

5-2001

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**Social Work Students' Perceptions of Educational Needs
and Readiness to Work with Clients who are Gay or Lesbian**

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Key Words: Gay, Lesbian, Social Work, Students, Educational Needs

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The author acknowledges the contributions of and thanks Elaine Jurkowski, PhD. for
her conceptual and developmental guidance in the preparation of this manuscript.

The author also acknowledges the contributions of and thanks Melinda K. Diaz,
BSW Undergraduate, for her assistance in the administration of the research materials.

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Social Work Students' Perceptions of Educational Needs and Readiness to Work with Clients who are Gay or Lesbian

Abstract

While research has increased regarding social work students' preparedness for diverse clients, there are few examinations of the readiness students feel regarding clients from the gay and lesbian community. In addition, while social work ethics and curriculum guidelines encourage the inclusion of this population, some observations would indicate that minimal efforts are being made to educate social work students regarding the lesbian and gay community. Students in an entry-level social work course as well as students from a senior-level social work course were surveyed regarding their perceived attitude, knowledge, and skills relative to gay and lesbian clients. Initially, results indicated a lesser degree of perceived readiness among the senior level students. However, unpaired t-test analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in knowledge, attitude, or behavior.

Social Work Students' Perceptions of Educational Needs and Readiness to Work with Clients who are Gay or Lesbian

Over the last several years, research has increased regarding the perceived readiness of social work students and other mental health professions students for the culturally diverse clients they are likely to encounter after entering practice. The amount of research, though greater, is still not sufficient to adequately gauge the effectiveness and strength of curriculum concerning how well it prepares students for multicultural practice. Most of the available literature comes from clinical and counseling psychologists who are attempting to study the issue and its effect on mental health practice. This presents problems for the social work student who will inevitably meet clients from culturally diverse backgrounds.

One of the populations for which some research is being conducted is the gay and lesbian community. Due in part to increased acceptance and support from the general population, as well as a commitment to supporting and affirming statements from the mental health communities, social work professionals are becoming more aware of gay and lesbian clients who feel encouraged and confident in disclosing their sexuality and the issues they are facing in their daily lives. Though the issues faced are typically no different from those faced by non-gay or non-lesbian clients, the dynamics surrounding the issues can be significantly different. While generalist social work approaches are often helpful with this population as much as they are with other populations, some students desire more education regarding the gay and lesbian community and the specific ways that their sexuality influences their daily lives. Some of this desire is met through the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Curriculum Policy Statement, which specifically requires content on the effects of discrimination, economic deprivation, and oppression on gay men and lesbians (CSWE, 1994). This statement sets a

standard and an expectation for the increased coverage and inclusion of material and resources in the classroom that will effectively portray the needs of individuals from the lesbian and gay community. Such course content is meant to increase social work students' understanding of the social work profession's value system and influence their own values in a way that helps them adhere to the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (CSWE, 1994).

A review of the curriculum content in various social work programs indicates a partial response to CSWE's requirements for an increase in the material regarding oppressed groups. However, an examination of the material being used rarely provides more than a few chapters in a textbook along with an occasional short discussion on gay and lesbian issues in social work programs. Further, few studies address the relationship between homophobic and sexist attitudes among social work students. Weiner (1989) studied the relationship of racism, sexism, and homophobia among social work students, but he did not study changes in the relationship between these attitudes while the students were enrolled in social work programs.

This study attempts to understand the perceived ability of students in one social work program to provide effective counseling services to gay and lesbian clients. It also attempts to decide whether the perceived ability is improved among those students who are identified as being close to completing their prescribed course of study in the social work program. Specifically, the hypothesis states that social work students perceived knowledge, ability, and skills to deal with gay and lesbian issues increases as they proceed through the various stages of social work education. A greater understanding of the students' perceived knowledge, attitude, and behavior or skills with regard to gay and lesbian clients can help educators develop curriculum that has the best chance of altering stereotypical and prejudicial perceptions, and increase the potential for effective service to gay and lesbian clients.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many researchers have examined factors that correlate with and contribute to homophobic attitudes with the hope of reducing negative views and increasing tolerance and acceptance of gay men and lesbians. Factors that include gender, race, and level of belief in traditional sex roles have been shown to contribute to various levels of homophobia among social work students, which in turn affects the ability of the student-turned-practitioner to effectively understand and meet the goals, objectives, and methods of counseling persons who are gay or lesbian. It is of great concern that a previous study (Black, Oles, & Moore, 1998) points to a strong relationship between sexism and homophobia among students majoring in social work and psychology. Of greater concern is the fact that the relationship, as well as the prejudice, increased at the end of the scheduled course work, possibly indicating that academic majors influence students' levels of sexism and homophobia. Black et al. (1998) studied 331 subjects who registered for core social work courses at Florida International University (FIU) and Texas Christian University (TCU) using the Sexist Attitudes Toward Women Scale (SATWS) (Benson & Vincent, 1980) and the Index of Homophobia (IHP) (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Although the findings of this study were interesting and warrant further research, there were several shortcomings in the methods. FIU is located in an ethnically and culturally diverse area, with more than 40% of the university's student population coming from a Hispanic background, potentially weighting the outcomes of the study with specific gender role ideology. As well, TCU is a private university affiliated with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, and religious upbringing of the subjects may well have affected perceptions regarding gender roles and sexual attitudes. This study is also difficult to generalize to a rural population since

population size and diversity of a large university community reflect little reality in comparison to a rural community.

