



## SUPPORT OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY CONTENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: RESULTS FROM NATIONAL SURVEYS OF U.S. AND ANGLOPHONE CANADIAN FACULTY

Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen , Michael R. Woodford , Katherine P. Luke & Lorraine Gutiérrez

To cite this article: Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen , Michael R. Woodford , Katherine P. Luke & Lorraine Gutiérrez (2011) SUPPORT OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY CONTENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: RESULTS FROM NATIONAL SURVEYS OF U.S. AND ANGLOPHONE CANADIAN FACULTY, Journal of Social Work Education, 47:1, 19-35, DOI: [10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900018](https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900018)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900018>



Published online: 16 Mar 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 477



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 11 View citing articles [↗](#)

# SUPPORT OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY CONTENT IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: RESULTS FROM NATIONAL SURVEYS OF U.S. AND ANGLOPHONE CANADIAN FACULTY

**Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen**

University of Washington

**Michael R. Woodford**

University of Michigan

**Katherine P. Luke**

University of Michigan

**Lorraine Gutiérrez**

University of Michigan

This article presents findings from the first national surveys of United States and English-speaking Canadian MSW social work faculty examining their support of curriculum content on sexual orientation and gender identity. Faculty in either country are generally supportive of including LGBT content but report significantly more support for content on LGBT populations as compared to the types of oppression experienced. Significant predictors of support for LGBT content include being female, younger, non-White/non-European, having positive LGBT social attitudes, and the availability of resources on transgender-related issues. The findings suggest that faculty development should address the social attitudes among faculty as well as integrate gender identity into diversity discourse in social work education.

SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE United States and Canada have an ethical obligation to be competent in interventions and to promote social justice and empowerment among marginalized and oppressed groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2005; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1999). Yet, homophobia and heterosexism are well documented among health and human service practi-

tioners (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Cochran, Peavy, & Cauce, 2007; Harris, Nightengale, & Owen, 1995; Krieglstein, 2003; Peterson, 1996; Swank & Raiz, 2008). These negative attitudes among social work practitioners have been attributed in part to the lack of LGBT content in professional social work education (Bergh & Crisp, 2004; Longres & Fredriksen, 2000; Morrow & Messinger, 2006).

Although curricula concerning gender, race, and cultural diversity have a foothold in

social work education, scholars in either country have observed that discrimination and oppression related to sexual orientation and gender identity are commonly not addressed (Aronson, 1995; CASSW Task Force on Gay/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgendered (GLBT) Issues, Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work [CASSW],<sup>1</sup> 2002; CASWE Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered Caucus, 2008; Morrow, 1996; O'Neill, 1995; Stainton & Swift, 1996; Woodford & Bella, 2003). Similar concerns have been raised in Great Britain (Logan & Kershaw, 1994; Trotter & Gilchrist, 1996).

As a consequence, many social work students may not have adequate knowledge and skills for competent practice with LGBT populations (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Longres & Fredriksen, 2000; Morrow & Messinger, 2006; Logie, Bridge, & Bridge, 2007), although they are becoming increasingly supportive of lesbians and gay men (Brownlee et al., 2005; Logie et al., 2007). One study found that nearly half of a sample of graduate students perceived insufficient training in their professional degree programs and reported moderate levels of competence to serve LGBT individuals and their families (Logie et al., 2007). Another concern identified in this literature is that the heterosexist bias of social work theory, literature, and teaching often goes unchallenged because heterosexuality remains the reference point for all other sexualities (Johnston, 2002; Logan & Kershaw, 1994; Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2002).

Current social work education accreditation policies and standards in the United

States and in Canada mandate the inclusion of content and curriculum related to diversity (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2008; CASSW, 2007a, 2007b). The accreditation policies within each country explicitly identify sexual orientation as a dimension of diversity; furthermore, the CSWE standards also explicate gender identity and expression. Both accrediting bodies direct schools to prioritize diversity in other ways, such as through field opportunities, faculty composition, and the consideration of candidates' experience and expertise in regard to diversity in hiring decisions for faculty positions. Within both countries much support exists on a policy level for the inclusion of curriculum and provision of field education opportunities related to the LGBT community. Although these policy mandates are important, support among social work faculty is essential because they are charged with achieving curricular objectives.

This article reports the results of cross-sectional surveys of U.S. and Anglophone Canadian MSW social work faculty and their support of content on LGBT populations and related types of oppression. This research extends earlier work conducted in 1992 in the United States about faculty support for content on diverse populations and types of oppression, including content addressing gay men, lesbians, homophobia, and heterosexism (Gutiérrez, Fredriksen, & Soifer, 1999). Similar research has not occurred in Canada. This current study addresses this gap and enables us to explore the impact of the social attitudes of faculty, the availability

---

<sup>1</sup>In 2008, the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW) was renamed the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE). For convenience, its former name, specifically the acronym CASSW, shall be used throughout this article because the documents referenced herein are under that name.

of LGBT curriculum resources, and the differences between the perceptions of social work faculty in both countries. Such an exploration is important given differences between each country's sociopolitical context (Thomas & Torrey, 2008), especially in regard to LGBT rights and policies. The current study also explores faculty views related to content on transgender individuals and transphobia—a population and form of oppression that until recently have been overlooked by social work education.

