Tolerance of heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice in generalist field education

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Abstract

Field education has an important role in professional education for social workers and provides an opportunity for students to engage diversity in practice, including sexual orientation and gender identity diversity. However, organizational settings differ in the extent to which they tolerate heterosexism and intend to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. This paper reports on a pilot study (N = 19) of students' experiences with heterosexism and gay-affirmative practice intentions in their field education settings. There was a relationship between heterosexism tolerance and generalist field placement students' LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions. Results also suggested that these social work students are sensitive to LGBTQ issues and have a willingness to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Implications for classroom and field education are explored.

Keywords: heterosexism; affirmative practice; field education; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities

Tolerance of heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice in generalist field education

Generalist field education plays an important role in undergraduate and graduate social work education. In its ideal form, field education is a period of professional mentoring in which social work students learn by working with an experienced social worker in a variety of health, school, community, and government organizations. Since 2008, social work education has moved to a competency-based approach to education. Competency-based education is defined as "the ability to integrate and apply social work knowledge, values, and skills to practice situations in a purposeful, intentional, and professional manner to promote human and community well-being" (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015, p. 6). The 2015 CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) further refine the approach to competency-based education by reflecting interrelated competencies and practices comprised of knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes.

Field education is viewed as the "signature pedagogy" of social work education whereby students are socialized to the profession by learning and practicing the principal components of social work in thinking and acting with ethical integrity (CSWE, 2015). By socializing the emerging practitioner into the profession, students are guided in applying knowledge and skills to make informed practice decisions and judgments and receive feedback through formal supervision (Larrison & Korr, 2013). Respect for human diversity and enhancement of quality of life are key principles included in the CSWE statement of purpose for social work (CSWE, 2015). Out of the nine required competencies in the 2015 EPAS, competency two specifically addresses diversity and difference in practice. It states:

> 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. (CSWE, 2015, p. 7)

However, in assessing field practice sites for student field placement assignments, it is unclear if all sites provide opportunities for students to engage all kinds of diversity, particularly sexual orientation diversity. This cross-sectional pilot study sought to examine generalist field education students' experiences with tolerance for heterosexism and the relationship between heterosexism tolerance and opportunities to engage in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)-affirmative practice.

Fortunately, the climate towards LGBTQ-affirmative practice in the helping professions shifted greatly during

the 20th century. Homosexuality was officially classified as a type of mental disorder in the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1952 by the American Psychiatric Association (Stein, 2001). Given the prevailing social mores, this classification was not controversial at the time. Prevailing science, which began to view sexual orientation identity as a normal variation of human behavior instead of a disease (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948), coupled with considerable pressure from the LGBTQ rights movement in the 1970s, led to the declassification of homosexuality in 1974 from the DSM (Eartman, 2001). Today, most mainstream professional organizations in social work, as well as other helping professions, acknowledge that LGBTQ identities are part of the normal spectrum of human experience and support LGBTQ-affirmative practice (American Counseling Association, 2009; American Psychological Association, 2008; CSWE, 2015; National Association of Social Workers, 2012). Public policy has also generally followed this trend. Laws in many jurisdictions in the United States within the last decade have changed to protect the rights of LGBTQ people, to include marriage, certain employment protections, and a growing number of other civil rights protections (Human Rights Campaign, 2014; United States Department of Labor, 2014; Wolfson, 2007).

Most empirical literature on attitudes towards LGBTQ people in social work education has also followed this trend. Though there are some social work students who have negative attitudes about LGBTQ people (Kulkin, Williams, Boykin, & Ahn, 2009), many social work students have adopted greater sensitivity to LGBTQ individuals and communities (Black, Oles, & Moore, 1998; Dentato, Craig, Messinger, Lloyd, & McInroy, 2014; Logie, Bridge, & Bridge, 2007; Swank & Raiz, 2010). An encouraging number of social work faculty teaches LGBTQ-sensitivity and/or affirmative practice within the classroom (Chonody & Smith, 2013; Einbinder, Fiechter, Sheridan, & Miller, 2012; Messinger, 2013; Rowntree, 2014; Woodford, Luke, Grogan-Kaylor, Fredriksen-Goldsen, & Gutierrez, 2012), a trend that suggests that social work educational settings are giving serious attention to the CSWE standard of engaging LGBTQ diversity in practice. Whether this trend is supported in generalist field education, however, is unclear as a current search of the empirical literature yields no results of generalist field students' experiences with heterosexism and the relationship to gay-affirmative practice intentions.

