



Reflections on LGBT Students in Social Work Field Education

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Abstract:

Over the last twenty years, social work literature on practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) populations has grown, and research has begun to emerge about challenges faced by LGBT social work students and practitioners in the field. Using the author's reflection on her own field experiences as a lesbian social work student almost twenty years ago, this article reviews the ways in which social work education and practice have changed to support these students' unique concerns, and it details the places where educators and field instructors fail to meet LGBT students' needs. The author also provides suggestions about ways that the profession can move forward to maximize students' learning experiences.

In 1994, I was a 26-year-old lesbian in my first year of an MSW program. That summer, I completed a block field placement in the Department of Social Services of a small Southern city. I had begun to self-identify as a lesbian only three years earlier, and I was in my first serious same-sex relationship, so I was still feeling my way through my identity development process. Entering the field placement agency created even more challenges for me, in that I spent much of my time trying to figure out how to negotiate and to integrate my sexual orientation with my emerging professional identity as a social worker.

As I began the field placement, I decided that the proper professional posture would be to share my sexual orientation with staff but not with clients. My agency-based field instructor did not receive the information warmly; though not openly hostile, she clearly was not comfortable. Then I opened the file folder of my first client, an African American teen mother who, one note in her file revealed, *might* be a lesbian. When I actually began to meet with the client, she pushed hard for me to reveal my sexual orientation. Was I dating? What kind of boys did I like? Or did I even like boys? I also overheard homophobic comments from the African American teenage mothers in the client group I mentored.

I wasn't sure how to respond to all of these issues related to my sexual identity. Should I address my supervisor's obvious discomfort? Should I discuss my client's orientation? If she came out to me, should I then come out to her? If I failed to confront the teens' comments and behaviors with respect to homosexuality, was I helping to marginalize any lesbian or bisexual women among the mothers? If I did confront their remarks, would that intervention implicate me as a lesbian?

When I asked my field instructor for advice, she retreated to the safety of agency policy, requiring that I withhold this information until she could get approval from the agency director. Unfortunately, he was on vacation, and when he got back, my instructor went on vacation herself. The summer ended without any resolution of these professional issues that also felt so personal. My faculty liaison, though supportive of me, had never confronted a situation like this. She sought guidance from the field education office and suggested that I look through the social work literature. But I could find almost no research on issues facing lesbian and gay social work students in field settings.

In the end, my faculty liaison suggested that I meet with my teen client and disclose my sexual orientation, which I did on the last day of my field placement. The moment was as electric as it was humbling. Thrilled to find out that I was a lesbian, the client quickly revealed that she was also a lesbian. She asked if I would be willing to meet her girlfriend, and, when I agreed, we headed over to the teen's apartment. As we sat and talked, her girlfriend noted how much of the client's time and energy had been focused on trying to determine my sexual orientation. My client also revealed her own internalized homophobia and self-hatred in statements about "how lesbians are" and their purported proclivity to steal, to use drugs, and to cheat on their partners. I pointed out that all three of us were lesbians, and that these stereotypes didn't apply to us. She agreed, hesitantly, but clearly had her doubts about what it meant to be a lesbian. I left that meeting pleased at the decision to be open, but saddened by the missed opportunities and the knowledge that I would likely never see her again.

In the fall, I talked to another queer student, Michelle Topal, who had done a summer block field placement about her equally difficult experience in a rural mental health agency. Her gay teen client, struggling with his fear of disclosing his sexual orientation to his family, had attempted suicide and had been referred to her agency. When she asked her supervisor whether she should disclose her sexual orientation to this teenager, her supervisor insisted she not do so, warned about issues of counter-transference, and instructed her to look at the social work literature on managing sexual orientation in practice. Like me, she quickly learned there wasn't much out there about LGBT social work practice, and literally nothing that focused specifically on LGBT students in field education settings. Even though these sexual orientation issues did not keep us from having what we believed were good educational experiences, they remained troubling and unresolved. We also believed that our inability to discuss sexual orientation identity development or to present ourselves as successful lesbian/bisexual role models limited our professional effectiveness.

When I reflected about our experiences in discussions with my liaison, she encouraged Michelle and me to write about the experience for the school's newsletter. When our essay appeared, several faculty members encouraged us to submit it for national publication. We expanded the essay into an article, which the feminist journal *Affilia* accepted (Messinger & Topal, 1997).

