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KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE LESBIAN, GAY,
BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY AMONG
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Allison Marie Hixon

June 2012

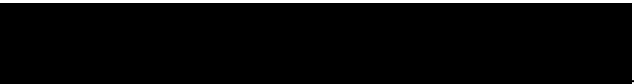
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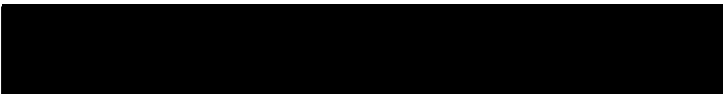
June 2012

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Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study used a quantitative approach to measure knowledge levels and perceived ability to serve the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community among Master of Social Work students (N = 43). Students enrolled in the Master of Social Work program at California State University San Bernardino were surveyed through a three-part questionnaire including questions regarding demographics, and general knowledge/perceptions of the LGBT community that this researcher created.

Data analysis included bivariate and univariate statistical analysis. A Tukey post hoc suggested that overall, Caucasian students had a higher level of knowledge of LGBT individuals ($M = 12.94$, $SD = 2.05$) than African American students ($M = 9.17$, $SD = 2.71$). A bivariate correlation found that MSW students with more years of social work experience had lower levels of knowledge than those with less years social work experience ($r = -.36$, $p < .05$). Suggested implications for social work practice and education are for MSW programs to examine current curriculum and find ways to integrate LGBT education into the program.

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A sincere and heartfelt thank you to all the amazing friends I have made throughout this program. Without your love and support I am unsure if I would have been able to make it through.

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Finally, I would like to thank my mother Kathy for always encouraging me to be the person I want to be. With your continued love and support I have been able to accomplish the goals I set out to. I love you.

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my college roommate Nicole Hershey. It was from Nicole I learned of the many hurdles that LGBT individuals face simply by being who they are. I am forever grateful for you allowing me into your world. The time we spent together reconfirmed my desire to spread the word of equality and justice for all of humanity. Thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The world is a diverse place with individuals from all different backgrounds. The differences that shape people into who they are, what they believe, and how they go about living their lives may be viewed as unique, interesting, strange and/or unnatural. In the social work profession, the notion of cultural competency is stressed in the National Association of Social Worker (NASW) *Code of Ethics*. Section 1.05 of the Code of Ethics titled "Cultural Competence and Social Diversity" indicates that social workers:

should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability. (NASW, 2008)

Section 6.04 of the *Code of Ethics* states that social workers should also "promote policies and practice that demonstrate respect for differences" (NASW, 2008).

Despite this as a basic underpinning for social work practice, it has become evident to this researcher through both personal observation and research that many social workers lack a basic education and understanding of working with certain vulnerable populations, more specifically the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Researchers Morrow and Messinger (2006) define this community as "the sexual minority population" consisting of lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals (p. 7).

Problem Statement

Up until 1973, homosexuality was labeled a psychiatric disorder in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) when the ideology of homosexuality as a mental illness was deemed unfounded by professionals (American Psychiatric Association, 2011; Mackelprang, Ray & Hernandez-Peck, 1996; Swank & Raiz, 2007). Even though many credible associations such as the National Association of Social Workers, American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association have warranted that an individual's sexual orientation is not something that can be changed, the

National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality continues to actively use and believe in the healing power of reparative therapy to "cure" individuals of their homosexuality (Hicks, 1997 p. 513).

Lucksted (2004) indicates that LGBT individuals are estimated to make up two to 10 percent of the United States population, which means that nearly "546,000 to 2.7 million LGBT Americans" require access to the same standard of mental health services that heterosexuals receive (p. 5) For LGBT individuals, having access to effective and efficient social services can be pertinent to overall well being as their sexual orientation places them at high risk for a number of problems including (but not limited to): alcoholism, depression and suicidal ideations (Mackelprang, Ray, & Hernandez-Peck, 1996, p. 19).

As the population continues to grow, it is pertinent for Master of Social Work (MSW) students (and other social service professionals alike) to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide services to this diverse group.

Research has suggested that many people who go into the social work profession are plagued by individual bias

and discrimination, specifically that of homophobia and/or heterosexism (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Cramer, 1997; Dulaney & Kelly 1982; Kulkin, Chavin & Percle, 2000; Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Reyes, 1996). Some individuals in the helping profession allow their own bias and misconceptions of minority groups control and effect how services are provided.

While there are many definitions for homophobia Kulkin, Chavin, and Percle (2000) give a concise yet all encompassing definition of homophobia as "an irrationally negative attitude toward homosexual people" (p. 12). Heterosexism is defined by Berkman and Zinberg (1997) as "the belief that heterosexuality is more natural and superior to homosexuality" (p. 320).