Method

Because little was known about generalist field education students' experiences with heterosexism and gay-affirmative practice intentions, a mixed-method study was used for the present study. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the investigators conducted a pilot study of students who were completing a generalist field placement in the College's undergraduate and graduate social work programs. The graduate program is a collaborative program between a private and public college in upstate New York.

Participants were recruited as a voluntary sample of convenience by sending three emails, once per month for three months, to the undergraduate and graduate listservs, inviting them to participate in an online survey about experiences of heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions within their field placement. All participants were invited to provide their email address for a random drawing for a nominal

incentive. A $10 gift card was awarded to one participant.

Students who provided consent to participate completed a questionnaire of demographic items, which included items about sexual orientation identity, gender identity, race and ethnicity, and highest educational degree. Additionally, participants completed items about their field placement setting, including primary client system served and field of practice. Participants were eligible for the study without regard to their own sexual orientation and gender identity, provided that they were currently completing a generalist field placement, either at the undergraduate or graduate level.

The primary quantitative survey measures for the study were Waldo's (1999) Organizational Tolerance for Heterosexism Inventory (OTHI), and Crisp's (2006) Gay Affirmative Practice Scale (GAP). OTHI uses four case vignettes in which the participants rate their perceptions of organizational tolerance of negative attitudes about LGBTQ people. The case scenarios measure how the participants perceive the organization would react if a supervisor or co-worker stated that LGBTQ people are "perverted," made heterosexist assumptions about marriage, or made statements suggesting that LGBTQ workers should remain closeted. For each of the vignettes, participants rated, using a five point Likert scale, perceived risk of complaints, likelihood that the complaint would be taken seriously, and consequences of the complaint for the perpetrator. GAP measures participants' beliefs about LGBTQ-affirmative practice and the participants' intentions to personally engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice, also using five point Likert scales. The OTHI and GAP instruments were chosen because the investigators believed they accurately captured the constructs of interest. OTHI and GAP also had high internal consistency (= 0.97 [OTHI] and = 0.95 [GAP belief domain] and = 0.94 [GAP behavior domain]) in the instrument development studies (Crisp, 2006; Waldo, 1999).

Investigator-developed qualitative questions were also in the survey. Participants were asked to provide two or three sentences of open-ended responses to several items. These items included: (1) Please describe the climate at your field placement in terms of inclusivity towards LGBTQ people; (2) In what ways do you demonstrate a respectful attitude for LGBTQ clients you might work with as a social work intern?; (3) How might you use field supervision to explore uncertainty about affirmative practice in your field setting?; (4) What approaches would you utilize to enhance your knowledge about issues that impact LGBTQ clients?; (5) How do you utilize the social work code of ethics when tensions arise in professional, personal, or agency values related to inclusive practice with LGBTQ clients?; and (6) What else do you think we should know about LGBTQ sensitivity at your field placement? Content of data from open-ended questions was analyzed for main themes, primarily to identify participants' perceptions about the climate towards heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions.

Results

A total of 23 students initially clicked on the survey; of those students, 19 (82.6%) completed the primary measures of the study. Participants were between 21 and 47 years old, with a mean age of 28.05 (SD = 8.17). Nearly all (n = 15, 78.9%) of the participants identified their racial background as white and non-Hispanic.

Seventeen (89.5%) participants identified their gender identity as female, and 16 participants (84.2%) identified their sexual orientation identity as straight.