Another study (Oles, Black, & Cramer, 1999) investigated the strategies used to attempt to improve anticipated professional behavior of students dealing with homosexual clients. Using both undergraduate and graduate students in social work courses in four different university settings ($n= 78$), the research team asked students to complete both a pretest and posttest instrument measuring their attitudes and their anticipated professional behavior toward gay men and lesbian clients during the first and last two weeks of classes. The research focused on the impact of having gay or lesbian friends, the academic focus of the student, and the stated attitudes of the students toward gay men and lesbians. The findings in this research suggested that anticipated professional behavior of students dealing with gay or lesbian clients improved during the course of study and that educators should emphasize changing the students anticipated professional behavior rather than attempting to change their attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.

Fischer (1998) conducted research that specifically looked at the level of instruction provided to students regarding gay and lesbian issues. Surveying students from twenty-five APA accredited counseling psychology doctoral programs and twenty-five APA accredited clinical psychology doctoral programs ($n= 108$), the researcher utilized the Index of Homophobia survey and the Survey of Training Experiences. The researcher found that minimal amounts of training were provided to clinical and counseling psychology students regarding gay and lesbian issues, and that most of the students indicated that they obtained information on lesbian and gay issues from sources other than their educational program. Further, even though some students received moderate training, and some even encountered lesbian and gay experienced faculty members

during their instruction, the level of instruction was not sufficient to allow the student to feel prepared to deal with gay or lesbian clients. The potential problems with this research may exist in the selection of the participants, as department chairs in each of the schools involved in the study were allowed to hand pick participants, potentially subjecting the research to bias. Further, the quality of the data could be questioned, since students were allowed to answer questions and return the instruments within a specific time frame, thereby allowing for potential bias following possible discussion between research participants and their peers and others.

A study that looked at instruction among social work students (Jurkowski & Gallant, 1997) found that although students perceived themselves to be aware of how to accurately assess the mental health needs of women and men, they felt limited in their ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of gay men and lesbians. Using the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (D'Andrea et al., 1991), forty-four students in the third year of their Bachelor of Social Work studies were surveyed. Although the study was conducted at a university located in a community noted for the presence of cultural diversity, results suggested that students were not comfortable with their perceived skills, and needed additional instruction to address this lack of perceived ability.

One research article suggests that in order for social work curricula to meet the challenges set forth by the revised Curriculum Policy Statement of the CSWE, increased knowledge about lesbians and gay men need to be made accessible through the professional literature (Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). The authors identified articles and book reviews concerning lesbians and gay men that were published during the 1988-1997 period in fourteen journals specifically chosen for the study. What the findings of this research point out is that although the gay rights movement has increased the visibility of the gay and lesbian community, social work literature does not

necessarily reflect an increase in attention to the subject by practitioners and educators. Since social work practice and education are influenced by journal publications in the areas of theory, research, and practice approaches, the authors contend that content about homosexuality in social work journals is vital to the profession's ability to respond effectively to gay and lesbian clients.

Additional research in the area of social work curriculum (Mackelprang, Ray & Hernandez-Peck, 1996) further provides evidence of the necessity to include content on gay and lesbian issues in social work education. Questionnaires were sent to the deans or directors of every accredited social work program in the United States ($n= 420$) and forty-six percent ($n= 192$) responded. The questionnaires were designed to assess the emphasis placed on providing curriculum content on sexual orientation and the methods of delivering gay and lesbian content. The study also explored efforts to recruit and retain gay and lesbian students and to recruit, hire and retain gay and lesbian faculty. What the researchers discovered was evidence that providing content on gay and lesbian issues has been a relatively low priority in social work education. Only about one-third of the programs questioned placed very strong emphasis on providing curriculum about sexual orientation, while race, ethnicity, and gender received much stronger emphasis. The authors concluded their discussion by stressing the importance of including gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum in order to increase students' growth and development with regard to their competence in working with gay and lesbian clients.

When working with gay and lesbian clients, it is important to keep in mind some of the core values of the social work profession. Remembering service, social justice, dignity, and the worth of the person and the importance of human relationships will help the social worker to provide the best service to the gay or lesbian client. Understanding the dynamics of communication and how they apply within the context of a gay or lesbian individual's life is also important in order

to conduct an assessment and proceed with any type of intervention. It is therefore necessary for the social worker to step back and examine their own attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality before proceeding with any attempt to help an individual from this community. Several pieces of research address the ethical and moral challenges social workers and other mental health professionals face when working with the gay and lesbian community. One self-study looks at the role of disclosure, trust, and collaborative meaning in creating a therapeutic relationship with gay and lesbian clients (Bernstein, 2000). The researcher examined the need to be culturally sensitive, clinically effective, and ethically responsible within her practice as it related to gay and lesbian clients. Considering various interactions with clients who had identified as gay or lesbian, the researcher came to recognize how the lack of consideration of the differences in sexual orientation between therapist and client could limit the possibility of providing an effective therapeutic environment.