There are many reasons individuals, even those that have or are working towards Master of Social Work (MSW) degrees hold negative perceptions of the LGBT community including: upbringing, religiosity and/or lack of sufficient knowledge about the community (Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Raiz, 2007). If MSW students graduate with insufficient knowledge and skewed perceptions of LGBT individuals, then the engagements, assessments, and

interventions that drive the social work profession will inevitably suffer.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore knowledge and perceptions of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community among Master of Social Work students (MSW) at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). The reason this study is necessary is because the LGBT community remains a vulnerable and discriminated group that utilizes both social and mental health services. It has been estimated that between 546,000 to 2.7 million (two-10%) of American LGBT individuals utilize mental health services per year (Lucksted, 2004).

Because of this vulnerability, the probability of social workers providing services to LGBT individuals' is high. Understanding the level of knowledge and perceptions MSW students have regarding the LGBT community is critical so that educational institutions, agencies and individuals alike can help future social workers become more "culturally" competent and able to

provide services to LGBT clients in the most informed and effective way.

The type of design that will be used to address this research is a quantitative approach. Quantitative research allows for this study to be conducted on a larger scale than that of a qualitative approach. The data sources for this investigation are MSW students who will fill out three part multidimensional surveys. Purposive sampling is what was used in this research since the individuals that are being surveyed are an "entire population of some limited group" (Grinell & Unrau, 2011, p. 237). The sampling criterion was simple; participants must have been enrolled as MSW students at California State University San Bernardino, first, second or third year in either the full or part time program. This includes all ethnicities, genders, and age groups of individuals that fit the criteria of being enrolled as graduate social work students.

The independent variables within this research are knowledge and perceptions and the dependent variable is level of knowledge. While knowledge and perceptions often coincide with one another, there are differences between the two. Knowledge is defined as "acquaintance with

facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation" (dictionary.com). Perception, on the other hand is defined by dictionary.com as "immediate or intuitive recognition or appreciation, as of moral, psychological, or aesthetic qualities." What an individual perceives about LGBT individuals will inevitably influence the level of knowledge they have regarding this population.

This research will be measured through The Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire which is an 18 question true, false, don't know survey developed by Harris, Nightengale, and Owens in 1995, as well as through questions created by this researcher. Eight of the researcher constructed questions pertain to demographics and nine questions regard general knowledge/perception of the LGBT community such as personal familiarity, assessment capacity, knowledge of LGBT identity formation, as well as history and politics that affect LGBT individuals.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study is important because the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community, regardless of

current visibility, remain a vulnerable population. As indicated in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) code of ethics "social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of...sexual orientation" (NASW, 2008). Findings from this study may affect social work practice because they could unveil negative perceptions and/or a lack of knowledge of the LGBT community among MSW students. If this is what is found, both educational institutions and social service agencies may consider evaluating and addressing the current curriculum and training tactics so that social workers can become more competent in successfully serving LGBT individuals.

All stages of the generalist intervention process will be informed by this study. Current research suggests that MSW students and social workers alike often allow personal bias and misinformation regarding LGBT individuals to dictate effective service delivery. As more and more LGBT individuals openly disclose their sexuality, the urgency for social workers who are prepared to provide services for this group of individuals increases significantly.

Since the goal of social work is to serve oppressed groups through advocacy, empowerment, and other social services, there must be a heightened awareness of how to work with LGBT individuals. There is an increased urgency to prepare social workers to provide services to this population. The research question for this proposed study is: what are the levels of knowledge and perceptions of the LGBT community among MSW students?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

One paradigm guiding this study is Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests that behavior is learned by observation of others (Swank & Raiz, 2007). Take for instance a child that grew up with parents who accept and rejoice individual differences; that child may be more likely to accept homosexuality as a natural occurrence, one that is not to be punished or stigmatized. Conversely, homophobic/heterosexist parents may unwittingly breed homophobic/heterosexist children. Social learning theory will guide this study by taking into account that knowledge and perceptions are often derived from how individuals are socialized. However, learned behavior is not always fixed, can be swayed, and often even changed by the acquisition of new knowledge and experience.

Another theory guiding the conceptualization of this research is Bernard Weiner's theory of attribution. Attribution theory suggests individuals who are professed at having made their own hardships will be condemned

further than those whose hardships are based around luck and/or biology (Swank & Raiz, 2007, p. 262). An example Swank and Raiz (2007) give regarding the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community is if an individual believes that homosexuality is a natural, biological reality it is likely there will be less reluctance to understanding LGBT individuals. On the other hand, if the belief is held that homosexuality is a choice that the individual makes, it often becomes easier to close off from and condemn individuals who identify as LGBT (p. 263).

Attribution theory suggests that people often use others as scapegoats in order to take the spotlight off of individual weaknesses and insecurities. For example, a person who has yet to define their own sexual orientation may discriminate against individuals who have defined their sexual orientation because of their own personal turmoil (Dulaney & Kelly, 1982, p. 179). By trade social workers should be more understanding of LGBT issues than the larger society, yet that is not always the case. This theory does not state that every person will indefinitely feel one way or another rather it suggests that a persons understanding of how the world works will ultimately

affect their reactions to and ability to work with/for those of differing sexual orientations.

