

PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIAL WORK FACULTY ON DIVERSITY AND SOCIETAL OPPRESSION CONTENT: RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

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This article presents data from a secondary analysis of a 1992 survey of graduate social work faculty to identify their views of the importance of content on diverse populations and types of oppression. The large majority of respondents rated content on several population groups and types of oppression to be important or very important. In most categories, however, the respondents rated including content on populations rather than on types of oppression to be more important, at a statistically significant level. The authors discuss the implications of this finding and place it in the context of current writings on multicultural social work.

IN 1968, THE COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION (CSWE) voted to consider the degree to which programs incorporated content on women and people of color into their curriculum when making accreditation decisions (Gallegos, 1984). The decision, rooted in years of advocacy and research by members of CSWE and its commissions on women and ethnic minority issues, led to changes in the Curriculum Policy Statement and evalua-

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tion standards (Greene, 1994). The impetus for this policy change was to require social work programs to be more effective in educating students for work in a diverse society.

Since that time, demographic and political trends have made the need for learning about cultural diversity and societal oppression increasingly important (Murdock & Michael, 1996). In response to these trends, CSWE has become more proscriptive regarding the need for social workers to be educated for practice that is sensitive to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, and for the focus of education to be on content about groups and about the impact of oppression on these groups. (CSWE, 1992; Greene, 1994; Greene & Watkins, 1997).

Despite this clear mandate from the accrediting body regarding the groups to be covered and the perspective to be taken, one finds little agreement within the social work literature regarding how and where to teach this content and the form it should take (Davis & Proctor, 1983; DeAnda, 1997; Greene, 1994; Longres, 1997; Torres & Jones, 1997; Van Soest, 1996). Instead, multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives have been presented in the past 25 years. This contributes to confusion regarding the meaning of this standard for social work education (Greene & Watkins, 1997; Tice, 1990).

Adequate and useful education for a diverse society relies on faculty comfortable with the material and competent to teach it. Little research exists on the perspectives of faculty on diversity content and whether their knowledge and skill levels are adequate. Without support for content on diversity, there is a danger that it will be covered inadequately or not at all (Humphreys, 1983; Newman, 1989; Siefert & Butter, 1992).

This article is an effort to address some of the profession's gaps in knowledge by building on the existing literature. It begins with a general discussion of ways in which the literature has described this content. It then reports data from a national survey of social work educators regarding diversity content. The final discussion focuses on the issues and implications that arise from these data. The authors hope that the information presented here will generate further discussion on approaches to diversity content in social work education.

Diversity Content in Social Work Education

The literature on diversity content has focused on the requisite cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of professional education as well as on methods

for teaching. This literature provides a great deal of prescriptive advice regarding teaching, with little empirical data to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.

The literature on teaching about women, people of color, and gay men and lesbians has most often focused on the need for accurate content on specific groups. The focus on content about groups is based on the assumption that information is a critical dimension for working with diverse populations (Chau, 1990; Davis & Proctor, 1989; Greene, 1994; Pastorello & Schooler, 1988). However, the tendency to focus solely on content without attending to the affective or behavioral components of practice has been described as inadequate. Such an approach can encourage emotional distance or may prevent educators from focusing on how power differentials and oppression characterize the experiences of different groups (Greene, 1994; Gutiérrez & Nagda, 1996; Latting, 1990; Longres, 1991; Torres & Jones, 1997).

Several authors have increased the focus on the affective dimension of education for work with diverse groups, including how attitudes toward different groups can lead to bias and inappropriate services (Davis & Proctor, 1989; Greene, 1994; Latting, 1990; Newman, 1989). Indeed, attitudes toward people of color have been found to be predictive of service outcomes (Davis & Proctor, 1989). The goals of affective learning are to become aware of one's own prejudices and beliefs and how one's worldview affects one's work (Greene, 1994; Lewis, 1993; Newman, 1989, Torres & Jones, 1997). Once that awareness is developed, the student can then both appreciate how the world view of clients and communities affects their experience and begin to develop alternative world views (Granger & Portner, 1985). The goal is thus more accurate and impartial interactions with women, people of color, and

other oppressed groups (Granger & Portner, 1985). This view of multicultural education is more process oriented than outcome focused, and integrates both *emic* and *etic* perspectives (Greene, 1997).