Looking back nearly two decades at the published essay and the experiences that inspired it, I am struck by the many ways in which the social work profession, and the larger social and political cultures that surround us, have both evolved and failed to evolve. LGBT people and issues have moved to the forefront of American consciousness, yet our personal and professional cultures still struggle with issues related to sexual orientation and to gender identity and expression.

The changes in the larger culture are plain enough. The military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, instituted in 1993, just before my summer field placement began, was repealed by Congress in 2011 (Burmiller, 2011). The Supreme Court struck down state sodomy laws in the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision in June 2003 (Human Rights Campaign, 2004), and as this article goes to press, the Court is considering the constitutionality of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (Lambda Legal, 2013). In 2009, the federal government recognized hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity as worthy of federal intervention (Human Rights Campaign, 2011). As of this publication, nine states and the District of Columbia have legalized gay marriage, five more states allow civil unions, and four more states offer domestic partnerships (Freedom to Marry, 2012). The U.S. Census included same-sex couples as unmarried partners in 2000, and then officially recognized same-sex marriages on the 2010 Census (Gates, 2010). Homosexuality has become a hot political topic, and sexual identity issues were central in the 2012 presidential election (ProCon, n.d.). There are also many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the public spotlight as entertainers, journalists, athletes, and politicians. Issues facing LGBT populations – relatively high suicide rates among LGBT youth, the resurgence of HIV/AIDS infections among men who have sex with men, relatively high rates of breast cancer among lesbians – led the National Institute of Medicine (2011) to determine that further study and intervention was essential for LGBT populations.

Trends in social work during the late 1990s and early 2000s have reflected this social and political progress, but at times, developments have mirrored backward movement as well. In 1993, just as I started my graduate social work program, the Council on Social Work Education adopted a revision to the Curriculum Policy Statement that required the infusion of materials about lesbian and gay populations into social work curricula (Johnson, 2002). This was seen as a giant step forward in preparing students to work with LGBT populations. It was accompanied, however, by the removal of the requirement for a nondiscrimination statement that included sexual orientation; this allows religious schools to discriminate against LGBT people in employment and admissions and yet remain accredited. Numerous books on working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (Appleby

& Anastas, 1998; Hunter & Hickerson, 2001; Hunter et al., 1998; Laird & Green, 1996; Mallon, 1998; Morrow & Messinger, 2005; Tully, 2000; van Wormer, Wells, & Boes, 2000) and a comprehensive bibliography (Martin & Hunter, 2001) emerged shortly after the accreditation change, along with establishment of the *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*. Yet the 2001 and 2008 versions of the *CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) do not require either the infusion of LGBT material in the curriculum or nondiscrimination policies with respect to sexual orientation. The standards dictate only that programs make continuous efforts “to provide a learning context in which respect for all persons and understanding of diversity (including ...sexual orientation) are practiced” (CSWE, 2001, 2008). The newest EPAS (CSWE, 2008) focuses on student competencies, yet the standards do not specifically state that students should be competent about LGBT issues.

We have sharpened our sense of cultural competence in the intervening years. It is not clear, however, that we have reached any solid consensus about this tricky intersection of the personal and the professional. Where do we stand today as a profession, and as educators, regarding LGBT issues in field education? What do these changes mean for the experiences of LGBT students in field placements? Despite our social progress, social work students in field placement in the summer of 2013 may not get much more clarity than I did in the summer of 1994.

In the rest of this article, I will reflect on our progress. I will present what we know about the challenges facing LGBT students in field placement, and I will review initial suggestions for improving students’ experiences raised in the *Affilia* article (Messinger & Topal, 1997). I will then use these recommendations to frame a discussion of what we have accomplished in improving social work programs, field education processes, and social work agencies for LGBT social work students. I will also provide some suggestions for how we might continue to improve professional supports for LGBT students and practitioners, and, ultimately, outcomes for LGBT clients, families, and communities.

Challenges Facing LGBT Students in Placement

In trying to understand the issues currently facing LGBT social work students, it is important to attend to the larger context of social work education and the extent to which current social work programs address LGBT issues. A recent survey of program directors and faculty (Martin et al., 2009) found that several areas of the curriculum neglect important topics related to practice with LGBT populations. Best practices with respect to LGBT and questioning youth and their families seem notably deficient. Only 59% of social work faculty and program directors surveyed rated their students as prepared to work with LGBT clients, while 47% considered their students prepared to work with LGBT youth (p. 10). Despite this widespread perception of a lack of student and practitioner competency, only 19% of social work programs reported having assessment mechanisms in place to evaluate student competence to work with LGBT people (Martin et al., 2009, p. 10). One complicating factor for assessing student competence is that there is no accepted set of comprehensive

standards for practice with LGBT populations, a dilemma to which I will return later in this article.