Comfort Levels and Knowledge of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals

There is empirical evidence that suggests the level of comfort/ attitude a person has toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) individuals can affect the knowledge they have/or are willing to acquire in regards to this population (Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). It has been suggested through extensive research that LGBT individuals have different developmental patterns than that of heterosexuals, much of which is attributed to stigmatization and discrimination (Kulkin, Chauvin, & Percle, 2000). Multiple studies propose that social workers who are misinformed and/ or have negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals have a diminished capacity for providing efficient and effective interventions for LGBT clients (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Swank & Reyes, 2007, p. 258).

There are many factors that contribute to knowledge levels and perceptions of the LGBT community (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Reyes, 2007). By far the most significant factors associated with

insufficient knowledge and negative attitudes of LGBT individuals are homophobia and heterosexism. Studies propose that both social work students and social work professionals experience the highest rates of homophobia of all helping professions (Cramer, 1997, p. 2; Dogonvillo & Ligon, 2001, p. 116). Some studies suggest that 30 to 90% of individuals in the field of social work are homophobic and that these attitudes contribute to inadequacies in social services available for the LGBT community (Cramer, 1997, p. 2; Kulkin et al., 2009, p. 79). Researchers propose a multitude of socio-demographic factors associated with social worker's high rates of homophobia which include (but are not limited to) gender, religiosity and personal contact with LGBT individual(s).

Studies suggest that one of the most significant deterrents of homophobia is gender (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Reyes, 2007). In multiple national studies, it has been reported that male social workers tend to be more homophobic than female social workers. Berkman and Zinberg (1997) correlate these differences between males and females to "less rigid views about sexuality in relation to women than men

and stereotypes about predatory sexual behavior and pedophilia in gay men" (p. 326). However, there have been discrepancies found in some research suggesting that gender is not necessarily a driving factor of homophobia and that it may only appear this way because the ratio of male to female social workers is significantly low (Swank & Raiz, 2007).

A second factor associated with homophobia among social work professionals are high levels of religiosity (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Reyes, 2007). Since many religions view homosexuality as an abomination and incongruent with belief systems, "religion may facilitate the spread of homophobia by its teaching" (Kulkin, Chauvin, & Percle, 2000, p. 10). Social workers who believe that homosexuality is a sin may inadvertently condemn, belittle, and stigmatize LGBT individuals (p. 10).

A third socio-demographic factor associated with homophobia amongst social workers is personal contact with LGBT individual(s). Studies suggest that social workers who have more contact with members of this vulnerable population are less likely to harbor prejudice attitudes (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997, p. 327). However,

research also suggests that simply knowing LGBT individuals does not necessarily lower the rate of homophobia (Swank & Raiz, 2007). Rather, having some sort of relationship with homosexual individual(s) tends to lessen levels of prejudice (p. 261). For example, a social worker who has gay peers, friends or a homosexual relative in which an emotional investment has been made, is less likely to be homophobic than a person who has a homosexual teacher or boss (p. 261).

Other factors that have been suggested to affect rates of homophobia amongst social workers are ethnicity, political ideology and living in rural areas (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Kulkin et al., 2009; Swank & Reyes, 2007). Although these attributes are not necessarily changeable, literature suggests that education and training on LGBT development, stigmatization, and discrimination along with becoming more self aware can greatly diminish negative perceptions of this vulnerable population.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Education and Training

In 1995 the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) added a requirement for social work programs to implement sexual orientation into the curriculum because both

Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) Programs were not sufficiently addressing identity formation and issues that gay and lesbian individuals face (Mackelprang et al., 1996; Oles, Black, & Cramer, 1999, p. 2). The shift towards a more diverse curriculum that emphasized LGBT material was hoped to aid in the creation of more efficient and effective social workers that are able to handle the diversity of this vulnerable, stigmatized group (Dongvillo, 2001, p. 116; Gezinski, 2009).

A core value of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics is to strive for social justice and equality of individuals, especially that of vulnerable/ oppressed populations (NASW, 2011). While the efforts of the NASW Code of Ethics and CSWE are well intentioned, scholars continue to unveil that social work students have minimal, if any knowledge of the LGBT community and that negative perceptions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals are still prevalent (Kulkin, Williams, Boykin, & Ahn, 2009).