A majority (n = 12, 63.2%) of participants was graduate students completing a first year generalist placement, with the remainder of students completing undergraduate generalist placements. On average, students had completed 17.9 weeks (SD = 7.11) in their current placement. Most (n =14, 73.7%) of the participants were completing their degrees on a full-time basis. Participants were completing their generalist placement in different settings, with adult settings (n = 10, 52.6%) and mental health settings (n = 9, 47.4%) as the most common practice settings. One participant (5.3%) was completing a field placement at an agency serving LGBTQ communities as a target population.

|Table 1

Generalist field placement students' perceived tolerance of heterosexism

Variable	Extremely Risky N(%)	Very Risky N(%)	Somewhat Risky N(%)	Slightly Risky N(%)	No Risk N(%)
Risk of making formal complaint					
Co-worker says perverted	0(0)	0(0)	4(21.1)	6(31.6)	9(47.4)
Co-worker asks why unmarried	0(0)	0(0)	1(5.3)	8(42.1)	10(52.6)
Supervisor calls LGBTQ special rights disgusting	0(0)	1(5.3)	3(15.8)	8(42.1)	7(36.8)
Supervisor says LGBTQ should keep quiet	0(0)	1(5.3)	3(15.8)	9(47.4)	6(31.6)

	Almost No Chance N(%)	Little Chance N(%)	Some Chance N(%)	Good Chance N(%)	Very Good N(%)
Likely complaint taken seriously					
Co-worker says perverted	0(0)	0(0)	5(26.3)	6(31.6)	8(42.1)
Co-worker asks why unmarried	0(0)	2(10.5)	3(15.8)	7(36.8)	7(36.8)
Supervisor calls LGBTQ special rights disgusting	0(0)	2(10.5)	4(21.1)	3(15.8)	10(52.6)
Supervisor says LGBTQ should keep quiet	0(0)	1(5.3)	5(26.3)	5(26.3)	8(42.1)

	Probably Nothing N(%)	Very Little N(%)	Told To Stop N(%)	Formal Warning N(%)	Seriously Punished N(%)
Anticipated response to complaint					
Co-worker says perverted	0(0)	2(10.5)	4(21.1)	6(31.6)	7(36.8)
Co-worker asks why unmarried	0(0)	2(10.5)	4(21.1)	10(52.6)	3(15.8)
Supervisor calls LGBTQ special rights disgusting	0(0)	2(10.5)	3(15.8)	6(31.6)	8(42.1)
Supervisor says LGBTQ should keep quiet	0(0)	1(5.3)	4(21.1)	8(42.1)	6(31.6)

Table 1 displays participants' perceptions of organizational tolerance for heterosexism within their field placement, based on the OTHI items. Each OTHI subscale included 4 items, including risk of making formal complaint (= 0.86), likelihood complaint would be taken seriously (= 0.93), and anticipated response to the complaint (= 0.94). Mean OTHI subscale scores were, for risk of making formal complaint 16.89 (SD = 2.64), likelihood complaint would be taken seriously 16.31 (SD = 3.54), and anticipated response to the complaint 15.74 (SD = 3.51).

A majority (n = 15, 78.9.%) of participants reported that if a department co-worker continually makes comments about LGBTQ people as "sinners" and "perverted," a complaint against that co-worker is slightly risky or not risky. A majority (n = 14, 73.7%) of the participants also reported that if a co-worker in the department continually asks an LGBTQ colleague why they are unmarried or tries to set them up on a date with a member of the opposite sex, there is a good or very good chance that the complaint would be taken seriously.

A portion of participants, however, perceived greater risk when dealing with heterosexist behavior from supervisors. Reporting a supervisor who refers to special rights for LGBTQ people as "disgusting" would be very risky or somewhat risky (n = 4, 21.1%), with only little or some chance (n = 6, 31.6%) that the complaint would be taken seriously. Five participants (26.3%) reported that a complaint about a supervisor who stated that LGBTQ workers should stay quiet about their personal lives would lead to little action or being told to stop, but not a formal warning or serious punishment.