We confront the challenge of educating students to work with LGBT populations amid a professional atmosphere of uncertainty and ambivalence. There is no way to estimate the number of LGBT students in social work programs; the Council on Social Work Education does not ask programs to collect these data and, as a result, few programs do. The needs and experiences of transgender students in field placements are almost completely invisible in the research literature (for an exceptional discussion of transgender issues in social work education, see the film *Bad Fit*, 2005). A select number of studies about gay, lesbian, and bisexual social work students' experiences in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom have emerged over the last decade in social work (Chung, 2008; Daley, Newman, & Bogo, 2008; Diehm, 2004; Dooley, 2007; Fairclough, Bernard, Fletcher, & Ahmet, 2012; Hylton, 2005, 2006; Hunt, Cowan, & Chamberlain, 2007; Messinger, 2004, 2007; Newman, Daley, & Bogo, 2009). These studies identify a series of issues and concerns that arise for LGBT students in field, including:

- obtaining information about the LGBT-friendliness of potential field agencies;
- managing decisions about disclosure to supervisors, co-workers, and clients;
- managing stresses of not disclosing sexual orientation or gender identity, if applicable;
- handling colleagues' and clients' discomfort with the student's gender identity or sexual orientation;
- managing conflicts regarding the student's self-presentation related to traditional gender norms;
- dealing with assumptions of heterosexuality and gender normativity among agency staff and embedded in agency policies and practices;
- working with homophobic or transphobic supervisors, staff, and clients;
- dealing with personal issues that arise related to one's same-sex relationship;
- managing inappropriate interactions with supervisors, co-workers, and clients;
- creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries with LGBT clients;
- addressing staff's discriminatory actions and attitudes related to LGBT clients; and
- dealing with hate-based violence in the agency.

The seriousness of these concerns is further complicated by field educators and field instructors who do not prepare LGBT students to address these issues with clients and colleagues, and who are themselves unprepared to respond to such issues when they arise. Michelle Topal and I raised many of these professional concerns in our *Affilia* article in 1997, making recommendations designed to help social work programs and agencies better serve these students. The next section will review these recommendations and the ways in which some social work programs and agencies have adopted these changes.

Affilia Article Recommendations

Our recommendations, many of which were drawn from an article by Rabin, Keefe, and Burtin (1986) on better serving sexual minority clients, pertained to the two organizations involved in the field experience: social work program field education offices and field agencies.

Field Education Offices. Most of the recommendations for field offices were related to resources for LGBT students going into field: (a) providing information about potential issues to LGBT students as they prepare for field, especially about issues of identity management; (b) gathering and presenting information about LGBT-friendliness of placement agencies; (c) recruiting openly LGBT people as mentors, faculty liaisons, and field instructors; and (d) creating policies that support LGBT students in placement.

Several social work programs, including the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) and the [University of Michigan](#), have created informational brochures for LGBT students going into the field. Dooley (2007) published an article in *The New Social Worker* giving advice to LGBT students preparing for field placement—an essay that would be an excellent addition to field and practice courses. Little research has been published about any specific recruitment of LGBT social work faculty (LaSala, Jenkins, Wheeler, & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2008) or staff to support LGBT students, nor has anyone described a social work program’s development of listings of LGBT-friendly or supportive agencies.

Perhaps we see the most improvement in the purview of policy change. Hundreds of universities and colleges now have nondiscrimination policies protecting sexual orientation (N=549, Human Rights Campaign database) and transgender identities (N=459, <http://www.transgenderlaw.org/college/index.htm#policies>) that extend to field experiences. Programs that still lack protections at the university level, the [Catholic University of America](#) (2007), for example, have specific nondiscrimination policies in their social work programs; like their secular peers, they also require field agencies not to discriminate.

Our 1997 article also recommended that social work programs provide training on LGBT professional issues for field instructors and discuss sexual and gender identity issues in field seminars and practice courses. Martin et al. (2009) found that, among the 83 field learning faculty experts who responded to their surveys, only 11% reported having field instructor training on these topics during the past two years. Field syllabi online at several institutions like [Simmons](#), [Western Kentucky](#), [SUNY Albany](#), and [Springfield College](#) include discussions on LGBT issues in field education and include in their curricula the few articles on supervising LGBT social work students in field (Messinger, 2004, 2007; Newman, Bogo, & Daley, 2008; Newman, Daley, & Bogo, 2009) in the assigned reading. Other useful material, such as Satterly’s (2007) model for sexual identity management, could be integrated in the field or practice curricula.