In 2009, Lambda Legal and the CSWE conducted a national survey of 157 social work (both BSW and MSW) program directors and 303 faculty members to see how much

their school curriculum and field placements cover LGBT material (Martin et al., 2009). Findings of this survey suggest that schools have many ways of educating students on the LGBT community, yet there continue to be discrepancies in the amount of information that faculty and directors know about transgender individuals and gender expression (p. 12). Thus, these discrepancies affect the transmission of knowledge to students (p. 12). Findings also suggest that many topics such as LGBT youth are often left out of curriculum completely. Service professionals who do not possess sufficient skill and understanding of how to work with a particular client population tend to use ineffective interventions that make clients feel alienated and unable to open up (Mackelprang, et al., 1996, p. 19).

Studies have suggested there is a correlation between the acquisition of knowledge, as well as exposure to LGBT individuals that allows social workers to gain positive perceptions of the LGBT community (Cramer, 1997, p. 463). Oles, Black, and Kramer (1999) found when students have LGBT infused courses within their social work curriculum rates of homophobia tend to decline significantly (p. 101-102). It has also been suggested

that perceptions and acquisition of knowledge were positively affected after social service professionals spent time in workshops in which they role played, had lectures and group discussions on LGBT individuals (Oles, Black, and Kramer, 1999, p. 102).

Van Den Bergh and Crisp (2004) propose that an individual's perceptions regarding the LGBT community can be very complex (p. 227). For this reason, research suggests that in addition to having educational curriculum dedicated to the LGBT community, social workers must also challenge their own self-awareness for personal bias and/or homophobic/ heterosexist ideology (Dulaney & Kelly, 1982).

Reflection on one's personal sexual orientation is imperative because it has been found that often times "people hate in others what they dare not admit in themselves" (p. 179). Educational policy and Accreditation Standard 2.1.4 of the Council on Social Work Education (2008), directly states that it is necessary for social workers to "gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups" (p. 5). Before a social worker or other helping professionals can

effectively serve LGBT individuals, an understanding of personal sexual orientation and/or bias should be scrutinized.

Summary

This chapter covered how demographics can affect social workers knowledge and perceptions of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. Social work education and professional training as it pertains to LGBT specific issues were outlined in order to pin point both strengths and inefficiencies. Finally, reflection into one's own sexual orientation was discussed as a pertinent aspect of enabling acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the LGBT community.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will cover the methods used for this study. This section includes the design of the study, a description of the sample that was utilized, how data were collected, and the instrument used to collect the data. This chapter also explains the procedures for data gathering, how human subjects were protected, and how the data were analyzed.

Study Design

This research explored knowledge and perceptions of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community among Master of Social Work (MSW) students at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study utilized a quantitative approach, in an effort to reach as many MSW students at CSUSB as possible. Part of the survey utilized eighteen questions from the "Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire" developed by Harris, Nigtengale and Owens (1995). In addition, a general knowledge/perception part of the survey was specifically designed because there was not a proven instrument that

gauged perceptions. For this reason, the issue of validity and reliability may be called into question. Problems with validity and reliability were minimized by reviewing survey questions with multiple California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) faculty members to ensure questions were focused enough to yield sound results.

A constraint of this study was generalizability. Since the human subjects surveyed consisted of students at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) only, the issue of generalizability to other Master of Social Work students at different educational institutions is raised. Regardless of limitations, it is expected that findings of this research effectively explored knowledge and perceptions of the LGBT community among MSW students, so that sound implications for social work education and practice can be drawn.

Sampling

Surveys were distributed to all Master of Social Work (MSW) Students at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB), which totaled 143 students. Out of the 143 surveys that were distributed, 30% (n = 43)

surveys were completed and turned in. The criteria for this sample were that the student must have been enrolled in the first, second or third year, full time or part time, MSW program at CSUSB at the time of the study (winter quarter 2012). Since the individuals sampled were an "entire population of some limited group" (i.e., MSW students at CSUSB) purposive sampling was utilized (Grinell & Unrau, 2011, p. 237).

Data Collection and Instruments

The research instrument for the study was a three page questionnaire (Appendix A). The first eight questions of the questionnaire were demographic questions. These demographic questions consist of: year of birth (interval), gender (nominal), ethnicity (nominal), sexual orientation (nominal), importance of religion (ordinal), social work program status (ordinal), years of social work experience (interval) and level of personal experience with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community (ordinal).

This instrument also utilized the "Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire" which is an 18 question survey developed by Harris, Nightengale, and Owens

(1995). This survey is modified from a larger survey developed by Koch (2000) which added the option of "don't know," to the other two options, true and false. Addition of "don't know" was done so that the survey becomes a more reliable indicator of knowledge (Morgan, 2003, p. 34). In regard to reliability and validity of the questionnaire, Morgan (2003) indicated that, "Reliability analysis obtained an alpha coefficient of .86, indicating satisfactory levels of internal consistency" (p. 34). This questionnaire has been used to gauge knowledge levels that students, nurses, social workers and psychologists have regarding homosexuality (p. 33).

The final part of this survey included nine additional questions that were created specifically for the current study to further assess MSW students' knowledge and perceptions of the LGBT community, as most of the surveys found did not measure perceptions. The format for these nine questions is based on a five point, ordinal, Likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agrees.