In a special issue of Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, several articles suggested the sort of education social workers and other human service workers should receive. In a study which focused on counseling psychology programs (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 1998), the authors examined the training and education practices with regard to preparing students to deal with their feelings regarding sexuality. The sampling frame included two groups of participants, one group consisting of 900 currently practicing counseling psychologists and the other group consisting of 65 individuals who held positions as current training directors in APA-accredited counseling psychology programs. The response rate was forty percent for practicing counseling psychologists ($n= 367$) and sixty percent for training directors ($n= 39$). The questionnaires that were mailed to the research participants sought to assess their doctoral training regarding sexual feelings toward clients, their incidence of

encountering sexual feelings for clients, how they cope with such encounters, and in what format, if any, their doctoral program addressed the topic of sexual feelings for clients beyond simply discussing APA ethical standards and APA's prohibition against sexual involvement with clients. The results showed that although most programs addressed the issue, only about half of the practicing graduates of these programs reported receiving such training, and only about 60% of those reported the training as adequate.

Michael Mobley (1998) reviewed several articles that focused on counselor training in lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in counseling psychology programs. He asserted that counseling psychologists must self-examine their perceived realities about lesbian and gay issues in order to promote and advance a healthier society. He concluded his discussion by saying that the readiness of counselors to deal with lesbian and gay clients will remain low if training is limited to classroom instruction only and not inclusive of what he considers to be necessary and sufficient clinical hours. Only through what he terms as a much more intrusive and extensive integration of lesbian and gay psychology into the curriculum will counselors in training be more prepared and comfortable to deal with lesbian and gay clients. He further cautioned counseling psychologists to carefully examine their perceived realities about issues and concerns affecting lesbian and gay individuals across the life span.

Finally, it is important to note the perceived ability of the mental health professional from the perspective of the lesbian or gay client. Research indicated a greater satisfaction with therapy experiences in more recent years, as well as an improvement in services over time (Liddle, 1999). Through exit and termination interviews with gay and lesbian clients over an expanded period, Liddle found that gay and lesbian client' retrospective ratings of non-gay therapists before 1985 were closer to "not at all helpful" than to "fairly helpful." By the late 1980s,

however, these ratings were rising sharply, surpassing heterosexuals' ratings of their therapists in the 1990s. Clearly, recent attention to the needs of gay and lesbian clients in the professional literature and by mental health training programs are resulting in improved mental health services to this population. Whether or not this is a result of an inclusion of or an increase of gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum is still at question, but indications are that further study should be conducted to determine if curriculum is resulting in improved services or if the mental health community is increasing its focus on the ethical requirements surrounding practice.

All of this review looks at the available literature that examines the experiences of mental health professionals with regard to their knowledge and skills with the gay and lesbian community, and the perception of preparedness they felt in being confronted with the issues of this particular community following their education. In each of the studies and reviews previously mentioned, it is clear that students perceive themselves to be knowledgeable and somewhat open to the gay and lesbian community in general. However, their perceived ability regarding their knowledge, ability, and skills to accurately assess and address the mental health needs of gay men and lesbians is limited and, for most, was not adequately addressed during their education. This forms the question that is the basis for the research in this paper. What is the perceived readiness of students in a specific social work program who may encounter gay or lesbian clients following their education that included social work generalist intervention courses? Does classroom instruction among entry-level and senior-level courses affect the perceived knowledge, attitude, and behavior or skills needed to deal with gay and lesbian culture? Is there any difference in the perceived level of readiness between entry-level students and those students who are about to graduate?

METHOD

This research is a cross-sectional survey seeking quantitative data. The research design is illustrated as O_1 , and is designed to look at the perceived attitude, knowledge, and skills of social work students (Appendix A). A ninety-eight-item questionnaire was administered to students enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work program within a rural Midwest university. The sampling frame consisted of all students in an entry-level SOCW 275 course as well as students from a senior-level SOCW 402 course at the end of their course work during the fall semester. These students were chosen since they represent the population specific to this research and also because the researchers wanted to measure whether or not there was a difference between two groups at freshman and senior levels of the social work education experience. The students are part of a university that is known to be highly diverse in the cultures represented, with nineteen percent of the undergraduate population representing minorities and thirteen percent of the graduate population representing minorities (IRS, 2000). The university recruits and attracts students from different parts of the world, thus bringing together different beliefs, values, and backgrounds. Located approximately 100 miles south of St. Louis, Missouri, the community in which the university is located has a population of about 21,000 residents and farming makes up the greater part of the regional industry.

The students were asked to volunteer their participation with the understanding that no additional course credit would be granted to those who chose to participate and, conversely, no penalties would be assessed for those who chose not to participate. All reasonable steps to protect student identity and confidentiality were taken, and an informed consent was included on the cover of the instrument. The informed consent laid out the reasoning for the research, the time necessary to participate, and the names and addresses of the researchers.

The instrument used was a revised version of the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (D'Andrea et al., 1991), which is designed to assess the effect of instructional strategies on students' multicultural counseling development. The revisions included additional questions to the original sixty items, the questions being those of a nature designed to assess the perceived differences in ability between the two levels of students. The revised questionnaire has not been standardized, nor has the validity and reliability of the instrument been determined.

The instrument is divided into four sections, along with a section that seeks demographic information regarding age, education, gender, and racial background. Responses are measured on one of two four-point scales. One scale measures agreement, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (4), while the other scale measure awareness, ranging from "strongly unaware" (1) to "strongly aware" (4). These scales combined measure three subscales that include awareness of one's attitude towards minorities, knowledge about minority populations, and perception of one's skill in dealing with multicultural issues in specific target groups and situations.

