

Double Jeopardy: The Ageing LGBT Population in Social Work Education

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the literature on the extent to which social work education prepares students to work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and ageing individuals. This review is important because an ageing population will result in more social workers engaging with this demographic. To conduct this review we assess a combination of research and commentaries that discuss perceived gaps in social work education. The fields reviewed include social work education, ageing, LGBT populations, and the intersection of age and sexuality. The main findings show that social work education is lacking in curriculum content and in challenging student and educator perceptions relating to ageing and LGBT populations, and that students and educators are open to change and development in the right circumstances. There are limitations in the use of selected material, primarily due to a limited range of contexts in which gerontological evaluations of social work education have taken place, and a tendency to treat the LGBT community as a single, homogenous group. However, these findings are still significant as social work students arguably need to be competent in, and knowledgeable about, working with this growing demographic. In conclusion we discuss, using a critical pedagogical approach, recommendations for addressing perceived limitations discovered in social work education.

Keywords: *Ageing; LGBT; Social work education; Pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

Social work education can take many forms. In Australasian settings, this is often in the form of programs that offer classroom courses, research experience, and fieldwork practice placements. Beyond the Bachelor of Social Work, there are postgraduate opportunities that offer specialist possibilities in diverse areas of practice. Recently there has been a rise in distance learning programs and applied master's degrees, increasing the versatility of social work education. These educational programs share a similar goal: to create critically reflective and competent social workers. However, social work competency is inherently contextual – dependent on a particular time, location, professional context, and client base to reflect the type of skills and knowledge needed. Changing social policy and demographic shifts all contribute to a requirement that social workers develop new skills, competencies, and attitudes. Child protection services are major employers of social work graduates in many countries; it is possible to speculate that competencies related to this field of practice may dominate education and training. This also involves ongoing debates about the extent of child protection content and the competency of students to work in other fields (Zufferey & Gibson, 2013). One factor that may challenge social work education's definition of "competency" in the future is the shift in a country's demographic makeup due to an ageing population and older individuals living for longer.

Politics also influences priority areas for social work competence. In New Zealand the lead-up to the introduction of the Vulnerable Children Act (2014) included the release of the Children's Action Plan (2012) documenting the need to upskill the workforce for working with children. This new Act and plan, along with the establishment of children's teams, have contributed to a dearth of attention being paid to the needs of older people. In relation to the status of sexual and gender minorities, the Homosexual Law Reform Act (1986) decriminalised gay sexual relationships in New Zealand, while in 2013 same-sex marriage was legalised. These Acts, and other law reforms, aimed to eliminate marginalisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals (LGBT), families, and communities and prevent them being socially, politically, and economically ostracised. The nature of competency to work with both older and LGBT populations, and how social work education incorporates this competency, has attracted the attention of a few authors (Chambers, 2004; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). However, compared to the extent of material on social work education and ageing there is little material dedicated to sexual and gender minorities. The authors of this review have backgrounds in the areas of social work practice with older individuals and sexual and gender minorities, both from practical and academic perspectives and, as a result, have an interest in how social work education covers these two fields.

The lack of relevant material on older and LGBT populations in social work curricula is concerning for a number of reasons. These include the fact that the population is facing an increase in older adults due to the baby boomer demographic reaching older age, along with the fact that older individuals are living for longer periods of time (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). As such, social and medical services are struggling with growing demand. Older LGBT adults also suffer from social and cultural prejudices, from homophobic and heteronormative attitudes, further affecting their wellbeing (Fredriksen-Goldsen,

Woodford, Luke, & Gutierrez, 2011). Even so, social work programs are considering the implications of these populations not being represented in curricula; previous attempts to address these limitations have had mixed success (Curl, Larkin, & Simons, 2005; Rogers, Gualco, Hinckle, & Baber, 2013). As such, it is possible to advance the argument that a potential double jeopardy exists for older LGBT people who require social work intervention.

It is widely acknowledged, both internationally and within Australasia that the older population is continuing to increase in both actual size, in its proportion to younger adults, and it is living for longer (Hughes & Heycox, 2010; Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Increasing numbers of older people means there will be a growing requirement for social workers to work in this field, and for them to be familiar with the diverse natures of this population (Martin, Kosberg, Sun, & Durkin, 2012). As such it is important that social work education prepare students to not only work with older adults, but to challenge negative preconceptions about ageing students may have. It has been noted in a number of international reviews that social work schools struggle to deliver accurate and comprehensive knowledge and practice experiences in the gerontological field, and that students report disinterest in working with older adults (Cummings & Adler, 2007; Ray, Bernard, & Phillips, 2009; Richards et al., 2013). The lack of student interest could be a function of the lower status of this field within the profession, societal stereotypes around ageing, or even the age of the students completing professional social work education programs. These attitudes reflect a dominant ageist discourse present in contemporary society (Ray et al., 2009). A lack of student interest and difficulties providing adequate training are a concern not just for social work's professional competency and aged-care systems but also represent difficulties for instilling a culturally competent framework.

Cultural competency is necessary for social workers to develop best practice. Cultural competencies include providing knowledge, practice experience, and self-reflective capabilities relating to a wide range of intersecting social, personal, and cultural axes. One area receiving limited attention from social work education involves the LGBT community; there are limited critiques of gender, sex, and sexuality discourses (Rowntree, 2014; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). This lack of LGBT-related content and education for social work students is surprising when the majority of social work professional bodies have mandates to ensure that sexual orientation and identity do not negatively impact individuals (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2010; Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers [ANZASW], 2013; The British Association of Social Workers [BASW], 2012; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008). Since homophobia and heteronormative attitudes continue to affect individuals in various settings (Antonelli & Dettore, 2014), it is vital that social work programs prepare students to recognise social oppression and advocate for LGBT clients along with ageing and older LGBT service users. Yet there are certain limitations in applying a cultural competency perspective to particular demographics. For instance, in relation to the LGBT community, the breadth of experiences, diversity, and social networks between gay men, lesbian women, bisexual individuals and transgender people reduces the effectiveness of a "one-size-fits-all" approach in terms of cultural competency. On a similar note, the generational difference in experiences between sexual and gender minorities in their 20s and 30s might be markedly

different from individuals in their 70s and 80s. Assumptions of uniformity among any group of individuals can potentially inform a limited perspective and practice approach for social work students. However, while these limitations (and others) do exist, there is still a stark absence of educational content and practice opportunities for social work students with the LGBT community. A cultural competency perspective may not have the capacity in an educational setting to address the diversity of these populations, but it will still improve the delivery of appropriate content, fieldwork placements, and will challenge negative stereotypes. The combination of addressing knowledge, skills, and encouraging active self-reflection in students is useful for work with any population, but is particularly relevant for communities not fully incorporated in the delivery of social work education.

METHOD

For this review, we conducted a search of the published material on two areas related to social work education: social work education and gerontology, and social work education on sexual and gender minorities. Our goal was to collect the major studies conducted on assessing and integrating gerontological and LGBT material into social work curricula. We also included critiques, reviews, and commentaries of the limitations and successes of social work education in these fields. For the purposes of this review, “social work education” was defined as any educational program that provided training to social workers at the levels of bachelor programs, diplomas, and postgraduate courses. We defined “gerontological content” as material relating to adults of 60 plus years, or of material that referred to the older population regardless of an age range. “LGBT” and “sexual and gender minorities” are defined as material relating to individuals and communities that identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or of non-binary sexual and gender identities.

We searched four electronic databases (Scopus, JSTOR, PsycINFO, Social Services Abstracts) using a series of keywords designed to reach the intersections between the different study areas. The abstracts of the returned results were individually screened to assess if the publications related to either social work education and gerontology or social work education on sexual and gender minorities, and that the selected papers met this study’s inclusion criteria. The study inclusion criteria were as follows: addresses the level of content and/or student and faculty interest in social work in relation to the areas of gerontology and sexual and gender minorities; English language articles, empirical research and systematic reviews, and articles relating to social work educational programs. The research articles selected had to have been published within the last 20 years in an effort to ensure relevance to contemporary social work educational programs.

Research studies excluded were those that did not meet the inclusion criteria or were published before 1995, or addressed aspects of social work education and student/faculty interest and competency in areas not related to ageing and the LGBT community. Due to the small number of extant relevant empirical studies, those selected have, of necessity, a wide range of methodological approaches. It was not plausible to exclude material due to methodological variance, which is a limitation in the selected material. The keywords used to search for relevant material were: *ageing, gerontology, LGBT, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, sexual minorities, gender minorities, pedagogy, student, faculty, social work, and education.*

Eighteen empirical studies were collected that focused on social work education and ageing. The majority of these (13) were qualitative research, with the remaining five using quantitative or mixed method research methodologies. Ten studies on social work education and sexual and gender minorities were used in this review, with six being quantitative and four qualitative. The majority of the collected studies were conducted in the United States (21 of the total 28), with one of these conducted between the United States and Canada. Of the remaining seven, one study was completed in Canada, one in the United Kingdom; three were conducted in Australia with one of the Australian pieces also featuring New Zealand data. There was also one study from Ireland and one that was multi-national between seven different countries (Australia, Brazil, England, Germany, Hungary, Israel, and the United States).

Table 1. Study location

STUDY LOCATION	NUMBER
United States	20
Canada	1
United Kingdom	1
Australia	2
Ireland	1
Multi-national	3
	Total: 28

The earliest study included was from 1995. However, the majority are from the mid-to-late 2000s. This review also includes government documents and strategies from New Zealand and Australia, along with 20 general commentaries that address a combination of the issues facing older people, the LGBT community, the ageing LGBT population, critical pedagogy, and the necessity that social work education covers these populations.

Studies were assessed according to their methodological quality, relevance to the review question, and topic pertinence. These collected works do not represent the entirety of research conducted on social work education in relation to these two populations. Instead, these topics were examined together in order to provide a broad overview of the variety of critiques, interventions, and recommendations for social work education. The fact that the majority of this research was conducted in the United States is a limitation in this review, but also represents the general lack of research into social work education in both New Zealand and Australia in relation to older LGBT people. The fact that the studies and articles on sexual and gender minorities often treat the LGBT community as a homogenous group in their data and commentaries is a limitation in the selected material, as it does not represent the diversity of experiences, identities, and representations in social work education that fall under the umbrella term "LGBT". However, this limitation is not only present in studies that address social work education, but represents the limited variety of social work literature and research in the area of sexual and gender minorities. This particular limitation, while influencing the results of this review, does highlight the necessity of furthering social work research and practice-based interest in this area.

RESULTS

Ageing and social work education

Gerontological content within social work programs has received strong critiques due to limited content, a lack of specialist training opportunities, and a deficit of academic leadership in this field (Holosko, 1995; Weiss, 2005).

Gerontological content

Research studies have found that practice opportunities with older adults are beneficial to social work students. One United States study that looked at student perceptions after completing specialised, rotational practice placements in aged care settings ($N=160$) found that almost all of the students reported positive experiences and would recommend the program to their peers (Ivry, Damron-Rodriguez, Lawrance, & Robbins, 2005). Conversely, additional research also conducted in the United States found that students completing practice experiences and research programs with older adults reported a positive improvement in practice skills and an increased comfort in working with older people, but a slight decrease in interest in working in a gerontological area (Rogers et al., 2013). These authors suggested that this decrease might be due to the fact that being engaged in working with older adults increased the student's awareness of their own lack of skills needed for this field, making them hesitant to display strong feelings of wanting to work with this population.

Concomitant with student disinterest in working with older people is the absence of course material about gerontological social work. A review conducted on six common social work textbooks in the United States found that out of the 9828 pages reviewed only 3% ($n=309$) included ageing content (Tompkins, Larkin, & Rosen, 2006). The material that *was* included was criticised by the authors for not accurately representing the diversity of the ageing experience, or incorporating material on mental health, wellbeing, and sexuality. While this is just one analysis of social work texts in a specific educational context (and material that is more recent could include updated gerontological content), it does indicate that ageing within social work education is still largely taught from a homogenous perspective.

Student disinterest

Limitations such as these may suggest why the ratio of students enrolling in gerontological courses within a specific program in the United States was roughly 3% compared to the 19% who chose a child and youth focused program (Curl et al., 2005). While this survey covered only one social work program, there are similar reports from elsewhere showing a lack of student interest in working with older people (Cummings & Adler, 2007; Richards et al., 2013).

Another survey designed to assess factors influencing student pursuit of gerontological employment in three southern United States schools found that it was a combination of uncertainty regarding pay rates, and the status of social work jobs in gerontology which impacted upon career choices (Cummings, Adler, & DeCoster, 2005). These factors indicate that, while gerontological content can be a beneficial way of improving student skills and knowledge in this field, we argue that further work is needed to improve student perceptions about working with older people.

Faculty leadership

The importance of social work faculty challenging negative perceptions of ageing and championing the inclusion of gerontological content has been noted as being integral for this cultural change (Wang, