was built from the exploration and discussion of each of the three stimulus cards that were derived from the e-survey. Each theme that follows is presented along with its associated data.

### *Theme 1: Words Associated with 'Integrity'*

Table 5.1 below sets out all the words identified in the first stimulus card as associated with integrity. I chose to present these words in alphabetical order rather than frequency of use as I believed the alphabetical display was easier to follow and read and would be less likely to steer the discussion in any particular way.

**Table 5.1 Words Participants Associated with Integrity:**

Altruism	Aroha - love, empathy	Authenticity
Accountability	Beliefs	Conduct
Care	Compassion	Congruence
Clear Conscience	Conscientiousness	Courage
Culture	Consistency	Decency
Empowerment	Ethics/Ethical	Ethical practice
Equality	Faithfulness	Forthright
Genuineness	Golden rule	Goodness
Hapu – kinship group, sub-tribe	Honesty	Honour
Humility	Informed	Independence
Iwi - extended kinship group, tribe	Justice	Kuia - female elder, grandmother
Love	Manaaki – support, take care of, give hospitality to, protect	Marae - place of gathering, public forum
Matua - father, parent, uncle	Morality	Partnership
Pono - be true, valid, honest	Principles	Professionalism
Respect	Responsibility	Righteousness
Self awareness	Sound practice/judgment	Supervised
Tika - be correct, straight, true, right, just, fair, accurate, appropriate	Transparency	Trustworthiness
Truth and trust	Turangawaewae - place where one has rights of residence	Values
Virtue	Whakawhanaungatanga - relating well to others	Whanau - extended family, family group
Wholeness		

Several words were repeatedly identified by multiple respondents; the most common word by far was honesty. This word was cited by more than half of the twenty respondents. The next most popular words offered were truth/trust, goodness, values, ethics and faithfulness. An example of the strong connection between honesty and integrity was offered by a participant who found a diamond ring in her car:

*...that obviously belonged to the previous owner, it was sort of buried underneath so I contacted the car sales person and traced it back and it was their engagement ring and I can remember telling some people about it and they were like. Why on earth did you give it back, what's wrong with you, like how mental, and I thought my integrity couldn't allow me to do anything else.*

Many of the words offered were associated with qualities such as compassion, courage, and humility. Other words were associated with aspirations, such as equality, justice, independence, ethical practice. Many respondents identified social work values, beliefs, principles and ethical practice. Two social workers in the study, who had identified as Maori, gave contributions that highlighted the association of integrity with people and places. This can be seen in the use of integrity as a noun, by listing 'Kuia', a female elder and 'Matua', a father, parent, uncle and 'Marae', the place of gathering, specifically the courtyard area in front of the Wharenuī/meeting house, (Te Aka Maori Dictionary 2005). These people and places were likely perceived by the respondents to carry out roles, functions and processes for their families and wider communities that exemplified integrity and added to the integrity of family groups.<sup>5</sup>

## **Practitioners 'Constructing' Integrity**

### ***Theme 2: Concepts Associated with 'Integrity'***

Respondents offered their initial thoughts in response to the second stimulus card about their concepts of integrity as displayed in Table 5.2 below. The majority of concepts reflect a personal orientation with credibility, reputation, and moral development.

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<sup>5</sup> In this document in addition to Te Aka Maori Dictionary I have consulted the Williams Dictionary of the Maori language to supply approximate translations of the Maori words and concepts used to supplement my understanding of how they were offered by practitioners.

Some recognition of the control aspects involved in presenting with integrity both personally and professionally, the external controls in codes of conduct and legislation and the internal control systems of our values, principles and morals. The understanding of integrity became a key theme in the focus group discussions that followed the survey. In articulating her understanding of integrity a participant said:

*This nebulous word integrity, it's about your norming, it's about your social expectations, it's about how you socialise and the kind of rules and values and all of that, which underpins your values. Your judgments about things.*

**Table 5.2 Concepts Participants Associated with Integrity:**

Individual and group elements.	Internal control system.
Ability to hold one's head up.	Personal credibility.
Personal reputation.	Uncompromising honesty.
Committed to client well-being.	Attention to boundaries.
Values consistent across personal and professional relationships.	Congruent words and actions. Holistic and congruent in personal and professional being.
Sharing and learning – striving to be the best you can.	Principles and codes of moral or artistic values.
That I look hard in the mirror and rest with my conscience easy at the end of the day.	Sometimes it means taking a stand, declaring interests and knowing the extent of my expertise.
The whakatauki: Naku te rourou, nau te rourou, ka ora te iwi (with my basket and your basket ... the people will be nourished).	Respect for others opinions but not at the expense of your own if they professionally compete.
Links to moral and empathetic development in early childhood and the influences of family and others.	Challenges to someone's honour or integrity can result in complaints, de-registration and even impeachment processes.
Integrity means that I integrate what I feel and think and believe to be right, with the way that I treat others- it's not just a concept for work but a way of living.	Acting honourably in accordance with my values, and with the values and standards of my profession- accounting for myself to clients, peers, employer and anyone else who trusts and relies on me.
Code of conduct, professionalism, state sector legislation, professional codes of conduct, personal, family, cultural and societal variations of morals, honour and codes of conduct; these codes can be formal and informal.	Integrity to me means to act in honesty, with sincerity and justice. Love and care for self and others is expressed through acting with integrity, which is empowering. What is said and done is truth from the heart and involves equality, partnerships and transparency.



Another participant identified three concepts that together expressed her understanding of integrity:

*For me integrity is three simple words in Maori which is tika, pono, aroha; and they mean to be right, to take the right action and to always do it with genuineness and heart.*

## **Practitioners 'Making Meaning' of Integrity**

### ***Theme 3: Definitions and Interpretations of what Integrity Means***

In each focus group participants grappled with the third stimulus card to find the meaning of integrity, accepting that it was a multi-faceted concept and that it was often easier to describe a 'lack of integrity' than it was to capture the full essence of the word.

One focus group discussion explored integrity from the premise that integrity was "*when core values line up with behaviour and choices of action*". The participants quickly acknowledged that congruity of values and actions (what you say and what you do) was insufficient as "*someone might be part of the Mafia and maybe their core values align beautifully with their behaviour, but that does not mean they have integrity*". The group identified that there was a whole other dimension of goodness and rightness of intent, coupled with a positive or constructive outcome for other people, that was required to demonstrate integrity.

Table 5.3 displays data drawn from the initial e-survey. It captures some of the many ways in which participants chose to describe and give meaning to their personal understanding of integrity.

**Table 5.3 Meanings Participants Associated with Integrity**

Honesty, uprightness, credibility, reputation, professionalism.
My values and beliefs demonstrated through my behaviour in a congruous manner.
My reputation is based on my integrity and I value that extremely highly.
The way I practice and do my job is the way I maintain personal integrity.
Being transparent in all areas of your work.
Being prepared to take responsibility for own actions and decision-making.
Being able to give explanation to actions/practice carried out, if questioned.
Being consistent in what you say and do.
The ability to be true to yourself.
To honour your own values, attitudes and beliefs.
To be honest, authentic, open, transparent and ethical, in both personal and professional relationships and settings.
Not only a code of morals which include values like honesty, conscientiousness, goodness and honour. These values, beliefs and principles guide my personal, family and professional lives and how I function in an ethical way within our society.
Integrating what I feel and think and believe to be right, with the way that I treat others – it’s not just a concept for work but a way of living.
Being honest with oneself and others
In particular in professional situations it means adhering to one’s code of ethics even if this is a difficult or unpopular course.
Being Tika and Pono in the way in which you conduct yourself, go about your life and how you interact with others.
Having the Whanau, hapu and iwi resources, relationships and support to ensure accountability in all aspects of life, is robust and comprehensive.
Being true and honourable in relation to ourselves and others. That trueness necessarily includes a commitment to ethical and respectful behaviour even when that is not personally convenient. Willingness to appear vulnerable.
Keeping your feet planted firmly on te whenua <sup>6</sup> – maintaining a good work-life balance to ensure your Whanau get the best of you when you’re home and your work ethic and input isn’t compromised.
Keeping faith with people. If a feeling of trust/and/or integrity is present the relationship is much enhanced. Staying true although being tested.
To act in honesty, with sincerity and justice. Love and care for self and others is expressed through acting with integrity, which is empowering. What is said and done is truth from the ‘here’ and involves equality, partnerships and transparency.

This next set of data has been generated from the focus groups and the individual interview.

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<sup>6</sup> Used in this context te whenua (the land) can be understood as meaning ‘connected to’ or ‘grounded’ i.e. feet planted firm on the ground.

## Practitioners Maintaining Integrity

How people ‘have’ and ‘grow or maintain’ their integrity was examined by the groups and the one individual interviewee, with some agreement that “integrity involves a willingness to be self-examining and self-critical, a willingness to stand back from oneself – be open to self question, and being open to grow.” The ability to be open to uncertainty and self-questioning, “*to critically appraising one’s own motivations and decisions and being open to grow*”. Linking back to the word congruence one participant explained:

*I sort of go for the origins and so integrity, integration, I think what’s on the inside is also what’s on the outside so there’s a congruence between the two and that the only way you can achieve that is with a degree of awareness of both.*

The strong connection between a person’s own integrity and their values and beliefs was affirmed. The various values that underpin integrity were identified as honesty, consistency, reliability and trustworthiness, thoughtfulness, transparency, accountability, advocacy and challenge. Honesty was the value prioritised most often above the others as a value that would transcend all settings where integrity was displayed. A participant saw the values that underpinned integrity as:

*...a concept of truth, self respect and respect for others. Being people of our word – keepers of promises – good parenting is tied up with integrity.*

The powerful influence of context upon people in the way they then express their integrity was highlighted by participants and captured and reflected upon by one participant:

*You do integrity differently, different settings, like my integrity as a mum is different to my integrity as a manager but the values that underpin what I would judge as appropriate I think would be transferable.*

The thought was expressed that as adults we have gained our integrity from values taught to us as children and the choices we then made along the way, to keep or reject some of those values and add others. These have contributed to where we stand in our integrity today. A further observation from a participant noted that they are aware of a ‘different’ integrity arising in young people, different values and a sense of ‘markers in

the sand' having shifted and noticing *"in that sense that integrity is very much aligned with morals and ethics and values."*

## **Integrity in the Workplace**

Social work is very context bound and so the culture of the agency, organisation, workplace which is created and influenced by leadership, management and staff, has an enormous influence on how people practice. The idea of integrity being a factor that connects people promoting trust and loyalty, particularly in the workplace, was described by one participant as: *"I think integrity promotes unity which is part of a feeling of safety and belonging.* The same participant observed that *"A lack of integrity particularly in key players promotes disunity, disaffection and a feeling of unsafeness and lack of commitment..."* This participant used the exploration of integrity to further unpack a workplace culture that she felt was not healthy or conducive to maintaining or growing people's integrity as she noted:

*The existence of integrity promotes trust and when there's disrespect and there's gossiping and those other behaviours that's exhibiting a lack of integrity and consequently a lack of trust. So I think integrity, it's a vital thing.*

Further reflection on this topic enabled the participant to describe a perceived 'immaturity' that permeates a work atmosphere where people are seen to be largely concerned with protecting and promoting themselves and do not have a sense of connection with colleagues or some degree of loyalty to the agency. The participant felt in these instances the actions of individuals affect the integrity of the workplace negatively. It can be experienced as a self defeating cycle of diminishing your own professional integrity, and therefore not being able to contribute to building the integrity of the agency or workplace. Given that the context in which social work takes place is highly influenced by the agency for which the social worker is contracted to provide social services, a workplace that is unable to support staff personal and professional integrity could be dangerous, and one might imagine a very toxic and unhealthy place to work. This participant through her own experiences of working in a service that she perceived lacked integrity, then moving to another agency where she perceived integrity

to be present, had come to the conclusion that integrity is integral to a healthy functioning workplace.

