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Amplifying LGBTQ Voices in Social Work

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Amplifying LGBTQ Voices in Social Work Education and Practice

by

Carey A. Winkler

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

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Abstract

This banded dissertation is focused on amplifying LGBTQ voices in social work education and practice through an exploration of language, policies, standards, and practices used in social work education. Using a historical lens, feminist, queer, and critical theories were used to examine issues of power, voice, context, and social justice.

The first product is a conceptual paper that examines the history of the language used in social work education related to how we think and talk about diversity. This examination includes a critique of the use of the term *difference* and the *othering* impact it can have on LGBTQ individuals and communities, deeming LGBTQ people as inherently different, deviant, or abnormal based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression.

The second product is a historical content analysis examining the conversation at the Council on Social Work Education regarding LGBTQ related issues from 1980-2015. This analysis expands on the literature and highlights tensions as well as advocacy efforts related to a variety of issues, most notably a recurring debate regarding policies and ethical standards that polarized religious freedom and LGBTQ rights.

The third product is a presentation on product one, the conceptual paper exploring the language used to understand and talk about diversity in social work education over time. The presentation included the author's recommendation to remove the term *difference* from the social work education competency language in an effort to move away from a binary and dominate-subordinate language structure that can *other* people. The LGBTQ community served as an example group to illustrate the impact in practice.

This banded dissertation is aimed at amplifying LGBTQ voices through exploration and documentation of issues that impact LTBTQ people in social work education and practice. This

work provides several points of opportunity for curricular infusion related to social work education history, diversity, social justice, and ethics as well as opportunities for additional research that could further amplify LGBTQ voices in social work education and practice, such as conducting individual interviews and developing a case study.

Keywords: LGBTQ, social work education, diversity

Dedication/Acknowledgments

This work is dedicated to Helen Anne Heath.

Thank you to my parents, especially my dad, for pushing education.

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Amplifying LGBTQ Voices in Social Work Education and Practice

The public discourse related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) acknowledgment, visibility, and rights, has been contentious and mixed throughout history. However, the past few years have brought what might be considered a rapidly changing environment for the LGBTQ community. The June, 2015 United States Supreme Court ruling that all states must recognize same-sex marriage demonstrated a significant shift in social policy and human rights related to LGBTQ people in the United States (*Obergefell* v. *Hodges*, 2015). In May, 2016 the United States Department of Education and Department of Justice issued a letter outlining the Title IX compliance expectations in relation to transgender students stating that,

> The Departments treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of Title IX and its implementing regulations. This means that a school must not treat a transgender student differently from the way it treats other students of the same gender identity" (United States Department of Education & United States Department of Justice, 2016, p. 2).

These landmark events illustrate a shifting context for LGBTQ people in the United States.

However, recent events, both in the United States and beyond, have served as painful reminders of the work that we still have ahead to continue efforts to dismantle systemic sexism, cisgenderism, and heterosexism. The June 12, 2016 tragedy in Orlando, Florida claiming the lives of forty-nine people at a gay nightclub is an example of such a reminder (CNN, 2016). While we have seen remarkable progress in the acknowledgement, visibility, and rights of the LGBTQ community in the United States, there are still many people who and systems that continue the oppression, discrimination, and hatred of LGBTQ people through violence, limiting access and rights, and vilification. This tragic event served as a reminder of the need for

continued advocacy and support for the LGBTQ community. Social work educators are in a unique position to address these issues through scholarship, teaching, and an emphasis on the profession's ethical standards and value of social justice. This includes documenting and carving out a place for LGBTQ people in social work education's written history and giving voice to the perspectives and experiences of LGBTQ individuals and communities.

Parallel to public discourse has been social work education's discussion of LGBTQ topics including what is expected in terms of curricular requirements for accreditation, ethical responsibilities, competent practice standards, and scholarship related to practice with LGBTQ individuals and communities. This banded dissertation sheds light on some of these elements and serves to amplify LGBTQ voices and document the history of how issues related to LGBTQ individuals and communities have been addressed in social work education language, policies, and practices.

In order to maintain progress and momentum, we need to continuously monitor the ways in which we integrate and concretize a spirit of inclusivity and respect in our day-to-day interactions and operations. This requires an understanding of history and how it has informed our current social structures. Historical knowledge can serve as a springboard for creating and maintaining systems change. The social work profession and social workers are well poised to be leaders in all aspects of continued awareness, education, advocacy, and systems change that recognizes and uplifts LGBTQ individuals and communities. As a discipline that appreciates, and uses as a foundation, the understanding of the dynamic relationship between people and their environments, social work lends itself well to these efforts.

This banded dissertation was completed in the spirit of inquiry and service emphasizing social work's responsibility to give voice to and document the history of the LGBTQ community

in social work education and practice. This work underscores social work education's commitment to social justice and therefore, social justice and best practices for all because, as we know, in the wise words of the late Senator Paul Wellstone, "We all do better when we all do better" (Wellstone, 1999).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this banded dissertation includes three theoretical lenses informing inquiry and analysis. The principles and values of feminist, queer, and critical theory served as the conceptual frameworks for the three products of this banded dissertation. Different principles of feminist, queer, and critical theory were used at various times in each product. These theories theory share a focus on power differentials influencing social structures that privilege or limit access and opportunities for people. Applying feminist, queer, and critical theory lenses to these scholarly pursuits served the focus on social justice and the influence of power on discourse.

Feminist theory is a framework of concepts that focuses on understanding people, the environment, and the interactions between them based on an acknowledgment of gender inequality, power differentials, and systems of oppression (Langer & Lietz, 2014). A key concept of feminist theory is intersectionality. Intersectionality suggestions that multiple issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class all impact a person's identity and experiences and that the power structures related to these issues impact one's social opportunities (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Feminist theory also calls for an examination of patriarchy and its influence on language, discourse, knowledge, and ways of knowing. Feminist theory specifically supports this banded dissertation by informing analysis and understanding of gender-related power dynamics and a historical perspective on patriarchal society including the origins of *othering* as related to the

defining of women as a lesser version of men – women as the *other* being inferior, less valued, and secondary to men.

Voice and marginalization are additional key elements of feminist theory. Emphasizing voice and whose voices are represented in a field, discipline, or body of knowledge, feminist theory explores representation and participation of various perspectives. Gilligan (2007) defined voice as, "the ability, the means, and the right to express oneself, one's mind, and one's will" (Gilligan as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 635). Exclusion of certain groups' voices leads to marginalization. While Gilligan was speaking specifically to the voices, perspectives, and discourse in psychology, the concept is transferable to many subject matters, including social work education.

Queer theory, which is closely related to feminist theory, more specifically questions the social structures such as the gender binary, expectations related to gender roles and gender expression, and heteronormativity as power-based structures that perpetuate oppression and discrimination of those who do not identify with those structures (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory suggests that such social structures *other* (deem abnormal, deviant, and inherently different) those who do not fit within them (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory supports the focus on rigid and polarizing social structures that dictate gender identities, roles, and expressions as well as reinforce heteronormativity and cisgenderism. Queer theory served to expand on the concept of *othering* by considering how these structures *other* the LGBTQ community and perpetuate stereotypes of abnormality, deviance, and inherent difference.

Critical theory emphasizes the need to examine what happened and why it happened in order to explore the influence of context, participation and representation, and power (Budd, 2012). Critical theory challenges us analyze policies and practices that might inadvertently

perpetuate systems of oppression and discrimination (Budd, 2012). Critical theory stresses the awareness of how issues of power influence our social structures and life experiences (Langer & Lietz, 2014).

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

This banded dissertation consists of three components. The first is a conceptual paper titled, "Challenging the Language of *Difference* in Social Work Education Competencies." This paper examines the evolution of language related to how we think and talk about diversity in social work education and responds to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) current competency language. Drawing on feminist and queer theory, this author proposes that by eliminating the word *difference* in the diversity-related competency, social work education can, a) move away from binary language that informs a dominant-subordinate relational structure; and b) move away from *othering* or deeming individuals and groups as inherently different, deviant, or abnormal based on a particular aspect of identity. This change would guide social work education towards a more inclusive and equitable framework. The LGBTQ community serves as an example group to illustrate the impact on social work practice.

The second product is a historical content analysis exploring the question, "What was the conversation at the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) regarding LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015?" This qualitative study includes an analysis of archival records such as board and committee minutes, annual reports, educational policies and accreditation standards, and conference programs. Feminist, queer, and critical theory served as the conceptual frameworks for analysis including an emphasis on what happened and why it happened, potential issues of power, and who had a voice in the discussion. An interpretive approach to data analysis was used to provide one possible interpretation of the content; another researcher may end with a different

interpretation. Background on the public and professional perspectives of the time (1980-2015) will provide context for the discourse in social work education. This study provided greater depth and breadth to understanding the history of how LGBTQ issues have been addressed in social work education.

The third and final component of this banded dissertation is a presentation of the conceptual paper, "Challenging the Language of *Difference* in Social Work Education Competencies" at the CSWE Annual Program Meeting (APM) on October 20, 2017. This author's intention was to share her argument and engage participants in further dialogue. The paper argues for the elimination of the term *difference* but does not suggest new terminology. Rather, the recommendation is that the community of social work educators further grapple with this question and further explore the language used in educating students about diversity in social work practice. Engaging APM participants in this discussion served as a first step in this exploration.

Discussion

The focus of this banded dissertation is amplification of LGBTQ voices in social work education and practice. The primary way in which this was done was through historical exploration of social work education language, curriculum and education policies, and accreditation standards. The author used a broad umbrella to explore the ways in which social work education has talked about and addressed diversity and then took a more focused approach to explore the influence on LGBTQ identities. Similarly, a broad timespan was used to frame exploration of how the CSWE addressed LGBTQ related issues in social work education language, curriculum, education policies, and accreditation standards. Moving from the broad to

the specific provided the opportunity to consider context as well as the unique voices of LGBTQ individuals and groups within that changing context.

As is often stated, language is powerful. Social work education includes attention to language as it applies to a variety of elements such as identity, relationships, socially constructed systems, etc. For example, social work has attended to person-first or person-centered language as a way to reflect values of respect, self-determination, and empowerment in working with clients. Examination of the language related to how we think about and approach diversity in social work education illuminated the evolution of such language as well as the historical context that informed social work education and practice over time. Honing in on the social work education competency language related to diversity provided the opportunity to critically examine the potential impact of use of the term *difference*. In doing so, the question of "*difference* as compared to whom" was explored. This uncovered concerns related to *othering* and a framework that perpetuates binary language structures and dominant-subordinate relationships between social workers and those with whom they work. These concepts were explored by drawing on LGBTQ individuals and groups as an example population, thus highlighting the impact of language used in social work education on the LGBTQ community and amplifying the voices of LGBTQ individuals and groups.

The examination of this language through a presentation at a social work education conference highlighted the opportunity for further discussion about the evolution of diversity-related language in social work education, including the consideration of current needs for change. Attendees articulated a desire for additional conversation, awareness of a new perspective, agreement and disagreement with the author, and interest in further examining the impact the language of *difference* has on various identities and groups. The combination of the

conceptual paper and the presentation provided a dynamic experience that allowed for individual study and meaningful discussion with colleagues exemplifying the ideal for this type of scholarly work; it should not exist in a vacuum or remain an idea for just the author to consider but rather contribute to the conversation and knowledge development of the discipline.

The in-depth content analysis exploring the conversation at the CSWE regarding LGBTQ related issues over a 35-year time span brought to the forefront some significant historical situations and conversations within social work education. Tensions related to the inclusion of LGBTQ subject matter, policies and standards related to accreditation, and the rights of religious groups versus the rights of LGBTQ people existed throughout the first twenty years of the explored timeline. The CSWE was tasked with addressing these tensions in establishing policies related to curriculum and accreditation. This included receiving feedback from constituents who fell on both sides of the argument. On one side were those who advocated for anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation as a protected status in programs and institutions and who advocated for LGBTQ related curriculum mandates. On the other side were those who advocated for exclusion of sexual orientation as a protected status based on the rights of religious institutions to have policies that reflected their religious beliefs and practices and optional inclusion of LGBTQ related curriculum. The CSWE sought legal counsel at multiple points and was consistently given feedback that any potential court cases that arose regarding this conflict would be expensive and have a dim outlook for the CSWE. The CSWE was faced with the ethical dilemma of adopting pro-LGBTQ related policies and standards or risking the financial stability and sustainability of the organization.

This study illuminated a challenging history and highlighted a conflict that has persisted in social work education, as well as in the profession and society as a whole. As the leading

organization in social work education, the CSWE had to grapple with the perspectives of multiple stakeholders (including a campaign organized by faculty and aimed at changing the accreditation standards), consider the mission and values of the profession, and consider the role of educational policies and accreditation standards in addressing LGBTQ-related issues. The tensions explored in this study exemplify the importance of reflection and continuous evaluation of alignment with professional mission and values, even within social work education; social work is not immune to the debates and conflicts that unfold in the greater public arena.

Implications for Social Work Education

This banded dissertation is focused on amplifying LGBTQ voices in social work education and practice. By drawing on the language and history of social work education, the experiences of LGBTQ individuals, groups, and topics has been highlighted to demonstrate challenges, conflicts, successes, and progress made over time in creating space, visibility, and voice within the context of social work education. Social work educators can draw upon this historical back-drop to inform current and future policies, standards, and practices. Continued analysis of language used to talk about diversity, policies and standards that impact marginalized and oppressed groups, and who is a part of establishing these narratives and practices aligns with the professional value of social justice. These efforts can serve to increase consideration, visibility, and representation of LGBTQ individuals and groups in social work education and practice.

Social work education emphasizes the importance of history. In fact, the first competency outlined in the CSWE's 2015 Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) articulates the expectation that "Social workers understand the profession's history, its mission, and the roles and responsibilities of the profession" (Council on Social Work Education

[CSWE], 2015b, p. 7). This includes an understanding of the language, policies, and standards that have framed social work education and consequently, emerging social work practitioners, including the language, policies, and standards that impact the visibility and/or marginalization of LGBTQ individuals and groups. This concept is further articulated in the competency language in the 2015 EPAS, which states that "social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power" (CSWE, 2015b, p. 7). The products that make up this banded dissertation illustrate a historical perspective on the ways in which LGBTQ issues have been addressed at the CSWE as well as the language used to talk about and teach diversity in social work education that may negatively impact LGBTQ individuals and groups. As social worker educators are called to teach students to develop competency in understanding diversity, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, and its impact on identity development, we can look internally to illustrate problem-solving, ethical dilemmas, advocacy strategies, and to work for social justice.