The questionnaires were distributed to students during their normal class periods with instructions on voluntary participation as well as on completion of the survey. Students were asked to indicate their responses on a standard scantron sheet, filling in the bubble that corresponded to the chosen response. The researchers oversaw the distribution and administration of the survey with classroom instructors present during the testing period, with the exception of one class, in which case one researcher was present to administer the survey.

RESULTS

Demographics

Of the possible 108 students in the entry-level course, 85 students participated in the survey (79% response rate). Likewise, of the possible 84 students in the senior-level course, 69 students participated in the survey (82% response rate). Non-responses may have been a result of absent students. Demographics were coded using nominal and ratio measurements, and included age, education, gender, and racial background.

Of the total SOCW 275 students who responded to the question of age (n=82), 69.5% (n=57) were under the age of 25, 18.3% (n=15) were age 25 to 40, and 12.2% (n=10) were over the age of 40. Of the total SOCW 402 students who responded to the question of age (n=65), 63.1% (n=41) were under the age of 25, 30.8% (n=20) were age 25 to 40, and 6.2% (n=4) were over the age of 40.

Insert figure 1 about here

Males represented 23.2% (n=19) of the SOCW 275 class and 15.4% (n=10) of the SOCW 402 class, while females represented 76.8% (n=63) of the SOCW 275 class and 76.9% (n=50) of the SOCW 402 class. It is noted that 7.7% (n=5) of the SOCW 402 students who responded to the question of gender (n=65) chose not to identify their gender, while all of the students in the SOCW 275 class who responded to the question of gender (n=82) indicated either male or female.

Insert figure 2 about here

Of the total SOCW 275 students who responded to the question of education (n=82), 1.2% (n=1) of the students identified as freshmen, 11% (n=9) identified as sophomores, 78% (n=64) identified as juniors, and 9.8% (n=8) identified as seniors. Of the total SOCW 402 students who responded to the question of education (n=66), 1.5% (n=1) of the students identified as freshmen, 4.5% (n=3) identified as sophomores, 4.6% (n=3) identified as juniors, and 89.4% (n=59) identified as seniors.

Of the total SOCW 275 students who responded to the question of racial background (n=79), 77.2% (n=61) identified as Caucasian, and 22.8% (n=18) identified as non-Caucasian. Of the total SOCW 402 students who responded to the question of racial background (n=64), 70.3% (n=45) identified as Caucasian, 25% (n=16) identified as non-Caucasian, and 4.7% (n=3) chose not to identify their racial background.

Insert figure 3 about here

For the purposes of this research, items were developed and categorized into "attitude, knowledge, or perceived skills," and variables were coded and measured using ordinal measurements on a standard scale of response that ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (4) or from "strongly unaware" (1) to "strongly aware" (4) (see Appendix B for complete codebook).

Attitude

Seven questions sought to measure perceived attitude towards generalist practice with gay or lesbian clients. When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding how cultural background has influenced thinking about gay or lesbian persons (Q5), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.7 ($sd=.86$, $n=85$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.8 ($sd=.95$, $n=66$). When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding the impact of thoughts and actions when interacting with gay or lesbian persons (Q9), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.8 ($sd=.72$, $n=85$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.9 ($sd=.88$, $n=65$). When asked if human service professions have failed to meet the mental health needs of gay or lesbian persons (Q14), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.5 ($sd=.78$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.6 ($sd=.78$, $n=65$). When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding the goals, objectives, and methods of counseling gay or lesbian persons (Q28), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.6 ($sd=.69$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.6 ($sd=.84$, $n=65$). When asked if there are some basic counseling skills that are applicable to create successful outcome regardless of the client's sexual orientation (Q31), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 3.1 ($sd=.62$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.9 ($sd=.86$, $n=64$). When asked if gay or lesbian persons need intensive counseling services (Q34), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 1.9 ($sd=.67$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.0 ($sd=.84$, $n=66$). Lastly, when asked if counselors should treat clients who are gay or lesbian differently than clients who are not gay or lesbian (Q36), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 1.7 ($sd=.69$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 1.8 ($sd=.82$, $n=68$).

Insert table 1 about here

Knowledge

Five questions sought to measure the students' knowledge regarding multicultural expectations for gay and lesbian persons. When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding heterosexism (Q37), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 3.2 ($sd=.79$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 3.3 ($sd=.90$, $n=67$). When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding mainstreaming (Q42), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.9 ($sd=.80$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 3.1 ($sd=.89$, $n=67$). When asked to self-rate in terms of understanding prejudice (Q43), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 3.5 ($sd=.65$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 3.5 ($sd=.81$, $n=66$). When asked if gay and lesbian persons in Europe, Australia, and Canada face similar problems as the same groups in the United States (Q57), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.6 ($sd=.59$, $n=84$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.6 ($sd=.82$, $n=65$). Finally, when asked if gay and lesbian persons are under represented in clinical and counseling psychology (Q62), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.8 ($sd=.59$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.7 ($sd=.80$, $n=65$).