Other participants noted that integrity in the work setting involved different values that underpin the work you are doing and the necessity for workers to figure out which values you are going to take on as a worker and be as consistent as possible - that is 'stick to them'. Participants also acknowledged that these values would need to change for different families you work with, and in different organisations they pointed out that whilst consistency is an important aspect of integrity, practitioners have to be able to review, adjust and align their values and work with the organisations and families they give service to, in order to maintain integrity in the workplace on both a personal and professional level. An example of this was given by a participant whose role is no longer explicitly mandating of social work and who experiences the practice environment as lacking a social work culture. She identified, that in order to develop and keep her integrity within her role and in this context, in practice terms, she operates an approach that names the punitive focus of her job and articulates and prioritises the values of honesty, fairness, justice, transparency and accountability within her client services. In another environment, she may choose to adjust this focus and instead prioritise the values of empathy, kindness, self awareness and understanding, exploring, listening and solution finding. Yet another work setting may prioritise advocacy, self determination, and active engagement in raising political and cultural awareness. Whilst all of these values will be present and held by most social work practitioners, their agency setting, mandate and job expectations can influence how they operate their integrity with clients and colleagues.

### **Personal and Professional Integrity**

A participant posed the question 'can you have professional integrity without personal integrity?' Several of the respondents believed this was not possible:

*I think integrity is just a part of who you are so it's a personal and a professional thing and you can't have one without the other.*

*My instinct is that you can't. If you don't have integrity as a person, how can you extend that into your professional role?*

*To walk the talk I think they do have to have integrity in both personal and professional lives; to be part and parcel of your value base and who you are as a person.*

*I don't think you can do it in your work and not do it in your life or do it in your life and not do it in your work for any length of time without...*

This re-occurring theme of personal and professional integrity is discussed in the next chapter in relation to codes of conduct, social work ethics and principles, professional practice frameworks and standards. How these expectations impact on both personal and professional integrity is also identified.

### **Integrity as a Process**

Participants spoke of integrity as a process located first and foremost in a social worker's life and in their value base and then moving on outwards. It was posed that "*if one respects oneself, then it follows that one will respect others*". The core values of a person were described as:

*[being part of a person's] health in some way and moral in some way and then [integrity] transfers from there to the choices they make and their actions and there's another dimension which is the impact of that on a third party, another person or another group.*

The word 'consistency' was seen to be important in the process. Consistency in your core values which then flow through to action and maintaining consistency in all areas of a practitioner's life. So, therefore constantly monitoring the effect of your own and other people exhibiting integrity and being aware of the outcomes of it or the impact, as noted in the participant's quote above. Another participant, acknowledging the process of gaining integrity simply said, "*so the values and integrity I've got are in fact those that I've developed over my career.*" Several participants identified courage as being an important ingredient necessary to the process of integrity. One participant talked about:

*...the process of it [integrity] is going to involve necessarily going to places and having discussions which are not comfortable, so it's about being willing to*

*allow a level of personal discomfort. I think that goes with the territory of integrity. So it's not about denial of difficulties. It's not about denial of conflict.*

The processing aspect was seen to aid the integration of learning, as social workers come across new experiences and are open to them, they 'take them in and do something with them'. Going back to check your beliefs and your values and

*...reassessing whether you are going to accept the feedback or whether you're not and make your judgment about that, I guess it's a growing living ongoing developing kind of a matter.*

The agreement across all three focus groups that integrity is strongly connected with one's own values, social work principles, and continuous learning on the job, also reinforced for participants the importance of professional supervision as a key mechanism for supporting the process. Supervision, and its role in supporting and sustaining integrity are discussed further at more length in this chapter.

### **Recognising Integrity**

Participants all grappled with the description of what exactly a person with integrity was displaying that allowed them to recognise and attest to it. What was it they wanted to convey to people when they wrote references that said this person has integrity? One participant thought that by demonstrating humility a person could be said to have integrity. Integrity was seen to be a combination of many personal qualities and traits. These included; genuineness, a willingness to be courageous, a willingness to rethink, to share things about self; an openness, unpretentiousness, humour shown through an ability to laugh at oneself, reliability and trustworthiness. Several participants mentioned integrity was demonstrated by '*following it through, seeing it through, doing all you can*'. A participant added:

*In terms of honesty and things, somebody who is clear about their limitations. You know, voices and lets people know that they are limited in what they can do or different situations, so it's about being upfront and honest, about your limitations.*

A person with integrity was seen to be someone who favoured consultation, was searching for answers, clarifying expectations, asking for support, being reliable, having a quiet confidence about them that invited trust. Another participant believed:

*They would be somebody reflective, somebody who modelled their values, someone who was open to challenge, feedback, who invited it...*

This participant felt a person with integrity would be a questioning person who could advocate and challenge, be assertive, stand up for something they believe in, have the courage of their convictions, but also know when to ‘back-off’ for the benefit of the client.

During these discussions, participants spoke about the opposite qualities and actions that would demonstrate a lack of perceived integrity, such as someone who is superficial, who is only out for their own satisfaction, or who plays games and creates dissonance. Two participants from separate focus groups commented that they had noticed how young people were quick to spot hypocrisy and sense injustice, and they saw that hypocrisy was a classic sign of a lack of integrity. Integrity is important to social work because although we use ourselves as the main tool in our social work, it’s not all about us; our work is all about being client focused. How we build, maintain and present our authentic self in the work we do with others is identified and discussed by practitioners in the next section about ‘doing’ integrity.

### **Practitioners ‘Doing’ Integrity**

Participants were invited to share their perceptions of how integrity is demonstrated in their lives. How is integrity lived? What are the hallmarks of it? What does it look like in action? What do we see and hear people doing that shows their integrity? In other words, how do practitioners ‘walk the talk’? Several respondents spoke about the doing of integrity being seen by the transparency of their practice:

*...to have integrity in my work I have to be able to do it in front of others and not worry that I might look or sound inadequate.*

*...be willing to expose your practice and not look like you’ve got it all together because none of us do.*



*...being able to front up and say what power I do have as a social worker and how I'm going to use it - let's be honest about it.*

*...anything that you do is open to scrutiny, that you're happy for it to be scrutinised, whatever action it is that you take, you take it knowing that it's the possibility of some other pair of eyes having a look and seeing what you've done ...*

Participants identified that integrity is evidenced through demonstrating respect. Respect is evidenced in turn through awareness of different cultures and customs, and your behaviour and responses towards them, in your attitude, dress, consistency and congruency, and in the building and maintaining of a reputation for professionalism.

*I think being respectful of customs in whatever shape or form they come in is really important, to acknowledge that there are ways of doing things when you're in different settings and dressing appropriately shows a sign of respect for that custom.*

*The way I maintain my own integrity is ensuring that my behaviour and dress and adherence to protocols and being respectful of people always match up ... I suppose what I'm saying is the way you present yourself professionally is also part of your own integrity.*

*I place a high value on my reputation and my reputation to me is based on acting in congruence with my integrity so it's not just a theory, it's not just a set of values, it's not just a thinking thing. Integrity to me is a doing thing. Something to act in the way I think I can hold my head up.*

Participants spoke about integrity in action being about recognising and crediting the work of others, about noticing when the values of the organisation or your role challenging you and requiring you to examine the discord or differences and not to ignore them. They identified integrity as being demonstrated by being open to feedback and external evaluation, by being aware of power and that knowledge is power so therefore a person's integrity is bound up in how they use that power. Being transparent and very clear about their role and the way in which they operate and fulfil that role was seen to be a part of personal integrity, as was the idea that you could 'look at yourself in the mirror' and be confident that you had been true to your values. Participants spoke

about recognising if there was anything or any way in which they were disappointed in themselves and, if so, having a strategy or solution that addressed the concern. One participant reflected:

*...there is something about that reaching some sort of internal resolution that I suppose is some sort of base for resilience. When things are sitting right then you're more robust, you're solid.*

Trotter's (1999) work around pro-social modelling as a framework of practice that demonstrated integrity was spoken about by a participant in one of the focus groups. This led to a group discussion about modelling the behaviour you want others to reciprocate, and the clarification and agreement that part of managing professional integrity is to work with clients whose behaviour or deeds may be abhorrent to you and society, but still be able to treat that person respectfully, without condoning their behaviour or indicating that it is, in any way, acceptable. As part of this exploration a participant highlighted the challenges in 'doing integrity with patients who are suffering mental illness'. She gave the example of trying to keep your own integrity when a person is experiencing, what can be termed as, delusions about their identity and relationship (often with, or about God). On the one hand, you are wanting "to affirm their faith because that is part of their wholeness but it's got quite crazy,..." and on the other hand you don't want "to shut them down or for them to think that you think less of them". The integrity is in how you conduct yourself, and convey that you are still there for them. In particular several respondents agreed with the sentiment expressed in their focus group that 'doing' integrity was:

*...also about being kind to ourselves and other colleagues and as respectful [to ourselves] as we aim to be with our clients.*

### **Practitioners' Experiences – Challenges to Integrity**

This theme arose in each focus group. Some of the participants identified this opportunity to explore integrity as 'very timely' as there were some challenges occurring in their workplaces at that time that gave them a sense that their integrity was being questioned. One participant shared her response to this challenge by being mindful about her congruency in the workplace, thinking about:

*... am I matching, am I congruent, am I what I think I'm wanting to portray – is that what I'm portraying, am I doing what I think I'm doing...*

This participant expressed the need for her internal awareness and monitoring to be supplemented by feedback loops from other people, and by inviting an external evaluation of how she was presenting, saw the whole challenge as “...*part of testing and growing your integrity and evolving your integrity ...*”. Another participant observed that challenges to your integrity in the workplace were often a warning to look deeper into what might be happening as:

*if your values as a worker are different, are at odds with those of your organisation or your manager in particular, you've got some stuff that you have to address*

Several respondents agreed that a clash of values, or difference in prioritising of values, would often cause sufficient challenge to the person's integrity, that they would choose to leave the organisation, rather than live with a sense of uneasiness, or loss of trust, or to compromise their integrity. This was raised by three participants as being particularly relevant in cases of women looking after family and giving priority to being able to respond to children's need. When this value was not supported by the workplace, women often felt their integrity was compromised, and they were forced to leave when no alternative acceptable solutions could be found. A participant shared:

*I see people and probably been in the position myself where I can't reconcile what I think is most important with the requirements of a role and that's been sufficient to mean moving out of that organisation or that role.”*

In another conversation a participant described a situation where she felt her professional integrity had been challenged ‘in a big way’. It presented her with an ethical and professional dilemma. This challenge involved managing and supporting social workers in a highly politicised situation with many other stakeholders presenting different agendas and priorities, and with complex legal ramifications. The outcome that this participant needed to support was a compromise, and she had to try and work with her social workers for whom she had an enormous amount of respect, to be able to present the compromise and negotiate with them to accept this outcome. The participant felt her social workers showed integrity in being able to work with this

situation, and needed to use supervision to reflect herself that she had handled the situation correctly, and that it was the right thing to have done. Her conclusion was:

*... I think it was [the right thing] but it was extremely difficult and illustrated how to have integrity in a situation is not necessarily straight forward.*

This was further highlighted for the same participant when she was supervising social workers who had very good reputations in Aotearoa New Zealand. The participant believed these workers would have been seen by their peers as displaying integrity; however, when they were exposed to a very different practice context, they were unable to keep professional boundaries, did not follow policy guidelines and therefore compromised their integrity. Boundaries with clients and colleagues were discussed in light of how practitioner behaviours demonstrated their integrity. Respect, kindness, honesty, consistency, to have courage and use humour appropriately, in relation to self and others, were attributes associated with showing integrity in relationships and safeguarding boundaries with each other.