This part of the research questionnaire has been pre-tested by professors, students, and other non-affiliated individuals to verify clarity of content

and language. Since this questionnaire has not been proven, reliability and validity are questionable. A strength of this part of the questionnaire is that it could further solidify levels of knowledge and also student's perceived ability to effectively serve this population.

Procedures

Once the Director of the Master of Social Work program, Dr. Laurie Smith, gave approval for conducting this study, surveys were distributed. Attached to the surveys were both the informed consent form (Appendix B) and the debriefing statement (Appendix C). Surveys were placed in the boxes of all Master of Social Work (MSW) students in the social work student research room. Students were informed that once questionnaires were completed to drop them off in a manila folder at the front desk in the Social Work office room SB-423. Students were able to return their questionnaires during normal office hours Monday through Thursday 8:00am-5:00pm and Friday 8:00am-4:30pm. If the office was closed, students were informed to slide their questionnaires under the office door.

Timetable of activities required:

- Data collection took place from January 17, 2012 to February 2, 2012.
- Data input and analysis took place from February 4, 2012 to April 6, 2012.
- Results took place from April 7, 2012 to April 19, 2012.
- Discussion took place from April 7, 2012 to April 21, 2012.

Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was of utmost importance when conducting this study. Questionnaires were placed in Master of Social Work students' boxes in the social work resource room. Both the informed consent and the questionnaire notified participants that they were not to put their names on the questionnaire. The informed consent page also told participants that the questionnaires would be seen only by researchers and findings would be conveyed only in group form.

A debriefing statement was attached to the questionnaire informing participants the reason

participation was important. The debriefing statement also included a phone number and email of a professor to contact if there were any questions or concerns regarding the study.

Once questionnaires were completed, students were informed to drop them off in the social work department office room SB 423 during normal office hours Monday through Thursday 8:00am-5:00pm and Friday 8:00 am-4:30 pm. Surveys were to be dropped off in the social work office to further protect participants' anonymity. Surveys were shredded and thrown away after the study was completed. This study was approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB).

Data Analysis

This was an exploratory study that looked at the level of knowledge and perceptions that MSW students have regarding the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community. Data analysis of this study looked at eight demographics of participants, levels of knowledge among MSW students through 18 true, false, don't know

questions, as well as nine general knowledge/ perception questions on a five point Likert scale of strongly disagrees to strongly agrees questions. To evaluate associations between certain variables, correlations were utilized. Because correlations look at associations between variables, it allowed this researcher to distinguish whether one variable affects another (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011, p. 441). T-tests and ANOVAs were also utilized to identify if there were associations between demographics, knowledge levels, and perceptions.

It is possible that Master of Social Work (MSW) student's status in the program (i.e., first year, second year, or third year) has an effect on the levels of knowledge and perceptions of LGBT individuals. It is also possible that correlations between levels of personal experience with LGBT individuals and/or how important religion is to the individual may affect a participant's level of knowledge and/or perceptions.

Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, importance of religion, status and social work program, years of field experience and/or level of personal experience with LGBT individuals can be correlated either positively or

negatively to knowledge and perceptions of LGBT individuals.

Summary

This chapter covered the methods that were used for this study. Presented in this portion of the research was study design, sampling, how data were collected, the instruments used to collect data, how participants were protected and analysis of the data collected. This study followed ethical guidelines and was approved by the Department of Social Work Sub Committee of the Institutional Review board of at California State University San Bernardino, prior to being conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The following chapter presents data analyses that were conducted by utilizing both bivariate and univariate statistics. Descriptive analysis and Frequency distributions of respondent's demographics are presented. Correlations, t-tests, and ANOVAs were utilized to test whether there were associations between knowledge levels/perceptions and demographics of study participants. A Cronbach's Alpha was run to test the internal consistency (reliability) of the general knowledge/perception questions that were created for this study.

Descriptive Statistics

The sample consisted of 43 Master of Social Work (MSW) students at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). Thirty-eight (88.4%) of respondents were female and 5 (11.6%) male. Ethnic composition of the sample was as follows: 6 (14%) African American/black; 20 (46.5%) Hispanic/Latino; and 17 (39.5%) Caucasian. With respect to sexual orientation of respondents, 38 (88.4%)

identify as heterosexual; 2 (4.7%) lesbian; 1 (2.3%) bisexual; 1 (4.3%) pansexual.

With respect to the demographic question, that religion is important in the respondent's life, where this researcher used an ordinal 5 point Likert scale, 12 respondents (27.9%) strongly agreed; 10 (23.3%) agreed; 8 (18.6%) neutral/undecided; 6 (14%) disagreed; 7 (16.3%) strongly disagreed.