Insert table 2 about here

Behavior

Seven questions sought to measure the students perceived behavior in dealing with gay and lesbian counseling issues. When asked if they were comfortable to conduct an effective interview with a gay or lesbian person (Q65), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 3.1 ($sd=.70$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.9 ($sd=.89$, $n=64$). When asked if they were comfortable to articulate the problems of a client who is gay or lesbian (Q73), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.9 ($sd=.61$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.8 ($sd=.70$, $n=64$). When asked if they were comfortable to identify strengths and weaknesses of psychological tests in terms of their use with persons who are gay or lesbian (Q77), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.6 ($sd=.65$, $n=81$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.7 ($sd=.80$, $n=65$). When asked if they were comfortable with their skill level to provide appropriate counseling services to persons who are gay or lesbian (Q81), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.8 ($sd=.71$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.6 ($sd=.80$, $n=65$). When asked if they were comfortable with their ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of gay men (Q87), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.7 ($sd=.71$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.6 ($sd=.87$, $n=65$). When asked if they were comfortable with their ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of lesbians (Q88), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 2.8 ($sd=.67$, $n=83$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.8 ($sd=.86$, $n=65$). Finally, when asked if counselors should treat gay or lesbian clients differently than clients who are not gay or lesbian (Q92), the mean response among SOCW 275 students was 1.9 ($sd=.73$, $n=82$) and the mean response among SOCW 402 students was 2.0 ($sd=.78$, $n=65$).

Insert table 3 about here

Visually, using bar charts, several questions appeared to indicate differences between the two groups.

Insert figure 4 about here

This warranted further testing using unpaired t-tests to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Unpaired t-test analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups in knowledge, attitude, or behavior.

Insert table 4 about here

CONCLUSION

The null hypothesis that social work students' perceived knowledge, ability and skills to deal with gay and lesbian issues increases as they proceed through the various stages of social work education is rejected.

DISCUSSION

The research cited at the beginning of this investigation would indicate the need for increased training regarding gay and lesbian issues among social work students in order to increase their

ability to deal with clients from this population. It is repeated, however, that many of the respondents in previous research indicate that their knowledge and perceptions of issues that face the gay and lesbian community come from learned experiences *outside* the classroom, not inside it. This fact is certainly validated by the empirical findings in this study, since student responses seem to indicate a level of general acceptance and tolerance for gay and lesbian persons, yet readiness in dealing with gay and lesbian clients would not seem as certain. At first, it appeared that entry-level students felt more comfortable with their perceived knowledge, awareness, and skills in dealing with the gay and lesbian client than the senior-level students. Further analysis of the responses would indicate no difference in these perceptions between the two groups. This might lead one to question the impact of the classroom instruction.

One of the limitations of this research is in the sample size. The sample is small and cannot be considered representative of social work students in general. A broader range of students representative of the target population would need to be surveyed and included in the results to attempt to provide a more accurate picture of the perceptions of social work students in general. Another limitation is the lack of reliability and validity applied to the instrument or, more specifically, to the questionnaire items, to see whether or not they are able to accurately measure the constructs identified.

Further review of this research warrants a need for additional study to further determine the needs of social work students and the curriculum that is presented to them. Longitudinal studies that follow a particular cohort of students from entry-level social work study through graduation will potentially provide the best information, examining the relationship between the strength of the students' perceived knowledge, ability and skills with gay and lesbian issues upon entering a course of study and the strength of those perceptions upon completion of the program. The

sample can be expanded to include students who have completed their undergraduate studies and have entered a graduate program of study, thereby lengthening the range of learning potential.

Instruments need to be developed or identified which would help point to specific curriculum needs for students during the course of study. It is one thing to discover that students become less certain in their level of comfort with gay and lesbian issues during their prescribed course of study, but an entirely different issue to know why the phenomena occurs and what factors potentially contribute to the perceived loss of ability.

Additional implications and recommendations for future research might include examination of the texts used to educate social work students. Does the material adequately cover gay and lesbian issues while effectively preparing the student for an appropriate understanding of the population? In what context and to what extent are gay and lesbian issues delivered in the classroom? If published texts provide insufficient instruction regarding the issues, what materials are available to supplement the intended instruction? Just as Mobley (1998) pointed out in his research, lesbian and gay issues in the curriculum must be intrusive and extensive in their integration in order for counselors to be more prepared and comfortable to deal with lesbian and gay clients.

It is important for social work students to gain the level of competence needed to address the many issues they will encounter during their practice. Whether or not gay and lesbian issues present challenges for the social worker will be dependent upon the knowledge and skills they have gained in preparation for their career. This preparation, however, requires both the student and the instructor to consider the full realm of possibilities in the field of practice. Moral and ethical dilemmas are sure to be faced, but improved educational experiences can certainly provide the type of information social workers need to deal appropriately with whatever issue

they encounter. The NASW and the CSWE took the first step in requiring increased content in the social work curriculum with regard to gay and lesbian issues. Now they must follow up with curriculum materials that can be applied to assure students the level of knowledge and skills that will be required to effectively respond to the needs of the gay and lesbian community.

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Appendix A

Study Design

0₁

0₁ = the level of perceived knowledge, attitude, and behavior held by the students.