Field Agencies. Our foremost recommendation for field agencies, and specifically agency-based

supervisors, was to discuss LGBT issues in practice with LGBT students, especially questions of identity management. These conversations can be challenging for field instructors because students' sexual orientation and transgender identity are not always clear to their field instructors. Previous research (Diehm, 2004; Hylton, 2005, 2006; Messinger, 2004, 2007) found that many LGBT students entering field are still deciding whether or not to disclose their identity; others have already decided to keep it private. Instructors who do know their student's identity may struggle with how to bring up these issues without seeming overly concerned or uncomfortable (Messinger, 2007). I have suggested, and others have agreed (Newman, Bogo, & Daley, 2008; Newman, Daley, & Bogo, 2009), that normalizing issues of sexuality, gender identity and expression, and making discrimination and oppression expected topics of conversation for all students, makes these discussions much easier. Further, it is important that the supervisor initiate such conversations, as the pressures of stigma and potential negative outcomes for disclosure make it more difficult for the student to bring up issues related to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Newman, Bogo, & Daley, 2008). It is unclear whether changes in social work education and subsequent trainings have improved field instructor knowledge and professional comfort around these conversations, although a recent study of counseling psychology students' supervisors found that only 18% of respondents initiated discussion with their students about sexual orientation issues (Genther, 2011).

Most other recommendations for field agencies mirror recommendations found in early (Rabin, Keefe, and Burtin, 1986) and subsequent social work literature on better serving LGBT clients (Crisp & McCave, 2007; Crisp, Wayland, & Gordon, 2008; Elze & McHaelen, 2009; Morrow & Messinger, 2006; Natale & Moxley, 2009; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). Agencies were advised to:

- develop inclusive anti-discrimination policies that protect employees and clients;
 - establish advisory boards of LGBT clients to provide insight into oppressive policies and practices;
 - recruit and hire openly LGBT staff, who can serve as mentors and resources to staff and clients;
 - conduct ongoing training about LGBT issues for employees; and
 - develop resource files related to LGBT issues and appropriate referral sources.
- It seems apparent that highlighting the relationship between the students' experiences and the culture and practice in agency settings would improve student support and client services.

While no overarching analysis has demonstrated specific improvements in service delivery to LGBT populations across the social services sectors, social work agencies are certainly seeing changes as a result of regional and national activities. Projects initiated by national groups include Lambda Legal's [Youth in Out-of-Home Care project](#), which has trained 1,600 social workers in child welfare about working with LGBT youth and their families. [The National Coalition for LGBT Health](#) has worked closely with the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) (HHS) to create LGBT-friendly policies

related to health and mental health care. "HHS requires that all organizations serving runaway and homeless youth be equipped to serve LGBT youth... HHS has begun the process of improving data collection among homeless and runaway LGBT youth through the Runaway Homeless Youth Information Management System" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2012, p. 17). It remains to be seen if research will show better outcomes for LGBT clients or practitioners.

Field Instructors. One additional theme from the *Affilia* article (Messinger & Topal, 1997) has been echoed in the subsequent literature on field education issues for LGBT students: the primacy of the relationship between the agency-based supervisor and the LGBT student (Burkard, Knox, Hess, & Schultz, 2009; Genther, 2011; Messinger, 2004, 2007). Bogo (1993) notes that that the quality of the communication between field instructor and students best predicts the success of this education experience. I found in my own study (Messinger, 2007) of 12 lesbian, gay, and bisexual social work students and their field instructors that several factors shaped the relationship: the field instructor's supervisory style, the comfort of the field instructor with addressing LGBT development and practice issues, the student's perception of the agency climate as gay-friendly, and the LGBT student's level of self-acceptance and ease about coming out. Genther (2011) had similar findings, identifying that sexual orientation competence, LGBT-related professional experience, and overall years of supervision experience correlated with initiating discussions about sexual orientation issues.

Field instructors with a more open, supportive style tended to have better communication with their students; field instructors more distant or professional in their demeanor generally met with less success (Messinger, 2007). Not surprisingly, field instructors with higher levels of knowledge about LGBT issues in practice and more facility in dealing with LGBT people also had better communication about LGBT issues with students (Messinger, 2007; Genther, 2011). When communication broke down for knowledgeable field instructors, it seemed to be rooted in the field instructor's anxiety about bringing up sexual orientation issues with the student (Messinger, 2007).