*...to act in honesty, with sincerity and justice. Love and care for self and others is expressed through acting with integrity, which is empowering. What is said and done is truth from the 'here' and involves equality, partnerships and transparency.*

*...being Tika and Pono in the way in which you conduct yourself, go about your life and how you interact with others.*

Supervision was frequently cited by focus group participants as an essential forum for reflecting on, testing and bouncing ideas around, exploring, off loading and developing strategies to do with their integrity. The participant quoted above said she:

*...could live with the resolution of that [ethical and professional dilemma] knowing I had kept my integrity because I had used supervision to work it through.*

Supervision was seen by another participant as offering a forum that:

*...really kind of develops some of the strategies that you need in order to maintain consistency and providing yourself with options and alternatives – all of which strengthens your integrity.*

And yet another participant reflected:

*I think maybe it can be strengthened, integrity can be strengthened by good supervision, but maybe if the supervision isn't so good a person with high integrity would seek somewhere else for the supervision possibly. Because in order to maintain that integrity you need to have that external person to reflect and support you in your practice.*

All five participants in one of the focus groups agreed with a summative statement offered by the interviewer that 'good supervision supports or strengthens worker integrity'. Focus group participants saw supervision as a place they have taken and will continue to take their challenges around integrity. A participant identified:

*When I've thought about situations where [integrity is an issue] I've been concerned perhaps about somebody's professional behaviour it would be most often supervision that I would hope would resolve that. Supportive supervision.*

Supervision in social work is a mandated forum where practitioners can critically reflect on their practice and issues that impact upon it. In relation to this study supervision has been identified as both a vehicle and a holding space for the exploration and discovery of ways to identify, retrieve, check and balance, strengthen and clarify practitioner integrity.

### **Practitioners' Understanding of Culture and Integrity**

Finally, participants in two focus groups considered integrity from a cultural perspective. Several participants acknowledged that cultural interpretations could differ from their own and their agencies' understandings. This was particularly noticeable around issues of confidentiality. In keeping with the commitment to a practice framework that supports bi-cultural social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, participants were aware of the need to critically analyse and discuss the individual vs. collective approach to working with clients, and the issues of confidentiality this raised. A participant offered this comment from a Tangata whenua, (Maori) perspective:

*In relation to culture and social work integrity – concepts of confidentiality are very different to ours so it's about understanding what those differences are and how you might apply it appropriately.*

The idea of confidentiality and integrity was further explored as participants shared their views and concerns on the use of technology, computer records, emails, texting and the forums such as personal websites, blogs and Facebook, Twitter and other public electronic means of communicating and disbursing information. Participants recognised the different concepts and perspectives about the limits of confidentiality as being complex, however, they saw it as vital to address these in a transparent manner. The conversation continued to explore just how giving a pamphlet or telling a client about confidentiality, does not ensure understanding, and they felt that a social worker's integrity is bound up with ensuring an understanding. Looking at other aspects of culture and integrity participants offered these thoughts:

*If I think about a cultural context, humility is a really valued ethic in Maori culture in particular, and you go to America and you'll not be well thought of with humility, it's seen as a weak response.*

*There's such a lot of cultural layers about integrity...There's some interesting challenges about integrity because pakeha integrity I think has some different elements to my experience of what I guess is appropriate in some other cultural settings...*

Culture was not only seen as ethnicity or race. Gender and the different values men or woman have were seen to influence people's perceptions of each other's integrity. Age was another area in which participants sensed there was a growing difference in how integrity was perceived, with an older generation questioning if the younger generation has the sort of core values that demonstrated integrity for them. An example of finding money on the street and taking it straight to the police station was given as being the accepted 'norm' in previous years; however, this participant shared how a group of younger parents told her that was ridiculous and questioned why she would be doing that. For this participant the answer was simple, she was demonstrating integrity to her children, however the perception by a younger generation was that this response was no longer seen to be of value. Our integrity and our identity are interwoven and are part of the complex, challenging, and life long process of self discovery, which is shaped and constructed by the contexts in which we experience our socialisation. The messages we

hear through our families, friends, schooling, the media and popular thinking and talking all contribute to our construction of our identity.

In presenting the findings from this study, some strong themes such as values and ethics, goodness and rightness of intent, and positive or constructive outcomes in relation to operationalising integrity, have emerged. Personal and professional aspects of integrity, self reflection on integrity and use of professional supervision to support and explore the process of maintaining and strengthening integrity, have been issues that participants explored in the dialogue. Integrity involves accountability, reflexivity, self evaluation and critical reflection. Davys and Beddoe (2010, p. 57) note that “...the development of professional insights, learning and responsive practice are considered to be a primary function of supervision.”

Professional supervision in this study was identified by participants as a forum in which they could safely engage with their supervisor to holistically examine their practice. This examination included their thinking, feelings, uncertainties, values, behaviour and motives; supervision was a place to reconstruct, rebalance and realign their personal and professional integrity. Hair and O’Donoghue (2009, p. 76), in discussing understanding social work supervision through a social constructionist lens, draw our attention to supervision being a forum where we value all knowledge and ensure:

...it is vulnerable to critique so that dominant beliefs and practices can be challenged and alternative narratives constructed. Thus knowledge and learning happens as ideas are reconstructed through dialogues that invite exchanges of thoughts, opinions, questions and feelings.

Approaching and using professional supervision with an anticipation of discovery, bringing curiosity, self-compassion and a thirst for learning to the table allows for integrity to be embraced as a process and product of supervision, as well as individual integrity to be investigated.

The gathered definitions, constructions, recognition, conceptualisation, process, meaning-making, reflections and questions concerning practitioner integrity in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand have been presented and discussed. How integrity is

displayed, maintained, issues of integrity in the workplace, challenges to integrity, how integrity is supported through supervision and lastly, examples of culture and integrity, have been captured and explored by the practitioners who took part in this research. The participants in this study have clearly identified their constructs of integrity and the meanings they attach to them, including the application of integrity to their personal and professional lives. They have explored how integrity influences their personal and professional selves and how integrity is impacted upon by the contexts in which social work is practised. The main themes from the data can be grouped into three key areas:

1. Constructions and meanings of integrity (through recognising and doing integrity).
2. Applications of integrity (in professional and personal lives through processes and culture)
3. Maintaining integrity (through challenges, the workplace and use of supervision)

In the following chapter a discussion of these findings in light of the literature and professional social work guidelines and frameworks, with particular attention to the role values, ethics, codes of practice and the role professional supervision plays, will be presented.



## Chapter 6 – Discussion of Findings

... Integrity is about managing self conflict well, rather than sticking to commitments come what may. (Cox et al., 2003, p. xix)

This discussion chapter will bring together learning from the literature and the findings of this study which looked to investigate: “*How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?*” The findings of the study can be distilled into two main parts:

- a) The ways in which practitioners have understood and applied integrity in their lives professionally and personally through recognising and doing integrity, and
- b) The ways practitioners have maintained and defended their integrity when challenged, using mechanisms such as professional frameworks of Codes of Ethics and Codes of Conduct and the medium of professional supervision.

As this study has demonstrated, whilst there are some common themes and perspectives amongst participants, social workers do not all have the same or similar values or approaches to understanding integrity in themselves and their work. This chapter examines some of the concepts that were identified and developed from the multiple discourses and constructions of integrity held by practitioners. Firstly these findings are placed in the context of the ANZASW Professional Code of Ethics, and the SWRB Code of Conduct which were perceived by many social workers to be the ‘keepers of standards’ and arbitrators of challenges to the honour and integrity of individual social workers. The ANZASW and the SWRB have a key focus in this chapter because this study is centred on the experiences of social work practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand. These two professional bodies are mandated albeit through different pathways, to provide frameworks to guide social workers and ensure ‘protection of the public through the delivery of competent and accountable social work practices’ (ANZASW NoticeBoard August 2010, p.2).

During this study, deconstructing integrity has allowed some new meanings, uses, and some clearer understandings in relation to the context of social work to emerge, as illustrated by research participants in the Chapter Five Findings. Secondly, in light of these findings, the task in this chapter has been to discuss boundaries and how participants have understood and applied integrity in respect of these. Thirdly, professional supervision, its purpose and its identified role as a tool to explore, maintain and strengthen integrity have been examined. Additionally, collective practitioner insights and wisdoms have been gathered from this study to create a 'perceptive framework' that is offered back to social workers and others interested in creating new ways of thinking, feeling and acting with integrity. It is suggested that practitioners may wish to use these insights of integrity to contribute to their capacity to manage their relationships with increased emotional intelligence. In the context of this research the perceptive framework is placed under the umbrella of professional supervision as this is where many participants identified experiencing safe and nurturing relationships that helped them to identify, explore, re-balance re-story, and grow their personal and professional integrity.

The literature search undertaken for this study revealed a paucity of published material specific to an exploration of integrity as understood and experienced by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. A focus group participant ventured that this lack of material may be because:

*Integrity seems like a word that is very easily bandied around and the presumption is that people will have the same values underpinning it.*

The assumption that because there is a common usage of the word integrity we therefore must have a common understanding of it has been refuted by the review of the literature undertaken for this study. Integrity was found to have multiple meanings and contested understandings. It was found to be used across a wide range of professions in contexts other than social work such as law, medicine, art, music, mathematics and leadership. Integrity was strongly aligned with moral philosophy and theory and firmly imbedded in ethical theory. Integrity was commonly perceived a valuable and valued trait, virtue or characteristic. Integrity specifically in social work has therefore been the focus of

robust critical inquiry with the experienced social work practitioners who contributed to and participated in this study.

In selecting the concept of integrity Cox et al. (2003, p. xvii) suggest each person needs to have examined

... the variegated nature of integrity, and how it is significant for our lives across time, in constituting who we are and in connecting disparate parts or stages in our life and self.

In this sense Cox et al. are saying that integrity demands that we each discern what is integral to 'selfhood'. They see that integrity challenges us to continuously examine what fits and what does not as we do our utmost to construct an integral self by looking to try to create a strong coherent self that is able to draw wisely upon and honour our life experiences. As Cox et al. (2003, p. 4) recognise "Integrity involves a frequent, if not constant, re-ordering or reprioritising of commitments."

Participants in this study identified and acknowledged the continuous process of building, testing and questioning integrity. Practitioners spoke about it being a process emanating from an individual social workers' core values and beliefs, flowing outwards into action. They identified the importance of being aware of the impact of those actions and monitoring, not just how integrity was being exhibited, but also the outcomes of it. One of the ways practitioners spoke of maintaining integrity was to use the ANZASW Code of Ethics as guidelines to monitor their own consistency.

### **Social Work Codes of Ethics and Integrity**

A comparison of several countries Codes of Social Work Ethics (Britain, America, Canada, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand) found 'integrity' identified in each code as a core value, principle or quality. Social workers were urged to demonstrate integrity through behaving honestly, responsibly, ethically, impartially, reliably, diligently and with confidentiality. The International Federation of Social Workers document 'Ethics in Social Work Professional Principles' (2004) requires social workers to act with

integrity and describes how. This principle is incorporated into ANZASW Code of Ethics (2008, p. 18), by:

...not abusing the relationship of trust with the people using their services, recognising the boundaries between personal and professional life, and not abusing their position for personal benefit or gain.

As presented in Chapter Five Findings, respondents readily identified with the descriptions found in the Codes of Ethics of these countries. Participants in this research described and explained integrity in similar ways, with honesty, responsibility, transparency, and ethical behaviour being the most common understandings. Respondents also gave additional constructions as to how integrity was found to be present in their professional and personal lives. A participant described her picture of integrity as:

*Integrity, it's consistent and principled - like fingers on your hands. Honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, loyalty, reliability, authenticity, transparency, trustworthiness, good judgment and taking responsibility for your own actions and decision-making.*

The participants in this study identified that they relied upon the Codes of Ethics and Code of Conduct to guide and evaluate their practice. Sarah Banks is a prolific writer on ethics, values, accountability and professional integrity in social work. Her work has influenced the shape of this inquiry into integrity and helped explore and unpack an understanding of integrity in relation to professional life, (Banks, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2009). Banks refers to the International Federation of Social Work (2000) definition of social work, that exemplifies ethical principles such as 'respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people'; 'human rights'; and 'social justice'; and notes that the 'intangibles' are often professional values such as integrity and creativity (Banks, 2006, p. 7). In the context of professional social work practice, integrity is often used to mean holding true to the values of the profession (Banks, 2004). Indeed ANZASW states that effective and ethical social work occurs in Aotearoa New Zealand when based on the ANZASW Code of Ethics. The Code (ANZASW, 2008, p. 6) states as one of its purposes, to "Inspire professional behaviour which reflects the core values and the integrity of social work practice." Congruity between the personal integrity of

participants and the professional integrity expected of social work practitioners, was raised and discussed in this research.