Appendix B

Code Book – demographics and codes used for this research.

| Variable | Codes-Categories |
|--------------------------|---|
| Question 95 | |
| Age | 1. < 21 years of age 2. 21 – 24 years of age 3. 25 – 29 years of age 4. 30 – 39 years of age 5. 40 + years of age |
| Question 96 | |
| Education | 1. Freshman 2. Junior 3. Sophomore 4. Senior 5. Other |
| Question 97 | |
| Gender | 1. Male 2. Female |
| Question 98 | |
| Racial Background | 1. Caucasian 2. Non-Caucasian |
| Questions 1 – 36 | 1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly Agree |
| Questions 37 – 50 | 1. Strongly Unaware 2. Unaware 3. Aware 4. Strongly Aware |
| Questions 51 – 94 | 1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly Agree |

Table 1

Questions Measuring Perceived Attitude Regarding Generalist Practice with Clients who are Gay or Lesbian

| Question | 275 | | 402 | |
|--|------|-----|------|-----|
| | mean | sd | mean | sd |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding how cultural background has influenced thinking about gay or lesbian persons | 2.7 | .86 | 2.8 | .95 |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding the impact of thoughts and actions when interacting with gay or lesbian persons | 2.8 | .72 | 2.9 | .88 |
| Human service professions have failed to meet the mental health needs of gay or lesbian persons | 2.5 | .78 | 2.6 | .78 |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding the goals, objectives, and methods of counseling gay or lesbian persons | 2.6 | .69 | 2.6 | .84 |
| There are some basic counseling skills that are applicable to create successful outcomes regardless of the client's sexual orientation | 3.1 | .62 | 2.9 | .86 |
| Gay or lesbian persons need intensive counseling services | 1.9 | .67 | 2.0 | .84 |
| Counselors should treat clients who are gay or lesbian differently than clients who are not gay or lesbian | 1.7 | .69 | 1.8 | .82 |

Table 2

Questions Measuring Perceived Knowledge Regarding Multicultural Expectations for
Gay and Lesbian Persons

| Question | mean | sd | mean | sd |
|--|------|-----|------|-----|
| | 275 | | 402 | |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding heterosexism | 3.2 | .79 | 3.3 | .90 |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding mainstreaming | 2.9 | .80 | 3.1 | .89 |
| Self-rating in terms of understanding prejudice | 3.5 | .65 | 3.5 | .81 |
| Gay and lesbian persons in Europe, Australia, and Canada face similar problems as the same groups in the United States | 2.6 | .59 | 2.6 | .82 |
| Gay and lesbian persons are under represented in clinical and counseling psychology | 2.8 | .59 | 2.7 | .80 |

Table 3

Questions Measuring Perceived Skills to Deal with Clients who are Gay or Lesbian

| Question | 275 | | 402 | |
|---|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| | <u>mean</u> | <u>sd</u> | <u>mean</u> | <u>sd</u> |
| Comfortable to conduct an effective interview with a gay or lesbian person | 3.1 | .70 | 2.9 | .89 |
| Comfortable to articulate the problems of a client who is gay or lesbian | 2.9 | .61 | 2.8 | .70 |
| Comfortable to identify strengths and weaknesses of psychological tests in terms of their use with persons who are gay or lesbian | 2.6 | .65 | 2.7 | .80 |
| Comfortable with skill level to provide appropriate counseling services to persons who are gay or lesbian | 2.8 | .71 | 2.6 | .80 |
| Comfortable with ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of gay men | 2.7 | .71 | 2.6 | .87 |
| Comfortable with ability to accurately assess the mental health needs of lesbians | 2.8 | .67 | 2.8 | .86 |
| Counselors should treat gay or lesbian clients differently than clients who are not gay or lesbian | 1.9 | .73 | 2.0 | .78 |

Table 4

Statistical analysis of survey question responses¹

| Question # | 2-Tailed P-Value | Significance | 95% Confidence Interval | t Value | df | Standard Error of Difference |
|------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------|-----|------------------------------|
| 5 | 0.49 | NS | (0.39) to 0.19 | 0.67 | 149 | 0.14 |
| 9 | 0.44 | NS | (0.35) to 0.15 | 0.76 | 148 | 0.13 |
| 14 | 0.43 | NS | (0.35) to 0.15 | 0.77 | 147 | 0.12 |
| 28 | 1.00 | NS | (0.24) to 0.24 | 0.00 | 147 | 0.12 |
| 31 | 0.10 | NS | (0.04) to 0.44 | 1.64 | 146 | 0.12 |
| 34 | 0.41 | NS | (0.34) to 0.14 | 0.81 | 148 | 0.12 |
| 36 | 0.41 | NS | (0.34) to 0.14 | 0.81 | 149 | 0.12 |
| 37 | 0.46 | NS | (0.37) to 0.17 | 0.72 | 149 | 0.13 |
| 42 | 0.14 | NS | (0.47) to 0.07 | 1.45 | 149 | 0.13 |
| 43 | 1.00 | NS | (0.23) to 0.23 | 0.00 | 148 | 0.11 |
| 57 | 1.00 | NS | (0.22) to 0.22 | 0.00 | 147 | 0.11 |
| 62 | 0.38 | NS | (0.12) to 0.32 | 0.87 | 146 | 0.11 |
| 65 | 0.12 | NS | (0.05) to 0.45 | 1.52 | 145 | 0.13 |
| 73 | 0.35 | NS | (0.11) to 0.31 | 0.92 | 145 | 0.10 |
| 77 | 0.40 | NS | (0.33) to 0.13 | 0.83 | 144 | 0.12 |
| 81 | 0.10 | NS | (0.04) to 0.44 | 1.60 | 146 | 0.12 |
| 87 | 0.44 | NS | (0.15) to 0.35 | 0.76 | 146 | 0.13 |
| 88 | 1.00 | NS | (0.24) to 0.24 | 0.00 | 146 | 0.12 |
| 92 | 0.42 | NS | (0.34) to 0.14 | 0.80 | 145 | 0.12 |

¹ Statistical calculator used during this investigation found at <http://www.graphpad.com/calculators/ttest1.cfm>

Figure 1. Age ranges of research participants.