Implications for Future Research

This banded dissertation offers multiple implications for future research. Further research regarding the language used to examine the way we understand and talk about diversity in social work education could illuminate whether or not LGBTQ individuals, or other identity groups, have an *othering* experience when the term *difference* is used as a way to assess, understand, and describe a person's identity. The conceptual paper that is a part of this banded dissertation outlines an argument that suggests that the term *difference* is in itself an *othering* term that has negative implications for the relational dynamic that exists between a social worker and a client,

particularly when working with LGBTQ-identified individuals. Additional research that brings in the lived experience and perceptions of LGBTQ individuals and groups could clarify the need to reassess this language and engage in further dialogue as social work educators to determine whether or not it is the best term to use to prepare emerging social workers for practice with diverse communities.

The historical content analysis research included in this banded dissertation uncovered various opportunities for future research. Three opportunities stand out and cover a range of topics addressed in this research. First, an in-depth analysis of archival materials related to efforts to change non-discrimination policies in the CSWE's accreditation standards could serve in the development of a case study that would highlight multiple concepts and practice skills. Second, a thorough analysis of the Annual Program Meeting (APM) programs would provide a greater understanding of the representation, or lack thereof, of LGBTQ topics as compared to other topics over time. Finally, and perhaps timelier, an oral history project that would include interviews with social work educators who were involved in developing and/or opposing policies and standards, developing curriculum and resources, and advocating for LGBTQ rights would further amplify the voices and experiences of LGBTQ individuals and groups and serve to solidify their place in the written history of social work education.

This banded dissertation contributes to the documented history of LGBTQ-related issues is social work education including an examination of language, policies, and accreditation standards. The historical lens used throughout the three products serves to inform the continued growth and development of social work education with a particular emphasis on recognizing and representing LGBTQ individuals and groups.

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Challenging the Language of *Difference* in Social Work Education Competencies

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Abstract

This conceptual paper examines the evolution of language related to how we think about and approach diversity in social work education and responds to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) current competency language. The author argues that by eliminating the word *difference*, social work can move away from *othering* - deeming individuals and groups as inherently different, deviant, or abnormal based on a particular aspect of identity - and towards a more inclusive and equitable framework. The LGBTQ community serves as an example group to illustrate the impact on social work practice. As the CSWE continues adapting accreditation standards to meet the changing contexts of social work education and practice, this change will emphasize intersectionality, inclusivity, and equity.

Keywords: othering, difference, diversity, social work education, LGBTQ

Challenging the Language of *Difference* in Social Work Education Competencies

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) uses an outcome-based framework of *competencies* to articulate how students demonstrate ethical and competent social work practice. The language used in the CSWE accreditation standards has evolved over time and has reflected changing social and political contexts as well as the profession's commitment to diversity and cultural competency as outlined in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). This evolution demonstrates social work education's commitment to developing an inclusive and equitable language structure.

Social work education's current competency-based framework includes, "Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice" (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). The competency states that, "Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity," and that, "social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim" (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

While this language provides guidance for how to apply understanding and recognition of *difference*, it also begs the question of *difference* as compared to whom? Based on the framework, the implied response is *difference* from the social worker who embodies the competency. The use and prominence of the term *difference* lends itself to *othering* and a dominant perspective whereby the social worker's lens and experiences serve as the default/normal/typical ones – leaving the client to be the *other* or somehow deviant, deficient, or abnormal (Browne & Nash, 2010).

In this conceptual paper the author will examine how the current competency language of *difference* perpetuates power based oppressive social structures. Drawing on feminist and queer theory, the author argues that this language and structure perpetuates the power, privilege, and oppression that manifests in individual social worker-client relationships and between the profession and those who seek services. It is important to note that the author's worldview as a white queer woman may influence understanding and use of the term *difference*. In addition, while feminist theory provides a particular lens for considering the framework of this language, it too is primarily grounded in the worldview of white women.

Feminist theory is a framework of concepts that focuses on understanding people, the environment, and the interactions between them based on an acknowledgment of gender inequality, power differentials, and systems of oppression (Langer & Lietz, 2014). A key concept of feminist theory is intersectionality. Intersectionality suggests that multiple issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class impact a person's identity and experiences and that the power structures related to these issues impact one's social opportunities (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Feminist theory also calls for an examination of patriarchy and its influence on language, discourse, knowledge, and ways of knowing (Dominelli, 2002). Queer theory more specifically questions social structures such as the gender binary, expectations related to gender roles and gender expression, and heteronormativity as power-based structures that perpetuate oppression and discrimination of those who do not identify with those structures (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory suggests that these social structures *other* (deem abnormal, deviant, and inherently different) those who don't fit within them (Browne & Nash, 2010).

This article explores the language used to talk about and understand diversity in social work education to support the argument that the CSWE should eliminate the term *difference*

from its current accreditation standard competency regarding diversity. The use of the word *difference* creates a *binary language structure* of *othering*, positioning the social worker as the *non-other* and the client as the *other* (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011). Removing the word *difference* from the competency language is a step in the direction of continuing to evolve social work education's language to be a more inclusive and equitable structure that aligns with the profession's commitment to diversity and cultural competence. Removal of the word *difference* will dismantle a relational structure and language that perpetuates *othering* and will guide social workers to develop equitable and responsive relationships with clients. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community will be referenced to illustrate the impact on social work practice.

An argument could be made that the term *difference* has alternate meaning within the context of the competencies. For example, one could argue that it is not meant to draw a singular comparison between one attribute and another but rather to refer to a wide variety of differences between and amongst diverse groups of people. While the author agrees that this is a reasonable interpretation of the competency and may likely be what was intended, the problematic nature of this language still exists, particularly when considering that this framework is being used to educate those newest to social work practice. This positional lens in which clients are seen in relation to how they are different from the social worker is problematic in preparing emerging social workers to 'truly meet a client where they are at' in practice. The foundational language of "diversity" (CSWE, 2015, p. 7) allows for a more inclusive interpretation of the competency language as it has a broad definition that does not imply comparison of two things. Removal of the term *difference* eliminates the implication of the question of *difference* as compared to

whom? and allows for a transformed and expanded understanding of diversity and intersectionality.

The Problem with *Difference*

Two concepts will be used to illustrate the problematic nature of the term *difference*: (a) *binary language structure* and (b) *othering*. In addition, this article demonstrates three challenges that use of the term *difference* creates in educating social work students to respectfully and effectively engage with diverse communities in practice: (a) the social worker's perspective as the primary lens through which the client system is seen; (b) a dominant/subordinate, *non-other/other*, relationship as the model; and (c) perpetuation of systemic issues of power and oppression that exist within higher education, the social work profession, and society as a whole.

The binary language structure of difference. *Difference* is defined as, "the quality or state of being dissimilar or different," or, "an instance of being unlike or distinct in nature, form, or quality" (Difference, n.d.). Webb (2009) states that the language of *difference* immediately creates a *binary language structure* that reflects an either/or framework in which people relate to one another. Webb suggests that use of this either/or framework in social work is deficit-based due to the fact that one person (social worker) is in the position of defining the *difference*. This binary approach to identities and relationships leads to the formation of a dominant-subordinate relational structure in which the social worker is in the dominant position of defining *difference* (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011; Webb, 2009). Webb (2009) uses poverty as an example of an externally defined identity characteristic ("poor") that is typically not declared by individuals but rather by those around them and that is used to characterize the *difference* between them an someone who is not poor.

While Webb (2009) also suggests a moratorium on use of the term *diversity* in social work, this author disagrees. Webb (2009, p. 315) argues that both terms perpetuate a "binary conception of the world: dominated/non-dominated" and that focusing on and celebrating of differences can be divisive and have a siloing effect that separates people based on *difference* and keeps them in one position that is static and externally defined rather than pushing for more in-depth understanding. This author's conceptualization of the term diversity is distinct from *difference* in that it is a broad umbrella that covers all people through a lens of intersectionality and does not impose a binary structure in which someone is one thing or another but rather an unending configuration of self-identities.

Othering. *Othering* is defined as, "placing a person or a group outside and/or in opposition to what is considered to be the norm," and refers to, "the processes by which people are made to contrast sharply with 'us'" (Harris & White, 2014). Almeida (2013) further articulates *othering* as a process that reinforces a dominant and subordinate model of interaction. The concept of *othering* was developed by Simone de Beauvoir who analyzed, "how women are constructed by the patriarchal culture as not simply different from men but as negative, inferior, and abnormal in comparison with men" and that the frame then becomes that, "men are 'the One', beings in and of themselves," and, "women are 'the Other', being defined only in relation to men" (Harris & White, 2014). This concept and framing can be applied to multiple identity characteristics such as sexual orientation and gender identity in which the default perspective upholds heterosexual and cisgender as the norms of the dominant identities or groups. It is imperative that social workers recognize that this framing perpetuates systemic oppression within social work education and practice and work towards eliminating the dominant-subordinate relationship structure.

Historical Context

Familiarity with the history and evolution of the term and concept of diversity in social work education is useful in understanding how the current approach and use of the term *difference* developed and what to consider in continuing to adapt to changing contexts. The following includes a review of social work education's theoretical approaches to diversity since the 1950s.

Melting pot and awareness of cultural contexts. Kohli, Huber, and Faul (2010) describe social work's approach to diversity in the 1950s as a "melting pot" perspective. This approach emphasized assimilation, particularly from a European-American lens, in which *others* (immigrants and Native Americans) were expected to adapt to the dominant traditions, which were seen as the correct way of doing things (Kohli, Huber, & Faul, 2010, p. 254-255). The 1960s social and political contexts prompted significant change. The impact of the civil rights movement led to what Kohli et al. (2010) refer to as an "awareness of cultural contexts," meaning that clients' social and political contexts were considered in the process of assessment and intervention (p. 254-255). This awareness of context aligns well with social work's person-in-environment perspective and highlights the relationship that exists between people and their contexts.

Minority perspective. The social, political, and economic climate during the civil rights movement had a significant impact on the integration of diversity into social work education. The 1970s brought the "minority perspective" approach during which time the voices and experiences of women and people of color were acknowledged and integrated in to social work education (Kohli et al., 2010, p. 254-255). Students and faculty advocated for more curriculum and attention to affirmative action policies related to under- and un-represented groups (Van

Soest, 1995). By 1970, the CSWE had created the Commission on Minority Groups and the Commission on the Role and Status of Women in Social Work Education (Austin, 1986). The minority perspective garnered criticism and was seen by some as a patriarchal approach that was limiting in scope and perpetuated stereotypical understanding of diverse groups (Kohli et al., 2010). Despite these criticisms, inclusion of minority voices was an important step in the evolution of incorporating diversity content in social work education.

Multiculturalism. The 1980s brought about a substantial paradigm shift and a theoretical approach to diversity that remains today. Since the 1980s, social work education has relied heavily on a multicultural framework for talking and teaching about diversity (Kohli et al., 2010; Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011; Van Soest, 1995). A multicultural framework assumes that society accepts cultural pluralism (Harris & White, 2014). Outside of social work, there have been varying degrees of criticism of the multicultural approach to education, particularly during the more conservative political climate of the 1980s (Van Soest, 1995). Criticism within social work education has not been as blatant and has manifest as resistance or denial of an increasingly broad definition of diversity such as inclusion of LGBTQ identities (Van Soest, 1995).

Multiculturalism continued to serve as the foundational theoretical approach through the 1990s with an emphasis on what Kohli et al. (2010) refer to as "respect for differences" (p. 255). This perspective was highlighted by the use of the term "tolerance" which was seen as a perspective inherently fraught with privilege and a dominant-subordinate structure (Kohli et al., 2010, p. 255). In the 2000s, Kohli et al. (2010) suggest that social work education moved into an ethnocultural framework, which emphasizes a humanistic approach recognizing that all people have a cultural background and identity, that each person has a uniquely individual identity and personal narrative. These unique narratives are based on a constructionist worldview in which

"multiple truths and narratives exist" (Kohli et al., 2010, p. 266). Kohli et al. (2010) state that the ethnocultural framework specifically cautions against an "either/or" approach (binary structure, other/non-other).

Ploesser & Mecheril (2011) describe three primary approaches to *difference* in social work since the 1990s: 1) neglect of the other; 2) recognition of the other; and 3) deconstruction of the differences between the other and the non-other (p.794). The first, neglect of the other, reflects an indifferent approach to diversity in social work practice in which defining aspects of individual identities are ignored with the intention of treating all clients the same. This is in direct conflict with the value of providing individualized services that meet the needs at hand. Ploesser & Mecheril also state that this approach neglects to adequately address issues of power, privilege, and oppression that clients experience, particularly the systemic nature of racism, sexism, cisgenderism, classism, homophobia, etc. The second, recognition of the other, emphasizes the importance of identity but tends to perpetuate stereotypes and, "(re)produces differences and otherness" (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011, p. 798). The third, deconstruction of the differences between the *other* and the *non-other,* is grounded in a binary structure that pigeon-holes people into a *non-other* or *other* identity that manifests as a dominant-subordinate relationship (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011).

While multiculturalism remains as the foundational theoretical approach to diversity in social work education, some have argued that it falls short and does not adequately address issues of power, oppression, and domination (Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner, & Schmitz, 2008). For example, Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner, and Schmitz (2008) suggest use of a critical multicultural approach that combines multicultural and critical theory to serve three primary goals: 1) inclusion of the foundational elements of multicultural theory, including that society accepts

multiple diverse communities; 2) integration of critical theory, which would necessitate acknowledgment of issues of power, oppression, and domination; and 3) acknowledgment of intersectionality and the idea that people embody multiple identities (Sisneros et al., 2008). Sisneros et al. (2008) suggest that this combined approach would address issues of power, which is missing from multiculturalism.

Webster (2002) argues that social work education needs to make a more significant paradigm shift towards a "human-centric" approach. The human-centric perspective contrasts sharply with those emphasizing *difference* in that it focuses on commonality in the human experience and an assumption of the interconnectivity and interdependence of humans (Webster, 2002). Webster describes the process of identity development as an individual and as part of particular groups as leading to a constant state of differentiation and *othering* that understandably leads to discrimination. A solution to this discrimination would be to use an inclusive identity approach that allows for a more macro oriented response to what Webster refers to as, "problems confronting the human species" (p. 21). The CSWE accreditation standards, including the competency framework, set the tone and expectations for an inclusive framework that emphasizes a more humanistic approach.

Influence of professional standards on social work education. While the language and concept of cultural competence has been debated within social work education, it remains as a professional standard outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008). The NASW (2007) cites the ever-changing nature of our society as the primary motivator for the integration of the cultural competence model in social work suggesting that practitioners need to be able to meet an expanding, diverse range of clients. The NASW (2007, p. 7) states that such "changes alter and increase the diversity confronting social workers daily in their agencies" and that social workers

must be prepared to provide culturally competent services. As noted by Jani, Osteen, and Shipe (2016) the long-standing place and understanding of the cultural competency terminology is often used to established shared meaning and to highlight the appreciation and respect for diversity within social work education and practice. While there are efforts to explore new models, such as cultural humility or cultural responsiveness, cultural competence is widely accepted and understood as a way to talk about and assess practice skills (Jani, Osteen, & Shipe, 2016).

There have been critiques of the NASW Code of Ethics Cultural Competence model that are related to the finite terminology, but not the basic idea that social workers need to be able to work the collaboratively with someone of a different race or ethnicity. There are similarities between the challenges posed by the cultural competence language and framework in the NASW Code of Ethics and the language of *difference* in the social work education competencies. The following is a brief overview of how cultural competence has fit into social work education and the similar challenges posed in relation to an *othering* language structure.

Cultural Competence has been defined in numerous ways (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010). The NASW Code of Ethics articulates cultural competence standards by suggesting that social workers understand culture and its role in the lived experience, have knowledge of their clients' culture, be able to provide services that are culturally aligned, and promote policies and practices that demonstrate cultural competence (NASW, 2008). Critics of the cultural competence language and framework highlight four primary concerns:

- the emphasis on knowledge prior to engagement with a client (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010; Fisher-Borne, Cain & Martin, 2015; Johnson & Munch, 2009);
- the implication of sameness within groups (Johnson & Munch, 2009);

- incongruence between the idea of valuing all cultural beliefs and practices as guides to social work practice and the profession's values of self-determination and democracy (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Johnson & Munch, 2009);
- the implication that there is an end point, a point at which someone can say they are fully culturally competent, which also implies that culture is static (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010; Fisher-Borne et al., 2015; Johnson & Munch, 2009).

The primary concerns identified are important because of the relationship between the professional standards articulated in the NASW Code of Ethics and social work education. Use of the NASW Code of Ethics in ethical decision-making is included in the CSWE competencies (CSWE, 2015, p. 7). It is noteworthy that some of the critiques of the cultural competence framework reflect the challenges related to the use of the concept and language of *difference*. The debates related to this framework further exemplify the problematic nature of the current language of *difference* in the CSWE competencies.

The assumption that a social worker can obtain knowledge prior to engaging with a client inherently puts the client in the position of *other*. Acting from this assumption supports a dominant-subordinate relationship in which the practitioner assumes a degree of individual authority and competence prior to and/or rather than engaging with and learning from clients, and collaborating to develop a mutually-agreed upon plan of action (Johnson & Munch, 2009). Johnson and Munch (2009) also refer to the professional value of self-determination, which includes the right to self-identify versus being labeled by a practitioner based on a particular identity characteristic or assumed cultural identity.

Fisher-Borne, Cain, and Martin (2015) further examine the positioning of social workers within the cultural competency framework. They suggest that the framework is *othering* based

on an emphasis on the social worker's sense of self-awareness as it relates to knowing about and building comfort with those who are different from them. The idea that some element of *difference* would certainly create discomfort for a social worker reinforces and perpetuates a lens of *othering* in which the client is inherently abnormal, deviant, and less than the social worker.

Diversity in accreditation standards. Social work education today includes specific language, courses, and attention to diversity, privilege, power, oppression, discrimination, and social justice. This is reinforced by the CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). While diversity has had a place in the accreditation standards since the 1960s, the integration and language has evolved over time and reflects changes in societal context (Kohli et al., 2010; Van Soest, 1995).

Shortly after its formation in the 1950s, the CSWE identified a need for attention to issues of diversity, specifically in relation to racial and ethnic discrimination (Austin 1986; Kohli et al., 2010; Trolander, 1997; Van Soest, 1995). Attention was first given to concerns raised regarding the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body, faculty, and staff. By 1969, a standard was approved by the CSWE Board of Directors indicating that schools need to demonstrate efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity among their students, faculty, and staff (CSWE, 1969). By 1970, the CSWE created the Commission on Minority Groups that was charged with the development and enhancement of curricular materials (Austin, 1986).

The first set of standards for baccalaureate social work programs was announced in 1973 by the CSWE. These standards included specific language regarding diversity in accredited programs and the expectation that curriculum include content on the, "ethnic, racial and cultural groups in the configuration of American society, their commonalities and differences, and. the

complexity of the social problems generated thereby" (CSWE, 1973, p. 4). By 1988, the definition of diversity was further articulated in the CSWE accreditation standard which stated:

> The curriculum must provide content on ethnic minorities of color and women. It should include content on other special population groups relevant to the program's mission or location and, in particular, groups that have been consistently affected by social, economic, and legal bias or oppression. Such groups include, but are not limited to, those distinguished by age, religion, disablement, sexual orientation, and culture. (CSWE, 1988, p. 111)

By 1992, the CSWE standards mandated content on women, people of color, gay men and lesbian women (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997, p. 119). The standards also articulated that the curriculum attend to issues of oppression faced by these groups, continuing to strengthen the language connection between diversity and social justice (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997). The CSWE's 2001 EPAS continued to emphasize diversity as a necessary aspect of accredited program curricula. The 2001 EPAS mandates that programs include curriculum that addresses "diversity in and between groups," and content on "populations-at-risk, examining the factors that contribute to and constitute being at risk" (CSWE, 2001, p. 9). The evolution of the language used to talk about and understand diversity within the context of social work education reflects a larger societal context of an expanded definition of diversity that minimizes stereotyping and assumptions related to in-group sameness and an increasingly diverse population.

The CSWE 2008 EPAS, the first to incorporate the competency framework, highlighted the term *difference* in articulating the knowledge, values, and skills that students would need to become competent social workers. Core Competency 2.1.4 was titled, "Engage diversity and difference in practice," (CSWE, 2008, p. 4). The title of this competency remained in the 2015

EPAS with minor changes in the descriptive language. Competency 2 in the CSWE 2015 EPAS includes the following statements referencing *difference*:

- social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity;
- social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim; and
- social workers apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. (CSWE, 2015, p. 7)

The overarching competency language, "Engage diversity and difference in practice," and these statements that further describe how students must demonstrate skills in engaging diversity and *difference* in practice, beg the question *difference* as compared to whom? What is inferred is *difference* in comparison to an individual or a particular group and is often in relation to one particular aspect of identity such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation. The individual practitioner or group becomes the lens through which everyone (and every experience) is seen and understood. This *binary language structure* sets up the social worker-client relationship as one in which the social worker embodies the baseline identity characteristics and the client embodies a position of *difference* from that baseline (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011; Webb, 2009). Rohleder (2014) indicates that this leads to a process of *othering*, situating people outside what is considered normal and acceptable in society.

A Case in Point: LGBTQ Individuals and Communities

The history and impact of *othering* and use of a *binary language structure* cannot be underestimated in exploring the use of the concept and term *difference* in relation to LGBTQ individuals and communities. As a heteronormative society, in which heterosexuality has been institutionalized as the norm in our social constructs, anyone who does not define as heterosexual is *other*, someone who is seen as abnormal, deviant, and inherently different from what is socially expected and accepted (De Oliveira, Costa, & Nogueira, 2013). Similarly, our societal adherence to a *binary language structure* in which people are identified as male or female, man or woman, and masculine or feminine, normalizes cisgender and gender conforming identities (Kitzinger, 2005). This structure is *othering* to those who identify as transgender, gender queer, or gender non-conforming.

An additional historical perspective important in examining the approach to social work education and practice with the LGBTQ population is the history of pathologizing LGBTQ identities. Homosexuality was not removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) until 1973 (Drescher, 2015), and Gender Identity Disorder (GID) was only revised in the DSM-5, published in 2013, and is now referred to as Gender Dysphoria (Drescher, 2016). Gender Dysphoria diagnostic criteria emphasize the presence of stress related to incongruence between a person's assigned sex and their gender identity (van de Grift et al., 2016). This history informs a lens of *othering* and a *binary language structure* that perpetuates heteronormativity, homophobia, cisgenderism, discrimination, and oppression.

From *Othering* to a Transformed and Expanded Worldview

The language that is used in social work education is foundational to the development of social work professionals. This language serves as a point of understanding, shared meaning, and

a catalyst for action. As social work education continues to intentionally integrate the importance and impact of diversity in social work practice, careful attention must be paid to language. Feminist and queer theory illuminate the problems that use of the word *difference* poses in developing inclusive and equitable relationships in social work practice. Use of the term *difference* creates a *binary language structure* that leads to a process of *othering*. This structure and process foster a position of dominance and oppression for the social worker and in turn the profession. This is incongruent with the profession's values and commitment to work against systems of oppression.

The impact of *difference* as the point of reference manifests in a structure and perspective that contributes to homophobia, heteronormativity, and cisgenderism in social work practice with LGBTQ individuals and communities. This same phenomenon exists in considering various aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, familial status, and more. If the individual social worker's identity characteristic serves as the locus of typical, normal, and acceptable when considering *difference*, then those whose identity attributes do not align with the social workers are considered *other* and deemed inherently different, deviant, or abnormal. This positioning and perspective perpetuates systemic racism, classism, discrimination, and oppression.

This article is a call to action for social work education to deepen its engagement with and further evolve the language and terminology used to talk about diversity. Removing the word *difference* from the title and description of Competency 2 in the 2015 EPAS will serve as a concrete step towards a more inclusive and equitable framework. Removing the word *difference* will be a step towards mitigating the problem of positioning the social worker's perspective as the primary lens through which the client system is seen and understood and by eliminating a

structural dominant/subordinate, *non-other/other*, relationship model in the competency. These steps, alongside a renewed engagement by social work educators in evolving the social work language related to diversity, will serve to interrupt the perpetuation of systemic issues of power and oppression that exist within higher education, the social work profession, and society as a whole by infusing a transformed and expanded conceptualization of multi-faceted identities and the need to reach for deeper understanding versus categorizing and positioning.

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LGBTQ Voices at the Council on Social Work Education

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Abstract

This study is an examination of the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) conversation regarding LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015. The literature noted changes in accreditation standards, curriculum development, and controversies throughout the years. However, the details regarding how and why the CSWE pursued particular initiatives and developed certain policies and standards is missing from the literature. Using content analysis, the author sought to illuminate these details in an effort to amplify LGBTQ voices in social work education. The results pointed to the key role of LGBTQ and allied members in advocacy and curriculum development as well as a recurring debate regarding policies and ethical standards that polarized religious freedom and LGBTQ rights. Implications for teaching, policy, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: LGBTQ, social work education, accreditation standards

Introduction

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) rights movement has intensified in the United States over the past few decades. Public discourse related to LGBTQ acknowledgment, visibility, and rights has been contentious and mixed, with several significant developments in the past few years. For example, legal recognition of same-sex marriage and efforts towards more equitable treatment of transgender students, have brought what might be considered a rapidly changing and improving environment for the LGBTQ community (*Obergefell* v. *Hodges*, 2015; United States Department of Education [DOE] & United States Department of Justice [DOJ], 2016). Historically, social work has intersected with the LGBTQ rights movement in a variety of ways. Social work's mission and values have lent themselves to involvement in LGBTQ rights as a profession committed to advocating for the vulnerable and oppressed. The social work professional organization, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), has been at the forefront of advocating for the LGBTQ community and furthering societal progress by establishing and advocating for ethical standards and policy statements, offering public position statements on controversial issues, submitting amicus briefs, and supporting research and resource development focused on LGBTQ affirmative social work practice.

Parallel to the public and professional discourse, social work education has engaged in discussion of LGTBQ issues. This study examined the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), social work education's accrediting body, conversation about addressing LGBTQ issues in social work education from 1980-2015. Documenting history is a key aspect of giving voice to marginalized groups, and this study serves to amplify LGBTQ voices in social work education, specifically as those voices relate to the accrediting body. As the accrediting body,

CSWE has direct influence in informing social work educators and practitioners and the ways in which they approach controversial issues. This study has the potential to provide social work educators greater understanding of how LGBTQ issues have been addressed by CSWE. As CSWE is a membership organization, social work educators have both the right and responsibility to understand this history and monitor and evaluate the processes, policies, and procedures that influence social work programs across the country

The public and professional discourse provides context for situating this topic within social work education's larger environment. Social work scholars have explored a variety of avenues studying the presence of LGBTQ curricular content, student and faculty attitudes, and representation in journal articles (Humphreys, 1983; May, 2010; Scherrer & Woodford, 2013; Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). This has included a few mentions of situations that involved CSWE's approach to LGBTQ issues (Jones, 1996; Parr, 1996; Van Soest, 1996). However, less is known about the details related to policy changes, accreditation standards, who was involved in these discussions, and what the challenges were in the process. This study provides a clearer picture of what took place and who was involved or had a voice in CSWE's approach to LGBTQ issues in social work education from 1980-2015. Content analysis was used to systematically explore and interpret archival documents to identify themes, voice, and prevalence of topics.

Literature Review

While social work education operates with policies, procedures, and standards informed by the CSWE, it lives within the larger context of the social work profession and society as a whole. When considering the CSWE's approach to LGBTQ issues in social work education, it is important to understand these larger social and professional contexts as a frame of reference and comparison. The following literature review sets the stage for exploring CSWE's approach to

LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015 by first outlining the public and professional discourse, highlighting significant events that provide context for what was happening in social work education. Finally, literature related to LGBTQ issues in social work education will be noted as complimentary to the data analyzed for this study.

Public Discourse

The public discourse related to LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015 was active and often contentious. Public discourse fell along the spectrum of those in support of LGBTQ acknowledgment, visibility, and rights to those opposed. On one end of the spectrum the Human Rights Campaign Fund, now known as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), was founded in 1980. The HRC was one of the first political action groups focused on advancing the rights of the lesbians and gays (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2017). On the other end of the spectrum was the Moral Majority, founded in 1979 by Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell. The Moral Majority identified as a conservative religious organization at the time, and would evolve into an influential political group supporting the Republican party in the early 1980s and beyond (Williams, 2010). The Moral Majority focused on several socio-political topics, including same-sex marriage (Stokes & Schewe, 2016). While other groups fell at different places along the spectrum, these two organizations illustrate the extremes of public discourse that spanned the 1980-2015 time period in the United States. The discourse was value-laden, philosophical, and included debates about morality.

1980s. The 1980s included a build-up of momentum for those in favor of LGBTQ rights and a similar build-up in anti-LGBTQ rights movements. Advocates for LGBTQ rights worked to reverse state sodomy laws, gain domestic partnership benefits, and worked on landmark events such as the establishment of National Coming Out Day and a national march on

Washington for lesbian and gay rights, driven in part by the need for greater acknowledgment and funding for care for those with HIV/AIDS (Morrow & Messinger, 2006). At the same time, anti-LGBTQ rights groups worked to uphold state sodomy laws. In 1986, the Supreme Courth rejected efforts to overturn sodomy laws and lobbied to formally ban same-sex marriage, (*Bowers v. Hardwick,* 1986). The first AIDS cases were also reported in the early 1980s leading LGBTQ advocates to organize in support of those suffering and to educate communities on safe-sex practices (Morrow & Messinger, 2006).

1990s. Visibility of the LGBTQ community grew in the 1990s in a variety of ways. The Hate Crime Statistics Act was passed by congress in 1990 which led to increased public awareness of hate crimes perpetrated against the LGBTQ community such as the murders of Brandon Teena and Matthew Shephard (Cook-Daniels, 2008; Morrow & Messinger, 2006). The 1990s also saw codification and implementation of social policies that systematically supported discrimination and oppression of the LGBTQ community, such as the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* policy of 1993 and the *Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)* of 1996. The former barred openly LGBTQ people from serving in the military and the latter defined legal marriage as between one man and one woman, effectively handing states the right to legislate against same-sex marriages (Morrow & Messinger, 2006).

Marriage equality. During the 1990s the debate related to same-sex marriage became a significant aspect of the public discourse. In 1995 about 15 states had bans on same-sex marriage and by 1999 this grew to almost 40 states having bans (Pew Research Center, 2017). During this time, a few states worked on establishing benefits and protections to same-sex couples through domestic partnership and civil union laws, such as Hawaii and Vermont. This momentum towards federal policy changes regarding same-sex marriage and reversal of sodomy laws

continued into the 2000s. In 2003, the landmark case of *Lawrence v. Texas,* (1943) invalidated several states sodomy laws and made same-sex sexual activity legal in the United States. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruling that all states must recognize same-sex marriage demonstrated a significant shift in social policy and human rights related to LGBTQ people in the United States (*Obergefell* v. *Hodges*, 2015). Figure 1 illustrates a snapshot of LGBTQ issues in the public discourse from 1980-2015.

Professional Discourse

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) serves as the guiding voice of the profession. The NASW articulates professional values, ethics, and standards in a variety of ways including the *Code of Ethics* (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008) and multiple sets of standards for work with specific populations and/or with particular issues or contexts in mind. The NASW also publishes *Social Work Speaks*, which addresses specific issues in detail including policy statements and expectations for social workers. In addition, the NASW announces position statements, advocates for policy change, and serves as an expert voice in various proceedings. The NASW has been engaged in discourse related to LGBTQ issues in social work practice for many years. The NASW Board of Directors formed the Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Issues in 1979 (NASW, n.d.). The NASW has focused on several issues including bullying, hate crimes, reparative therapy, marriage equality, and international human rights for LGBTQ people. The timeline in Figure 2 illustrates a snapshot of the NASW's activities from 1980-2015.

Debate regarding the intersection of social work, religion, and LGBTQ issues. While NASW has been actively engaged in LGBTQ rights advocacy, an additional conversation has taken place within the profession regarding the tensions between some religious groups and

Figure 1

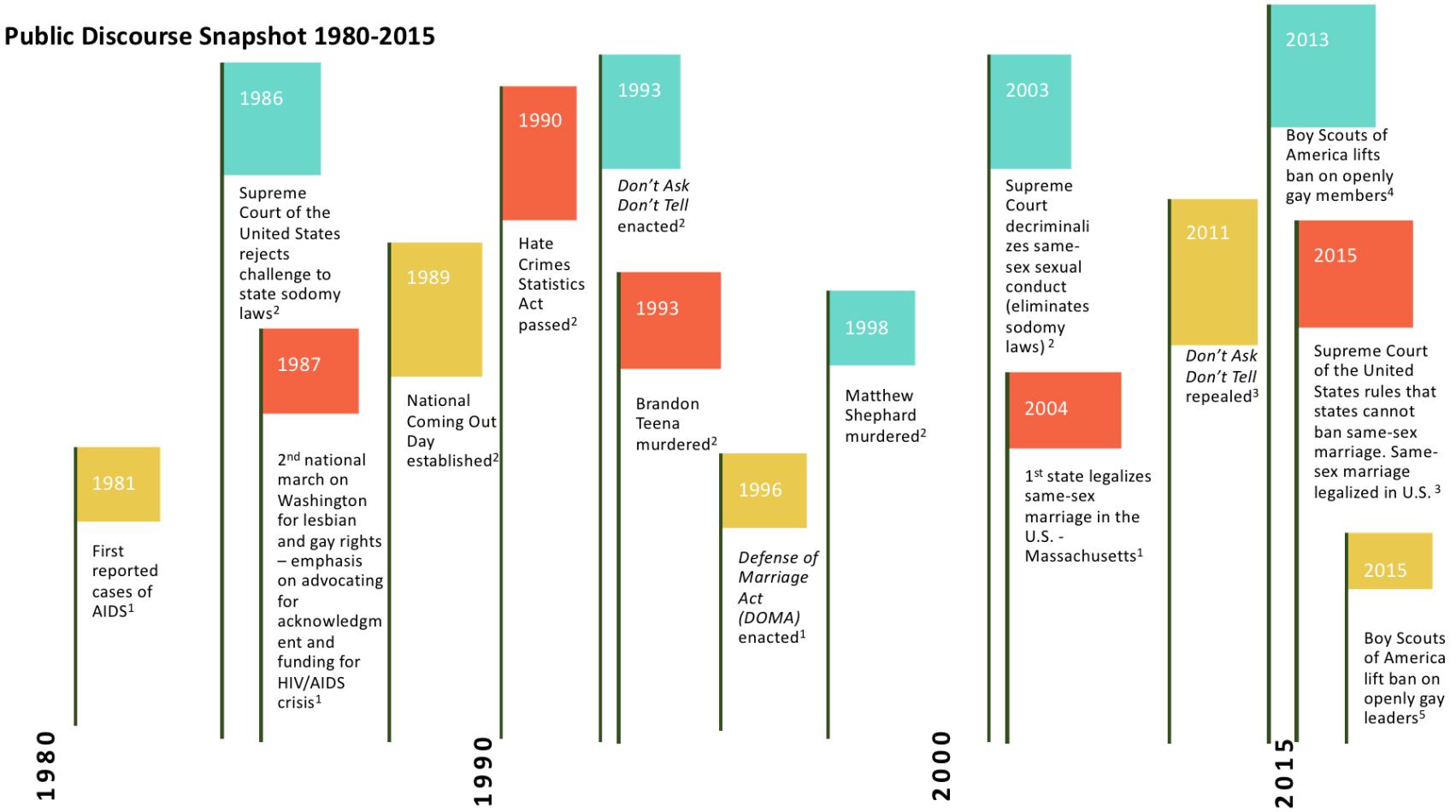

Figure 1

Morrow & Messinger, 2006[1]
Cook-Daniels, 2008[2]
Human Rights Campaign, 2015[3]
Human Rights Campaign, 2015[4]
Human Rights Campaign, 2015[5]

Figure 2

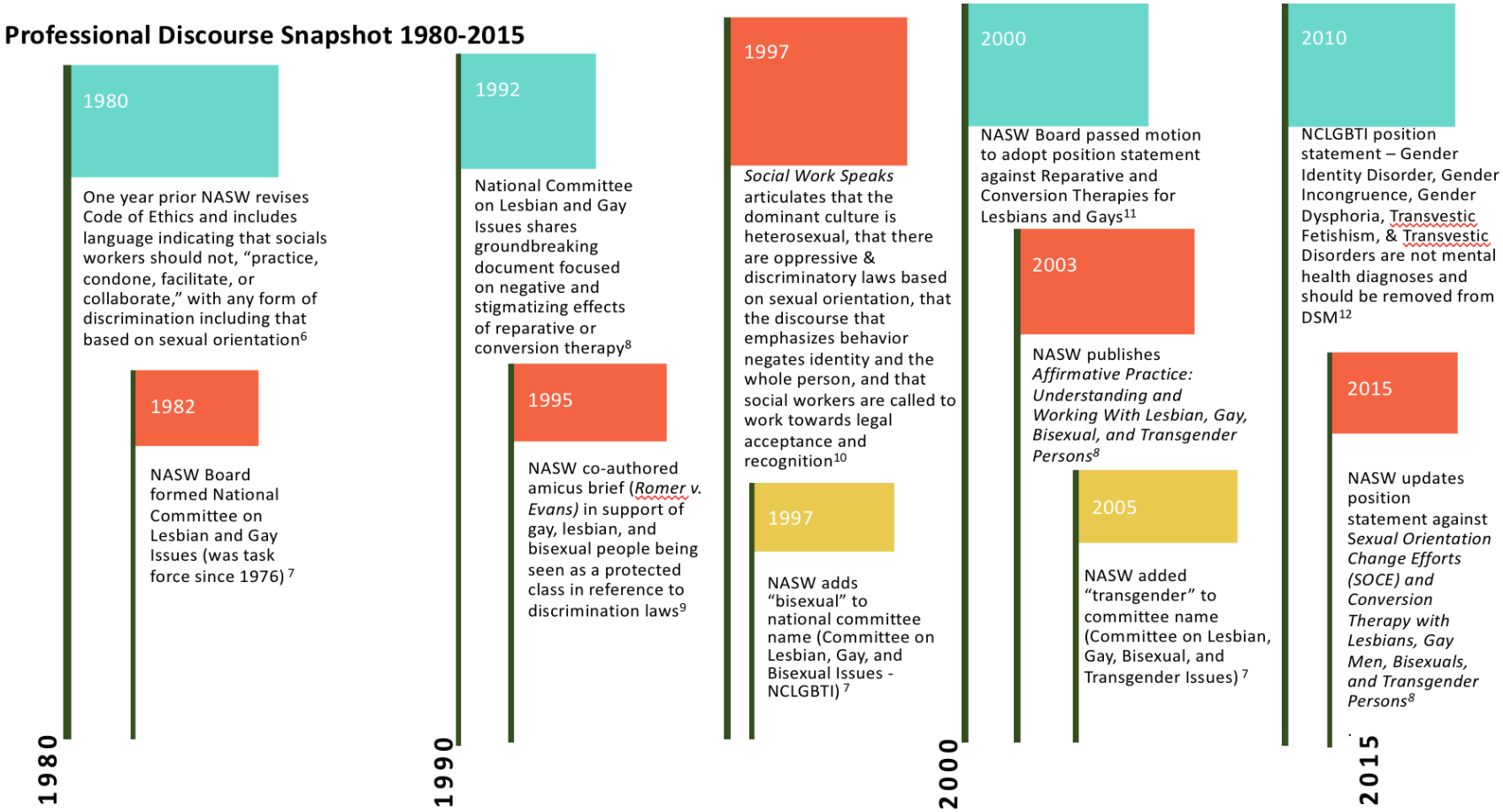

Figure 2

NASW, 1979[6]
NASW, 2017[7]
NASW NCLGBT, 2015[8]
APA, 1994[9]
NASW, 1997[10]
NASW, 2000[11]
NASW, 2010[12]

LGBTQ people. This debate has been taking place within the context of social work values, ethics, and practice standards. On one side of the debate, LGBTQ people and their allies have argued that advocacy for LGBTQ people is an inherent responsibility of the profession citing values and standards within the *NASW Code of Ethics*, which call on social workers to value inherent dignity and worth of all people, respect self-determination, advocate for and with oppressed populations, and work to change discriminatory and oppressive systems (Jimenez, 2006). On the other side of the argument, conservative religious groups have argued that they are being oppressed by not being able to practice their religious values by being required to support and advocate on behalf of LGBTQ people, who they deem immoral and/or discuss as accepting people but not necessarily their behavior (Hodge, 2005). The anti-LGBTQ groups also cite the *Code of Ethics* and the professional expectation to value religious diversity (Hodge, 2005). While others fall at various points between these two arguments, these perspectives represent the polarity of the debate.

Social Work Education

Curriculum Policy Statement/Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards. The CSWE dictates the policies and standards that accredited undergraduate and graduate social work programs must abide by to maintain their accredited status. Before 2001 these were referred to as Curriculum Policy Statements (CPS). Since 2001 they have been referred to as the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). The CPS and EPAS have historically included language and expectations regarding the inclusion of various aspects of diversity into the curriculum. LGBTQ subject matter has been couched in diversity in the CPS and EPAS.

The first time that lesbian and gay identities were reflected in CSWE's policy and standards was in the 1982 CPS which uses the term "special populations" to describe groups that

characterize diversity. This umbrella term included gays and lesbians. For the first time a CPS included encouragement of curricular content on issues affecting the gay and lesbian population, specifically, as an oppressed group. But content was not mandated. It was not until 1992 when the definition of diversity was broadened to include gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and other "at-risk" populations that curricular content regarding gays and lesbians was mandated for accreditation (Kohli, Huber, & Faul, 2010; Van Soest 1995). However, these efforts did not include bisexual or transgender identities.

The 1994 *Baccalaureate Evaluative Standards, Interpretive Guidelines, Curriculum Policy Statement, and Self-Study Guide* demonstrates further integration in that it specifically linked the institution and program nondiscrimination policies to the state and federal policies related to a variety of identity characteristics, including sexual orientation (CSWE, 1994b, p. 84). The 1994 standards related to curriculum also stated that programs must have content on the "difference and similarities in the experiences, needs, and beliefs of people," and that various population groups must be included, such as "groups distinguished by race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin" (CSWE, 1994b, p. 101). The use of the term sexual orientation, in contrast to the previous language of lesbian and gay, suggests a more inclusive stance and represents the first time in which bisexual identities were reflected in the policies and standards.

The 2008 EPAS demonstrated a significant shift in the articulation of standards through the introduction of the Core Competency and Practice Behavior framework (CSWE, 2008c). This outcome-based framework outlined skills and behaviors that students were expected to demonstrate competence in based on their engagement with social work education's explicit curriculum. Core Competency C.2.1.4 was titled, "Engage diversity and difference in practice"

and included sexual orientation as well as gender identity and expression in the definition of diversity (CSWE, 2008, p.4). This illustrates the first time that transgender identities are reflected in the policies and standards. The most recent EPAS published by the CSWE was released in 2015 and includes a similar competency structure. Competency 2 is now titled, "Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice" and continues to include sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (CSWE, 2015b, p.7).

Organizational structure. In 1982 the CSWE appointed a Gay/Lesbian Task Force to "examine the teaching of social work practice as it related to issues of sexual lifestyle" (Austin, 1986, p.42). Today, the CSWE has a commission structure focused on attention to diversity; the Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice (CDSEJ) is one of the groups continuously monitoring the position, language, and evolution of diversity-related accreditation standards. The charge of the CDSEJ includes the following statement, "The Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice shall promote in social work education inclusion, equity, social and economic justice, and the integration of knowledge of how the multiple aspects of human diversity intersect" (CSWE, 2010b). The CDSEJ includes the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE).

Controversy in Social Work Education

Much like the public and professional discourse, social work education has faced challenges in resolving the tensions between conservative religious and LGBTQ perspectives. The inclusion of sexual orientation in nondiscrimination policies and mandate of curriculum related to sexual orientation has served as a source of controversy and debate within social work education (Jones, 1996; Parr, 1996; Van Soest, 1995,1996). Some argued that social work programs within religious institutions should be allowed exemption from nondiscrimination

policies that included sexual orientation and inclusion of curricular content standards (Parr, 1996). Parr's (1996) argument named these accreditation requirements as violations of self-determination, First Amendment rights, the professional *NASW Code of Ethics*, and the CSWE's commitment to a nonexclusive political agenda. Others suggested that the mandates were weak and allowed for inconsistent adherence to the policies. In particular, it was noted that because the mandates did not require host institutions abide by nondiscrimination policies, the social work programs could still discriminate based on institutional practices (Jones, 1996; Van Soest, 1996). A theme of quiet or silence has been noted in public discourse and social work education that has influenced the profession's sense of ambivalence and overall perceptions and visibility of LGBTQ people (Newman, 1989; Van Soest, 1995,1996). Van Soest referred to the passive nature of the conversation in social work while Newman referenced society at large describing the lack of attention to LGBTQ issues as a, "conspiracy of silence" (Newman, 1989, p. 205).

Curriculum Content

Scholars have explored faculty knowledge, values, attitudes, and practices regarding LGBTQ curricular content (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Woodford, Luke, & Gutiérrez, 2011; Humphreys, 1983; May, 2010). While the CSWE may mandate inclusion of various topics, populations, and issues, there are not specific criteria outlining what specific aspects are to be covered or to what degree. At varying points in time studies have shown that faculty noted inadequate course content (Humphreys, 1983) and that faculty indicated that they thought course content on lesbians, gays, and bisexuals was important; content on transgender people was less important (Fredricksen- Goldsen, et al., 2011; Gutiérrez, Fredricksen, & Soifer, 1999). A 2010 study (May) went further and explored what types of content (content related to knowledge and/or attitudes) were included and whether there were any trends across faculty identity groups.

May (2010, p. 351) found a relationship between the inclusion of *knowledge* content on LGBT, African Americans, individuals with mental health disabilities, and individuals with physical disabilities. Similarly, those who reported teaching *attitude* content on the LGBT population also reported teaching *attitude* content on these same groups and content on women. While May (2010) suggests that this study indicates progress, he also states that, "change in the academic community is often slow," and that even though the CSWE mandated inclusion of LGBTQ content several years ago, it has taken a long time to see it integrated into curricula.

Few studies have explored how the attitudes about LGBTQ people have influenced faculty coverage of content in their courses (Fredriksen-Goldsen, et al., 2011; Gutiérrez, et al., 1999; May, 2010). A study conducted in 1992 indicated that despite a CSWE mandate, only about half of survey respondents indicated that curriculum content on gays and lesbians or heterosexism and homophobia was very important (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999). Another study showed that faculty who reported less homophobia were more likely to have course content on homosexuality (May, 2010), and that faculty reported that learning, "tolerance of homosexuality" or about the LGBTQ populations in general was more important than learning about experiences of oppression or advocacy for LGBTQ groups (Fredricksen-Goldsen, et al., 2011; May, 2010). These studies suggest that faculty comfort, knowledge, and skill to teach LGBTQ content is critical to educating competent practitioners (Fredricksen-Goldsen, et al., 2011; Gutiérrez, et al., 1999; May, 2010). Similarly, few studies have explored student levels of comfort in working with LGBTQ individuals. Newman (1989) cited Davis and Smith's 1984 General Social Survey and suggested that with 73% of adults believing that same-sex sexual activity is wrong, chances were that social work students also had a negative perspective. A later study found that while

students lean towards a sense of comfort, 14-37% of students indicated a preference for social distance from LGBTQ individuals (Swank & Raiz, 2007).

Scholarship Content

An important resource for faculty in developing curriculum related to any content area is the scholarship, research, and writing found in the academic and professional journals. If there is a gap in the literature, social work faculty have fewer resources to draw on in including LGBTQ subject matter in their courses, thereby effectively preparing students for practice with LGBTQ communities. There have been two studies that cover large spans of time that illustrate the inclusion of LGBTQ subject matter in popular social work publications.

Van Voorhis and Wagner (2001) conducted an analysis of twelve social work journals published during 1988-1997. This analysis included a review of the number of articles and books published that were related to lesbians, gay men, and issues related to homosexuality. Van Voorhis and Wagner suggest that these publications influenced what topics are addressed in social work. Given social work's commitment to diversity and social justice, they wanted to know whether these values were reflected in the literature related to the topic of homosexuality (Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). Van Voorhis and Wagner found that in the 10-year period, 3.2% of the publications across the twelve journals related to homosexuality. The *Journal of Social Work Education* was included in the sample and was found to have 2.9%, or nine out of 310, publications related to homosexuality (Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). Van Voorhis and Wagner suggested that this was a low representation of content given the larger societal context related to lesbian and gay issues stating that it was "a much smaller amount of coverage… than would reasonably be expected" (p. 156).

Scherrer and Woodford (2013) built on the work of Van Voorhis and Wagner (2001) conducting a similar study exploring the incorporation of LGBTQ content in six popular social work journals and analyzing the content of full-length articles published during 1998-2007. They included a broader language set than Van Voorhis and Wagner in identifying content. They used the terms bisexuality, gay, gender identity, gender expression, homosexual, homosexuality, lesbian, queer, same sex, sexual orientation, and transgender to search titles and article content (Scherrer & Woodford, 2013). Scherrer and Woodford found that 2.6% of the publications included LGBTQ content. *The Journal of Social Work Education* was not included in Scherrer and Woodford's sample so a specific comparison cannot be drawn. Scherrer and Woodford noted that the results suggested a decrease in LGBTQ content in comparison to what Van Voorhis and Wagner (2001) found several years earlier and that despite growing visibility of the LGBTQ community in broader society, "attention given to these topics in the selected mainstream social work journals remains marginalized" (Scherrer & Woodford, 2013, p. 429).

Overall, there is a dearth of literature related to development of the inclusion of LGBTQ subject matter in social work education. While a review of CPS and EPAS documents provides information on the inclusion of language in standards, it does not provide insight into the conversation at the CSWE in regards to determining, monitoring, and enforcing the standards. The literature illustrates a long-term and tension-filled process for social work education's inclusion of LGBTQ subject matter. There is a lack of representation of the CSWE's response to concerns regarding discrimination policies and adherence to curriculum content standards. This leads to a continued sense of ambivalence regarding the CSWE's commitment to the inclusion of LGBTQ subject matter and how it fits with a commitment to diversity and social justice. Additionally, the extent to which programs and faculty are in fact incorporating LGBTQ subject

matter is unclear. Questions remain as to whether or not it is included, what type of content is included, and the frequency of that content within the curriculum.

Methodology

Design

Sample. The sample of this qualitative study consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included but were not limited to meeting minutes and supporting documents, committee and board reports, policies and standards, and conference programs. The sample included documents spanning the years 1980-2015 from the following groups:

- CSWE Board of Directors minutes, reports, and supporting documents
- Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice minutes and reports
- Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE) minutes and reports
- CSWE Annual Program Meeting (APM) conference programs
- Curriculum Policy Statements (CPS)/Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS)
- Task Force of Gay and Lesbian Issues minutes and reports
- Commission on the Status of Women minutes and reports
- Commission on Accreditation minutes and reports

Method. The method used for this qualitative study was content analysis of primary sources to explore the question, *what was the conversation at the CSWE regarding LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015*? Content analysis allowed for a systematic examination of the CSWE-related documents in search of patterns, themes, and meaning (Berg, 2007). These were measured by the presence and nature of dialogue and discourse related to LGBTQ issues found in meeting minutes, committee and board reports, policies and standards, and conference programs. This research employed an interpretive approach to content analysis. The interpretive approach to content analysis highlights the post-positivist and subjective nature of analysis as it is interpreted by the researcher. The researcher served as the tool for analysis and is therefore

articulating one possible narrative of the analysis; another researcher may produce a different narrative ascribing different meaning to the text (Bhattacharya, 2012).

Data Collection

Procedures. Data collection began with a request to the archivist at the Social Welfare History Archives (SWHA) at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota to pull any materials from the identified sample groups from within the 1980-2015 timeframe. Once the documents were pulled by the archivist the researcher went to the reading room at the SWHA to review them. The qualitative data collected were identified by text within the sample documents that included, "homosexuality," "sexual orientation," "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "transgender," "gender identity," "homophobia," "queer," and "LGBTQ" (and variations such as "GLBT" and "LGBT"). Photos were taken of these sections of documents and organized by year and group. The researcher also downloaded any available documents from the CSWE website and was provided access to the personal collection of Dr. Barbara Shank who has been involved with the CSWE in various capacities since 1984 including membership on multiple committees and commissions, serving as a board member and officer, and who currently serves as chair of the CSWE Board of Directors.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included both qualitative and quantitative elements, representing the range of content analysis (Berg, 2007). The researcher established a systematic approach to the qualitative analysis using three primary steps: 1) chronological organization of the material based on group identity, 2) first reading and coding, and 3) second reading and coding. The qualitative analysis process was structured by organizing sources by year and group. The data was coded according to the nature of the discourse represented in the text. The researcher took a deductive

and thematic approach to the first step of analysis by coding the text into predetermined categories. The codes included, a) topic, b) tensions, 3) decisions made, and 4) consideration of voice. The data was coded a second time to capture any additional categories and themes that emerged from the first reading. The second coding allowed the researcher to compare between groups and across time periods providing a more complex analysis of the data (Kuckartz, 2013). The deductive approach to coding, using pre-determined main categories, aligns with the conceptual framework that served as a lens through which the data were viewed (Kuckartz, 2013). The researcher used different color highlighters to code the text according to the themes and took field notes in the margins to identify themes, questions, and connections to other texts (Kuckartz, 2013).

The quantitative analysis was used specifically in reference to the CSWE APM conference programs as a way to measure presence and prominence of LGBTQ-related presentations from 1980-2015. This analysis was conducted in one of two ways depending on the format of the program. The first approach was using the program index, which sorted presentations according to various topics and identified the page numbers that aligned with descriptions of the presentations. The researcher located each description and documented the title of the presentation. The second approach was a page-by-page review looking for LGBTQ-related presentation titles. This approach was employed only when the program did not include an index. Once all of the titles were documented in a spreadsheet according to the conference year, the researcher did a count of presentations per year.

Protection of Human Participants

Because the data were collected using primarily publically available documents, protection of human participants was not relevant to this study. However, it is worth noting that

one of the documents that the researcher received from the personal archives of a colleague did note that the document should not be cited without permission from the authors. The researcher reached out to one of the authors to seek and received permission to use that document as a data source.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. The strengths of this study included three primary elements: 1) the timespan explored, 2) access to primary documents, and 3) the cross-section of documents collected for analysis. The research question was explored via documents that covered a 35-year timespan, which allowed for examination over time and reflected a range of social and political contexts in United States (Berg, 2007). Access to primary documents via the SWHA and the personal collection of Dr. Barbara Shank served the researcher in delving deeper into the topic and expanding on available literature. Finally, use of documents that reflected various arms of the CSWE including formal committees, as well as individual members, allowed for a breadth and depth in exploring various perspectives.

Limitations. The primary limitation of this study lies in both the known and unknown incomplete story told by the data sources. Based on reference to particular documents that were not available to the researcher and discussions that were referenced but not specifically documented in the primary sources, it is evident that there may be more data to consider that could influence the findings. In addition, there is an unknown element in that there may be additional documents and undocumented experiences that were not referenced but that are important to telling the story of the CSWE's conversation related to LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015. As Berg (2007) notes, a significant weakness of content analysis is that the researcher

must rely on what is already documented. The experiences, perspectives, and voices that were not documented in the sample are therefore absent leaving the narrative incomplete.

Conceptual Framework

Feminist, queer, and critical theory served as conceptual frameworks for this study. Their roles were essential to data analysis in that key tenets of these theories served as the lens through which the data were analyzed, interpreted, and reported. Feminist theory is a framework of concepts that focuses on understanding people, the environment, and the interactions between them based on an acknowledgment of gender inequality, power differentials, and systems of oppression (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Feminist theory also calls for an examination of patriarchy and its influence on language, discourse, knowledge, and ways of knowing (Dominelli, 2002). Queer theory more specifically questions social structures such as the gender binary, expectations related to gender roles and gender expression, and heteronormativity as power-based structures that perpetuate oppression and discrimination of those who do not identify with those structures (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory suggests that these social structures *other* (deem abnormal, deviant, and inherently different) those who don't fit within them (Browne & Nash, 2010). Critical theory emphasizes the critique of both what has happened and why it happened with the goal of illuminating taken-for-granted aspects of how social values and constructs inform our actions and can perpetuate systems of oppression and discrimination (Budd, 2012). Critical theory stresses the awareness of how issues of power influence our social structures and life experiences (Langer & Lietz, 2014). This research study explored the voice(s) that guided the language, discourse, and standards in an analysis of how the CSWE approach LGBTQ issues in social work education. The conceptual framework informed the analysis process through coding, interpretation, and reporting.

Findings

The data collection process resulted in review of a combination of meeting minutes, annual reports, and supplemental documents from the CSWE House of Delegates, Board of Directors, Commissions, and Councils spanning the years 1981-2015. While none of the materials were consistently found for each year, there was some form of documentation reviewed for all years except 1982 and 1987. In addition, 30 of the possible 36 APM programs were reviewed spanning the years 1986-2015.

Coding was organized around four themes: 1) topic, 2) tensions, 3) decisions made, and 4) consideration of voice. There was significant overlap in these themes, and findings indicated a recurrence of themes over time. For these reasons, the findings are categorized into one of three overarching themes, which integrate the topics, tensions, decisions made, and consideration of voice found during data analysis. The three primary themes are, 1) organizational structure, 2) accreditation standards, and 3) presence and prevalence of LGBTQ issues at the APM conferences.

Organizational Structure

The work of the Gay/Lesbian Task Force, which would go through multiple structural and name changes from 1980-2015, including Commission on Gay/Lesbian Issues, the Commission on Gay Men and Lesbian Women, the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression, and the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression, represented the primary way in which LGBTQ voices were included in the work of the CSWE. This group attended to curriculum and faculty development, LGBTQ visibility in social work education, accreditation standards and curriculum policies, and other issues relevant to representing LGBTQ voices in social work education.

Curriculum development. The Gay/Lesbian Task Force reported on several projects related to curriculum development in the 1980s. While this work appears to have continued in later years, two publications in the 1980s illustrate the task force's attention to this matter. Sponsored by the CSWE, in 1983 the Gay/Lesbian Task Force published *An Annotated Bibliography of Lesbian & Gay Readings: 1st Edition* (CSWE Task Force on Lesbian and Gay Issues, 1983). This bibliography included references for 116 books, 199 articles, and 80 additional types of documents related to lesbian and gay issues. This was followed in 1984 by an *Annotated Filmography of Selected Films with Lesbian/Gay Content*, which included information on 74 education films from 1967-1983 and 29 feature length films from 1951-1983 (CSWE Commission on Gay/Lesbian Issues in Social Work Education, 1984). The group also presented regularly at the APM conferences providing resources for curriculum development and further integration of lesbian and gay issues into the curriculum.

Advocacy. The group, under its various names over the years, was involved in advocacy related to a variety of issues, including nondiscrimination policies and practices related to accreditation standards, sodomy laws, the use of inclusive language, and training of accreditation site visitors. In 1988, the Commission on Gay/Lesbian Issues (CGLI) presented a report to the CSWE House of Delegates expressing concern about APM conferences being held in states where there were sodomy laws (CSWE, 1988b). This report brought attention to the issue including suggested actions. In 1992, the CGLI hosted an open forum and teach-in, "regarding social work efforts to eradicate sodomy laws and add sexual orientation to non-discrimination and affirmative action policies" (CSWE, 1992a, p.1). In 1996, commissioners spoke to the National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD) regarding discrimination in schools of social work and served as political advisors to help refute Tennessee's sodomy law (CSWE,

1996a). In 2010, the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression (CSOGE) created a Task Force on Inclusive Language. This task force developed and advocated for the use of inclusive language on the CSWE membership form and in data collection efforts. These efforts increased the visibility of issues of identity, language, and self-identification. The inclusive language efforts expanded the terminology used in social work education to include gender identity as separate from sexual orientation and a variety of terms such as woman, man, intersex, transgender, genderqueer, Two-Spirit, lesbian gay, bisexual, and heterosexual (CSWE, 2010b).

LGBTQ visibility. The overall existence and work of the task force/commission/council contributed to LGBTQ visibility in social work education. Two projects illustrate the ways in which the group sought formally recognized LGBTQ visibility in social work education. First, in 2008, the Center for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice (CDSEJ), which was the umbrella under which the CSOGE fit, began consulting with Lambda Legal (CSWE, 2008a). This collaboration led to the development of two surveys, one for program directors and one for faculty, that explored how well social work programs prepare students to work with LGBT people and LGBT youth in out-of-home care. This brought visibility and data for social work education to use to address gaps in curricular content (CSWE, 2008a). Second, the CSOGE developed the Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression Research Award which was launched and awarded for the first time at the 2012 APM conference (CSWE, 2012b). This brought visibility as well as an emphasis on encouraging LGBTQ-related scholarship.

Accreditation Standards

Nondiscrimination policies and practices. There was a recurring theme regarding accreditation standards related to LGBTQ issues. This topic was prominent from 1981-1983, 1988, 1990-1993, 1996-1997, and 2000 (CSWE, 1981, 1983, 1988b, 1991a, 1992a, 1993a,

1997c, 2001b). This included issues related to nondiscrimination policies as well as curriculum content. The tensions related to nondiscrimination policies were polarizing. On one side of the debate were those who advocated for anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation as a protected status in programs and institutions. On the other side were those who advocated for exclusion of sexual orientation as a protected status based on the rights of religious institutions to have policies that reflected their religious beliefs and practices. The tensions related to curriculum were between those who advocated for mandated curriculum content vs. the option for curricular content on LGBTQ issues.

1981-1983. The March, 1981 Board of Directors minutes articulate the tension that existed regarding accreditation standards (CSWE, 1981). At this point in time, the attention was on the program policies, not the institutional policies. (Sexual orientation was excluded from the list of protected statuses in the accreditation standards for institutional nondiscrimination policies.) The minutes reflect a motion to accept accreditation standards proposed by the Commission on Accreditation (COA), which included the statement "The program shall be conducted without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, ethnic or nation origin, handicap, age, political orientation, sex or sexual orientation in any aspect whatever of program organization and implementation" (CSWE, 1981). It was proposed that the language go back to the COA "to come up with language which could offer a solution to protect the special populations and be also acceptable to those with religious objections to the standard as presently worded" (CSWE, 1981). The discussion centered on whether to include or exclude language regarding political and sexual orientation. The discussion began with review of a memo that stated:

> opinions on the subject had been obtained from the CSWE legal co[u]sultant specializing in accreditation and COPA [Council on Postsecondary Accreditation] official. Both emphasized the fact that the courts view accreditation as critical in the issues of quality of education but not as a vehicle for social change. If some religious based programs contested the Commission's judgment of non-compliance with the standard as presently stated, the courts might rule in their favor. Furthermore, although COPA is against proliferation of accrediting agencies in the same specialized area, it might consider a request for recognition as a separate accrediting body for programs under sectarian auspices, if they petitioned on the basis that their religious convictions prohibited them from participating in the CSWE because of such a standard. (CSWE, 1981)

The minutes reflect two opposing perspectives: 1) that the accreditation standards should mirror the "professional *Code of Ethics* which prohibits discrimination and values affirmative action," and social work education's value of "protecting the rights of all groups of persons against discrimination," and 2) that "the rights of all groups need to protected including the religious organizations" (CSWE, 1981).

> The concern was expressed that if a program of a university was denied accreditation on the issue of political or sexual orientation issues that the Council would almost certainly face long and expensive legal action. Social change problems of the world cannot be addressed in an accreditation document. It does not imply a negative stance to ask for time to secure other more appropriate language and get legal advice to help us deal with this complex and sensitive situation in a sounder fashion. (CSWE, 1981)

1988. In 1988 the CSWE drafted its strategic plan and sought input from the House of Delegates and constituency groups (CSWE, 1988b). At this time, the issue of nondiscrimination

policies was brought forward by the American Indian Constituency group who expressed that they were, "concerned with social justice and the progress made through Affirmative Action" (CSWE, 1988b). They went on to say that they supported the language in the social work *Code of Ethics* and that they considered, "any weakening of the CSWE Standards on Affirmative Action and Discrimination to be deleterious to all persons" (CSWE, 1988b). The group passed a resolution that the CSWE standard state, "ALL social work schools and programs MUST have stated Affirmative Action Procedures and a stated policy against discrimination based on color, creed, gender, ethnic or nation origin, handicap or age, political or sexual orientation" (CSWE, 1988b).

1990-1993. In 1990, the debate about nondiscrimination policies expanded to include institutional policies. As a result of the 1988 CPS, accreditation standards included sexual orientation as a protected status in required nondiscrimination policies for programs, but not for institutions hosting social work programs. In 1990, a campaign was organized by faculty at the University of Minnesota called the 7-11 Campaign, referencing standards seven and eleven of the CPS (University of Minnesota School of Social Work [U of M SSW], 1990). A group of faculty prepared a document titled, "An Ethics Crisis in Social Work Education: Discrimination Against Gay Men and Lesbian Women" (Abramson et al., 1990). This document specifically outlines the social work ethical standards that relate to nondiscrimination and poses the following concern regarding the 1988 accreditation standards:

> On the one hand, all standards regarding nondiscrimination at the level of social work programs include the profession's prohibition against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. On the other hand, sexual orientation is systematically deleted from all standards regarding the <u>institutions</u> within which social work programs exist. Gay men

> and lesbian women are the only minority group to be singled out in this way. The result is that the institutions hiring faculty, admitting students and approving programming may discriminate against individuals on the bases of their sexual orientation and still receive CSWE accreditation of their social work departments or programs. (Abramson et al., 1990, p. 2)

The document further outlines the connection between ethics and accreditation. Accreditation is, "a means of accountability in social work education," and accountability to "the profession and its *Code of Ethics* concerning discriminatory practices is a primary goal of this process" (Abramson et al., 1990). The authors then wonder "how the very organization entrusted with the responsibility for holding our educational institutions accountable has come to permit accreditation of programs in institutions that discriminate against gay men and lesbian women" (Abramson et al., 1990). They advocate for accreditation standards "consistent with our ethical standards," and that "the term 'sexual orientation' should appear in <u>all</u> nondiscrimination standards" (Abramson et al., 1990). The authors note that, "at least ten years have passed since our profession has prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation," and "it is now time that the profession bring external pressure for change through our granting of accreditation to social [work] schools and departments" (Abramson et al., 1990).

A newsletter outlines the 7-11 Campaign including concerns, campaign initiation, a sample resolution, and information on how to get involved, including who to contact and organizations that had endorsed the campaign (U of M SSW, 1990). This sample resolution includes several points of concern related to the issue of nondiscrimination in the accreditation standards including a direct statement suggesting that the standards are in violation of professional ethics. The sample resolution states, "Whereas the Council on Social Work

Education's Standards of Accreditation (Eligibility Standard 7 and Evaluative Standard 11) violate the intent of the National Association of Social Workers' *Code of Ethics* as approved in 1979 and effective as of July1, 1980" (UM SSW, 1990).

As noted in the Commission on Gay and Lesbian Issues (CGLI) 1990-1991 Annual Report to the CSWE Board of Directors, the standards were not changed. The report also indicates that the CGLI made a recommendation to the Board that the, "CSWE policy statements [serve] as a vehicle for change relative to issues of concern to lesbian women and gay men" (CSWE, 1991a). Rather than changing the standards related to nondiscrimination, the COA requested that the Commission on Educational Policy and Planning address the issue in the CPS. The Board liaison to the CGLI made the following motion, which was unanimously approved by the Board:

> Social work education programs must prepare practitioners capable of working effectively to end discrimination as it is experienced by lesbian and gay people. Therefore, the Board of Directors requests that the Commission on Educational Policy and Planning find constructive means to assure that inclusion of curriculum content on lesbian and gay people (in line with our profession's historical commitment to inclusive coverage of all vulnerable, high-risk and oppressed populations) be mandated by the new Curriculum Policy Statement. (CSWE, 1991a)

That same year, the COA annual report articulated what led to their decision not to change the accreditation standards.

> The Commission [COA] held meetings with the Commission on Gay Men and Lesbian Women, the Board of Directors, the Council's attorney, the Council on Postsecondary Accreditations (COPA), and with several other civil rights agencies and attorneys. The

> attorneys and civil rights groups advised against requiring colleges and universities to comply with such a provision as a requirement for accreditation. They unanimously were of the opinion that the Council would become involved in extensive litigation. Given the present climate of the courts, the Council would lose. Some of our members would object on the basis of religious beliefs. It was pointed out that there are no federal regulations in this area, and some institutions might have difficulty with their state legal systems. All agreed the Council would be on very uncertain ground, unless we deliberately decided we wanted to test the legal system and charter new ground.
>
> Accreditation standards must address issues of quality education, and not be construed to support or encourage "social movements." It would be up to the Council to prove that such a nondiscriminatory provision is essential to quality social work education. The Commission felt strongly that the curriculum should explicitly contain content on sexual differences. The Commission sent a letter to the Commission on Educational Policy urging that the curriculum require content expressly related to sexual differences. (CSWE, 1991a)

1996-1998. The conversation related to accreditation standards resurfaced again from 1996-1998 as the COA updated the accreditation standards. At this point the proposed accreditation standards related to nondiscrimination read, "the program must make specific continuous efforts to provide a learning context which is non-discriminatory and in which understanding and respect for diversity (including age, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation) are practiced" (CSWE, 1997a, p. 117). The concern was that this language weakened both the accreditation standards and the expectation

that accredited programs have nondiscriminatory policies and practices. Further concerns included exemption of religious institutions from nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation.

The COA sought feedback from individual and program members who responded in various ways such as attendance at an open meeting of the 1996 APM and letters of inquiry and opposition. In 1996, one university wrote a letter to social work education colleagues stating that they were "disappointed and outraged at CSWE's proposal," and they invited colleagues to join them in "opposing the adoption of the exemption to the nondiscrimination policy for religious, or other institutions" (University at Buffalo School of Social Work, 1996). Such communication took place both before and after the accreditation standard was approved. A representative of the CSWE's Commission on the Role and Status of Women wrote a letter in March, 1998 indicating that there was "significant and profound anger, disappointment and despair expressed," and that "in the minds of most of our members (and hundreds of other CSWE members as expressed at previous hearings on this matter), this action represented a clear and unmistakable step backwards for our profession's stance on social justice" (CSWE Commission on the Role and Status of Women [CRSW], 1998a). The letter ended with a request for further explanation and a summary of the rationale for the changes.

A response letter from the Chair of the COA and the Director of the Division of Standards and Accreditation written in July, 1998 responded and described that

> Much discussion ensued with the social work community, our recognition agency, civil rights organizations, our own attorneys, and "second opinion" attorneys, all of whom admonished us that the Commission on Accreditation, as an accrediting body, has a narrow focus, that of accrediting social work programs that meet minimum standards in social work education. The Commission, we were told time and time again, is not a

> "social action agency" and could not be seen as promoting one cause or another. We were more than strongly advised by our sister accrediting agencies and everyone we talked with, to be unequivocally clear about attending to curriculum matters related to social work education and not to social causes. We were further admonished that if the courts decided we had overstepped our boundaries, the Council on Social Work Education could lose its privilege to accredit or would have the accrediting process under the jurisdiction of the courts (as is the case presenting with the American Bar Association). (CRSW, 1998b)

Given this feedback, the COA opted to attach issues of sexual orientation to curriculum content requirements. The letter went on to say

> While many of our constituencies recognized the educational, legal, professional, and personal complexities in this issue, others wanted us to "go for it," refusing accreditation to all faith-based and other institutions who would not agree to include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policy statement, and if the Council loses, then we would have fought the good fight. The Commission felt obligated to recognize the tremendous stakes involved, as well as the fact that the by-laws of the Council bind the Commission on Accreditation to act in a manner that does not jeopardize the Council's privilege to accredit. (CRSW, 1998b)

The process leading up to the COA disseminating the draft for feedback to the general constituency included tension between the COA and the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men (CLWGM). In June of 1997, the CLWGM sent a letter to the Board of Directors expressing their dissatisfaction and requesting specific actions and procedures to be developed to facilitate communication between the COA and the CLWGM (CSWE, 1997c). The letter

outlined the frustration of the CLWGM because they were unable to review the draft of the proposal before its review by the general CSWE membership in a discussion at the 1996 APM. They further outlined their concerns noting a failure on the part of the COA to follow through on agreed communication.

> More pointedly was our concern on an issue having tremendous consequences for how social work education would respond nationally to the services needs of gays, lesbians, and other sexual minorities. The Commission on Gay Men and Lesbian Women met with the Chairperson and the Director of the Commission on Accreditation at the 1996 APM during which time an agreement between the two Commissions was reached. That agreement centered on developing mechanisms to improve communication between the two Commissions. Specifically, the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men requested the Commission on Accreditation to be more responsive in involving the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men on accreditation issues pertaining to sexual orientation. The agreement resulted in the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men establishing a liaison from its members to help improve communications between the two Commissions. The President and the Director of the Commission on Accreditation agreed to forward drafts of proposed revisions to the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men by way of its liaison. The Commission on Accreditation also agreed to consult with the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men on proposed revisions of relevant eligibility and evaluative standards prior to their dissemination to the general constituency. Moreover, the Commission on Accreditation agreed to allow for responses from the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men on revised eligibility guidelines and evaluative standards before the 1997 APM.

> The results of these agreements were nil on the part of the Commission on Accreditation. Once again it was not until the 1997 APM that the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men was able to get a copy of the proposed revisions to Standard 3.0 and a proposed preamble for insertion in the Handbook on Accreditation Standards and Procedures. The Commission on Accreditation did not consult with the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men before the release of the Proposed revisions to the social work education community at a general meeting. (CSWE, 1997c)

The CLWGM indicated that establishing actions and procedures for future communication between the two commissions was an important aspect of the CLWGM being able to carry out its charge related to the accreditation of social work programs.

2000. The debate regarding accreditation standards related to nondiscrimination policies and practices returned in 2000 as the COA prepared the 2001 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). A public draft provided in January 2001 included Accreditation Standard 6, which read, "The program does not discriminate against any person or group on the basis of age culture, class, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, national origin, race, religion and sexual orientation" (CSWE, 2001d). However, the final standard related to nondiscrimination in the 2001 EPAS read the same as in the previous set of standards, leaving room for exemptions for religious and other institutions to have discriminatory policies and practices (CSWE, 2001c).

After the 2001 EPAS was approved, the COA received a letter from the President of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) (CSWE, 2001a). The individual stated that he was

> pleased that the final version of the EPAS revised the wording in standard 6, taking out the most offensive part of the standard which has been the source of tensions between some of our member institutions and CSWE for a number of years. While this revision improved the working of the standard, the language that was approved is still subject to different interpretations. The ambiguity is most evident in the phrase in the second sentence that reads, "the program provides a learning context that is nondiscriminatory." (CSWE, 2001a)

The letter went on to note the place of religiously affiliated institutions in higher education and that sometimes such institutions have faith commitments and/or lifestyle expectations that faculty and students are asked to sign. The author pointed to the fact that there were about 45 member institutions at the time that were accredited. It was also noted that

> it would be helpful to be assured that the current wording will be interpreted in such a way that the rights of member institutions are preserved to hire faculty preferentially on the basis of faith as well as to have lifestyle expectations that are consistent with the religious beliefs of the denominations and the mission of the college. The CCCU and its member institutions are committed to the spirit of standard 6 which includes respect for and understanding of the entire diversity list included in the standards. We have a unique context which requires its own respect and understanding that I trust is kept in mind in the interpretation of the standards. (CSWE, 2001a)

The issue of accreditation standards related to nondiscrimination policies and practices was one of the most prominent and conflictual issues related to the conversation at the CSWE related to LGBTQ issues between 1980-2015.

Presence and Prevalence of LGBTQ Issues at APM

Examining the APM conference programs provided insight into the presence and prevalence of LGBTQ issues within the broader CSWE constituency. Thirty of a possible 36 programs published from 1980-2015 were analyzed. Table 1 provides a snapshot of how many LGBTQ-related presentations were at each conference alongside how many total presentations the conference hosted each year (CSWE, 1988a; 1989a, 1990, 1991b, 1992b, 1993b, 1994a, 1995, 1996b, 1997b, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008b, 2009, 2010a, 2011, 2012a, 2013, 2014, 2015a).

Table 1

Year	LGBTQ-Related Presentations	Total Conference Presentations	% of Overall	Year	LGBTQ-Related Presentations	Total Conference Presentations	% of Overall
1986	7	145	4.8	**2001**	9	201	4.5
1987	6	237	2.5	**2002**	9	194	4.6
1988	8	140	5.7	**2003**	11	210	5.2
1989	2	144	1.4	**2004**	20	290	6.9
1990	10	158	6.3	**2005**	21	749	2.8
1991	15	165	9.1	**2006**	7	394	1.8
1992	7	176	3.9	**2007**	15	555	2.7
1993	10	215	4.7	**2008**	26	604	4.3
1994	7	179	3.9	**2009**	27	663	4.1
1995	6	231	2.5	**2010**	11	533	1.9
1996	13	210	6.1	**2011**	31	495	6.3
1997	10	238	4.2	**2012**	28	600	4.7
1998	13	192	6.7	**2013**	29	557	5.2
1999	24	236	10	**2014**	31	664	4.7
2000	16	229	6.9	**2015**	43	796	5.4

Table 1 illustrates that over the course of thirty years, the average number of LGBTQ-related presentations at the CSWE APM was approximately 4.8% of the total number of presentations with a range of 1.4% in 1989 to 9.1% in 1991. The table also demonstrates that there has not been a trend of an increase in the percentage of LGBTQ-related presentations over

time. However, the number of LGBTQ-related presentations as generally increased over time alongside the increase of overall presentations at the CSWE APM.

These findings illustrate that the conversation at the CSWE regarding LGBTQ issues from 1980-2015 was dynamic and included both tensions and accomplishments. These findings suggest that there has been a history of ambivalence related to how CSWE has navigated LGBTQ issues and that some within CSWE, particularly those who served on the task force/commission/council, have been strong advocates for LGBTQ rights, visibility, and practice competence. These findings have implications for social work education, research, and practice.

Discussion

The data collected were extensive and included a variety of topics. The predetermined themes of the CSWE's a) organizational structure, b) accreditation standards, and c) presence and prevalence of LTBTQ issues at APM conferences provided a framework for organizing these topics. The CSWE's organizational structure included a consistent task force/commission/ council dedicated to addressing LGBTQ issues in social work education. This group served as the primary vehicle for bringing LGBTQ voices to the CSWE. This included curriculum and resource development, a variety of advocacy efforts, and formally recognized LGBTQ visibility within the CSWE. Examination of the accreditation standards and related discussion served as a prominent place in which the conversation regarding LGBTQ issues took place. The nondiscrimination policies within the accreditation standards were a focus of conversation, debate, and contention and highlighted the tensions among religious freedom and LGBTQ rights and the legal implications related to these tensions. Finally, examining the presence and prevalence of LGBTQ-related topics demonstrated that the LGBTQ-related topics were consistently less than 10% of the total presentations at each APM conference. These themes

illuminated specific and prominent elements of the conversation at the CSWE regarding LGBTQ-related issues.

Organizational Structure

Group identity. The CSWE's inclusion of a group focused on attending to LGBTQ issues was consistent from 1980-2015. This long-term commitment to the group impacted the representation of LGBTQ voices at the CSWE. However, a few subthemes emerged in relation to voice and formalized involvement. First, in 1981, the Gay and Lesbian Task Force made a formal request to the CSWE Board to become a commission in hopes of establishing a more long-term agenda (CSWE, 1981). The Board denied their request. In 1983, the Board extended the appointment of the Task Force to 1985 to allow for long-term planning but still did not formalize long-term involvement by changing the group to a standing commission (CSWE, 1984). However, in 1984 a new commission structure was introduced which included the Commission on Gay/Lesbian Issues (CSWE, 1985). It is also worth noting that this language shifted within the text as the group was sometimes referred to the Commission on Lesbian Women and Gay Men. While there was not reference in the materials to why this happened, a critical feminist perspective might suggest that there were efforts to attend to issues of power by naming women before men in the group title.

Second, only gay men and lesbian women were represented by the group title until 2002 when a new structure was implemented changing commissions to councils and at which point the group became the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression (CSWE, 2002-2003). This indicates a lack of representation and visibility for bisexual, transgender, and queer (in addition to intersex, gender-queer, Two-Spirit, gender non-conforming, etc.) identities at the CSWE. The affirmative action policy was first referenced in the 1989 strategic plan in which it

was stated that the policy aimed to “ensure that minority groups of color and women” were represented throughout the organization (CSWE, 1989b). This policy didn’t reflect LGTBQ identities. The lack of visibility and representation was also evident in affirmative action reports based on the CSWE by-laws which required that " a minimum of 50% of the board must be representatives of” underrepresented groups (including but not limited to: women, African Americans/Other Blacks; Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders; Chicano/Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, other Latino(a)/Hispanics; Native Americans/American Indians; persons with disabilities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons) (CSWE, 2004-2005). Reports thereafter consistently cited a lack of representation of transgender individuals with no representation in units until 2010 at which time two of 22 units reported a transgender member (CSWE, 2010c).

Curriculum development. The work of the task force/commission/council to develop curricular materials and resources included creation of an annotated bibliography and an annotated filmography. Additionally, the group offered multiple presentations at APM conferences and served as consultants to programs working to develop their own curriculum. This attention to curriculum development and consultation with programs highlighted the integral role that the group has played in integrating LGBTQ-related curriculum into social work education. This work does not appear to be well-represented in the social work education literature. Further examination is needed to explore whether or not these curriculum development initiatives are documented and/or archived.

Advocacy and visibility. The findings indicated that the task force/commission/council advocated in various ways within the CSWE. Efforts included keeping LGBTQ issues at the forefront of social work education, encouraging the CSWE to use inclusive language on its

membership forms and in collecting program data, and educating faculty about their concerns related to nondiscrimination policies and state sodomy laws. Through advocacy efforts, this group increased visibility of LGBTQ issues through projects such as collaboration with Lambda legal to conduct research exploring how well programs prepare students for work with LGBTQ populations and creating a research award highlighting LGBTQ-related scholarship that is given out annually at the APM conference.

Accreditation

Examination of the conversations related to accreditation standards, specifically nondiscrimination policies, over time revealed ongoing tensions within the CSWE and among its membership. These tensions surfaced at multiple points in the 1980-2015 timeframe that was explored (1981-1983, 1988, 1990-1993, 1996-1997, and 2000). Two themes emerged from the data related to these tensions. The first was a tension between religious freedom and LGBTQ rights. The second was the emphasis on legal perspectives in navigating these tensions. The literature pointed to this tension but offered very little information about the details and the specific nature of the legal concerns (Jones, 1996; Parr, 1996; Van Soest, 1996).

Religious freedom. As the CSWE worked on and revisited accreditation standards over the years, the standards related to nondiscrimination policies were a repeated concern. The standards consistently required programs to include sexual orientation as a protected status in the nondiscrimination policies but the same was not required of institutions. This became a point of contention. On one side of the debate were those who argued that sexual orientation should be a protected status and aligned with the idea of protection for those who experienced oppression and discrimination. On the other side were those who argued that religious institutions should be exempt from such a policy based on principles of religious freedom. An illustration of the level

of tension surrounding this debate was a campaign that was launched arguing that institutional nondiscrimination policies that excluded protection based on sexual orientation were in violation of the professional *Code of Ethics* and that programs in such institutions should not be accredited.

Legal perspectives. The findings demonstrated that legal implications related to accreditation standards were considered in 1981, 1990-1991, and 1998. The CSWE sought legal counsel during each of these time periods. Legal counsel suggested that the CSWE risked expensive legal fees if they were to be sued by a religious institution and that they would likely lose given the perspective of the courts at that time. In addition, legal counsel suggested that accreditation's purpose was to focus on the quality of education and not to spur social change. Legal counsel also cautioned that the CSWE could lose its position as an accrediting body if the courts decided it had gone beyond its scope and authority. The CSWE indicated it was obligated to heed this concern, as not doing so could have jeopardized their ability to accredit any social work program.

Presence and Prevalence of LGBTQ Issues at APM

Findings based on a review of presentations published in APM programs from 1986-2015 indicate a range from 1-10% of presentations focused on LGBTQ issues, with an average of about 4.8%. The presence and prevalence of other topics was not reviewed so as to have data with which to compare the LGBTQ-related topics. It is also worth noting that the highest percentage of LGBTQ-related presentations occurred in 1999 when the APM conference was located in San Francisco, a city known for being at the center of LGBTQ history. In addition, this same year the Commission on Gay Men and Lesbian Women was responsible for getting a rainbow sticker placed on the front of every APM program. It is difficult to determine whether or

not this representation is high or low. However, in reference to the work of Van Voorhis and Wagner (2001) and Scherrer and Woodford (2013) who examined the presence and prevalence of LGTBQ-related topics in journals, the average approximate percentage present from 1986-2015 in the APM programs was higher that what they found in the journals.

Feminist, Queer, and Critical Theory

The feminist, queer, and critical theoretical traditions have informed this research in considering the voices present in the conversation at the CSWE related to LGBTQ issues in social work education, issues of power in the decision-making processes, and a critical look at what decisions were made and why they were made. The task force/commission/council played a significant role in representing the voices of LGBTQ individuals and communities in social work education and at the CSWE. However, not all voices were always represented. Privilege, power, and visibility influenced not only the name of the group operating within the CSWE structure but the topics that were given attention and resources.

Implications for Teaching, Policy, and Research

These findings illustrate a rich and, at times, contentious history surrounding the conversation about LGBTQ issues at the CSWE from 1980-2015. Curricular inclusion of this history could enhance understanding of important issues that have arisen in social work education over time and how accreditation standards are developed and navigated with the CSWE membership. In relation to policy education and policy practice, this history serves as a possible case study for navigating organizational policy while working with multiple stakeholders, adhering to obligations related to governance, and working to maintain ethical values, standards, and practices. Further research into the 7-11 campaign (U of M SSW, 1990) could serve in the development of a thorough case study highlighting professional ethical

dilemmas, policy advocacy, and community organizing strategies. Additionally, a more detailed analysis of the APM programs could illustrate the prevalence of LGBTQ-related topics as compared to the prevalence of other topics. This would clarify the degree of presence that LGBTQ issues had within the larger context of social work education. Finally, additional data sources could enrich this research. Possible source materials could include diverse personal archives and interviewing social work educators who were involved in the conversation related to LGBTQ issues at the CSWE over time. These approaches could enhance this research by providing more depth, breadth, and perspectives.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. The strengths of this study include the length of time examined and the availability of archival materials. The examination of a 35-year timeframe provided the opportunity to observe changing social contexts, the evolution of language, and the re-emergence of issues over time. This illuminated both successes and challenges navigated throughout the CSWE's conversation regarding LGBTQ issues. The availability of archival materials that included relevant documentation from nearly every year examined supported a thorough data collection process. The additional availability of Dr. Barbara Shank's personal collection illuminated information that was not available in the Social Welfare History Archives. This gave depth to the analysis and opened up additional opportunities for inquiry.

Limitations. The primary limitations of this study were the inability to include materials missing from the archives and the fact that it is unknown what was missing. For example, in relation to the tensions between religious freedom and LGBTQ identities being a protected status in nondiscrimination policies several communications and documents were referenced but were unavailable. There was also very little documentation further outlining the religious institutions'

perspectives in the archives. While the basic argument is documented, the voice of that side of the debate was not well represented in the archival materials. If there are documents that further explore that perspective, it could provide greater depth to this line of research.

Conclusion

Amplifying LGBTQ voices in social work education requires documentation and examination of the history, particularly within the context of the accrediting body of social work education. The LGBTQ community has been historically marginalized and often sought ways to hide in order to survive. As a profession and discipline committed to social justice, empowerment, and recognition of the impact of history on individuals and communities, attention to capturing and documenting the history of the LGBTQ community should be a priority for social work education. This study offers one articulation of part of this history including some of the successes and challenges that have arisen over time.

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Presentation: Challenging the Language of *Difference* in Social Work Education Competencies

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of a presentation given at the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting (APM) in the fall of 2017. The presentation was based on a conceptual paper that examines the evolution of language related to how we think about and approach diversity in social work education and responds to the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) current competency language. The author argues that by eliminating the word *difference*, social work can move away from *othering* - deeming individuals and groups as inherently different, deviant, or abnormal based on a particular aspect of identity - and towards a more inclusive and equitable framework. The LGBTQ community serves as an example group to illustrate the impact on social work practice. As the CSWE continues adapting accreditation standards to meet the changing contexts of social work education and practice, this change will emphasize intersectionality, inclusivity, and equity.

Keywords: othering, difference, diversity, social work education, LGBTQ

Introduction

The presentation titled *Challenging the Language of Difference in Social Work Education Competencies* was accepted on May 5, 2017 for presentation at the Council on Social Work Education's *63rd Annual Program Meeting: Educating for the Social Work Grand Challenges* The presentation took place on October 20, 2017 in Dallas, Texas. This was a presentation of the paper written for product one of the author's banded dissertation. The presentation was guided by a PowerPoint slideshow (See Appendix A).

In its accreditation standards, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) uses an outcome-based framework of *competencies* to articulate how students demonstrate ethical and competent social work practice. The language used in the standards has evolved over time and has reflected changing social and political contexts as well as the profession's commitment to diversity and cultural competency as outlined in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). This evolution demonstrates social work education's commitment to developing an inclusive and equitable language structure.

Social work education's current competency-based framework includes, "Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice" (Council on Social Work Education, [CSWE], 2015, p. 7). The competency states that, "Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity," and that, "Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim" (CSWE, 2015, p. 7).

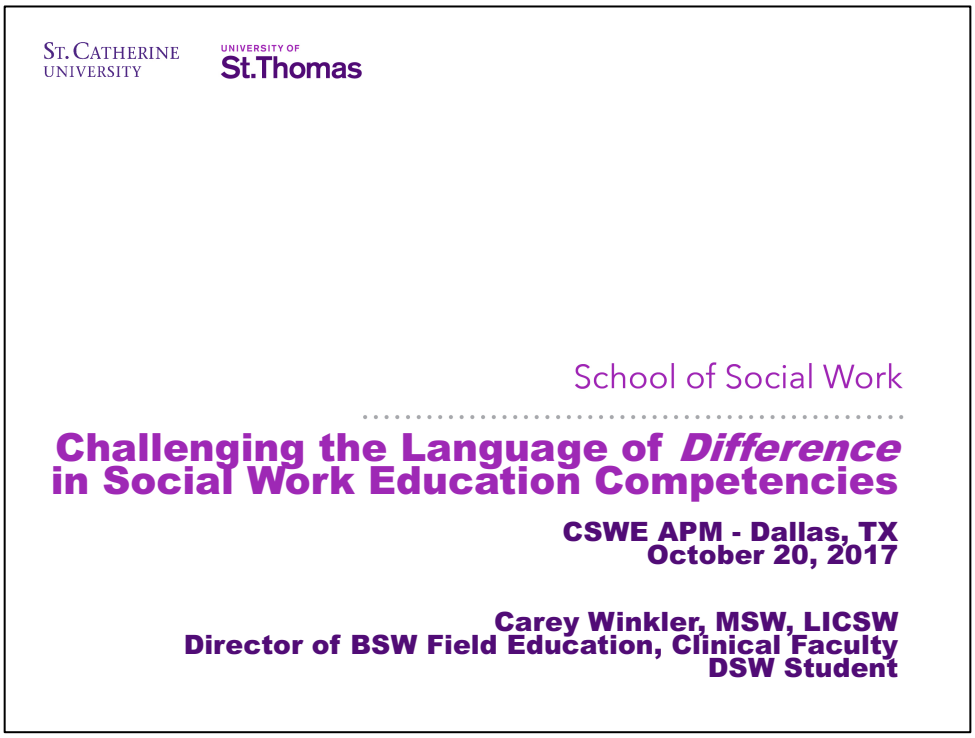
While this language provides guidance for how to apply understanding and recognition of *difference*, it also begs the question of *difference* as compared to whom? Based on the framework, the implied response is *difference* from the social worker who embodies the competency. The use and prominence of the term *difference* lends itself to *othering* and a dominant perspective whereby the social worker's lens and experience serve as the default/normal/typical one – leaving the client to be the *other* or somehow deviant, deficient, or abnormal.

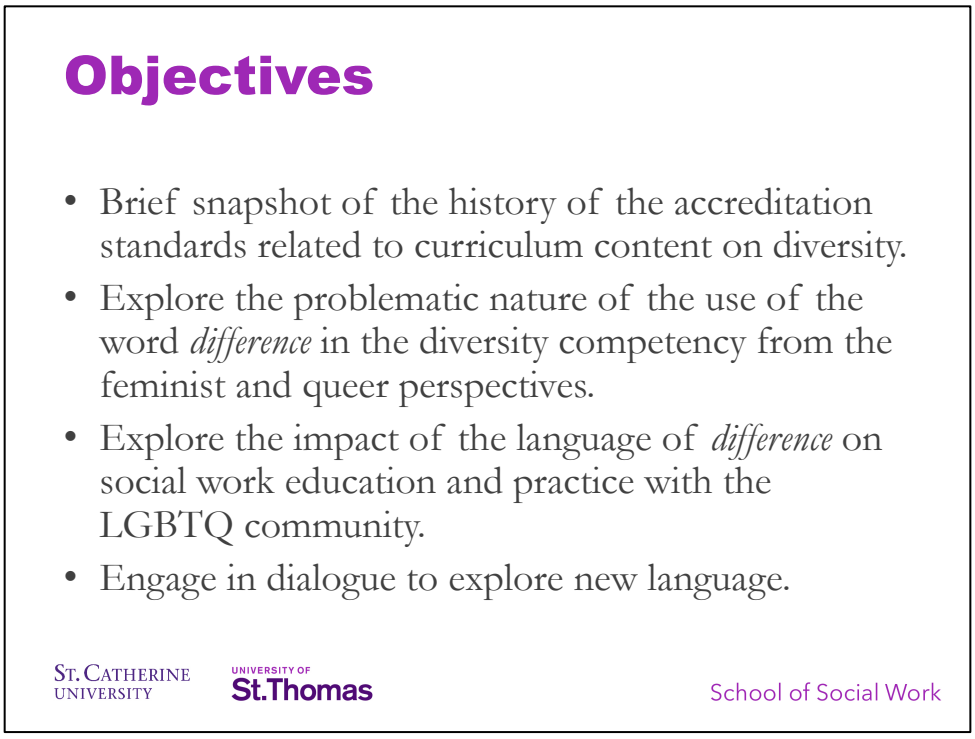
Drawing on feminist and queer theory, the presenter argues that this language and structure perpetuates the power, privilege, and oppression that manifests in individual social worker-client relationships and between the profession and those who seek services. Feminist theory is a framework of concepts that focuses on understanding people, the environment, and the interactions between them based on an acknowledgment of gender inequality, power differentials, and systems of oppression (Langer & Lietz, 2014). A key concept of feminist theory is intersectionality. Intersectionality suggests that multiple issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and class impact a person's identity and experiences and that the power structures related to these issues impact one's social opportunities (Langer & Lietz, 2014). Feminist theory also calls for an examination of patriarchy and its influence on language, discourse, knowledge, and ways of knowing (Dominelli, 2002). Queer theory more specifically questions social structures such as the gender binary, expectations related to gender roles and gender expression, and heteronormativity as power-based structures that perpetuate oppression and discrimination of those who do not identify with those structures (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory suggests that these social structures *other* (deem abnormal, deviant, and inherently different) those who do fit within these structures (Browne & Nash, 2010).

The use of the word *difference* creates a *binary language structure* of *othering*, positioning the social worker as the *non-other* and the client as the *other* (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011). Removing the word *difference* from the competency language is a step in the direction of continuing to evolve social work education's language to be a more inclusive and equitable structure that aligns with the profession's commitment to diversity and cultural competence. Removal of the word *difference* will dismantle a structure and language that perpetuates *othering* and will guide social workers to develop equitable and responsive relationships with clients. The LGBTQ community will be referenced to illustrate the impact on social work practice.

Appendix A

Presentation Slideshow





Diversity in Accreditation Standards

- CSWE founded in 1952
  - 1969 - schools need to demonstrate efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity among their students, faculty, and staff (CSWE, 1969)
  - 1970 - Commission on Minority Groups created and charged with the development and enhancement of curricular materials (Austin, 1986).

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Diversity in Accreditation Standards

- 1973 – 1st set of standards for BSW programs
  - Standard that curriculum include content on the, "ethnic, racial and cultural groups in the configuration of American society, their commonalities and differences, and the complexity of the social problems generated thereby" (CSWE, 1973, p. 4).

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Diversity in Accreditation Standards

- 1988– Definition of diversity is expanded
  - "The curriculum must provide content on ethnic minorities of color and women. It should include content on other special population groups relevant to the program's mission or location and, in particular, groups that have been consistently affected by social, economic, and legal bias or oppression. Such groups include, but are not limited to, those distinguished by age, religion, disablement, sexual orientation, and culture" (CSWE, 1988, p. 111).

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Diversity in Accreditation Standards

- **1992** - CSWE standards mandated content on women, people of color, gay men and lesbian women (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997, p. 119).
- **2001** - EPAS mandates that programs include curriculum that addresses "diversity in and between groups," and content on "populations-at-risk, examining the factors that contribute to and constitute being at risk" (CSWE, 2001, p. 9).
- **2008**- Move to competency & practice behavior framework
  - C2.1.4 Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

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Theoretical approaches informing social work

- 1950s - melting pot perspective (Kohli, Humber, and Faul, 2010)
  - Awareness of cultural contexts
  - Assimilation expected
- 1960s-70s – minority perspective (Kohli, Huber, and Faul, 2010)
  - Informed by civil rights
  - Voices of women and people of color included
- 1980s-present – multiculturalism (Harris & White, 2014, Kohli, Huber, & Faul, 2010; Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011; Sisneros, Stakeman, Joyner, & Schmitz, 2008, Van Soest, 1995)
  - Assumes societal acceptance of cultural pluralism
  - Respect of differences; tolerance

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Competency #2: Engage Diversity & Difference in Practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. The dimensions of diversity are understood as the **intersectionality of multiple factors** including but not limited to age, class, color, culture, disability and ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, immigration status, marital status, political ideology, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexual orientation, and tribal sovereign status. Social workers understand that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of **oppression and discrimination** and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power. Social workers:

- apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;
- present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and
- apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.

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Noting the Term Difference

- Competency #2: Engage Diversity & Difference in Practice
  - "Social workers understand how diversity and **difference** characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity"
  - "Social workers understand that, as a consequence of **difference**, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim"
  - "apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and **difference** in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels"

(CSWE, 2015, p. 7)

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My Argument

- The use of the term *difference*
  - Perpetuates power based oppressive social structures
  - Becomes problematic in operationalization
  - Is important when considering education new practitioners

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How is *difference* operationalized?

- Difference as compared to whom?
  - *Difference* as compared to the individual social worker/student who establishes the frame.

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Why is *difference* problematic?

- Binary language structure (Ploesser & Mecheril, 2011; Webb, 2009)
  - Either/or framework
  - Dominant/subordinate relational structure
    - The social worker/students is positioned to define difference
- *Othering* (Almeida, 2013; Harris & White, 2014)
  - Social worker's/student's perspective is primary lens through which client system is seen
    - Comparison made based on social worker/student definition in relation to themselves
  - Placing person or group outside the norm
  - *Other* seen as deviant, deficient, or abnormal

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LGBTQ Individuals & Communities as *Others*

- Heterosexuality has been institutionalized as norm in our social constructs
  - Those who are not heterosexual are *others* – often seen as abnormal, deviant, and inherently different from what is socially expected and accepted
- Societal adherence to binary language structure of female or male, woman or man
  - Normalizes cisgender and gender conforming identities – *others* those who identify as transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming.

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Alternate Interpretation

- Refer to a wide variety of differences between and amongst diverse groups of people.
- Language and operationalization remain problematic.

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What is the replacement language?

- Leaves a question – should the term be replaced? Do we need to find new language to talk about and teach diversity in social work education?

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Removing the term *difference*

- Mitigate the problem of positioning the social worker's perspective as the primary lens through which the client system is seen and understood
- Eliminate a structural dominant/subordinate, *non-other/other*, relationship model in the competency language
- Serve to interrupt the perpetuation of systemic issues of power and oppression that exist within higher education, the social work profession, and society as a whole
- Evolve our language and embrace a more inclusive and equitable framework

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Questions? Comments?

For a copy of the slides, please email:

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