There were several qualitative responses that provided additional insight about organizational tolerance for heterosexism in these participants' generalist field placements. Six participants (31.6%) described their generalist field placement agency to be inclusive towards LGBTQ issues:

> (1) [My agency] is extremely conscious of providing respectful services to the LGBTQ population. One patient was declined from a job because of his sexual orientation and the care managers made a note of what place he tried to get a job because they did not want to tell anyone to try to get a job there. I have seen a lot of respectful behaviors of staff and I believe that [my agency] is doing an excellent job of being LGBTQ sensitive.

This student was able to connect to specific advocacy action and a proactive approach to the agency climate.

> (2) This agency employed individuals that are part of LGBTQ community. The people at this agency promote LGBTQ issues by educating themselves in order to assist their clients.
> (3) In the assessments that the care managers complete with the patients, one of the questions asks about the pronouns that the person likes to be addressed as. The questions are respectful and cater to all sexual orientations
> (4) My field placement has a very open policy with LGBTQ. There are several students that self-iden-

tify as LBGTQ and a few staff members as well. These individuals feel safe and comfortable to be out and the staff supports them. Staff reaches out to other students to educate about sexuality to help improve situation of those students and staff that are out. For the most part, students are accepting and staff is very accepting.

Agency trainings were also described as an indicator of a positive agency culture.

(5) [The field agency] works very closely with many LGBTQ patients and has worked hard to create an environment that is a comfortable, safe place for all patients. The staff has had LGBTQ training in which the staff learns about the importance of understanding how to address people of all sexual orientations.
(6) I think the staff has a very open and tolerant view of people's sexuality as they offer trainings for employees on LGBTQ sensitivity.

Several other participants, however, noted that there was an element of invisibility regarding LGBTQ issues:

(1) One counselor started a LGBTQ group but received no support from colleagues or management. When the employee left the agency, the group was disbanded.
(2) It appears to be open and diverse, but unsure if it is truly like that as I have been asked to make a presentation on LGBTQ education.
(3) The climate at my internship is one that is open thus far. However, I am in just one sector of the agency and cannot honestly say if the climate overall would be inclusive of LGBTQ people.

One participant noted that she or he has "never heard client or staff members talk about [LGBTQ issues]," either "because it doesn't come up very often or if it is, it is 'hush hush.'" Three participants (15.8%) reported that they were unaware of whether they were serving any LGBTQ clients:

(4) Don't Ask Don't Tell. It is not a part of the screening process. There was a LGBTQ group, but it was hard to convince the agency to start one. The group will end by the end of the month.
(5) It's rare to ever hear anything about LGBTQ at my placement.
(6) I feel this topic of LGBTQ sensitivity isn't discussed.

Table 2

Generalist field placement students' average LGBTQ-sensitive practice intentions

Variable	M	SD
Reduce shame about homosexual feelings	3.21	1.72
Address problems created by prejudice	3.26	1.73
Inform about gay affirmative community resources	3.32	1.73
Acknowledge impact of living in homophobic society	3.36	1.77
Respond to sexual orientation when relevant to treatment	4.11	1.56
Help overcome religious oppression	2.74	1.69
Provide interventions that facilitate safety	3.26	1.85
Verbalize that gay/lesbian orientation healthy as heterosexual	3.32	1.86
Demonstrate comfort about gay/lesbian issues	3.63	1.71
Help clients identify internalized homophobia	2.74	1.56
Educate myself about gay/lesbian clients	4	1.29
Am open-minded when tailoring services	4.21	1.44
Create climate that allows for voluntary self-identification	3.95	1.65
Discuss sexual orientation in non-threatening manner	3.9	1.56
Facilitate appropriate expression of anger due to oppression	3.42	1.77

M = mean
SD = standard deviation

The LGBTQ-sensitive practice intentions variable contained 15 items (= 0.97). On average, participants' summed LGBTQ-sensitive practice intentions were 52.42 (SD = 21.11), indicating that most participants engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice behaviors "usually" or "always." Table 2 displays mean LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions on individual items. A slight majority of participants (n = 10, 52.6%) reported they always verbalize that an LGBTQ orientation is as healthy as a heterosexual one. They (n = 13, 68.4%) usually or always educate themselves about LGBTQ issues. However, participants (n = 13, 68.4%) rarely or never help clients overcome religious oppression the client has experienced because of their sexual orientation identity. The same number of participants (n = 13, 68.4%) reported that they rarely or never help clients deal with internalized homophobia.