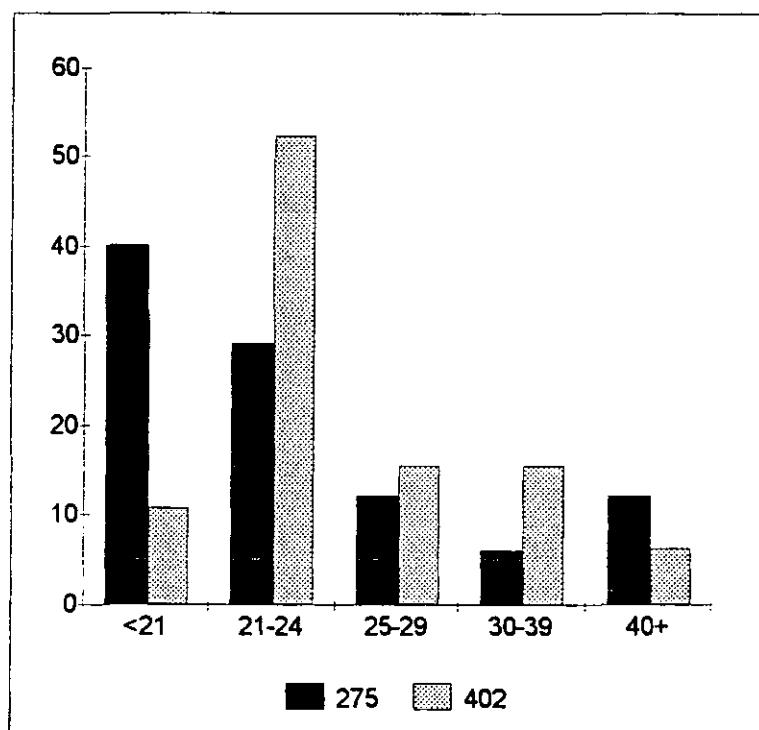


Figure 2. Gender makeup of research participants.

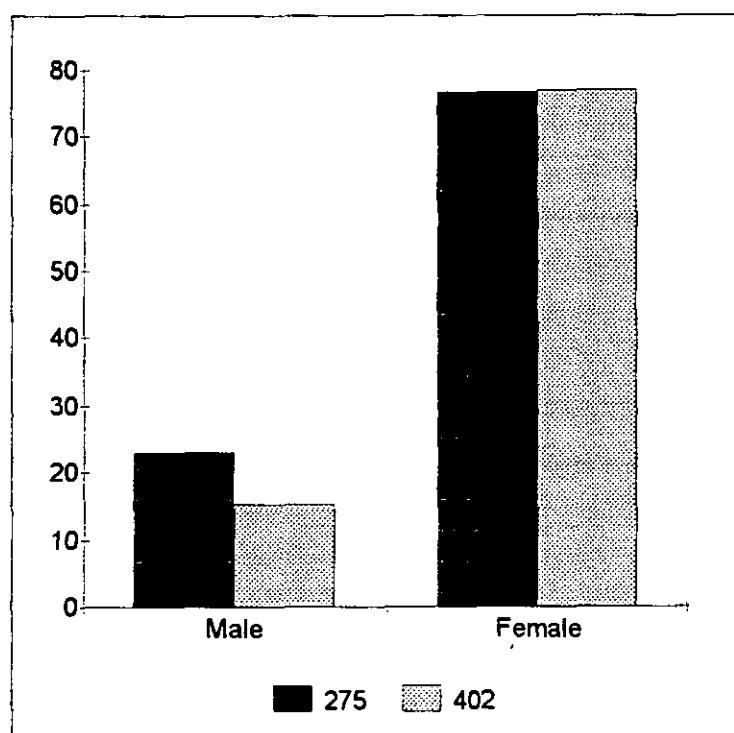


Figure 3. Racial background of research participants.