The context of the agency also could ease or undermine the LGBT student's learning experience (Messinger, 2007). LGBT students were less likely to talk about issues of sexual orientation or gender expression in agencies that they perceived as less capable of serving LGBT clients or as unwelcoming and/or unsupportive to LGBT clients and staff. When good communication did exist despite an unfriendly agency culture, it was a result of the student's perception of the field instructor's supportiveness and knowledge.

Finally, the LGBT student's stage of identity development and their comfort with their sexual orientation or gender identity was a predictor of the quality of field instructor-student communication (Messinger, 2007). If students were still in the coming-out process, or if they were uncomfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity, they were less likely to be prepared to discuss issues related to LGBT status in their placements. Other students, however, saw their own sexual orienta-

tion or gender identity as unrelated to their professional practice.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Unfortunately, each of the recommendations listed above – for field education offices, field agencies, and field instructors – still seems to bear repeating. Recent survey research (Martin et al., 2009) among field education faculty (n = 81) found:

25% [of respondents] reported having open LGBT-identified field instructors or liaisons, but fewer reported using specifically designed resource materials (13%) or support groups (4%) for LGBT students in field placements. Likewise, few reported offering any specific field instructor training during the past two years on working with LGBT students (11%) (p. 16).

In my own experiences training field education staff and field instructors about these issues, I still encounter a substantial lack of knowledge and comfort. Some educators ignore sexual orientation and gender identity issues in placement. Others appear to see LGBT students as problems to be addressed or accommodated. I am often asked why LGBT students would need to disclose their identities to staff or to clients. Field instructors worry about client and worker discomfort with their openly LGBT students, especially those who do not meet traditional gender norms; these field instructors often attempt to enforce more traditional performances of sexual and gender norms. Both field educators and field instructors often fail to understand the ways in which heterosexism, gender-normative biases, and biphobia shape their own practices, their approaches to field supervision, their students' experiences, and their institutions and communities. And many field educators and field instructors stress only the challenges and ignore the positive aspects of having openly LGBT social workers, such as having someone who can provide insight into LGBT issues and connections to local LGBT communities.

Social work field education faculty and field instructors must engage in our own professional development so that we can provide support for LGBT students' burgeoning professional identity development. Recent research (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Woodford, Luke, & Gutierrez, 2011; Martin et al., 2009) found that whereas most social work faculty supported the inclusion of LGBT issues in the curriculum, support for inclusion was not universal, differing by faculty gender, race, age, and social values, as well as the availability of transgender resources in the social work program. Further, even if faculty believe that including material related to LGBT issues is important, there is no clarity about what topics are most important, or what methodologies are most effective.

One of the challenges of preparing LGBT students for practice is the lack of professional standards for social work practice with LGBT populations. Unlike our peers in psychology (Division 44, 2000) and counseling (ALGBTIC, 2004), none of the major social work organizations has adopted a definitive

set of standards for effective, competent practice with LGBT populations. The NASW Standards for Culturally Competent Practice (2001) approaches LGBT issues as falling under a general approach to diversity, with sexual orientation as one of many groups to be considered. Yet each population's unique history and concerns require specific consideration; in much the same way that learning the dynamics of working with Hmong clients may not help social workers to work with African American communities, there are particular and unique kinds of knowledge and competency that contribute to professional effectiveness with LGBTQ clients and students. The related NASW indicators for measuring practice competency (NASW, 2007) do not include any indicators specifically focused on LGBT issues.

Several social work researchers have proposed different definitions of culturally competent (or gay-affirmative) practice (see reviews in Appleby & Anastas, 1998; Van Den Berg & Crisp, 2004), although there is no agreement across the profession on these definitions or on how they relate to the current NASW practice standards and CSWE accreditation standards. In 2008, the CSWE Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression proposed specific standards for practice with LGBT populations (Fredriksen-Goldsen & LaSala, 2008). These standards were submitted to the Council on Social Work Education for review, but they have not been formally adopted.

So here we stand as a profession: unable to move forward, offering the same recommendations almost twenty years after I left my MSW field placement. Why haven't we identified a core set of professional competencies related to practice with LGBT populations? I would argue that there are two primary, interrelated reasons.