Open-ended responses did not provide much further insight on students' discomfort in dealing with religious oppression in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. However, a number of participants (n = 9, 47.4%) indicated that they have taken several opportunities to further educate themselves about LGBTQ issues while in their generalist field placement. Several (n = 4, 21.1%) specifically noted that supervision with their agency field instructor has been helpful in further educating themselves about LGBTQ issues and in helping resolve uncertainties about working with this population with comments such as: "I would ask my supervisor to help point me in the right direction of possible services regarding gay affirmative practice." One participant, however, reported a significant lack of visibility of LGBTQ issues at the agency: "I have been told

that none of the clients identify as gay at the site where I am located. I am unsure with the cultural background of many of the clients if that would be respected."

The relationship between perceived tolerance for heterosexism in the generalist field placement and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions was also tested. A Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between summed LGBTQ-affirmative practice intention scores OTHI subscales. The risk of making a formal complaint subscale and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions were significantly correlated ($r = 0.52$, $p < .05$). The correlation between the likelihood that the complaint would be taken seriously subscale and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.08$) was not significant. Additionally, there was no correlation found between the anticipated response to complaint subscale and LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions ($r = 0.28$, $p = 0.25$).

Discussion

The present pilot study explored generalist field students' experiences within heterosexism with the agency and its relationship to LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions. The study also sought additional insight from students in generalist field placements about their placement agencies' climate towards LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Encouragingly, the results of the present pilot study found that these students have field placements that generally do not tolerate heterosexist behaviors. The perceived risk of making a complaint about heterosexist behavior was low, and the likelihood that the complaint would be taken seriously and acted upon was high. This is consistent with other recent research on LGBTQ-practice intentions (Gates & Sniatecki, 2016).

Interestingly, these generalist field students' intention to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice was associated only with the risk of making a complaint, but not with whether the complaint would be taken seriously or acted upon. This finding suggests that, when there was lower risk for making a complaint about heterosexist behavior, these generalist field students more regularly intended to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. This may not be surprising, as agencies that tolerate heterosexist behaviors might have a less friendly climate towards LGBTQ people generally and LGBTQ-affirmative practice approaches specifically.

Willingness to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice was not statistically correlated with whether the complaint would be taken seriously or acted upon. This finding suggests that, when there is an organizational climate that allows the reporting of heterosexism, it may not matter whether generalist field placement students actually observe the consequences imposed. Of course, consequences should be imposed for harmful heterosexist behaviors. However, it seemed to only matter to these students that there would be no risk associated with making a complaint. This may be because consequences are not always directly observed, unless perhaps the offending employee was terminated from employment. Informal warnings or write-ups may be confidential between the offending employee, person(s) affected, direct supervisors, and/or human resource staff. Because of the nature of generalist field placements, students may not be privy to knowledge about personnel actions either because they are only spending a limited number of hours at their

placement each week or they are shielded from these actions by their social work supervisors. Additionally, generalist field students may also have no "need to know" because they are serving in a learning capacity instead of a traditional employment capacity. Field settings engaging in intentional activities of inclusion and training provide field students with positive modeling and a welcoming environment for them to explore questions and practice strategies in field supervision.