The literature on multicultural practice has often contrasted the ethnic-sensitive or culturally competent approach with one that focuses on oppression and status differences (Gutiérrez & Nagda, 1996; Longres, 1991; McMahan & Allen-Meares, 1992). Ethnic-sensitive approaches have been characterized as focused on learning about culture and ways in which differences can be used in the design, development, and delivery of programs and services (Iglehart & Becerra, 1995; Lum 1998). Ethno-conscious approaches consider culture in the context of oppression and focus on ways in which race, ethnicity, and other status characteristics have been used in the differential allocation of resources in our society (Gutiérrez, 1997; Longres, 1991; Simpson, 1990). This perspective moves beyond the current focus on content and affect in multicultural education to skills for working around status differentials and toward social justice and empowerment.

Research on Diversity Content

Few studies have looked at the amount of diversity content in social work curricula. Two surveys have targeted individual programs to determine their curriculum content on gender (Knight, 1991) and aging (Lubben, Damron-Rodriguez & Beck, 1992). Knight's survey (1991) indicated that most all of the responding schools incorporated some content on specific women's issues. The study on aging content found that while almost all schools described content on aging as "important" or "very important," there was a recent, substantial drop in the number of social work programs of-

fering an aging concentration (Lubben et al., 1992).

Two surveys have examined the incorporation of content from the perspectives of individual educators. Humphreys's (1983) survey of all California MSW educators, which yielded a 37% response rate, showed that the curricula lacked adequate content on gay and lesbian issues. Moreover, faculty members who were less prejudiced toward their gay and lesbian acquaintances and friends were more likely to include gay and lesbian content in their courses. A survey of faculty in the southeastern United States attempted to look at content on religion (Sheridan, Wilmer, & Atcheson, 1994). Their results revealed widespread support of this content, with 80% of the respondents favoring course content on religion and spirituality.

Although these studies suggest support for diversity content, they are restricted by their samples and specific focus, and many were conducted prior to the inclusion of content on gays and lesbians into CSWE's Evaluative Standard 3.0 (CSWE, 1994), which became effective in June 1998. To date, no research has looked at the attitudes of social work faculty toward diversity content in general. A more general survey can be useful to get a clearer picture of how supportive faculty are of diversity content and what kinds of material they think would be important to teach.

Research Questions and Methodology

This quantitative and descriptive study will clarify how faculty in schools of social work think about diversity content. Do they see it as important? Do some groups of faculty view it as more important than others? Using data from a larger survey on Jewish content (Soifer & Schnyder, 1994), we attempted to answer the following questions:

- How do faculty in schools of social work rate content on diversity?
- Do faculty in schools of social work think that some types of diversity content are more important than others?
- What predicts support of diversity content?

Sample

A 1992 national survey of 400 randomly chosen full- and part-time MSW social work educators forms the database for the article. A complete list of all the teaching faculty at MSW accredited schools of social work across the United States, including Puerto Rico, was constructed by the authors. All social work schools with accredited MSW programs ($n=102$) were contacted and asked to send the authors their most current faculty list. Lists were received from all the schools and a complete list was compiled. From the 2,069 names on the list, 400 were randomly chosen to receive our survey (19.3%).

Preparation of the survey questionnaire and the procedure for sending it out followed Dillman's (1978) total design method. The most distinctive features of this method are the utilization of a booklet format for the survey and the recommendation to send out four mailings within a seven-week time frame. One week after the first mailing goes out, a reminder postcard is sent out to the sample. Three weeks after the first mailing, a reminder letter and duplicate questionnaire are mailed to nonrespondents. Seven weeks after the first mailing, another letter and replacement questionnaire are sent out by certified mail to those who still have not responded. All respondents were also assured that their answers would remain confidential.

A total of 278 usable completed surveys were obtained within three months of mailing (69.5% response rate). Of the

remaining 122 incomplete surveys, 24 people replied to say that, for one reason or another, they chose not to participate in the survey; 3 people had moved and were unreachable; and 1 person had died.

Measures

The survey questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section asked questions concerning faculty beliefs about the relative importance of including content on various populations (people of color, gays and lesbians, women, Jews, people of different ages, people from different social classes, people with disabilities, and power differences between people) and corresponding forms of oppression (racism, heterosexism/homophobia, sexism, anti-Semitism, ageism, ableism, classism, and authoritarianism). A five-point scale (very important, important, somewhat important, little importance, and not important) was utilized. To control against a fixed response set by respondents, variables in the population areas and variables in the oppression areas were placed in different orders.

Moreover, to look at attitudes toward diversity in more depth, these items were summarized into two additional scales. A summary *diversity content scale* was constructed using mean faculty responses to the seven items rating the importance of including content on specific population groups (Cronbach's $\alpha=.88$). An *oppression content scale* was assessed utilizing the mean score for the responses to the seven items rating the importance of including content on specific types of oppressions (Cronbach's $\alpha=.88$).

A final section asked questions about personal and demographic information, such as level of education, current teaching status, full-time or part-time teaching, years of teaching, teaching area, in what state their school was located, size of city or town, size of MSW program, size

of faculty and student body, whether the school was public or private, gender, age, racial/ethnic background, religious upbringing, and current religious identity. These variables were the independent variables used to look for predictors of attitudes toward diversity and oppression.

The remaining questions were designed to find out how much content on Jews and anti-Semitism exists in social work curricula across the country and to ascertain social work educators' level of knowledge about Jews and anti-Semitism. These questions were not the focus of this particular article, except as they relate to attitudes toward diversity content.

Results

As displayed in Table 1, the distribution of women and men among survey respondents was about equal. Nearly 76% of the survey respondents were European American, 12.6% were African American, 5.6% were Latino/Hispanic, and 4.4% were Pacific Islander/Asian.

The median age of respondents in this survey was 50, ranging in age from 33 to 72. Under religious identity, 31.9% identified themselves as Protestant, 22.3% as Jewish, and 15.8% as Catholic.

The vast majority of survey respondents had completed advanced degrees and held tenure track positions. For example, 85.6% of the respondents had doctorate degrees (58% in the field of social work) and more than 98% had a master's degree (90% had a MSW); 30.4% were full professors, 37.4% were associate professors, and 29.6% were assistant professors. For the regional distribution, 35.4% taught at schools in the East, followed by 23.5% in both the Midwest and South, and 17.6% in the West.

The majority of the survey respondents were employed at public institutions as compared to private institutions, approximately 70% and 30%, respectively. The respondents taught in the following areas: 43% in interpersonal practice and field of practice, 35% in macro practice (e.g., social policy, planning, administra-

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (Percentages)

Gender			
Female	50.2	Male	49.8
Race/Ethnicity			
White (non-Hispanic)	75.6	African American	12.6
Latino(a)/Hispanic	5.6	Pacific Islander/Asian	4.4
Other	1.9		
Age			
30-39	11.4	40-49	34.8
50-59	31.5	60 and over	22.3
Religious Identity			
Protestant	31.9	Catholic	15.8
Jewish	22.3	Other	30.0
Highest Educational Degree			
Doctorate	85.6	Master's	12.9
Bachelor	1.5		
Teaching Rank			
Full professor	30.4	Associate professor	37.4
Assistant professor	29.6	Other	2.6
Region of Country			
East	35.4	South	23.5
Midwest	23.5	West	17.6

tion, and community organizing), 21% in human behavior and social environment, and 20% in research and evaluation.

Three analyses were conducted to answer our research questions. Frequency distributions were used to look at faculty support for diversity content. *T* tests were used to investigate whether differences between ratings on diversity and oppression observed in these distributions were statistically significant. In a final set of analyses, hierarchical multiple regression was used to identify the characteristics of faculty that were most likely to support diversity content.

Frequencies indicated that faculty were supportive of most content on specific population groups (see Table 2). For example, 97.1% of the respondents indicated that content on people of color was

very important or important, followed by content on different classes (96.4%), women (94.6%), different ages (93.1%), people with disabilities (90.3%), gays and lesbians (84.8%) and Jews (74.4%). However, these frequencies indicate that this content was not valued equally, with 15.1% of the faculty rating content on gays and lesbians as somewhat or of little importance and a 4.7% rating content on Jews as having little or no importance.

Faculty also endorsed the importance of curriculum content on various types of oppression (see Table 3). The majority of faculty reported that content on racism (97.8%), sexism (93.8%), classism (91.3%), ageism (88.7%), heterosexism/homophobia (85.9%), anti-Semitism (84.1%), and ableism (68.4%) was very important or important. On the negative

Table 2. Percentage of Responses to the Importance of Content on Diverse Populations

Population	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Little Importance	Not Important
People of color	80.9 (224)	16.2 (45)	2.9 (8)	-	-
Power differences	77.6 (215)	20.2 (56)	2.2 (6)	-	-
Social classes	70.4 (195)	26.0 (72)	3.2 (9)	0.4 (1)	-
Women	66.8 (185)	27.8 (77)	4.7 (13)	0.7 (2)	-
Different ages	60.6 (168)	32.5 (90)	5.4 (15)	1.1 (3)	0.4 (1)
Gays and lesbians	52.7 (146)	32.1 (89)	12.6 (35)	2.5 (7)	-
People with disabilities	51.3 (142)	39.0 (108)	9.7 (27)	-	-
Jews	37.9 (105)	36.5 (101)	20.9 (58)	3.6 (10)	1.1 (3)

Table 3. Percentage of Responses to the Importance of Content on Types of Oppression

Type of Oppression	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Little Importance	Not Important
Racism	78.6 (217)	19.2 (53)	1.8 (5)	0.4 (1)	-
Authoritarianism	33.6 (91)	31.7 (86)	26.6 (72)	7.0 (19)	1.1 (3)
Classism	54.4 (149)	36.9 (101)	6.9 (19)	1.8 (5)	-
Sexism	58.9 (162)	34.9 (96)	5.8 (16)	0.4 (1)	-
Ageism	49.1 (135)	39.6 (109)	10.5 (29)	0.7 (2)	-
Heterosexism/Homophobia	50.4 (139)	35.5 (98)	11.2 (31)	2.2 (6)	0.7 (2)
Ableism	37.9 (102)	30.5 (82)	18.6 (50)	5.2 (14)	7.4 (20)
Anti-Semitism	43.5 (120)	40.6 (112)	14.1 (39)	1.8 (5)	-

side, 7.4% of the faculty indicated that content on ableism was not important, and 0.7% reported that content related to heterosexism/homophobia was not important. When comparing the frequencies on population groups with that on oppression, it appears that faculty are more supportive of content on specific groups.

This observation was tested using paired *t* tests comparing the relative importance of content on population groups (e.g., people of color) with content on types of oppression (e.g., racism). An analysis on authoritarianism was not completed because it is not a social work curriculum area. As shown in Table 4, results indicate that including curriculum content on women, different ages, people with disabilities and different classes was more important, at a statistically significant level, to respondents than including content on the corresponding type of oppression. However, faculty attitudes toward including content on anti-Semitism was found to be significantly more favorable than including content on Jews. The differences observed between content on people of color versus racism and content on gays and lesbians versus heterosexism/homophobia were not significant.

Hierarchical regression models were

estimated to assess what factors predict faculty attitudes regarding the degree of importance of including content on diverse populations as well as on types of oppression. A model was developed that considered whether respondents' rank, age, gender, racial/ethnic identity, teaching, and practice experience influenced their attitudes toward this content. We predicted that women or faculty of color, who may have had personal experiences with diversity or oppression in relation to their gender or race/ethnicity, would be more supportive of this content. We were also interested in seeing if age, rank, or years of teaching experience would be associated with these attitudes, as more recently educated faculty were more likely to have attended school when MSW programs were mandated to include content on diversity and oppression. Years of practice experience could influence these attitudes due to the potential of exposure to social work in a diverse society.

Structural variables related to the program were also included in the model. We predicted that the size of a program, measured by the number of students enrolled, and the population size of the town or city of the college or university could influence attitudes. In larger programs, faculty could have the potential of

Table 4. Results of *t* Test Comparing Relative Importance of Content on Diverse Populations and Content on Corresponding Types of Oppression

	Population Group M (SD)	Oppression Type M (SD)
People of color by racism	1.22 (0.48)	1.24 (0.47)
Women by sexism*	1.39 (0.61)	1.48 (0.62)
Gays/lesbians by heterosexism/ homophobia	1.65 (0.80)	1.67 (0.81)
Different ages by ageism**	1.48 (0.69)	1.63 (0.70)
Disabilities by ableism**	1.57 (0.66)	2.16 (1.25)
Jews by anti-Semitism**	1.93 (0.91)	1.74 (0.76)
Different social classes by classism**	1.33 (0.56)	1.56 (0.70)

Note: Mean scores calculated by coding responses with the following values: very important=1; important=2; somewhat important=3; little importance=4; not important=5.

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

interacting with students from many different backgrounds. Similarly, programs located in large cities would be more likely to be dealing with issues related to multicultural practice.

To test this model, dummy variables were created for gender and race/ethnicity. Academic rank, years of teaching experience, years of practice experience, number of students and size of city or town were treated as continuous variables.

As illustrated in Table 5, neither of these models accounted for more than 6% of the variance in attitudes toward content on diversity or oppression. The primary factor that entered significantly into the model of diversity content was gender ($B=-.26$; $p<.001$). Both gender ($B=-.23$; $p<.001$) and academic rank ($B=-.18$; $p<.05$) were the only significant predictors of attitudes toward oppression.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore faculty attitudes toward content on diversity and oppression. As one of the few randomized national surveys on this topic, it provides some initial information concerning these attitudes and their implications for faculty development. However, as a secondary analysis of a survey developed for another purpose, it

does not tell us everything we would want to know about these issues. For example, it did not ask participants to identify their sexual orientation or their experiences with others who were different from them. These questions would have provided us with richer information for interpreting these results and could have contributed to better regression models.