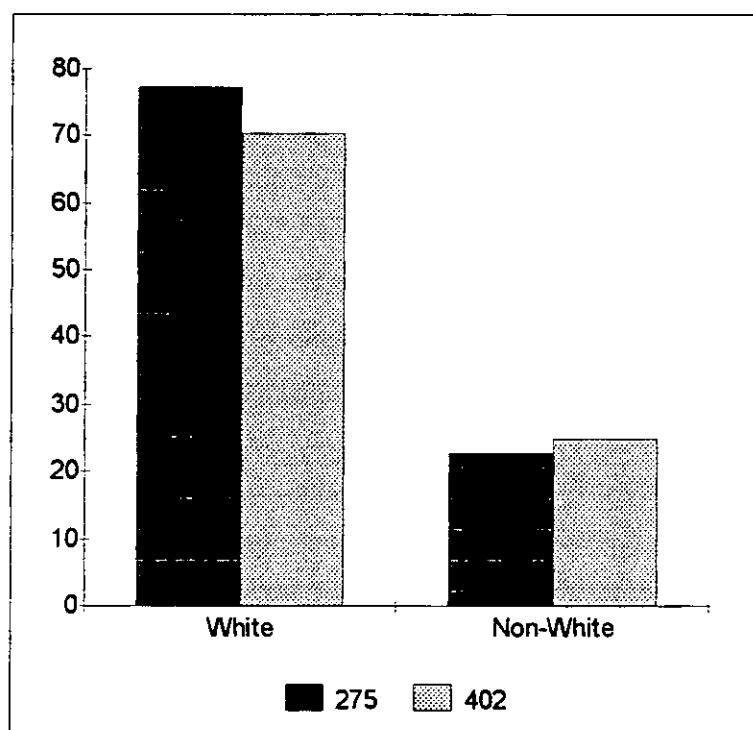
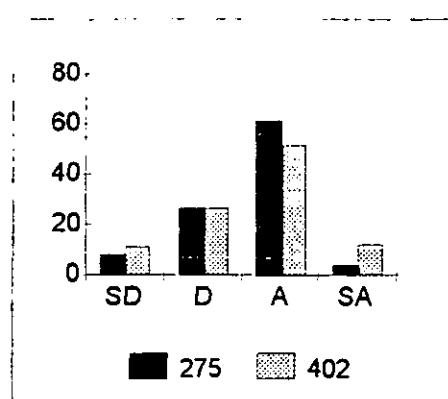
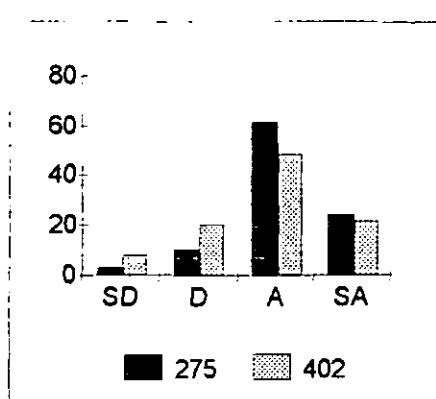


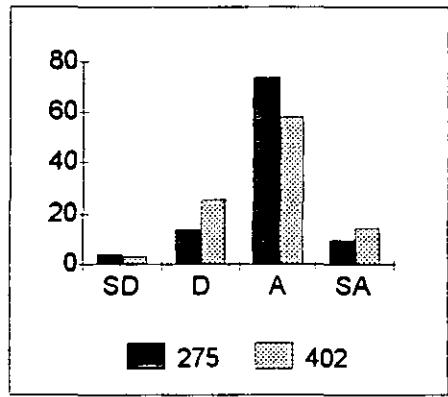
Figure 4. Bar charts providing initial visual assessment of responses to questions.



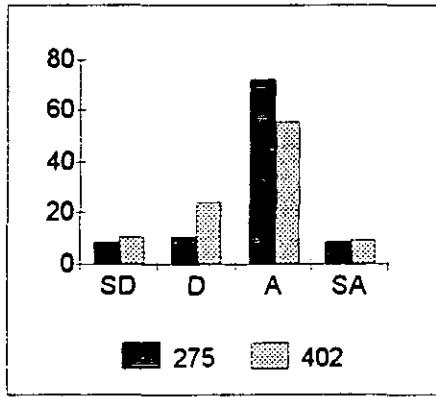
Understand Goals, Methods & Objectives of Counseling Persons who are Gay or Lesbian.



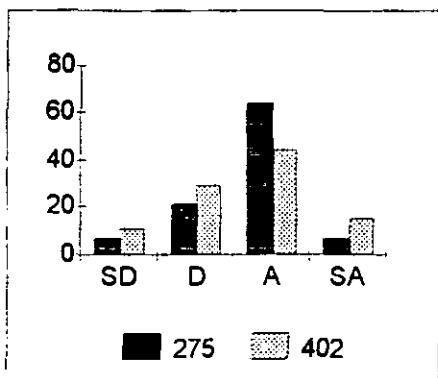
Comfortable to Conduct and Effective Counseling Interview w/a Person who is Gay or Lesbian.



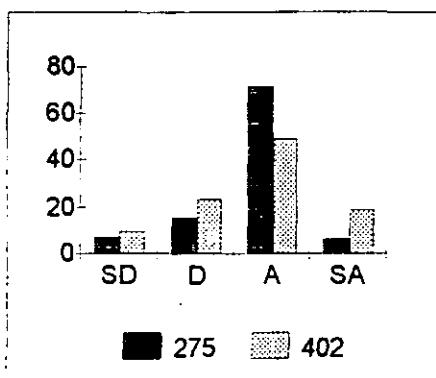
Comfortable to Accurately Articulate Problems of a Client who is Gay or Lesbian



Comfortable w/Skill Level to Provide Appropriate Counseling Services to Gay and Lesbian Persons.



Comfortable w/Ability to Accurately Assess Mental Health Needs of Gay Men.



Comfortable w/Ability to Accurately Assess Mental Health Needs of Lesbians.