These findings generally support previous research that suggests that social work students are becoming more sensitive to LGBTQ issues and are demonstrating a greater willingness to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Students in the present sample were open to learning about LGBTQ individuals and communities and were beginning to apply that knowledge in their generalist field placement when there were opportunities to do so. What may be more problematic, however, are some of the climate indicators that several generalist field students alluded to in their qualitative comments. At least at some of the generalist field placement agencies, there is some apparent invisibility of LGBTQ clients. Though these generalist field placement agencies tend not to tolerate heterosexism and tend to have field students who are willing to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice, some of the agencies, as evidenced by the qualitative comments, appear to be under the mistaken notion that the agency serves only heterosexual clients. Not having any LGBTQ clients is unlikely. Rather, the agencies may simply not realize they are serving LGBTQ clients because they fail to see sexual orientation and/or gender identity as a relevant part of their clients' psychosocial history. This finding may more accurately capture the organizational climate towards heterosexism, for if the organization is totally unaware of whether they are serving any LGBTQ clients, they may be operating under the mistaken assumption that their clients are heterosexual and non-LGBTQ. It would be difficult to provide truly affirmative services if the agency does not recognize serving LGBTQ individuals and communities as important to the mission of the agency.

Limitations

Though the present pilot study provided interesting insight about organizational tolerance for heterosexism and its relationship to student LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions at certain generalist field placement agencies, the findings should be interpreted with caution because of methodological limitations of the study. First, the size of the sample is a significant limitation. Sample size has previously been an issue in other studies assessing LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions in social workers (Crisp, 2012).

One of the first methodological limitations of the study was that the L, G, B, T, and Q in LGBTQ-affirmative practice was grouped together. Though this may have served a pragmatic purpose in the present study, grouping all people from different sexual minority and gender expression identities together can be problematic. LGBTQ communities have historically aligned themselves for the purpose of solidarity. However, sexual orientation is separate from gender identity. One can be transgender identified but also heterosexual. What it means to be lesbian-affirmative practice intentions could be very different from what it means to have gay-affirmative practice intentions. Exploring these complexities is critical in future research studies about affirmative practice intentions.

There are also methodological limitations. The purpose of the present study was to assess the feasibility of a more comprehensive study of generalist field placement students' experiences. Only a small number of students participated in the survey. However, the study revealed that LGBTQ-affirmative practice experiences may differ in field settings and that a larger study would be both feasible and worthwhile. While the findings suggest that a larger study of heterosexism and its relationship to students' LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions at certain generalist field placement agencies, no claims can be made for these phenomena at any other universities, with any other generalist field placement students, or with any other generalist field placement agencies, until further research is done. Future research, involving multiple institutions, would provide a more nuanced understanding of the nature of LGBTQ-affirmative practice.

Second, participants were also very likely different in important ways than non-participants. Because this was a voluntary survey which generalist field placement students were invited to participate in by an email sent to a listserv, the experiences of many students were likely not captured in the survey. Those who completed the survey likely have a high awareness of LGBTQ sensitivity; at minimum, they saw LGBTQ affirmative practice to be important enough to take the time to complete the survey. This might have also skewed participants' self-reporting about extent that generalist field placement agencies tolerate heterosexism and their own willingness to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Whether current employees would concur with students' perceptions of field experiences was not, however, assessed in the study. Future research should augment student perceptions about LGBTQ-affirmative practice with the perceptions of current employees. This may yield a better understanding of LGBTQ-affirmative practice experiences in the field.

Participants who feel strongly about LGBTQ sensitivity might not continue to complete a generalist field placement at an agency that tolerated heterosexism. Their presence at the agency could have also influenced the degree to which the agency was willing to provide LGBTQ-affirmative services. In other cases, these participants might have already had a strong orientation to LGBTQ-affirmative practice prior to beginning their generalist field placement. In other words, they might have intended to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice despite whether heterosexism was tolerated at the agency.