Many social work practitioners in this study identified that although they use Codes of Ethics and Conduct, it was their personal integrity that led them into the job in the first place. Banks (2006, p. 58) asks the question – is it more important for social workers to abide by explicit sets of rules stating what they will and won't do (e.g. our Code of Ethics), or is it more important that they are particular types of people, “with integrity, who have a disposition to act justly and in a trustworthy fashion?” A perception of participants in this study was that integrity was a personal possession, a property of their character and something that attracted them to, and aligned with, their work. A focus group participant described it as something she brought to the job;

*...having that integrity sort of means that you can, or enables you to do the job and keep doing it and not get burnt out so all the values and beliefs and attitudes and everything that sits behind integrity helps you to keep on in the role.*

Another participant commented:

*...for me it was actually a conscious choice to go from an area that was quite different to a career that would fit with my own integrity and values and beliefs.*

For many participants the Codes of the profession were what they used to measure and evaluate their integrity to carry out the work competently, but regardless of the Codes, they already brought a strong and coherent sense of integrity with them to the job. One focus group participant identified that because of her young age in entering social work services (17 years), she had not developed or formed her values and needed to quite literally grow them on the job. This was during a time when ANZASW had not yet adopted and published its Code of Ethics, so she had little in the way of professional guidance from a professional body available to her, and would have valued this resource.

In the current context of social work, graduates may have entered their degree programme straight from high-school; they could be practising at 22 years of age so an explicit Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct to guide and grow informed ethical

practice, is likely to be an essential resource. Integrity as an ethical principle is captured by our Code of Ethics and social workers are asked to preserve client integrity by maintaining client confidentiality, by ensuring social workers are well informed about all relevant aspects of each client's situation and by keeping the client informed. With regards to colleagues social workers are urged to relate to colleagues with integrity, respect, courtesy, openness and honesty (ANZASW Code of Ethics, pp. 10–12). Participants in this study discussed Codes of Conduct and Ethics (in their employment as well as their professional association); social work ethics and principles; professional practice frameworks and standards; and how they found these expectations impacted on both their personal and professional integrity. The following two comments from the findings illustrate how participants perceived they were aware of constantly being engaged in constructing and reconstructing their integrity, in the different environments of work and private lives:

*Integrity is contextual and I see it as a continual challenge to manage in different situations.*

*Integrity is sort of like a goal that we might strive to achieve in our work or our personal life.*

Participants identified that integrity was not a 'fixed state'. Their findings indicated the need for constant diligence and awareness of how their integrity was being played out in different contexts. As part of their commitment to maintain integrity, participants spoke of developing a consciousness of how their actions affected people with whom they interacted. Bar-On (2000), along with many social work writers, would see this emotional awareness or intelligence as essential to practice (Morrison, 2007; Collins, 2007; Weld & Appleton, 2008; Beddoe & Maidment, 2009; Carroll, 2009a, 2009b; Davys & Beddoe, 2010).

Integrity is inextricably bound up with emotional intelligence, as to hold and display integrity, a person must be able to recognise and continually manage one's own desires, commitments, values and principles. Not only to recognise these tensions in oneself, but also be able to discern, acknowledge and work with the expectation that these will be different for each individual. Therefore social workers using their emotional

intelligence in both their personal and professional lives will be aware of the tug between commitments and desires and be looking to identify and resolve this conflict. As Cox et al., (2003, p. 9) comment:

...a conflict between commitment and principle needs resolution in terms of an intelligible and defensible picture of what is most important in a situation.

Integrity in this sense, is being able to recognise these tensions or ambivalence, and work towards balancing the conflicting interests. In this study, several participants indicated that they have consulted the ANZASW Code of Ethics and Bicultural Code of Practice to assist them to identify and think through competing commitments and desires and, on occasions, ethical dilemmas that have threatened or challenged their integrity. Respondents acceptance of, and use of, these professional tools to regain or maintain their integrity, (along with their use of professional supervision), was a finding from this research.

### **Interpreting and Applying Integrity**

Participants identified integrity as being first and foremost a personal concept, very much shaped and influenced by our cultural understandings and constructions. Shaw (2009, p.184) introduces the notion of 'internalist' and 'externalist' ways of knowing and justifying what we believe, and he notes there is a frequent tension in social work between the two. Shaw goes on to explore the different types or sources of knowledge and draws on the work of Schwandt (1997) who:

...distinguishes theoretical knowledge ('knowing that'), craft or skill knowledge ('knowing how'), and practical-moral knowledge ('knowing from').

It is likely that our knowledge, understanding and sense-making of integrity in this study falls under the umbrella of practical-moral knowledge. It is to a large extent being drawn from an 'internalist' source connecting to participants' ethical and moral values and beliefs. Our personal knowing of the concept of integrity is also strongly linked to our intuition, spirituality, creativity, and emotional awareness. It is a continuous process, where we are integrating new experiences and challenges in personal and professional contexts, and aligning them with our sense of morality, ethics, values and beliefs. Participants are calling upon their ability to reflect and be reflexive in order to

think about, and act on, their perceived understandings of external and internal information and circumstances, in an effort to work towards integrity in any given situation. Supervision (as discussed later in this chapter) offers us an ideal forum for exploring these constructions and reconstructions of integrity. Professional supervision can allow us the reflective space in which to undertake the work involved in redefining our values to allow integration of changes while still keeping a strong sense of our authentic self (Morrison, 2001; Weld & Appleton, 2008; Davys & Beddoe, 2010).

To understand how practitioners recognise, interpret and apply integrity to the social work contexts in which they practice, was a key aim of this inquiry. Shane Dunphy (2006) is a social worker who has penned a book about fifteen years of his life delivering social work services in child protection in South-East Ireland. He describes in graphic detail some of the work he undertook, and his emotional responses to coping with, and learning from, the families he was engaged to serve. Although Dunphy does not specifically use the word integrity or name the concept as such, his story speaks about his journey to establish and maintain his professional and personal integrity in 'doing' social work. His chosen stories illustrate the sometimes daily struggle he faced to maintain and reconstruct his integrity, and to ascertain his boundaries, as he confronted the challenges of working with disturbed children and adults. His professional integrity is demonstrated in his dilemmas and collaborations with the systems and agencies that surround child protection practice, but do not always manage to resource and support the service users of them. This book exposes conflicts of morals, ethics, values and beliefs as Dunphy draws on all three knowledges – theoretical, craft or skill, and practical-moral to identify, reflect and work with these dilemmas which at times cause him a crisis of belief and confidence. It is a powerful and challenging book that invites the reader to reflect on how social workers, who are in this case exposed to human suffering, trauma and distress, use their integrity to make connections to resilience and hope. This book demonstrates the multiple contexts and conditions that are influenced by our personal integrity, our professional integrity and the integrity of helping professions. Dunphy's eventual decision to resign as a social worker may be understood in the context of his need to maintain his integrity.



In the course of this research, respondents, critical friends, and colleagues, have all spoken about having had similar experiences where it has been matters of integrity that have impelled critical decisions about major life and job changes. Stories were shared of times when practitioners were unable, despite their best efforts, to change or influence agency policy, procedures or approaches that they perceived to be socially unjust, or that disadvantaged or disempowered clients. There were situations where colleagues or managers behaved in ways that were considered disrespectful and lacking in integrity either towards the practitioner themselves or the client group. Practitioners identified that challenges to their personal and professional integrity that could not be satisfactorily resolved, created a crisis and always necessitated action of some sort to address, rebalance, and reaffirm their sense of identity and authentic self.

The British Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics identifies integrity as comprising of honesty, reliability, openness and impartiality and sees integrity as an essential value in the practice of social work (BASW, 2003). The families, agencies and systems Dunphy worked with and the circumstances under which he delivered those social work services questioned, and tested all the above aspects of his integrity and challenged his boundaries. The emotional impact and complexity of the work presented him with many ethical dilemmas and opportunities to take stock of his espoused and enacted values, the work shook and eroded his sense of self. In the end his resignation from social work signalled his recognition that he was unable at that time to continue to wrestle with balancing his personal and professional integrity. Several practitioners who participated in this research spoke about situations in the workplace where they felt their integrity and their boundaries were being challenged or undermined. Participants spoke about times when they were asked to do something that did not sit well with their values or they were asked to compromise their beliefs, something or someone that pressured them to 'bend their rules' and cross their 'line in the sand', and set aside their boundaries. It was at times like this, practitioners felt their integrity had been challenged, and that there was an absence of integrity in the workplace to be able to work through difficult or conflicting situations. If this happened consistently, they left the job.

Some participants spoke of how gossiping, and having fun at colleagues expense demonstrated an absence of trust and therefore a lack of integrity in the workplace. Respondents in the e-survey identified integrity as both personal-internal (qualities, credibility, reputation, values, beliefs and principles), and professional – external (Codes of Conduct, ethics, professionalism, legislation). They spoke about the challenges to integrity in light of establishing understanding with clients about both the intent and extent of their services. An example was given of working as a care and protection social worker with people who are experiencing trauma and distress, and who may not ‘hear’ the information given by social workers. They may ‘hear’ it differently because of their stress and may have different understandings. This was seen to be particularly applicable to the concept of confidentiality. Many participants in the focus groups said they drew upon the ANZASW Code of Ethics and the Bicultural Code of Practice as their guide to establishing and maintaining boundaries for themselves and clients, and as an evaluation of both their personal and professional integrity. They used it to answer the question ‘how well am I measuring up?’ One of the key purposes of the Code of Ethics is “to inspire professional behaviour which reflects the core values and the integrity of social work practice” (ANZASW Code of Ethics, 2008, p. 6).

### **Supervision and Integrity**

ANZASW clearly mandates the use of supervision to support both social worker integrity and the integrity of social work it “... asserts that ethical practice can be maintained only where appropriate arrangements for supervision of practice are in place (ANZASW Code of Ethics, 2008, p.12). All practitioners in this study indicated they were primarily using individual one-on-one supervision, with some in addition engaged in peer and cultural supervision. These practitioners were also supervisors themselves, providing supervision to staff and colleagues as part of their job descriptions.

There are many writers who have made ongoing contributions to the human services supervision field; (Bond & Holland, 1998; Carroll, 1996, 2009a, 2009b; Carroll & Tholstrup, 2001; Carroll & Gilbert, 2005; Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Hawkins & Shohet, 2000, 2006; Hughes & Pengelly, 1997; Morrison, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2009; Morrison &

Wonnacott, 2010; O'Donoghue, 2003; Shohet, 2008). Tony Morrison who died 6 February 2010 was an English independent trainer and consultant, well known for his passion for supervision and the belief in the difference it can make to front line practice. Morrison's extensive publishing and training in the field of social services supervision contributed to the development of staff supervision and management in the social services field in Aotearoa New Zealand for many years.<sup>7</sup> Each of the writers mentioned above has their own perspective to share on supervision, its purpose and function; however, they all agree that one of the primary tasks of supervision is professional development.

Beddoe and Maidment, draw our attention to supervision as a place where professional development (and hence examination of integrity) occurs, and they see a supervisor's primary role as providing support and challenge to facilitate that development. Beddoe and Maidment (2009, p. 83) assert that "Supervision is a major component of continuous learning and competence in professional practice." This professional development function of supervision is critical to practitioners maintaining and strengthening their own integrity and therefore the integrity of their work.

Morrison (2005, 2009; & Morrison & Wonnacott 2010) offer further goals of supervision to support professional practice and personal growth and thereby build practitioner integrity:

- to assist supervisees to be clear about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities,
- to provide a supportive and constructive climate for practice reflection,
- to encourage practitioner voice and the building of a robust practice frameworks,
- to mediate or act as a conduit between supervisees and management where needed,

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Morrison's seminars, conferences and training events, articles, books and manuals have had wide influence on supervisor and supervisee practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially my own.

- to enhance the practitioners' clinical practice through awareness of, and utilization of, best practice models and approaches,
- to provide a safe emotional space for supervisees to 'be' with their feelings and thoughts.

Perhaps a robust critique of what integrity means in social work as presented to us in our Codes of Conduct and Code of Ethics would be of value in supervision and might go some way to meet these goals. The Code identifies integrity in each of the areas of responsibility social workers have; to Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based society, to clients, to colleagues and for self. Participants in this study have begun to explore how integrity is perceived and applied mostly in relation to self, and this exploration could be expanded to each of the areas of responsibility in the Code of Ethics.

Participants saw supervision as a place that supported and strengthened their integrity. Participants variously identified they have used supervision to explore and 'listen' for personal insights, and evaluate what was happening at the times their integrity was brought into question, and what had triggered their sense of unease or discomfort. What deeply held values and beliefs were being threatened and how were they feeling and managing their emotions around this challenge. Zorga (1997, p. 158) comments that

In its essence the supervision process usually leads to the restructuring of the existing cognitive schemes and to the reorganisation of used behaviour and emotional reaction patterns. It can frequently be a painful process fundamentally endangering the feeling of an individual's integrity.

It impels supervision to strive for the goal of offering a 'safe emotional space for supervisees "to be" with their feelings and thoughts.' A focus group participant recalled 'a situation that challenged her integrity in a big way'. It was an ethical and professional dilemma. The participant spoke about how she would not have felt comfortable about the resolution if she had not accessed her supervision and used it for working through that situation:

*and then afterwards reflect myself in supervision had I done that correctly was that the right thing to have done which I think it was but it was extremely difficult and illustrated how to have integrity in a situation is not necessarily straight forward.*

So how might having and using integrity contribute to or increase supervisors capacity to manage their own and others emotions more positively? The strength of social work is in relationship-based practice and as Morrison (2005, p. 9) comments:

It is therefore precisely at a time of professional and occupational turbulence that an understanding of relationship based practice and the contribution of emotional intelligence to social work can make their most important contribution.

It is possible that an understanding of integrity will, as it contributes to practitioners understanding of themselves, also heighten their ability to recognise and monitor feelings and emotions associated with integrity. If explored in supervision for example, it may enable these feelings and emotions to be investigated, and the intelligence gained from this intra personal discovery (self awareness and self management), can in turn be used to guide further thinking, decision making and action. This is in fact very similar to how Salovey and Mayer (1990) first conceived of and described 'emotional intelligence'.

How then might we be able to apply integrity as a tool to assist us in reflecting upon and measuring the core competencies of our supervision practice? Or perhaps we might use it to test the quality of our work through critiquing and crafting our supervision to build relational qualities and strengthen our practice?

Practitioners who participated in this research identified and offered many insights into integrity and in this process how it links to, and may be valuable for, supervision. I have grouped these five key understandings under the heading 'A Perceptive Framework for Supervision' in Box 6.1 on the following page.

### **Box 6.1 A Perceptive Framework for Supervision**

- The existence of integrity enables trust and respect between supervisor and supervisee
- Integrity promotes unity which is part of a feeling of safety and belonging, a key element in the supervisory relationship
- Integrity shows a willingness to be self examining and self critical
- Integrity displays intellectual humility, perseverance, impartiality, courage, fairness, sensitivity, perceptiveness
- Integrity contributes to appraising one's own motivations and decisions and being open to grow.

Supervision was found to be a critical element in participant's strategies to maintain their personal and professional integrity; it is therefore a key finding of this study. When I presented an excerpt of this work at the 2010 Aotearoa New Zealand Supervision Conference Common Threads Different Patterns, conference participants were intrigued by the multiple meanings and concepts of integrity. They were excited about the possibilities of adopting and exploring the perceptive framework in their provision of supervision. Two participants spoke to me about using the framework to discuss and get feedback on the 'culture' of their supervision practice and as a starting point for negotiating a supervision contract. Dwyer (2007, p. 53) talks about the importance of setting the right culture and suggests that:

A facilitating culture is likely to promote reflective practice where distressing events and situations can be processed constructively — thought about and talked about so that the person affected feels appropriately supported and sustained.

I am hopeful that supervisors will be inviting conversations about integrity and how it is perceived by their supervisees, whilst at the same time undertaking a parallel process of checking out their own understandings and enactment of integrity. If integrity and how it is enacted is able to be identified in both professional and personal lives, I believe it will contribute to, and enrich relationships that will provide safe emotional space to

identify and build emotionally intelligent practice. My examination of integrity in relation to undertaking this research has led me to evaluate the factors that ‘worked well’ and the factors that could have ‘been better’. The successes and limitations of this study are discussed in the next chapter.

The following final chapter brings together the key learnings from the research and assesses what these learnings are able to offer social work and social work practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand. A reflection on the research process, including successes and limitations, is provided. Some considerations of how this research may be disseminated and used are discussed and some ideas that have emerged for further study are identified.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusions and Recommendations**

Research is an engaging process of discovery and even self-discovery for individuals and groups and there is invariably as much knowledge gained from the process as there is from the discoveries. (Martinez-Brawley, 2001, p. 279)

The findings from this study have emphasised practitioners' constructions of integrity, its importance to them, and how they are able to recognise and apply integrity in their personal and professional lives. The findings have demonstrated multiple meanings of integrity and that the concept is inextricably linked to personal morality, values and belief systems that connect and influence the use of integrity in personal and professional contexts. Practitioners in this study have identified how they use professional supervision and Codes of Ethics and Conduct to strengthen and protect the integrity of their practice.

### **Social Work Culture and Integrity**

The two overarching themes of individual integrity and professional integrity have been constant threads woven by participants throughout this research, highlighted by the finding that professional supervision is a key strategy used by practitioners to manage their relationships with integrity. A third theme encompassing the integrity of the profession offers us another thread. Interwoven with these three themes is the culture of social work and how it influences and is experienced by practitioners. Social work is undertaken in a political milieu and is subject to the political and economic pressure of the day. Beddoe and Maidment (2009, p. 7) describe social work in both Australia and New Zealand as being shaped by Government policy and the profession as being in an uncomfortable position occupying 'contested territory'. They allude to what may be perceived as 'a struggle to gain professional integrity' as on the one hand social work seeks

...to be a valued profession (with the requisite respect and status) while maintaining a purity of purpose based on ideals of empowerment, anti-oppressive practice and social justice.



Struggles to gain and retain integrity in relation to the social work profession per se were touched upon by participants in this study, in particular those who were working for government organisations. They mentioned restructuring of social work positions, redefining social work tasks and integration of social workers within teams of other professionals, as possible threats or attempts to water-down the role and challenge the status of social work as a profession. It was noted that some agencies, such as the Department of Corrections, no longer required a social work qualification to undertake the work. In some cases social work tasks have been divided up and ‘assistants’ appointed to undertake some of the jobs that were previously done by social workers, such as transporting clients. There was an observation in one focus group that this sectioning off of responsibilities has undermined the opportunities for building relationships and getting to understand and work with the client in a holistic way. A participant noticed that job titles such as whanau support or caseworker were being used perhaps to avoid the need to employ qualified and registered social workers. These moves were seen as subtle and not so subtle erosion of the valuing of social work principles and practice, and hence may be perceived as an attack on the integrity of social work.

Many of the respondents had, at times in their social work career, been part of multidisciplinary teams. They noted the need for social workers to be strong in their beliefs and confident in their role so that the voice of social work was accepted and respected within those teams. They identified this as contributing to building the integrity of the profession. There was also some lamenting of the lack of visible social action. Social workers were perceived to be less able or willing to speak out against unjust systems and processes, perhaps for fear of losing their jobs or promotion, or the contract for services that binds them to achieving certain outputs and outcomes set by a higher authority. The term ‘radical social’ work does not seem to fit readily into the culture of social service delivery in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

My research was able to acknowledge the importance of culture, ethnicity and cultural difference from the twenty respondents engaged in the e-survey, initially by valuing and

using the words, concepts and understandings of integrity they offered, and throughout the research by creating and facilitating safe opportunities for respectful inquiry to occur. I aimed for what Bishop (1998, p. 199) describes as a “conscious participation with the cultural aspirations preferences and practices of the research participants”. As my respondents came from different ethnicities and backgrounds, issues pertaining to ‘culturally safe’ research practice (particularly in relation to Maori), were relevant (Cram, 1997). The Treaty of Waitangi and the ‘3P’s’- the guiding principles of protection, partnership and participation, were recognised and applied from the initial ethics application through the selection of methods, design of research materials, and during the conduct and follow up of focus groups with participants. From the first invitation to participate through to the writing up and discussion of research contributions, I engaged with participants using an invitational and non hierarchical approach. I ensured I was using non-discriminatory language, that there was transparency of intent and process, valuing of difference, respect for all contributors and their contributions. I undertook through the use of memorandums of understanding, an honouring of their conversations and a checking back for accuracy of the material I had recorded. These approaches and principles are applicable across cultures and communities and sat comfortably with the intention of my research. They also supported me to retain my own integrity as a researcher in undertaking the study.

The focus groups allowed practitioners to engage in constructivist learning. It provided for members the learning conditions which allowed them to build their capacities and revise their perspectives. As noted by Peavy (2004, pp. 104–107) participants were ‘constructing’ their own knowledge by testing ideas and prior knowledge and experience, applying these to a new situation, and integrating the new knowledge gained with pre-existing constructs. Different perspectives and approaches were discussed by participants. They acknowledged that culture and the value placed on certain traits and responses will influence what is seen and accepted by a country or group to be demonstrative of integrity. As quoted earlier, a participant reflected:

*“If I think about a cultural context humility is a really valued ethic in Maori culture in particular and you go to America and you’ll be not well thought of with humility, it’s seen as a weak response.”*

The material gathered from this research has endeavoured to engage with participants to capture and reflect their understandings and cultural interpretations of integrity and its relevance in both their personal and work lives.

### **Honouring the Learning**

In introducing this research project, I boldly declared that the study did not set out to simply define integrity in social work. The study attempted to discover and honour social work practitioners’ understanding of the concept in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, at this moment in time, and in this current context, and to ensure their voices were prominent throughout the study, and in the reporting of it. The significance of the results of this research is that it has portrayed narratives about integrity from current practitioners, and offers the possibility of new discoveries and understandings about integrity for social work practitioners. It offers a contribution to strengthen our social work knowledge and add to a framework for reflexive practice for the social work profession, in particular for use within professional supervision.

I laid claim to using an approach that was seeking to find, acknowledge and bring to the surface the often unvoiced spiritual elements and aspects of ourselves. I wanted to undertake an inquiry into integrity that offered an opportunity for practitioner reflection on an individual and group basis. An inquiry that ‘honoured’ practitioners’ wisdoms, and on a personal level, enabled me to discover, explore and begin to understand how inextricably linked my spirituality and my integrity are. Integrity is connected to spirituality and as Carroll (1998, p. 2) recognises, this is:

[Because] spirituality is an integral part of one’s ‘self’, our basic nature, it contributes to the process of finding meaning and purpose in one’s life.

Our integrity, like our spirituality, is about striving for wholeness and integrating our biological, mental, social and spiritual aspects of life. Cox et al. (2003, p. xiii) suggest that for a person to attain integrity it seems to require a degree of tension, inner conflict,

discomfort and disquiet. Self reflection invites the struggle to resolve conflict; critical self reflection engages us in a debate on how we might go about integrating values, desires, commitments, obligations and pursuing happiness and satisfaction in our personal and professional lives.

An experience of undertaking this research has been my involvement in the process of recognising, conceptualising and articulating the strong link between my spirituality and my integrity, with the result that it will continue to strengthen my understanding and use of self.

This study discovered the importance of integrity and that integrity is not an absolute state. It is a lifelong work in progress. Integrity is something we need to be attuned to, so we can be curious about recognising and examining the emotions and events that alert us to attacks upon it. Hansson, (2008, p. 135) says “Integrity is a property which determines how individuals interact with the world about them.” Hansson sees integrity as related to the individual’s capacity to experience things and to our social orientations (Hansson, 2008). To lose our integrity implies an emotional loss and even the thought of this loss gives an emotional reaction, usually fear, embarrassment or pride (Hansson, 2008). Integrity is involved in trying to recognise and address the ambivalence in ourselves as we make choices in our socially complex world.

Hiebert (2003) asserts that when our integrity is questioned our whole sense of self is threatened. He says we can tolerate almost any affront better than having our integrity questioned. Cox et al. (2003) comment that integrity is inextricably bound up with emotional intelligence because to have integrity a person must be able to recognise and continually manage one’s own desires, fears, commitments, values and principles, and be able to acknowledge they will be different for others. Having integrity means acting on principles even in circumstances which might threaten those principles. It is ‘speaking up’, ‘taking action’ and ‘walking the talk’. Social workers in both their personal and professional lives will look to identify and resolve these conflicts because

when they don't, as several participants noted, there are negative consequences which do not go away!

*There's a situation where there were some wrong things happen so it was taken as a complaint to the professional body, who, on the balance of probability, couldn't prove it. This is so often the case, but you know the person who behaved in that way still operates in this very small little professional world, and I still bump into them regularly, and I mean probably about five years has elapsed, it didn't go away because it's unresolved. You never end up really building your trust in their integrity, there's no resolution. (Focus group participant)*

### **Honouring the Process**

The research process began with prospective participants being informed about the broad aims, objectives and intent of the research. These four aims re-stated below provided a framework for this inquiry and were encapsulated in the research question: *“How do social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive, understand and interpret the concept of integrity and how do they assess it as being relevant in their work?”*. I undertook to:

1. Investigate the concept of integrity, to see if and how it contributes towards being a sustaining or 'protective mechanism' which enables practitioners to weather the extremes of working with human pain and grief in an often hostile and critical milieu.
2. Explore the concept of integrity to see whether this concept acts (or could act), as a mitigating factor against the forces that appear to deter and disillusion practitioners in the social work profession.
3. Discover and understand how 'integrity' is perceived, interpreted and applied by social work practitioners and how this might contribute to self aware and resilient practice; by exploring practitioner wisdom and 'tacit' knowledge about the concept of integrity and giving it voice.
4. The overall aim of the study was to heighten awareness for practitioners with regards to integrity that would enable deeper reflective practice, thereby enhancing professional reflexivity, knowledge, hope and capacity.

The initial information sheet suggested this study of integrity would “be of interest to practitioners who wish to extend their examination of ‘self’ and to explore further contributing factors to insightful sustainable practice” (p. 1. Appendix 3). From the first e-mail exchange with prospective participants, through to the final memorandum of understanding affirming their contributions, social work practitioners were engaged in a process of discovery of self in relation to integrity. Through participating in this research, respondents have paid attention to, and have a heightened awareness of integrity. This is supported by an appreciative inquiry principle to do with ‘noticing’, that says what you focus on, grows. Participants have had the opportunity individually and collectively in small groups, to examine the word, explore the concept and affirm what integrity means in relation to their personal and professional selves, and to the profession itself.

The themes described have emerged from the e-survey information and focus group discussions and have given voice to practitioners, wisdom and tacit knowledge. The themes that emerged were recognising, defining, constructing and making meaning of integrity personally, professionally and in the workplace. They included integrity as a process, culture and integrity, doing integrity and challenges to integrity. All of which have been discussed in this thesis. A participant shared that “*having integrity with myself and my beliefs can sustain me through what could be a hard consequence. It really strengthens my practice.*” When recalling times their integrity had been threatened, respondents used the opportunity to reflect on what the contributing factors were and how they were affected by them. Supervision was seen as an appropriate place to undertake this inquiry. Some participants clearly identified integrity as a sustaining and protective factor in their lives for example, “*I think integrity is indispensable to resilience*”. Another participant reflected that integrity for her was:

*...reaching some sort of internal resolution that I suppose is some sort of base for resilience. When things are sitting right then you’re more robust, you’re solid.*

It would be fair to conclude that practitioners in this study have recognised and affirmed integrity as a protective and enabling factor in their work and private lives.

## **Successes and Limitations of this Research**

### ***Key Success Factors***

I have identified six major factors that have contributed to the successes experienced in this research project. The first factor was approaching the study with a 'correct attitude'. This meant as the researcher/facilitator I was listening with a positive attitude and curiosity. I was open to new perspectives and views without pre-assumptions which are merely looking for an 'affirmation' from the group. I was both respecting and expecting wisdoms to emerge from the practitioners' contributions and discussions. Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 98) assert "Ethical social work research depends on the integrity of the individual researcher and his or her values." My intent was always to capture the voices of participants and share their interpretations and understandings of integrity. My attitude and actions were congruent with this intent throughout the study.

My expectation, approach, attitude and values were identified and scrutinised through my journaling and discussions with critical friends, and then brought to supervision for further reflection. In carefully choosing my words in all communications, I endeavoured to convey a trust in and respect for the relationships and collaborations I was inviting and building.

The second factor was all about thorough preparation, planning and attention to communication. I took the time to ensure the purpose of the study was carefully explained to participants and their understanding checked. Role clarity of both researcher and respondent were discussed and clarified. I ensured everyone had an equal opportunity to participate – following the 'no dominance' rule. This required a skilful balance between being open to new and divergent views and focused enough to lead the discussion in the direction of information being sought on the research topic. Being 'in the moment', mindful and staying focused on the discussions and pace of the conversations were all part of being prepared and attending to the communication.

The third ingredient was in relation to group management. Being able to balance and manage the allocated time. I ensured the focus group was neither hurried nor dragged

out, respecting the participants, attending to their need to be introduced and establishing rapport with others in the group. This meant we adhered to the time agreement and commitments of participants. Holding the focus groups at university venues was also very positive as respondents were pleased to meet at these locations which were familiar to them, in convenient locations, and they were offered free parking, café facilities and comfortable rooms.

Fourthly, the use of skilful questioning techniques enabled a thorough and focused exploration of the topic. I asked open ended questions to learn and understand instead of looking to 'affirm' pre-assumptions. I used a "5WH enquiry" approach, consisting of who, what, when, where, (with why used occasionally and carefully in a non-confronting way), and how. Most of the questions were framed with a tentative, non-judgmental approach of "I'm wondering ... or I am interested in understanding ...". I used an appreciative inquiry approach, of being respectfully and genuinely curious about the participants' perspectives.

The fifth area covers my self-serving reasons and intrinsic motivations for undertaking this research. These include my passion: belief and knowing that this study had the potential to further inform social work education, teaching and training. Acknowledging and embracing my relational responsibility to join in the construction of meaning and morality with others; and widening my networks, relationships and engagement with people (Cotter et al, 2004). I was able to take the opportunity to present material from this work to interested audiences and publish from it in order to continue the exploration and social construction of the meanings of integrity.

Lastly, the measures I put in place to ensure my personal and professional integrity and that of the research processes were upheld. Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 425) urge researchers to:

Engage in your work in the company of others. Collective investigation and analysis may provide insights missed by the solitary mind.



The collaboration I undertook was enabled through my commitment to, and use of, regular supervision and my use of the support and positive challenge of my ‘critical friends’ group, colleagues and family, who all took an active interest in this topic, my progress (or at times struggles), and the unfolding discoveries.

### ***Limitations***

This study was necessarily a small sampling. A larger study would have enabled a wider range of participant perspectives. As this research was intent on discovering how social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand perceived and constructed integrity, it would have been good to have been able to engage with a representative or proportional sampling of social work practitioners from Tangata Whenua and Pasifika cultures. Recruiting from wider ethnicities would have allowed a much greater exploration of potential differences in understanding and approach to integrity from a range of cultural standpoints.

There were no male social workers able to participate in the focus groups, (two responded to the e-survey), therefore it could be seen that gender has not been well represented in this study; again a larger sampling could ensure a masculine voice was reflected. Similarly, social workers outside of the three main urban cities of Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland were not able to be involved in the focus groups, which means the perspectives of rural social workers and those operating from smaller towns and cities nationwide, have not been included in this study.

In hindsight, and also acknowledging the risk of putting too much into the initial survey, I would still have liked to ask participants a question about what feelings/emotions they associated with integrity. I believe this would complement the question asking for a description of what integrity means, and the questions asking for a list of key concepts/words associated with integrity. A feelings question may have invited respondents to move away from their dominant discourse and journey on an inquiry into alternative emotional, intuitive and tacit experiences of integrity.

Given more time, I would have liked to have taken the key themes from the focus group and explored them with those interested individual practitioners who were unable to participate. Each participant could have explored a separate theme in more depth or selected themes could have been presented. In a one on one interview it would have been interesting to see what sense these practitioners were able to make of the findings, and how they might value and contextualize them in their current work. I think this refinement would add another layer of variation, multiple perspectives and diverse voices in the construction of how social workers understand and operationalise the concept of integrity.

In this study there was a point when I seriously questioned my choice of using focus groups as a key part of my methodology. I found it very challenging to set up focus groups, firstly to even get hold of people, then to find suitable times for people to be able to meet. A lot of time and energy went into getting an agreed date in each location. Despite email and phone reminders some respondents had to withdraw the night before the focus group and two were unable to attend on the day. This was disappointing, particularly as my numbers were originally small and the purpose of focus groups was to share information, draw on the synergy between members and generate more views and ideas. As I had already flown to Christchurch and Wellington before I was advised people were unable to attend, I was unable to reschedule or offer alternative dates, so I worked with an individual in Wellington and a pair in Christchurch. Despite these setbacks I was pleased with the rich material that was generated from focus group discussion and I was satisfied with the way I was able to work with the participants and attend to the individual and group processes. I recognise that I could have engaged in more preparation by devising additional appreciative inquiry questions that would have been beneficial, and I could have improved my preparation of participants by sending them some of these questions in advance of the meeting so that respondents could come 'warmed up' to the topic, having already undertaken some targeted thinking and conceptualising.

Jones (2000) talks about integrity in the professional sphere being concerned with “... striving for a convergence of practices and espoused values.” Jones refers to Timms, 1993, who comments that:

...for human services staff, constructing integrity coheres around a sense of doing the work properly in a context where values-talk’ is prevalent ...

I have a heightened awareness of and commitment to ensuring the integrity of information gathering and processing by being clear and transparent. I have attended to my own integrity in this process through subjecting my values, beliefs, opinions and judgments to inquiry, as I have examined and questioned the processes by which they were reached. I am passionate about continuing to integrate the learning and striving to increase and develop my ethics and research capacity, and to share the results of this particular inquiry into social workers understanding and assessment of the relevancy of integrity to their work.

### **Ideas for Future Research**

This study was a very small sampling and so cannot be generalised. It has only skimmed the surface of an intriguing complex and multifaceted virtue, concept or trait. It has however, demonstrated the potential worth of undertaking further inquiries into integrity in the social services.

I would suggest an additional six lines of inquiry for future research on this topic;

1. The areas of culture and ethnicity would immediately be attractive to research, on how Maori, Pasifika, Asian and minority groups of social workers perceive integrity.
2. It would be interesting to find out if there are gender differences in perception and use of integrity.
3. Another area could be investigating how you might introduce and develop student social workers understandings and use of integrity – how can it be taught?
4. The whole area of integrity, leadership and power would also be interesting to explore.

5. Looking for links between integrity, spirituality, and perhaps dignity could be another line of investigation.
6. In my successful use of 'critical friends' I found most of the supporting literature to be from the field of education. This suggests that some research into the role of critical friends in the context of social work research might be of interest and future use.

## **A Final Word on Integrity**

Kreuger and Neuman (2006, p. 435) says:

The researchers' goal is to organise a large quantity of specific detail into a coherent picture, model or set of interlocked concepts.

A qualitative inquiry has allowed me to research integrity from the inside. I have journeyed with participants in a focused and purposeful, but not fixed or prescriptive manner, to uncover their personal and professional understandings and application of integrity. I have done my best to honour the voice of practitioners who contributed so richly to this research. The information we explored has been organised and presented in a form that links theory to practice and encourages self reflection. It is a beginning, and I believe through discussions, presentations and publications from this study<sup>8</sup>, this work on discovering the meaning of integrity in social work will continue to make a contribution to the wider social work knowledge base. I hope it will encourage practitioners to undertake critical self reflection in relation to their own individual and collective understanding and use of integrity in their personal and professional lives. As Dudzinski (2004, p. 309) reasons:

Attention to integrity sharpens our ability to discern and deliberate well. We weigh all relevant aspects of the situation before acting. We deliberate with our moral purpose in mind, orientating mediate goods toward the ultimate good.

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<sup>8</sup> A paper based on this material was presented at the Aotearoa New Zealand Supervision Conference - Common Threads Different Patterns 30 April-1May 2010. An article will be submitted for consideration for publication in the conference proceedings. It is planned that two further articles will be written based on the material gathered in research for this thesis.

Dudzinki's contention that integrity is a purposeful tool in ethical and moral decision-making sits well with the profession of social work whose Codes of Conduct and Codes of Ethics guide practitioners to take thoughtful and reflective approaches to their work. If we recognise integrity and describe its functions then we can use it to contribute to our sense of purpose and as a measure of our achievements and wellbeing.

This research did not set out to simply define integrity in social work. It tried to discover and honour social work practitioners' understanding of the concept in social work in Aotearoa New Zealand, at this moment in time, and in this current context. It is my hope that the findings from this research will be used to help build both personal and professional knowledge to assist social work practitioners to practice mindfully, which in turn will enable the delivery of a more effective service to clients.

In conclusion, the following poem was discovered by a focus group participant in a book about Pasifika carvings in Manukau; she liked it, copied it and shared it at the end of their focus group discussion. It was well received by the group and participants all asked to have a copy. I include this poem at the conclusion to this chapter and thesis as it offers another voice and eloquently reinforces the sentiments expressed by a participant in this study who said: "*integrity at the end of the day is a relationship you have with yourself*".

**Integrity**  
**Begins with me standing upright**  
**With a heart of gold sincerity**  
**Holding an ambient shield of honesty**  
**I believe in what is true**  
**Like pressing into crystal skies of blissful blue**  
**Purity in action. It's one's mind in pure thought**  
**Humble unto righteous teachings**  
**An open heart unto what is taught**  
**For a mortal warrior will always embody a courageous spirit**  
**A person who never fears to confidently share it**  
**And I bear such strength wherever I go**  
**Like a flame that lightens a wondrous glow**  
**It is freedom, yes I do feel free**  
**This is integrity for it begins here with me.**

**Poem about integrity by Mosiah L Cooper, (undated)**

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Ethics Approval

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**Massey University**

21 July 2008

Ms Cherie Appleton  
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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT  
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Dear Cherie

**Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 08/28**  
**Social workers' perspectives and insights into integrity**

Thank you for your letter dated 10 July 2008.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karl Pajo, Chair  
**Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B**

cc Dr Mary Nash                      Prof Robyn Munford  
School of Health and Social Services    School of Health and Social Services  
PN371                                      PN371

Prof Carol McVeigh, HoS  
School of Health and Social Services  
PN371



## **ANZASW Social Work Notice Board Advertisement**

### **Social Work and ‘Integrity’ Research.**

Kia ora and Greetings,

My name is Cherie Appleton. I am a trained, qualified and registered social worker and learning and development manager.

I am currently completing a Masters Degree in Social Work through the School of Health and Social Services Massey University.

### **I am conducting research into social work practitioners’ professional understanding, experiences and application of the concept of integrity.**

This research seeks to raise awareness, stimulate and inform discussion and debate at all levels about the role and contribution of integrity within the practice of social work.

To avoid any potential conflict of interest with my current employment I am only seeking social workers who are employed by agencies other than Child Youth and Family.

#### **Research Criteria:**

I am looking for social workers to participate who are current members of ANZASW, social workers who have practiced social work in Aotearoa New Zealand for five years or more and social workers who are not employed by Child Youth and Family (CYF), who would be interested in taking part in the study. Selection will be based on getting the best possible spread of representation over social work agencies and location e.g. rural and urban.

If you are interested in participating and would like more details on what would be expected of you as a practitioner please contact me letting me know your place of employment and social work qualification. I will send you out a more detailed information sheet and look forward to discussing this project with you.

Contact: - by email at [cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz)  
by telephone at 027-3214660 or 09 2983840 .



**Information Sheet for prospective participants in research project:  
“Social Workers’ Perspectives and Insights on Integrity”**

**Researcher:** Cherie Appleton MSW student Massey University

**Supervisors:**

1. Dr. Mary Nash, Senior Lecturer, School of Health and Social Services Massey University. 06 3569099 ext.2827
2. Professor Robyn Munford, Graduate Studies Coordinator and Professor of Social Work, School of Health and Social Services Massey University. 06 356 9099 ext. 2825
3. Liz Beddoe, Head of School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education University of Auckland. 09 6238899 ext. 48559

**What is this study about?**

This research is designed to investigate the concept of integrity, to see if and how it contributes towards being a sustaining or “protective mechanism” which enables practitioners to weather the extremes of working with human pain and grief in an often hostile and critical milieu.

I intend to explore the concept of integrity with social work practitioners to see whether this concept acts (or could act), as a mitigating factor against the forces that appear to deter and disillusion practitioners in the social work profession.

The study is looking to discover and understand how ‘integrity’ is perceived, interpreted and applied by social work practitioners’ and how this might contribute to self aware and resilient practice.

I want to explore practitioner wisdom and ‘tacit’ knowledge about the concept of integrity and give it voice.

The aim of this study is to heighten awareness for practitioners that will enable deeper reflective practice, thereby enhancing professional reflexivity, knowledge, hope and capacity.

It will be of interest to practitioners who wish to extend their examination of ‘self’ and to explore further contributing factors to insightful sustainable practice.

### **What is required from you?**

If you consent to take part in this study you will be asked to participate in up to three ways.

1. Everyone will be asked to answer a short e-survey to provide general information for data analysis such as gender, ethnicity, qualifications, practice context and a beginning exposure and thought gathering on the topic of Integrity. This e-survey will also be used to select participants in the event of the study being over-subscribed. The criteria for this selection will be based on getting the best possible spread of representation over social work agencies and location e.g. rural and urban.
2. Some respondents will participate in a focus group meeting (of maximum 2hours) to discuss and explore the identification and application of Integrity in your personal and professional life. This meeting will take place outside of work time and will be audio-taped. A copy of the key themes, my understandings of your contributions including any direct quotes I identify for use in write up of the material will be made available for you to review and verify.
3. And some respondents who are unable to attend a focus group may participate by invitation in a one hour interview to undertake a deeper exploration of the concepts and issues raised in the focus group. Prior to this interview I will send you an interview outline based on my collating of information and themes gathered in the focus group. This interview will require a separate consent form and will be audio-taped. A copy of the transcription from the tape will be available for you to view for accuracy if you so wish.

### **Your rights and responsibilities:**

**Anonymity and Confidentiality** – all information you provide will be treated confidentially. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym to protect your identity and no specific quotes or statements that you make throughout the research will be used without your informed consent.

This study is about social workers’ experiences. Over the course of the research you may be drawn to think about and discuss experiences you have had with people in collegial, familial and service delivery settings. At no time will you be identifying people, instead pseudonyms can be used.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and is to be kept confidential. This is to both protect your privacy and the privacy of other participants. All interviews will be arranged outside of work time and no identifying details regarding place of work will be requested or reported. The type of social work practice that you engage in will be identified but not employer details.

Each participant is responsible for checking out their unique employer-employee contracts regarding participation in research projects outside of work time where no identifiable employer and client details will be requested or provided.

### **What's in it for you?**

As a participant you will be able to request a summary of the current literature review findings on the topic of integrity. You will also be able to request a copy of the abstract of the completed thesis and information on where to source the thesis. A spiral bound copy of the thesis will be made available for circulation among participants.

You will also have the opportunity to reflect and engage in discussion with interested colleagues on aspects of practice that may add to your professional credibility and integrity, strengthen and sustain your personal and professional understandings and growth.

You may choose to 'log' the time spent engaged in the focus group and/or interview process of this research project as part of your continued professional development (CPE), which would count towards your hours required for re-certification and registration (it would also waive your right to confidentiality). If you elect to do this at the conclusion of the interviewing I would be able to provide you with a letter that specified your time involved in contributing to the research project.

Last but not least you will be making a direct contribution to yourself and your profession through engaging in continued professional education. This study will bring to the fore the less 'seen or heard' aspects of our work, including the motivation,

strengths and richness that you as social work practitioners bring and offer to the people with whom you work. In exploring practitioners' understandings of the 'concept of integrity' we aim to describe how it is recognised, defined and applied to self and others. This will be a direct contribution to social work practice knowledge.

**You would like to participate?**

If you are interested in participating I would love to hear from you. Please send me an email with your contact details, social work practice area and qualifications so I can send you further information regarding proposed focus group meeting times and venues.

Thank you for your interest in this project. If you are aware of social workers that might be interested and who meet the research criteria (i.e. members of ANZASW, social workers with 5yrs practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and social workers who are not employed by Child Youth and Family (CYF), who would be interested in taking part in the study please pass this information on to them. Alternatively feel free to give my contact details and invite them to ring or email me.

I require up to 12 participants for this study, in the event more social workers indicate their interest I will apply a selection criteria based on agency representation and geographical location.

Many Thanks & Kind Regards

Cherie Appleton

**Phone 0273214660 or 09 2983840**

**Email [cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz)**

***This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/28. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)***

## **E-Survey of Participants – Demographical Data**

### **Social Workers’ Perspectives and Insights on Integrity.**

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study, I look forward to working with you. “Completion and return of this survey implies consent to participate. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.”

Please fill out the following profiling information and answer the two questions, then return to me via email [cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cherie.appleton@xtra.co.nz) by 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

If you have any queries or concerns please ring me direct on 0273214660 or 09 2983840

**Name:**

**Pseudonym:**

**Gender:**

**Ethnicity:**

**Social Work Qualifications:**

**Social Work area of Practice:**

**Years of Social Work Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand:**

**Age Group (please tick or highlight the applicable age bracket):**

**25 – 30      31 -35      36 – 40      41 – 45      46 – 50      51 – 55**

**56 – 60      61 + yrs**

**Q.1. In 50 words or less describe what Integrity means to you:**

**Q.2. List the key concepts/words that you associate with Integrity:**

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/28. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)*

## Participant Focus Group Consent Form

*(This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years).*

I have read the information sheet for participants and I have had the details of the study explained to me. I understand I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and I am free to decline to answer any particular question without disadvantage.

My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I agree to the focus group being audio taped.
- I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used.
- I understand that I will be invited to provide a pseudo name for any information that directly belongs to me.
- I agree not to use colleagues or family or service recipients' real names, or provide data that would make them identifiable in anyway, such as place of employment, place of residence, school etc.
- I understand that I am to keep confidential my participation in this research.
- I understand that I am not to provide the name of my employer throughout my participation in this research.
- I understand that it is my responsibility to check my employer-employee contract regards my participation in this research.
- I understand that the information I provide will be used for this research, publications arising from this research project, possible conference papers and training workshops.
- I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the participants' information sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** July 2008.

**Full name printed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher:** Cherie Appleton **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** July 2008.

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/28. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)*

## Transcriber Confidentiality Form

I have agreed to provide transcribing services to Cherie Appleton.

I understand that all the material is confidential. I understand that I am not to discuss any of the details of this material outside of my discussion with the researcher.

I understand that I need to advise in writing to the researcher where the tapes will be stored while I am working on the transcribing process.

I will adhere to the researcher's written guidelines for safe storage processes while the tapes are in my care.

I understand that I am not to keep any material such as tapes, scripts or notes, pertaining to the participants' information. This information must be returned to the researcher.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

**Full name printed:**

**Contact Details:**

**Researcher:** Cherie Appleton

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:**

### Supervisors

Dr Mary Nash, Senior Lecturer, Massey University

Professor Robyn Munford, Professor, Massey University

Liz Beddoe, Head of School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland

***This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/28. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x 6929, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz***





## Appendix 8 – Memorandum of Understanding

Memorandum of Understanding - Letter of reflection and gratitude, Interview held Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November  
2008

Covering email read: Greetings (respondent 3),

In November last year (2008) you kindly joined a focus group I held at Massey Albany and contributed to my MSW thesis project on Integrity.

At long last I have been able to devote some time to the Integrity research analysis. I am attaching for your interest and attention a letter of appreciation (memorandum of understanding) in which I reflect on your contributions to the integrity project.

I believe the material I have recorded is accurate and acceptable to use as stipulated by the initial consent documents and ethics approval for my thesis. However if there is anything you wish to amend or add I will ensure I take note and action accordingly.

I would be most grateful to receive verification and any feedback from you by 5th January 2010 so that I can finalise my coding and analysis.

Thank you once again for your participation and your generous sharing of knowledge and skills. I look forward to completing this project and sharing the results with you in 2010.

~~ All the very best for the festive season I hope you are able to connect with loved ones and get some rest and recuperation for yourself, kind regards Cherie~~

Cherie Appleton  
09 2983840 (evenings)  
027-3214660 (anytime)

7 Short Street, Papakura, 2110.  
2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009

Dear (respondent 3),

I am writing to thank, acknowledge and reflect on your wisdoms and contributions to my study "Social Workers' Perspectives and Insights into Integrity". This piece of research is being undertaken as partial fulfillment of a Masters in Social Work from Massey University. Please feel free to review and clarify or correct where necessary my understandings of our conversation. The origin of all material will be kept confidential, I will not use any identifiable information and where I quote directly from this interview it will be attributed to respondent 1-8 or your chosen pseudo name.

My journal reflections after our interview noted how easily I felt rapport and trust were established and this enabled you to go straight into your reflections and stories which you so generously shared. I found you passionately engaged in the topic and enjoying the opportunity to go deep into the many aspects of integrity you traversed. You stated at the start of the focus group interview that you expected to learn from it and as we drew to a close you reflected how helpful it had been to be able to verbalise your thoughts and how it had enabled you to make sense of some things, I hope this has continued to be the case.

From your interview I grouped the information under the following 6 key headings or themes:

1. Understanding integrity
2. The process of integrity
3. Values that underpin integrity
4. Recognising integrity in others

5. Doing integrity
6. Possible quotes and stand out discoveries

I am sure as I combine your material with other focus group contributions other themes may emerge and I am excited to see how the process will shape and inform my final piece of work.

This reflective letter of thanks [memorandum of understanding] summarises and acknowledges my understanding of your exploration, key ideas and contribution on this topic from the interview last November.

### **1. *Understanding Integrity:***

When you identified what integrity meant to you, you said "... it's when core values line up with behaviour and choices of action ..."

You shared a conversation you had which led you to that thinking "... someone might be part of the Mafia and maybe their core values line beautifully with their behaviour but does that mean that they have integrity".

You were clear that "it's not just enough to have consistency. That there's another whole dimension of kind of rightness and it's about and also good outcomes for other people..." And you stated "So it needs to have a constructive outcome for other people." You commented that you thought integrity involves a willingness to be self-examining and self-critical a willingness to examine, a willingness to sort of stand back from oneself – open to self question, being open to grow.  
"Self –questioning, yes and critically appraising one's own motivations and decisions and being open to grow."

You reflected that the existence of integrity promotes trust and when there's disrespect and there's gossiping and those other behaviours, that's exhibiting a lack of integrity and consequently a lack of trust. So I think integrity it's a vital thing.  
You also said "I think integrity is indispensable to resilience "

During our discussion you reflected on how it is sometimes easier to recognise a lack of integrity. "There's a word there too that comes to mind which is immaturity that when that kind of permeates a work atmosphere I think that really is closely tied in with a lack of integrity so when the people are largely concerned with themselves and not sufficiently with colleagues and also with the agency. I think there needs to be a sense of some degree of loyalty to the agency as well".

You said "I think integrity promotes unity which is part of a feeling of safety and belonging - a lack of integrity particularly in key players promotes disunity, disaffection and a feeling of unsafeness and a lack of commitment."

### **2. *Process of integrity, or integrity as a process:***

You identified with the idea of integrity being a process. "one could say that integrity was a bit like a process where it starts with the core values of a person that are health in some way and moral in some way and then transfers from there to the choices they make and their actions and there's another dimension which is the impact of that on a third party, another person or another group."

Your perception was that we've got integrity as a process located in a social worker's life and in their value base and then moving on outwards. If one respects oneself then that follows that one will respect others.

You said "I think a healthy office has a flow on effect from people exhibiting integrity. It's the process idea. It's going to the outcome of it."

Your thinking was "That's where courage comes into integrity because I think integrity; the process of it is going to involve necessarily going to places and having discussions which are not comfortable so it's about being willing to allow a level of personal discomfort. I think that goes with the territory of integrity. So it's not about denial of difficulties. It's not about denial of conflict."

You felt that integrity demonstrated consistency in one's core values which then flows through to action, but that consistency was necessary in all the areas of one's life as well.

**3. Values that underpin integrity:**

You identified "A concept of truth, self respect and respect for others. Being people of our word – keepers of promises – good parenting is tied up with integrity." And you identified thoughtfulness as a value that was present in people with integrity.

**4. Recognising integrity in others & spotting lack of integrity in others:**

You said "If a person demonstrated humility I'd be expecting to find integrity, the opposite to self-satisfaction. Willingness to be courageous and evaluate, a willingness to rethink." You recognised integrity in others as being demonstrated by "Respecting other people and respecting themselves".

You noted that a person with integrity would display "tremendous courage, very honest, willingness to share things about self, open to saying that's not a strength of mine and I've struggled in that area, very open, unpretentious." You have experienced integrity in another person as having "the quality of kindness and solidness about her life and practice" You also thought "they'd have a sense of humour. It's not enough on its own but I think that would be there in an honest way, it's about honesty because also in humour is the ability to laugh at oneself too."

You were clear that "Integrity is not about dodgy" and this came from exploring live an experience that was current and a challenge to your integrity. You noted that "There is something about games that is the opposite of integrity". "Sometimes it's easier to define things by what they're not isn't it? So there's a dissonance and I think that's what integrity isn't."

One of the phrases you used in relation to getting a sense of something not right to do with integrity was - 'things knocking together' create sense of uneasiness loss of trust challenge to or compromise of integrity

**5. Doing integrity:**

You asked "what are the hallmarks of it, what does it look like in action, how is it lived – how is integrity lived?" From sharing a past experience you identified that "to have integrity in my work I have to be able to do it in front of others and not worry that I might look or sound inadequate." You were able to offer the wisdom the doing integrity means you must "be willing to expose your practice and not look like you've got it all together because none of us do."

You also said "it is also about being kind to ourselves and other colleagues and as respectful as we aim to be with our clients."

In the personal example you shared earlier you were able to share the example of protecting or preserving your personal integrity in the face of a challenge to it from someone who wanted to 'bend the rules' you reflected "I need to give myself a lot of room in this conversation and I'll think about what you've said and I'm' going to talk it over with my husband...."

**6. Possible quotes and stand out discoveries about integrity:**

I've got a friend at church who's 83, I call her Aunty she is a marvellous woman and she says, 'we breathe the atmosphere we create' and that's about our integrity, promoting trust, promoting respect, that's right, that's the atmosphere we'll breathe"

You are identifying during our interview several ways that Integrity is integral to a functioning healthy workplace. You state "It is a multi faceted thing isn't it?"

"I don't think that one can have integrity in ones social work practice and not in one's personal life."

"it's not just with clients or not just how one behaves with colleagues but its, there's so many different settings in which one can see there's whether there's an absence or a presence of integrity."

Integrity is “present in core people and its present in enough of a kind of a mass of integrity, yeah I think that would be strong enough to model for others that they might get with the programme. That they might modify that they could learn, that they could actually be mentored in integrity but when it’s lacking in key people and lacking a critical mass of integrity you could say I think that then gives some of the loose cannons in a way permission to really explore increasingly unsafe boundaries”

“I think there’s a sort of a positive spiral and there’s this negative spiral there when there’s not enough of it and enough people in a critical mass of integrity that gives people permission to behave in ways that increasingly lack it and actually that the whole, the negativity and the sort of disruptive effect of an environment can kind of gain in strength.”

(respondent 3) I am ever so grateful for your valued contributions to this topic, which I have endeavored to summarise and present back to you in this letter. In part this is an act of reciprocity and affirmation of your generosity and in part it is an act of accountability to ensure the integrity of my interviewing and your material.

I do hope you have enjoyed revisiting the topic and I would be delighted to receive verification from you that the material I have recorded is accurate and acceptable to use as stipulated by the initial consent documents and ethics approval in my thesis. If you have anything to add or correct please inform me by 5<sup>th</sup> January 2010.

(respondent 3), I would like once again to express my sincere thanks for your valuable insights and offerings to this exploration of integrity. I wish you and your loved ones a wonderful festive season and good health, happiness and fortune for 2010, may it be an exciting and rewarding year.

Kind regards,  
Yours Sincerely,  
Cherie Appleton.

**Focus Group Interview Facilitation Guidelines:**

The purpose of this research is to find out how the concept of 'integrity' is perceived, interpreted/understood and applied by social work practitioners i.e. how it is conceptualized and operationalised.

As noted in your information sheet you have the right to withdraw from this research at anytime and I want to ensure that the principle of 'no harm' sits firmly behind this research, so I am making it explicit that I am in no way judging or scrutinizing your 'integrity' during discussions I am simply gathering information about your understanding of it.

I will be sending each individual who joins the focus group a Memorandum of understanding that captures the key themes and the essence of their individual contribution as I have understood it. I will be sending this to you electronically and you will be invited to reflect and will be given an opportunity to clarify or correct my impressions. This will include my checking any direct quotes I might want to use in the write-up of the material.

I want to ensure you have supervision and support in place in the unlikely event that this topic might trigger an unpleasant, embarrassing or disturbing experience for you.

Discuss group agreement, get consent form signed, start recording!

**Group Agreement:**

Respect - Value difference & encourage discussion "confronting is for issues not people"

Commitment - To using anti-discriminatory language,

To working together and sharing knowledge, thoughts and feelings.

Responsibility - Giving yourself permission to learn from your experiences and opinions. Personalising the learning.

Confidentiality - Being responsible for what you share and the circumstances in which you share it.

Expectation - That you will practice self care. Take a break when you need to reflect. Participate to your utmost. Be committed to managing time.

(Adapted from Tony Morrison)