Our first research question asked how faculty rated content on diversity and oppression. The analysis found that the majority of faculty rate content on population groups and on oppression to be important or very important. In respect to specific groups, more faculty members viewed content on people of color, power differences, social classes, and women to be very important. Fewer faculty respondents rated content on Jews as very important. With the exception of responses to including content on Jews versus anti-Semitism, content about groups was rated as more important than content on a corresponding oppression.

These results suggest that respondents to this survey were more likely to reflect a "sensitive" perspective rather than a "conscious" view of teaching this material. This pattern of responses reflects much of the current social work literature, which has focused more on group differences than on oppression, status

Table 5. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Coefficients for Content on Diverse Populations and Content on Types of Oppression Content

	Diversity Content ($R^2=.06$)	Oppression Content ($R^2=.05$)
Gender	-.26 *	-.23 **
Age	-.05	-.03
Race/ethnicity	.03	.04
Academic rank	-.13	-.18 ***
Years of teaching	-.01	-.06
Years of practice	-.03	.01
Number of MSW students	-.15	.01
Size of city or town	-.05	-.03

* $p<.001$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.05$

differences, or structures of inequality. This perspective does not reflect much of the current thinking in the social sciences on multicultural issues, or our emerging literature in social work on this topic. This suggests a *mismatch* between faculty views of this content and the current emphasis in multicultural studies and in the CSWE curriculum policy statement on ways in which group membership relates to societal oppression and social justice (Van Soest, 1995).

Our analysis also reveals the degree to which faculty support the inclusion of content on women, people of color, and gay/lesbians as mandated by the CSWE Evaluative Standard 3.0 (CSWE, 1994). Content on people of color or racism was ranked as very important by at least 78.6% of the respondents. However, content on women or sexism was rated as very important by 59–67% of the respondents. Content on gays and lesbians or heterosexism/homophobia was rated as very important by only about half of the respondents. These mandated curriculum content areas, therefore, are not equally supported by a large majority of faculty. In social work education, we often talk about diversity content without further clarification of populations or types of oppression included. These findings indicate the importance of being more specific when targeting faculty groups to improve their competence to teach in certain areas.

Our final analysis gives us some insights into who may be more supportive of this content on diversity and oppression. When controlling for other factors, gender is the only significant predictor of content on diversity and gender, and rank is the only significant predictor of content on oppression. This finding is consistent with other scholarship that has found that women are more likely than men to have attitudes that are supportive of social equality and that individuals with lower status are more likely

to have critical perspectives on existing structures (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980; Mills, McGrath, Sobkoviak, & Stupec, 1995; Pope-Davis, Menefee, & Ottavi, 1993; Sidanius, Pratto, & Rabinowitz 1994). These differences suggest that those individuals in schools of social work who have more formal power may be the less supportive of this material.

What are the implications of these results for social work education? Although faculty are in general more supportive of content on groups than on oppression, we need to move beyond this approach and incorporate a “conscious” approach into our teaching. This may require discussions among faculty as well as faculty development work to gain skills and understanding of how to integrate issues of structural inequalities and oppression into information about groups. Models for this form of education exist both within social work (cf. Chau, 1990; Latting, 1990; Pinderhughes, 1989; Torres & Jones, 1997), in other professions (Banks & Banks, 1995; Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; Ferdman & Brody, 1996; Suarez-Balcazar, Duviak, & Smith, 1994; Tatum, 1992) and in the liberal arts (Davis, 1992; Gehrig, 1991; Madden & Hyde, 1998). Indeed, the field of education can be particularly helpful in thinking of ways to educate students for practice in a multicultural world (Banks & Banks, 1995).

This study also points out the need for further research that takes a hard look at the effectiveness of methods for teaching about diversity and oppression in social work. Much of our literature on teaching presents interesting and compelling models for courses or class activities, but very little of it analyzes the degree to which curricular goals are met or their effectiveness in preparing students for practice. Models for this type of research exist in other fields (cf. Banks & Banks, 1995; Brown et al., 1996; Tatum, 1992). A simi-

lar body of research in social work would be particularly useful for those who wish to change their teaching methodology or transform their curriculum to prepare students more effectively for a multicultural world.

Effective infusion of content on diversity and societal oppression requires faculty who have the knowledge, values and skills to teach this content. These results suggest that certain faculty groups—specifically women and those of lower rank—are more amenable to including and supporting diversity content. This demonstrates that although faculty are supportive of content in general, there are significant differences in the type of content that is valued and its salience for individual instructors. Schools and our profession at large need greater dialogue around these issues that includes faculty groups who may be less supportive of this material. The responsibility of including diversity content must be shared, rather than placed primarily on the shoulders of members of oppressed or disenfranchised groups if we are to make changes in the form and content of social work education.

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