First, the profession remains stuck in an argument between respect for religious belief systems that condemn homosexuality and professional standards that advocate full inclusion and acceptance of LGBT people (Dessel, Bolen, & Shepardson, 2011). Some social workers argue that the respect for religious beliefs embedded in the NASW Code of Ethics requires that social workers' religious opposition to homosexuality must be accepted, as long as they do not harm individual LGBT clients (Hodge, 2005). The predictable – and, I believe, appropriate – reply is that homophobia and gender hierarchy systematically harm human beings and therefore undermine our professional mission (Melendez & LaSala, 2006). Other social workers have tried to bridge this chasm by encouraging practitioners who hold beliefs that condemn LGBT cultures, identities, and practices to refer LGBT clients to other practitioners. LGBT advocates, however, have argued that this response only serves to further marginalize LGBT identities and concerns (Dessel, Bolen, & Shepardson, 2011).

The implications of these arguments for field practice are profound. How do we support LGBT students if field instructors and agencies are allowed to maintain beliefs that disdain these students and deny the legitimacy of their lived experiences? Can we argue that field instructors must attend to LGBT students' unique needs around disclosure if we cannot expect that the field instructors

recognize the legitimacy of students' sexual orientation or gender identity? And what do we say to LGBT students who complain that a field agency's approach to practice reflects harmful heterosexist or gender-normative assumptions?

We have to work through this conundrum in order to move forward as a profession. One way to engage this problem is to review the history of our profession. Some of the first social work professionals, for example, held chauvinistic and paternalistic views that manifested in discriminatory practice and real harm to people (Simon, 1994). As recently as the 1970s, social workers in my own state of North Carolina actively participated in the sterilization of many low-income people, people of color, and people with disabilities (Rose, 2012). These social workers held views that we no longer consider appropriate in our profession, views that kept these social workers from engaging in what we now would call ethical best practice. Practicing from a belief system rooted in the supremacy of heterosexuality and gender normativity is similarly harmful to culturally competent social work practice with LGBT clients.

Because we find ourselves in this place of theoretical and/or theological "stuckness," for want of a better word, LGBT advocates in social work education have focused more on addressing the heterosexist and gender-normative beliefs of heterosexual and traditionally gendered practitioners, and less on growing their knowledge and skills in working with LGBT populations. This approach represents a serious problem. As Logie, Bridge, and Bridge (2008) note in their study of MSW students, even if practitioners have supportive or tolerant attitudes towards LGBT populations, they may not be prepared to practice with these populations. Almost 43% of their mostly LGBT-supportive sample reported feeling unprepared to practice with LGBT populations. "Sensitivity or tolerance," they write, "does not equate to competence" (p. 216). Increased competence with LGBT clients, reflected in improved knowledge and skills of social work field instructors, would result in better supervision and training of LGBT students in their field placements.

Field educators and field instructors' lack of understanding of LGBT student issues in field placement is best addressed through a focus on the knowledge and skills required for culturally competent practice. Social workers need to understand:

- sexual orientation and gender identity development;
- within-group diversity and intersecting oppressions;
- the impact of social and cultural contexts on LGBT people;
- the differential effectiveness and ethical ramifications of diverse practice modalities with LGBT populations;
- cultural and political issues facing LGBT populations, and resources and practices for advocacy on these issues;
- challenges in conducting research and data collection with LGBT populations;
- mechanisms and consequences of oppression and discrimination based on sexual orien-

- tation and gender expression; and challenges facing LGBT social workers and mechanisms for negotiating these issues (Fredriksen-Goldsen & LaSala, 2008).

Social workers also need experience applying micro-, mezzo-, and macro-practice skills with LGBT individuals, couples, families, communities, organizations, and in policy arenas. We must gain experience managing our own biases, learning how to communicate effectively across differences in sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. We must learn to become effective advocates with and on behalf of LGBT populations.

Until social work, as a profession, comes to some agreement about what social workers need to know to practice competently with LGBT populations – until we recognize that there is important, legitimate knowledge that must be obtained and practice skills that must be developed – social work field educators and field instructors cannot move forward to train all social work students to become more knowledgeable and skilled in these areas. And until we are properly prepared to practice competently with LGBT clients, we cannot ensure that LGBT students will get the support they need to become skilled social work professionals. Once current social work educators and field instructors are properly trained, we can move our field education programs to include materials that address the intersection of sexual and professional identities, provide mentoring to LGBT students interns, facilitate conversations about issues facing LGBT social work professionals, and work to make social work programs and agency practices, policies, and curricula more inclusive. Then, and only then, field faculty and field instructors will create spaces that encourage, rather than inhibit, LGBT student development.

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