The sample was comprised of 28 (65.1%) students in the two year full time program (currently enrolled in their second year); 12 (27.9%) second year full time students (enrolled in their first year); 2 (4.7%) in the three year part time program (currently enrolled in their third year); and 1 (2.3%) student in the three year part time program (currently enrolled in their first year).

Years of social work experience of respondents were as follows: 15 (34.9%) of respondents had under two years; 16 (37.2%) had two-five years of experience; 10 (23.3%) had six-nine years; and 2 (4.7%) had over ten years of experience.

The final demographic question was level of personal LGBT experience for each respondent. Two (4.7%) indicated they identify as members of the LGBT community; 34

(79.1%) reported that they had friends or family who are LGBT; 1 (2.3%) reported being an ally of the LGBT community; 2 (4.7%) reported working with LGBT staff; 1 (2.3%) reported working with LGBT clients; and 3 (7.0%) reported no experience with the LGBT community. Out of the 43 participants who answered level of LGBT experience, 18 (41.9%) chose more than one answer; and 25 (58.1%) of participants chose only one answer.

Findings

A Cronbach's Alpha was run to test the internal consistency (reliability) of the nine general knowledge/perception questions that this researcher created. Findings of the Cronbach's Alpha indicate the reliability coefficient is low (0.56).

A frequency distribution showed the mean score for all survey respondents on the Knowledge about Homosexuality questionnaire was 11.72 (65%) ($SD = 2.64$) out of 18 (100%) points.

A one-way ANOVA was run in order to test whether or not LGBT knowledge/perceptions differed between ethnicities. The ANOVA indicated that there are differences between ethnic groups [$F(2,42) = 5.816$,

$p < .01$]. The Tukey post hoc test revealed that the only difference was between African Americans and Caucasians. Overall, Caucasians had a higher level of knowledge of LGBT individuals ($M = 12.94$, $SD = 2.05$) than African Americans ($M = 9.17$, $SD = 2.71$).

A bivariate correlation was run to test whether years of social work experience were related to MSW students' knowledge levels/ perceptions of the LGBT community. Contrary to expectations, findings suggest that MSW students with more years of social work experience had lower levels of knowledge than those with less social work experience ($r = -.36$, $p < .05$).

Summary

This chapter covered findings of the study. A Cronbach's Alpha indicated that the internal consistency of the knowledge/perception questions created was low. An ANOVA found that there were differences in levels of knowledge/ perceptions between African Americans and Caucasians. A correlation suggested that Master of Social Work students with more years of social work experience had less knowledge of the LGBT community than those with less years of experience. The following chapter will

discuss these findings and implications for both social
work practice and education.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore knowledge and perceptions of the LGBT community among Master of Social Work (MSW) students at a California State University. Since there is an absence of any course dedicated to LGBT individuals, it was postulated that survey respondents may have a lack of knowledge and/or skewed perceptions of this population.

Some variables considered to affect knowledge and perceptions of the LGBT community were: Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, importance of religion, status in the social work program, years of field experience and/or level of personal experience with LGBT individuals. Because of the low ratio of male respondents 5 (11.6%) to female respondents 38 (88.4%), there appeared to be no difference in knowledge levels or perceptions between genders [$t(41) = -0.218, p > .05$]. However, if a more equal sample size of females and males were surveyed, it is possible that differences could be identified.

Results of the study indicated that Caucasian students showed higher levels of knowledge in regards to the LGBT community than African American students. A reason for these differences may be associated with the researcher's assumption that there may be variations in cultural perspectives on the LGBT community.

Results of this study also found that Survey respondents with the most years of social work experience had the lowest levels of knowledge about LGBT individuals. Due to this finding, it is conceivable that more training and/or education on the LGBT community is necessary.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that the survey instruments did not utilize any questions pertaining specifically to transgender individuals. Doll (2012) suggests that because a fear of ostracism from the wider society exists, many people do not self-identify as transgender (p. 163). Due to the minimal number of persons that identify as transgender, "little research has been conducted on this population" (p. 163). Also, many studies labeled lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) tend to offer minimal information about transgendered individuals.

Although there is little research pertaining to transgender individuals specifically, studies suggest that there are certain unique challenges that transgender individuals face. These challenges include: fear of health care bias and denial, higher rates of HIV and substance abuse than the general population and health problems such as polycystic ovarian syndrome and liver disease associated with hormonal treatments (p. 164). Because of these unique challenges, this researcher suggests that future research be more inclusive of the transgender population.

Another limitation of this research is that the nine general knowledge/ perception questions at the end of the survey were created by this researcher. Although this part of the research questionnaire has been pre-tested by professors, students and other non-affiliated individuals to verify clarity of content and language, there appeared to be no significance ($P > .05$) in all correlations, t-tests, and ANOVAs ran between these nine questions and participant demographics. This researcher suggests

meta-analysis of MSW programs at other institutions in order to test validity and reliability.