Social desirability of responses bias, which was not controlled in the study, may also be a significant limitation. One of the challenges of assessing the practice intentions and practice behaviors of social workers is that measures like GAP and OTHI completed by students and faculty may not represent what is actually happening in the learning experience (Craig, McInroy, Dentato, Austin, & Messinger, 2015; Martin et al., 2009). Educators and students may report that they are doing the right thing in terms of LGBTQ-affirmative practice, but our clients may report otherwise. Generalist field placement students who participated in the study likely recognized that LGBTQ-affirmative practice is consistent with CSWE practice behaviors and NASW ethical standards. Even if the participants were completing a generalist field placement at an agency that tolerated heterosexism or if they were opposed to LGBTQ-affirmative practice, they might have been less likely to report negative beliefs or experiences because they recognize that these are ethical issues with heterosexism in social work practice. Reporting that their generalist field placement agency tolerates het-

erosexism might have been tantamount to acknowledging complicity with this behavior. If the participant is aware of the heterosexist behavior yet fails to act, her or his own ethical decision-making may be in question.

Additionally, measurement limitations existed in the study. Though the items used in the study were reliable measures of the constructs of interest, these measures of heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice might have not wholly captured these generalist field placement students' experiences. There might have been other more salient indicators of heterosexism and LGBTQ-affirmative practice that were unreported in the study because the right questions were not asked. Additionally, the statistical procedures used in the present study might have also introduced measurement problems. While tolerance for heterosexism, particularly risk of making a formal complaint, was statistically correlated with participants' LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions, there were likely a number of other intervening variables that may be affecting this relationship.

Implications for social work practice, education, and research
While there are limitations to the present pilot study, there are several important implications for social work education and research. The results of the study suggest that these generalist field placement students are entering placement at agencies that generally do not tolerate heterosexist behaviors, and that this climate may help the participants feel comfortable with engaging in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Yet, there are some indicators of a lack of awareness of LGBTQ issues and visibility of LGBTQ clients at some of the agencies. Whether the agencies are effective at engaging diversity of LGBTQ clients, and perhaps other forms of diversity, when they are perhaps not recognizing the diversity that exists within their client population, should be called into question. Sexual orientation and gender identity are salient pieces of clients' psychosocial histories that should be captured even when the agency is a "mainstream" agency that serves primarily non-LGBTQ clients. However, LGBTQ clients also use mainstream agencies. All intake forms, questionnaires, and other agency documentation should recognize this reality and include sexual orientation/gender identity.

Social work education must continue to recognize the importance of LGBTQ diversity in its curriculum. LGBTQ issues should not be relegated to specialty elective courses. Sexual orientation and gender identity should be infused throughout the social work curriculum. This may help ensure that students entering generalist field placements have a baseline knowledge of and/or sensitivity towards LGBTQ issues. LGBTQ individuals and communities can be encountered in a variety of generalist field placement settings, regardless of whether the agency actually recognizes the presence. If all students learn about LGBTQ individuals and communities as part of their regular coursework, their knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity can be potentially used in their generalist field placement.

Accreditation Standard 2.2.10 requires programs to describe how its field education program provides, orientation, field instruction training and ongoing dialogue with field settings and field instructors (CSWE, 2015). To ensure field instructors are competent to effectively practice diversity including gender identity

and expression, programs are encouraged to offer field instructor training programs focusing on LGBTQ-affirmative practices as part of their menu of field instructor trainings. Some programs may also be able to integrate this content into continuing education offerings that field instructors will be able to count toward their license renewal and increases the likelihood that field instructors supervising social work students will have competence in this area of diversity.

Future social work research should continue to explore the issue of agency heterosexism and generalist field placement students' LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions. In particular, future research should examine whether the risk of making a complaint is indeed associated with LGBTQ-affirmative practice, as well as whether the chances that the complaint would be taken seriously and consequences are indeed not correlated with LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Future research should also examine whether other forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011), might be affecting LGBTQ-affirmative practice intentions. Tolerance for LGBTQ heterosexism and/or discrimination might be becoming a less overt and more complex variable.

Summary

Field education provides an opportunity for students to engage in LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Yet, in this pilot study, there was a relationship between agency tolerance for heterosexism and LGBTQ-sensitive practice. Agencies that have a low tolerance for heterosexism can provide greater opportunities for LGBTQ-affirmative practice. Social work practice, education, and research should continue to explore dynamics of LGBTQ-sensitivity within the generalist field education experience.

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