In this article we address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do social work faculty in either country support the inclusion of content on LGBT populations and the concomitant types of oppression experienced?
2. What are the social attitudes of social work faculty in the United States and Canada as they relate to LGBT people and issues?
3. To what extent do faculty have LGBT curriculum resources available to them?
4. What factors predict faculty support for such content among U.S. and Canadian faculty?

## Methods

### Sample

This research is part of a larger study that addresses faculty support for inclusion of multicultural content in graduate social work education in the United States and English-speaking Canada. Data were obtained from Web-based surveys of MSW-teaching faculty in the United States (including Puerto Rico) and Anglophone schools in Canada. The U.S.

sampling frame was constructed from lists of faculty with e-mail addresses available on accredited school websites ( $N=2,691$ ). In spring 2006, 400 faculty were randomly selected to receive the survey. Fifty-one individuals were removed from the sample when they responded to an initial e-mail message that they were not eligible for the survey (e.g., they were retired, no longer teaching). From the final listing of 349 eligible faculty selected in the United States, we achieved a 50% response rate ( $n=175$ ). The Canadian sampling frame was created of faculty with e-mail addresses available on the websites of accredited English-speaking schools in Canada ( $N=236$ ). In summer 2006, all Canadian faculty with available e-mail addresses were invited to participate to obtain a sample size similar to the U.S. sample. We obtained a 64% response rate ( $n=152$ ). Combining the U.S. and Canadian samples, we obtained an overall sample of 327.

The surveys were conducted using professional online survey software (surveymonkey.com). Procedures for survey distribution followed Dillman's (2007) "tailored design" method for Internet surveys and Web-based survey technology to allow for anonymous data collection and automatic data entry in a secure independent website. Initially, we sent an e-mail message to potential respondents explaining that they would be receiving an invitation to participate in a research project in one week. One week later, we followed-up with an e-mail message inviting them to participate with a secure individualized Web link connecting them directly to the online survey. All potential respondents were sent three additional e-mail messages reminding them to complete the survey if they had not done so.

## Measures

The survey included questions concerning support for content on LGBT populations and concomitant types of oppression, faculty attitudes regarding LGBT people and issues, the availability of LGBT curriculum resources and the willingness to use them, and program and respondent characteristics.

*Support of LGBT content.* Support of LGBT content was assessed by faculty beliefs about the importance of content on LGBT populations and associated types of oppression. Specifically, we used four items in the following content areas: gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; transgender-identified people; heterosexism, homophobia, and/or biphobia; and transphobia (defined as the irrational fear or oppressive treatment of transgender-identified people). Faculty were asked to conclude the statement, "Concerning social work education at the MSW level, it is my opinion that including content on [each of the four content areas inserted] is:" with response categories on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) *not at all important* to (5) *very important*. A summary variable of support for LGBT content measure was constructed using the responses to the four items described previously (Cronbach's alpha = .84). A higher score reflects more support for the inclusion of LGBT content.

*Social attitudes toward LGBT people and issues.* Based in part on the Attitudes Regarding LGB Relationships Scales (Liang & Alimo, 2005), we assessed attitudes related to LGBT people and issues. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the following four statements: *lesbian/gay couples should not be able to be legally married* (reverse

*coded*); *romantic and sexual relationships between homosexuals are as acceptable to me as relationships between heterosexuals*; *if I found out a friend was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, I would be accepting and supportive*; and *transgender-identified people experience discrimination in this country*. Each item was measured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (4) *strongly agree*. We developed a composite measure for LGBT social attitudes using the respondent scores for the four items (Cronbach's alpha = .59). A higher score indicates more positive attitudes toward LGBT people and issues.

*Availability of curriculum resources and intent to use teaching resources.* Respondents were asked six questions concerning LGBT curriculum resources. Two items concerning teaching resources availability (such as bibliographies, filmographies, and speakers) were included: (1) whether there were lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-related teaching resources available (specifically resources on heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia); and (2) whether gender identity-related resources (specifically resources on transgender people and transphobia) were available. Two items queried willingness to use (1) lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-related, and (2) transgender-related teaching resources relevant to their teaching areas. Two items addressed field placements, namely, knowledge of MSW field placements where students can work with (1) lesbian, gay, bisexual people and/or address heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia; and (2) transgender-identified people and/or transphobia. The response categories for each of these items were *yes*, *no*, and *don't know*. The response categories of *no* and *don't know* were collapsed into a single category.

ry for further analyses because in either case respondents did not have access to LGBT-related resources.

*Program and respondent characteristics.* We queried respondents about the characteristics of their MSW programs, including the number of students in the MSW programs (used as an indicator of program size) and the city/town locale of their schools. Standard questions were used to measure age, sex, race/ethnicity, faculty rank, and years of teaching. Open-ended questions were used to obtain information on the respondent's sexual orientation and religious affiliation; responses were coded into specified categories for each variable.

## Analysis

Distributions on key variables were examined; proportions (if indicated), means, and standard deviations were computed for each variable. Correlations between variables were examined to ensure that multicollinearity was avoided. Distributions of the scale scores were examined, and measures of internal consistency for each scale, using Cronbach's alpha, were computed. Frequency distributions were used to examine faculty characteristics and their support for the differing facets of LGBT content, social attitudes toward LGBT people and issues, and resources available. Next, chi-square and *t* tests were used to investigate differences between U.S. and Canadian faculty responses on key variables. *T* tests were used to examine differences observed between ratings on support for content concerning LGBT populations compared with support for content on concomitant forms of oppression, as well as support for gay, lesbian, and bisexual content compared with transgender content.

In a final set of analyses, the U.S. and Canada samples were combined and a linear regression model was estimated to assess which factors predict faculty support for including LGBT content. A model was developed that considered whether faculty background characteristics (i.e., age, sex, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and country) and social attitudes influenced their views toward the importance of inclusion of LGBT content. Structural variables related to the program were also included in the model, namely, resources available, the number of students enrolled, and the school locale. To test this model, dummy variables were created for race/ethnicity (non-White/non-European, White/European); religious affiliation (non-Christian, Christian); the availability of lesbian, gay, and bisexual resources (no/don't know, resources available); and the availability of transgender resources (no/don't know, resources available). Age, LGBT attitudes, and size of program were treated as continuous variables.

## Findings

### Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 provides the sociodemographic characteristics of the U.S. and Canadian respondents. In both samples, the survey respondents were primarily female, heterosexual, and middle aged ( $M=53$  U.S.;  $M=52$  Canada), with an average of at least 15 years of teaching experience. The schools of social work in either country sample were located primarily in urban/suburban environments. There were significant differences between the U.S. and Canadian samples in terms of the survey

**TABLE 1. Demographic and Program Characteristics for U.S. (N=176) and Canadian (N=151) Respondents**

Characteristics	United States		Canada		Test Statistic
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Sex					$\chi^2(1)=0.32$
Male	54	35.8	50	39.1	
Female	97	64.2	78	60.9	
Racial/ethnic background					$\chi^2(5)=23.44^*$
White/European	99	66.4	97	77.0	
Hispanic/Latina(o)	8	5.4	1	0.8	
Pacific Islander/Asian	9	6.0	10	7.9	
Black/African/Caribbean	29	19.5	6	4.8	
Aboriginal/First Nations/Native	1	0.7	6	4.8	
Other	3	2.0	6	4.8	
Current religion					$\chi^2(5)=19.95^*$
Christian	71	50.7	26	24.1	
Jewish	16	11.4	16	14.8	
Eastern religions	2	1.4	5	4.6	
Multiple religions listed	6	4.3	5	4.6	
None	35	25.0	46	42.6	
Other	10	7.1	10	9.3	
Sexual orientation					$\chi^2(1)=0.002$
Heterosexual	117	86.0	100	86.2	
Nonheterosexual	19	11.8	16	13.8	
Current rank					$\chi^2(4)=56.16^*$
Associate professor	54	34.2	27	20.6	
Full professor	42	26.6	9	6.9	
Lecturer/instructor	14	8.9	42	32.1	
Other	11	7.0	—	—	
School locale					$\chi^2(5)=7.52$
Urban/suburban	103	68.7	91	71.7	
Nonurban/nonsuburban	47	31.3	36	28.3	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	53.2	9.5 <sup>a</sup>	52.1	7.1 <sup>b</sup>	$t(253)=-0.95$
Number of MSW students	246.7	165.28 <sup>c</sup>	140.0	112.95 <sup>d</sup>	$t(201)=-5.162^*$

<sup>a</sup>*n*=140. <sup>b</sup>*n*=115. <sup>c</sup>*n*=116. <sup>d</sup>*n*=87.

\**p*<.001.

respondents' racial/ethnic background, religious affiliation, rank, and number of MSW students. Although most of the respondents in the samples were White/European, the U.S. sample had a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino and Black/African/Caribbean respondents, and the Canadian sample had a higher percentage of Pacific Islander and Asian, Aboriginal/First Nations/Native, and Other. In terms of religion, the Canadian sample had a significantly larger percentage with no current religious affiliation, whereas the U.S. sample had a higher percentage of Christians. The U.S. sample also had a higher percentage of respondents at the rank of full or associate professor, compared to the Canadian sample, which had a higher percentage of assistant professors and lecturers/instructors. On average, the U.S. faculty respondents taught in MSW programs with significantly more students than did the Canadian faculty.

### **Support for LGBT Content**

The majority of the faculty in the U.S. and Canadian samples reported that they were generally supportive of LGBT content. For example, 94% of the U.S. respondents and 98% of the Canadian respondents indicated that content on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is very important or important, followed by content on heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia (90% U.S.; 95% Canada), transgender-identified people (81% U.S.; 89% Canada), and transphobia (63% U.S.; 72% Canada). There were no significant differences between the ratings of importance of content between the faculty in the two countries.

Though general support of LGBT content was found, support was not universal and dif-

fered by the type of specific content. For instance, 18% of the U.S. sample and 9% of the Canadian sample indicated that content on transgender-identified people was less than important. The faculty support for content on transphobia was even lower, with 38% of the U.S. and 28% of the Canadian faculty reporting that inclusion of such content is less than important. Faculty in either country were significantly more likely to rate content on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals as more important than content on transgender people ( $t(172)=8.89, p<.001$  U.S.;  $t(144)=6.18, p<.001$  Canada) and to rate content on homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism as more important than content on transphobia ( $t(164)=10.43, p<.001$  U.S.;  $t(137)=8.11, p<.001$  Canada).

As shown in Table 2, when comparing the mean scores of support for content on population groups with that of the corresponding type of oppression, we found that U.S. and Canadian faculty were significantly more likely to be supportive of content on lesbians, gays, and bisexuals compared with heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia. In addition, the faculty in either country reported that they supported content on transgender individuals more than content on transphobia.

### **Social Attitudes Toward LGBT People and Issues**

The faculty in the United States and Canada reported generally supportive attitudes related to LGBT people and issues (see Table 3). When comparing the U.S. and Canadian faculty on their social attitudes, the Canadian faculty were significantly more likely to be supportive of gay marriage (69% U.S.; 92% Canada). There were also significant differences between the



U.S. and Canadian faculty on their attitudes toward homosexual relationships being acceptable (67% U.S. faculty and 93% Canadian faculty report strongly agree) and their support of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual

friend (89% U.S. faculty and 99% Canadian faculty report strongly agree). Seventy-three percent of the U.S. and 79% of the Canadian faculty strongly agree that transgender individuals experience discrimination in the

**TABLE 2. Differences Between the Importance of Content on Diverse Populations and Content on Corresponding Types of Oppression Among U.S. and Canadian Faculty**

Content Area	United States			<i>t</i>	Canada			<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	
Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people	4.72	0.58	166	4.61*	4.72	0.50	136	3.85*
Heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia	4.52	0.71			4.56	0.62		
Transgender people	4.31	0.86	166	7.43*	4.49	0.75	137	7.26*
Transphobia	3.86	1.06			4.00	1.01		

\**p*<.001.

**TABLE 3. LGBT Social Attitude Differences Between U.S. and Canadian Faculty**

Survey Item	<i>N</i>	United States		<i>N</i>	Canada		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Lesbian/gay couples should not be able to be legally married. (R)	162	3.48	0.87	138	3.80	0.71	-3.59	298 <sup>a*</sup>
Romantic and sexual relationships between homosexuals are as acceptable to me as relationships between heterosexuals.	161	3.53	0.78	134	3.93	0.29	-5.87	211 <sup>a*</sup>
If I found out a friend was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, I would be accepting and supportive.	158	3.89	0.31	132	3.99	0.09	-3.87	185 <sup>a*</sup>
Transgender-identified people (people who express gender variance) experience discrimination in the United States [Canada].	154	3.70	0.55	126	3.72	0.62	-0.30	278

Note: LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender; (R) = reverse order.

<sup>a</sup>Based on the result of Levene’s test for equality of variances (all *p*<.001), equal variances not assumed.

\**p*<.001.

respondent's respective country. Differences between the countries are not significant for the latter variable.

### **Curriculum Resources Available and Willingness to Use Resources**

Although most faculty in either country had resources available on heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia (87% U.S.; 93% Canada), fewer faculty had resources available to address gender identity (57% U.S.; 53% Canada). Interestingly, 29% of the U.S. and 24% of the Canadian faculty did not know if gender identity-related teaching resources existed at their schools. Only 9% of the U.S. respondents indicated not knowing if resources on heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia were available at their schools and all of the Canadian respondents knew about the availability of such resources.

Nearly all of the faculty in either country reported that they would utilize lesbian, gay, and bisexual-related resources if they were available (93% U.S.; 95% Canada); fewer faculty said they would use transgender-related resources (79% U.S.; 84% Canada). The majority of the faculty reported that their schools had field placements that involved working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people or addressing related systems of oppression (81% U.S.; 84% Canada); however, fewer faculty indicated the availability of field placements that provided opportunities to work with transgender-identified clients or on transphobia (47% U.S.; 50% Canada). Furthermore, many faculty did not know whether their schools offered transgender-related placements (38% U.S.; 34% Canada), whereas

fewer faculty in each country reported not knowing about the availability of lesbian, gay, and bisexual-related field placements (13% U.S.; 10% Canada).

### **Factors Predicting Support**

Combining the U.S. and Canadian samples, a linear regression model was developed that tested whether the following variables influenced faculty support for LGBT content: faculty characteristics (including country); social attitudes toward LGBT people and issues; and program characteristics and teaching resource availability. As illustrated in Table 4, the model is significant ( $F=3.89$ ;  $p<.001$ ), accounting for 24% of the variance in attitudes toward the importance of including LGBT content. Age, sex, race/ethnicity, LGBT social attitudes, and transgender-related resource availability were significant predictors of the importance of LGBT content, after controlling for other factors.

### **Discussion**

This article presents findings from the first study of U.S. and Anglophone Canadian social work faculty and their support of content on LGBT populations and the concomitant types of oppression, as well as their LGBT social attitudes and the availability of and intent to use LGBT curriculum resources. The findings from this study illustrate that although U.S. and Canadian faculty are generally supportive of including content on LGBT populations, they are significantly less likely to support content on the corresponding types of oppression experienced. Furthermore, the findings suggest that faculty development is

needed in both countries to further integrate gender identity and expression in the discourse on diverse groups and societal oppression. To support this, schools of social work, accreditation bodies, and other organizations need to promote the development of teaching resources and field placements related to the transgender community. Important differences exist between the U.S. and Canadian faculty in terms of their social attitudes (with the exception of attitudes toward transgender-identified people); however, both groups of faculty show similar response patterns concerning support for content on sexual orientation and gender identity and the concomitant forms of oppression, and when controlling for other factors, the respondents' country was not a significant predictor of support of LGBT content.

### Support for LGBT Content

Social work faculty are mandated to prepare graduates for competent practice with LGBT individuals, including the promotion of empowerment and social justice. Faculty support for integrating LGBT content is an important component necessary to realize these responsibilities. Although the findings suggest that faculty in either country strongly support LGBT content, the content on different populations and the concomitant types of oppression were not equally valued by the faculty in this study. Faculty in both the United States and Canada were significantly more likely to endorse the importance of content on gays, lesbians, and bisexuals compared with heterosexism, homophobia, and biphobia, as well as more likely to support

**TABLE 4. Linear Regression Analysis Summary for Faculty Demographics, Attitudes Toward LGBT People and Issues, MSW Program Characteristics, and Available Teaching Resources Predicting Faculty Support for the Inclusion of LGBT Content (N=150)**

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$
Age	-0.05	0.02	-.16*
Sex (reference group male)	1.04	0.37	.21**
Race/ethnicity (reference group non-White/non-European)	-1.36	0.42	-.26**
Christian (reference group not Christian)	-0.66	0.43	-.14
Sexual orientation (reference group not heterosexual)	-0.65	0.59	-.09
Country (ref. United States)	0.01	0.41	.00
LGBT social attitudes	0.26	0.13	.18*
Number of MSW students	-0.00	0.00	-.07
School locale (reference group nonurban/nonsuburban)	0.30	0.43	.06
LGB-related teaching resources (reference group no/don't know)	-1.00	0.61	-.14
Transgender-related teaching resources (reference group no/don't know)	0.96	0.34	.20**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

content on transgender people as compared with transphobia.

These findings reflect the orientation of much of the existing social work literature, which focuses on population differences and needs rather than on structural inequalities experienced by these populations (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). This represents a potential incongruence with the accreditation standards, which require social work faculty to provide content on the ways that societal structures marginalize and oppress individuals and groups with less access to resources. Without instruction on structural inequalities, social work students may not be well prepared to address systemic forces that contribute to the marginalization of LGBT people and to foster their empowerment. On the other hand, these findings could reflect the crowded nature of social work curricula and that faculty may integrate material on oppression as part of content on marginalized populations.

### **Gender Identity and Expression**

Accreditation standards in the United States recently mandated that social work students understand and be responsive to gender identity and gender expression as dimensions of diversity (CSWE, 2008); the current Canadian standards do not explicitly identify gender identity or gender expression (CASSW, 2007a, 2007b). Social work faculty in the United States and in Canada were significantly more likely to support content on sexual orientation and related oppressive systems compared with content on transgender-identified people and transphobia. It may be that some social work faculty believe that the transgender population is small and not in need of as

much attention as other populations. Or it may be that some faculty do not differentiate between subgroups in LGBT communities and are not aware of the unique challenges and issues facing the transgender population. As social work accreditation policy positions expand on enumerated dimensions of diversity, it is essential that training opportunities be made available to ensure that faculty have the values, knowledge, and skills necessary to fulfill such requirements. Likewise, it is important that faculty be provided with teaching resources to help fulfill the curricular goals related to gender identity and expression.

### **Factors Related to Support of LGBT Content**

When testing the overall model, the findings suggest that faculty who are female, non-White/non-European, younger, have positive LGBT social attitudes, and whose schools have teaching resources related to gender identity are more supportive of LGBT content. It may be that female social work faculty and non-White/non-European faculty have more personal experience with marginalization and empathize more strongly with historically marginalized groups, thus believing that providing LGBT content is important. Younger faculty may hold more liberal views and be versed in contemporary theories of oppression. Although they be more supportive of such content, it will be essential to ensure that women, non-White/non-European faculty, and younger faculty—those who often have the least status and power within higher education—are not expected to retain primary responsibility to meet the institution's and profession's diversity goals.

Although it has been argued that there are irreconcilable tensions between traditional religious beliefs and LGBT-affirmative curricula (Hodge, 2002, 2005), our findings do not support a simple dichotomy between religious affiliation and beliefs about the importance of LGBT content. It may be that many of our respondents were affiliated with progressive religious communities or that some members of religious groups that traditionally hold negative views toward sexual minorities do not identify with the core teachings of their religion on this particular subject (Moon, 2004).

We had hypothesized that faculty in schools with LGBT-related teaching resources would be more likely to endorse the importance of LGBT content. Interestingly, our data suggest only faculty in schools that have gender identity-related curriculum resources available were more supportive of LGBT content. Because the vast majority of social work schools were reported to have lesbian, gay, and bisexual-related resources, it may be that schools with transgender-related resources are even more inclusive and deeply committed to addressing LGBT issues overall. It may be that helping faculty understand the value of using such teaching materials and resources may promote support for LGBT content. However, caution is required in interpreting this finding because of the high number of individuals in each country who do not know whether transgender-related curriculum resources exist in their institutions. Not knowing whether resources exist could be indicative of a range of factors, such as insufficient time to determine whether resources are available or lack of interest.

### **Comparison of U.S. and Canadian Faculty**

When controlling for faculty characteristics, social attitudes toward LGBT people and issues, program characteristics, and curriculum resource availability, a faculty member's country did not significantly predict support for LGBT content. Yet, Canadian respondents reported significantly more supportive social attitudes related to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and issues (except transgender-identified people). Several factors may help to explain the differences in social attitudes between Anglophone Canadian and U.S. faculty, including societal context and the contemporary LGBT issues within each country.

Critical differences exist between the United States and Canada in regard to human rights protections for sexual minorities. Canada offers substantially more legal rights for LGBT people than are available in the United States (Elliot & Bonauto, 2005; Smith, 2007). Same-sex marriage is a powerful indicator of this. Same-sex marriage has been legally recognized throughout Canada since 2005—and earlier in some regions of the country (Larocque, 2006)—whereas current federal marriage legislation in the United States explicitly and purposefully excludes same-sex couples, and, presently, same-sex marriages can be legally performed in only a few states.

These policy differences themselves are important; however, given the relative newness of these policy changes and debates, for the purpose of explaining our study's findings, the disparities in the underlying policy discourse are likely more influential. In Canada, a strong, official commitment to minority rights exists as

evidenced by Canada's multiculturalism policy and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.<sup>2</sup> This commitment was the foundation for same-sex marriage as well as many earlier pro-LGBT policy changes in Canada (Woodford, Newman, Brotman, & Ryan, 2010). In the United States, however, this is not necessarily the case, particularly in regard to LGBT people (Phelan, 2001). Seeking specific LGBT rights in the United States is often constructed as seeking differential treatment at a cost to others (Goldberg-Hiller & Milner, 2003). We do not intend to imply that U.S. social work faculty necessarily endorse this position; however, social work faculty are not immune to such discourse and their social attitudes may reflect such differences.

Finally, in terms of contemporary LGBT issues in each country, it is noteworthy that this research was conducted 1 year after the legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada. The topic received considerable media attention nationwide, and thus Canadian social work faculty were likely being exposed to sexual minority concerns and rights discourse quite frequently, possibly becoming more aware of the issues facing lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities. Given the substantial media attention surrounding the 2008 Proposition 8 in California, which involved constitutionally prohibiting same-sex marriage after a short period of being legally allowed, we wonder if even stronger perceptions would exist among U.S. faculty today. Again, social work faculty are not immune to contemporary developments, which may affect, in either direction, their social attitudes toward LGBT people and issues.

Although this study offers new and important insights into faculty support of LGBT content, it is a cross-sectional study, and we are not able to determine causality or the temporal ordering of the relationships among the variables assessed in this study. Because of the survey's anonymous nature we also cannot determine whether there are differences between survey respondents and nonrespondents.

In future research, it will be important to define constructs clearly and include questions that can better differentiate between sexualities and identities. The common practice of collapsing diverse populations into a single construct may obscure important similarities and differences among groups. It will also be important to address attitudes about sex development so that we can help to ensure that future social workers recognize and are equipped to address the needs and experiences of intersex individuals and their families. The definition and relationship among different types of prejudice and oppression (i.e., homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism) also warrant more attention because these constructs are often used differently and may treat oppression as an individual phenomenon (i.e., fear-based) rather than as a cultural, institutional phenomenon.

Measurement tools are needed to capture more subtle differences in social attitudes. Although some of the items used in this study to measure social attitudes were based on a contemporary scale (Liang & Alimo, 2005), societal attitudes about sexual minorities seem to be shifting from blatant expressions of prejudice

<sup>2</sup>Although sexual minorities are not an enumerated group in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, since a 1995 Supreme Court ruling they are read into the *Charter* (Elliot & Bonauto, 2005).

and hatred toward tolerance and acceptance in some situations. Thus, new measures are needed. Recent advances are supporting the development of measures more appropriate for assessing subtle forms of prejudice based on sexual orientation (Cowan, Heiple, Marquez, Khatchadourian, & McNevin, 2005; Raja & Stokes, 1998). Further, only one question in this study measured social attitudes related to gender identity, and it assessed an awareness of discrimination within society as opposed to the respondents' personal attitudes. Measurement scales related to transphobia are also needed. Although the CSWE accreditation policy (2008) now enumerates gender identity and expression as key diversity content areas, this policy was not in place when these surveys were conducted. In the future, it will be valuable to compare the findings presented here with data gathered after gender identity and expression were mandated in the accreditation policy. Likewise, a similar study could be implemented in Canada if gender identity and expression become explicitly identified forms of diversity in accreditation policies. In addition, in future studies it will be important to explore better ways to measure both the availability and utility of existing LGBT-related curriculum resources as well as to assess how different types of resources, such as community resources, may support faculty in addressing LGBT issues.

### Conclusion

Professional organizations, such as the American Psychological Association (1998), as well as the *Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients* (American Psycho-

logical Association, 2000), have defined specific competencies to ensure relevant education and effective professional practice with sexual minorities. Recognizing that value tensions exist within the social work profession and the larger society, social work's accrediting bodies and professional organizations need to develop explicit competencies and create resources to help social work educators achieve their curricular objectives for culturally relevant and competent practice with LGBT individuals and their families and communities.

### References

- American Psychological Association. (1998). Appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation in the proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the legislative year 1997. *American Psychologist, 53*, 882-939.
- American Psychological Association, Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns Joint Task Force, Division 44. (2000). Guidelines for psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *American Psychologist, 55*, 1440-1451.
- Aronson, J. (1995). Lesbians in social work education: Processes and puzzles in claiming visibility. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 6*(1), 5-26.
- Bergh, N. V. D., & Crisp, C. (2004). Defining culturally competent practice with sexual minorities: Implications for social work education and practice. *Journal of Social Work Education, 40*, 221-238.
- Berkman, C. S., & Zinberg, G. (1997). Homophobia and heterosexism in social workers. *Social Work, 42*, 319-332.

- Brownlee, K., Sprakes, A., Saini, M., O'Hare, R., Kortess-Miller, K., & Graham, J. (2005). Heterosexism among social work students. *Social Work Education, 24*, 485–494.
- Camilleri, P., & Ryan, M. (2006). Social work students' attitudes toward homosexuality and their knowledge and attitudes toward homosexual parenting as an alternative family unit: An Australian study. *Social Work Education, 25*, 288–304.
- Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW). (2007a). *Educational policy statements*. Ottawa, Canada: Author.
- Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW). (2007b). *Standards for accreditation*. Ottawa, Canada: Author.
- Canadian Association of Social Workers. (2005). *Code of ethics*. Ottawa, Canada: Author.
- Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work, Task Force on Gay/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgendered Issues. (2002, April). *Draft final report of Task Force on Gay/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgendered (GLBT) Issues*. Paper presented to CASSW Educational Policy Committee, Ottawa, ON.
- CASWE Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered Caucus. (2008, March). *Report of the CASWE Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered Caucus*. Presented at the Annual General Meeting, Canadian Association for Social Work Education, May 22, 2008, Toronto, ON.
- Cochran, B. N., Peavy, K. M., & Cauce, A. M. (2007). Substance abuse treatment providers' explicit and implicit attitudes regarding sexual minorities. *Journal of Homosexuality, 53*, 181–207.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.cswe.org/Accreditation/41865.aspx>
- Cowan, G., Heiple, B., Marquez, C., Khatchadourian, D., & McNevin, M. (2005). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward hate crimes and hate speech against gays and lesbians: Old-fashioned and modern heterosexism. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*, 67–82.
- Dillman, D. (2007). *Mail and Internet surveys* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Elliot, R. D., & Bonauto, M. (2005). Sexual orientation and gender identity in North America: Legal trends, legal contrasts. *Journal of Homosexuality, 48*, 91–106.
- Goldberg-Hiller, J., & Milner, N. (2003). Rights as excess: Understanding the politics of special rights. *Law & Society, 28*(4), 1075–1118.
- Gutiérrez, L., Fredriksen, K. I., & Soifer, S. (1999). Perspectives of social work faculty on diversity and societal oppression content: Results from a national survey. *Journal of Social Work Education, 35*, 409–419.
- Harris, M. B., Nightengale, J., & Owen, N. (1995). Health care professionals' experiences, knowledge, and attitudes concerning homosexuality. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 2*, 91–107.
- Hodge, D. R. (2002). Does social work oppress evangelical Christians? A "new class" analysis of society and social work. *Social Work, 47*, 401–414.
- Hodge, D. R. (2005). Epistemological frameworks, homosexuality, and religion: How people of faith understand the intersection between homosexuality and religion. *Social Work, 50*, 207–218.



- Johnston, L. (2002). Conquering heterosexism: The gay and lesbian challenge to social education. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, 8*(1), 1–16.
- Kriegelstein, M. (2003). Heterosexism and social work: An ethical issue. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 8*, 75–91.
- Larocque, S. (2006). *Gay marriage: The story of a Canadian social revolution*. Toronto, Canada: James Lorimer.
- Liang, C. T. H., & Alimo, C. (2005). The impact of White heterosexual students' interactions on attitudes toward lesbian, gay and bisexual people: A longitudinal study. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(3), 237–250.
- Logan, J., & Kershaw, S. (1994). Heterosexism and social work education: The invisible challenge. *Social Work Education, 13*, 61–72.
- Logie, C., Bridge, T. J., & Bridge, P. D. (2007). Evaluating the phobias, attitudes, and cultural competence of master of social work students toward the LGBT populations. *Journal of Homosexuality, 53*, 201–221.
- Longres, J., & Fredriksen, K. I. (2000). Issues in the work with gay and lesbian clients. In P. Allen-Meares & C. Garvin (Eds.), *Handbook of social work direct practice* (pp. 477–498). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moon, D. (2004). *God, sex, & politics: Homosexuality and everyday theologies*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Morrow, D. F. (1996). Heterosexism: Hidden discrimination in social work education. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 5*, 1–16.
- Morrow, D. F., & Messinger, L. (2006). Sexual orientation and gender expression in social work practice: Working with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- National Association of Social Workers. (1999). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.naswdc.org/pubs/code/code.asp>
- O'Neill, B. J. (1995). Canadian social work education and same-sex sexual orientation. *Canadian Social Work Review, 12*(2), 59–74.
- Peterson, K. J. (1996). Developing the context: The impact of homophobia and heterosexism on the health care of gay and lesbian people. In K. J. Peterson (Ed.), *Health care for lesbians and gay men: Confronting homophobia and sexism* (pp. xix–xxii). New York, NY: Harrington Park.
- Phelan, S. (2001). *Sexual strangers: Gays, lesbians, and dilemmas of citizenship*. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- Raja, S., & Stokes, J. P. (1998). Assessing attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: The modern homophobia scale. *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity, 3*(2), 113–134.
- Smith, M. (2007). Framing same-sex marriage in Canada and the United States: Goodridge, Halpern and the national boundaries of political discourse. *Social Legal Studies, 16*(1), 5–26.
- Stainton, T., & Swift, K. (1996). "Difference" and social work curriculum. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue canadienne de service social, 13*(1), 75–87.
- Swank, E., & Raiz, L. (2008). Attitudes toward lesbians of practicing social workers and social work students. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work, 13*(2), 55–67.
- Thomas, D. M., & Torrey, B. B. (Eds.). (2008). *Canada and the United States: Differences that count*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press.

- Trotter, J., & Gilchrist, J. (1996). Assessing DipSW students: Anti-discriminatory practice in relation to lesbian and gay issues. *Social Work Education, 15*, 75–82.
- Van Voorhis, R., & Wagner, M. (2002). Among the missing: Content on lesbian and gay people in social work journals. *Social Work, 47*, 345–354.
- Woodford, M., & Bella, L. (2003). Are we ready to take a stand? Education about heterosexism —fostering anti-oppressive practice. In W. Shera (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on anti-oppressive practice* (pp. 413–430). Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Woodford, M. R., Newman, P. A., Brotman, S., & Ryan, B. (2010). Northern enlightenment: Legal recognition of same-sex marriage in Canada—Strengthening social work's advocacy efforts. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 22*(1/2), 191–209.

Accepted: 01/10

**Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen** is associate professor at the University of Washington. **Michael R. Woodford** is assistant professor, **Katherine P. Luke** is doctoral student, and **Lorraine Gutiérrez** is professor at the University of Michigan.

Address correspondence to Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen, University of Washington School of Social Work, 4101 15th Avenue NE, Seattle, WA 98105; e-mail: fredrikk@u.washington.edu.

Acknowledgments: This study was supported by funding from the School of Social Work, Rackham Graduate School, and the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at the University of Michigan.

We would like to recognize the important contributions that Katherine Luke made to this article. Dr. Luke died suddenly September 12, 2009, one month after receiving her PhD. Although she joined our research team as a student assistant, she was actively involved in developing our measures, conceptualizing the analysis, interpreting results, and writing this article. We deeply miss Dr. Luke, and her sudden death is a significant loss to our field and scholarship.