A third limitation of this study is that participants were only comprised of MSW students from California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB) and findings may not be generalizable to other MSW students from other universities. It is suggested by this researcher that future research of other universities may make findings more generalizable to students enrolled in other MSW programs.

Further research of student's knowledge and perceptions is suggested by this researcher in order to assess whether current social work curriculum is effectively addressing the LGBT community within curriculum.

Implications for Social Work

Findings of the current study could suggest that MSW programs assess current curriculum (or lack thereof) on the LGBT population. There are various ways in which LGBT education could be integrated into MSW programs including: implementation of LGBT material into core curriculum, offering elective courses on LGBT education,

and/or offering fieldwork opportunities for students to work with LGBT individuals.

The insertion of LGBT material within MSW core curriculum is important to creating a constructivist environment for students to critically reflect on the binaries that generate "sexual minorities as the other" (Gezinski, 2009). Van Den Bergh and Crisp (2004) suggest several areas that LGBT education can be infused within core MSW curriculum. Within human behavior social environment (HBSE) courses professors can include:

- (a) The coming out process as an identity development model,
- (b) heterosexism and homophobia as structural impediments to human development, and
- (c) cultural victimization as a risk factor for health and well-being of sexual minorities. (p. 235)

In macro social work courses, issues surrounding LGBT rights (and lack thereof) could be addressed (p. 235). When addressing different family policies, a discussion on LGBT individual's entitlement to the same leave options available to heterosexuals, so that they too can care for dependent family members could be implemented into the curriculum. Finally, discussing the importance of LGBT couples eligibility for benefits such

as health insurance and that if this population is not afforded coverage it "is a violation of equal pay for equal work principles" (Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004, p. 235).

Micro Social work classes can utilize role-plays to touch on challenges LGBT individuals endure such as the coming out process and discrimination in educational institutions. Self-awareness exercises could also be utilized for students to examine personal bias or confusion surrounding the LGBT community. Also, discussion of Cass' model of gay and lesbian identity formation could be addressed when discussing developmental stages such as Erickson's psychosocial development and Freud's stages of psychosexual development (Gezinski, 2009, p. 108).

Another way MSW programs can incorporate LGBT education into course work is by offering an elective or separate course pertaining to the LGBT individuals. An advantage to this approach could be more in depth coverage of this population. A disadvantage of offering LGBT education as an elective might be that since students are not required to take the course, not all students would get this training.

Offering fieldwork opportunities for MSW students to work with LGBT individuals gives future social workers a chance to gain applied knowledge for working with the LGBT community. One area in which the possibility for field experience could be is within college Pride Centers. Pride Centers are meant to be "safe zones" for LGBT individuals; a place where individuals can go for resources and support (SMSU Pride Center, 2012).

Pride Centers also foster advocacy, education, and spreading the word of social justice for people of all sexual orientations. These centers organize events on and off campus that are relevant to LGBT individuals such as panel discussions about the community. These centers also tend to provide group therapy for LGBT individuals. If MSW students were given the opportunity to intern at places such as college campus Pride Centers, it could be suggested that additional insight and a better understanding of the LGBT community may perhaps be developed.

Conclusions

In conclusion, findings of this study could suggest that MSW programs should consider assessing the current

curriculum (and lack thereof) for areas in which LGBT education could be integrated. Implementation of LGBT education into MSW curriculum could help future social workers gain more knowledge, address skewed perceptions, as well as heighten levels of comfort in working with and serving the LGBT community.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

**Demographics
(8 questions)**

1. What year were you born?
2. What gender do you identify with?
Male___
Female___
Other (please specify) ___
3. What is your ethnicity?
African American/ Black___
Asian/ Pacific Islander___
Hispanic/ Latino___
Caucasian/White___
Native American___
Other (please specify) ___
4. What is your sexual orientation?
Heterosexual___
Gay___
lesbian___
Bisexual___
Questioning___
Other (please specify) _____
5. Religion is important in my life.
Strongly disagree___
Disagree___
Neutral/undecided___
Agree___
Strongly agree___
6. Please indicate your social work program status.
3 yr part time/ 1st year___
3 yr part time/ 2nd year___
3 yr part time/ 3rd year___
2 yr full-time/1st year___
2 yr full-time/ 2nd year___
Other (please specify) _____

7. Please indicate your number of years of social work experience (including internship/ field experience).
- None__
 - Under 2 years__
 - 2-5 years__
 - 6-9 years__
 - 10+ years__
8. What is your level of personal experience with the LGBT (lesbian/ gay/ bisexual/transgender) community?
- I identify as a member of the LGBT community__
 - I have a friend(s) or family member(s) that are LGBT__
 - I am an ally of the LGBT community____
 - I work with staff that is LGBT____
 - I work with clients that are LGBT____
 - I have no personal experience with LGBT people__
 - Other (please specify) ____

Developed by Allison Marie Hixon

Knowledge about Homosexuality Questionnaire
True or False (18 questions)

Please mark a number 1-3 for each question:

1-True

2-False

3-Don't know

9. ___ A child who engages in homosexual behaviors will become a homosexual adult.
10. ___ There is a good chance of changing homosexual people into heterosexuals.
11. ___ Most homosexuals want to be members of the opposite sex.
12. ___ Some church denominations oppose legal and social discrimination against homosexual men and women.
13. ___ Sexual orientation is established at an early age.
14. ___ According to the American Psychological Association, homosexuality is an illness.
15. ___ Homosexual males are more likely to seduce young men than heterosexual males are likely to seduce young girls.
16. ___ Gay men are more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general public.
17. ___ A majority of homosexuals were seduced in adolescence by a person of the same sex, usually several years older.
18. ___ A person becomes a homosexual (develops a homosexual orientation) because he/she chooses to do so.
19. ___ Homosexuality does not occur among animals (other than human beings).
20. ___ Kinsey and many other researchers consider sexual behavior as a continuum from exclusively homosexual to exclusively heterosexual.
21. ___ A homosexual person's gender identity does not agree with his/her biological sex.

22. ___ Historically, almost every culture has evidenced widespread intolerance toward homosexuals, viewing them as "sick" or as "sinners".
23. ___ Heterosexual men tend to express more hostile attitudes toward homosexuals than do heterosexual women.
24. ___ "Coming out" is a term that homosexuals use for publicly acknowledging their homosexuality.
25. ___ Bisexuality may be characterized by sexual behaviors and/or responses to both sexes.
26. ___ recent research has shown that homosexuality may be linked to chromosomal differences.

Harris, M. B. (1998). Knowledge about homosexuality questionnaire. In C. M. Davis, W. L. Yarber, R. Bauserman, G. Schreer, & S. L. Davis (Eds.), *Handbook of sexuality-related measures* (pp. 383-384). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

**General Knowledge/ Perceptions of the LGBT community
(9 questions)**

Please mark a number 1-5 for each question:

1-Strongly disagree

2-Disagree

3-Neutral/undecided

4-Agree

5-Strongly agree

27.____ I feel that homosexuality is a choice.

28.____ I feel confident in my ability to effectively engage with LGBT individuals.

29.____ I feel confident in my ability to clearly identify the psychosocial needs of LGBT individuals.

30.____ I feel confident in my ability to effectively provide interventions with LGBT individuals.

31.____ I am familiar with gay and lesbian identity formation.

32.____ I am familiar with gay civil rights.

33.____ I am familiar with the Matthew Shepard Act (2009).

34.____ I am familiar with the Defense of Marriage Act (1996).

35.____ I am familiar with how internalized homophobia can affect LGBT individuals.

Developed by Allison Marie Hixon

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant,

I am writing to invite you to share your insight on an exploratory study of Master of Social Work (MSW) student's knowledge and perceptions of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. This survey is limited to Master of Social Work Students at CSUSB and is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Rosemary Mccaslin. This study has been approved by the social work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

For this study, you will be asked questions regarding your perceptions and knowledge of the LGBT community. Participation in this study will take approximately 15- 20 minutes of your time and your participation is completely voluntary, with no consequences if you choose to decline or withdraw at anytime. If you choose to take part in this survey, please do not write your name on the survey, so that your identity can remain anonymous.

This survey entails no foreseen risks. Although the benefits of this study do not directly impact you, the hope is that the results will identify knowledge and perceptions that MSW students have of the LGBT community, to see what implications for social work education and practice can be drawn. The survey is completely confidential and no record will be made or saved that might be used to positively identify you as a participant. The only identifiable information that will be asked of you is your birth date but the anonymous surveys will only be seen by the researchers, and results will be conveyed in group form only.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the survey you may contact Dr. Rosemary Mccaslin by phone at (909)537-5507 or by E-mail: rmccasli@csusb.edu.

By placing a check mark in the space below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purpose of this study and agree to voluntarily participate accordingly..

_____ I agree

*****Once you have completed this questionnaire, please turn it in to the manila folder in the Social Work department office room SB423 during normal office hours Monday through Thursday 8:00am-5:00pm and Friday 8:00am-4:30pm. If the office is closed you may slide your completed survey under the office door. Thank you again for your participation.**

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. The purpose of this study was to explore knowledge levels and perceptions of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community among Master of Social Work Students (MSW) at California State University San Bernardino.

If this questionnaire has caused you any discomfort or distress, you may withdraw from the study at any point prior to the submission of your questionnaire. If you have any questions regarding your participation in the study, please contact Dr. Rosemary Mccaslin at (909)537-5507 or by E-mail: rmccasli@csusb.edu. Group level results from this study will be available after June 20th 2012 at the Pfau library, California State University, San Bernardino. Thank you for your participation in this study.

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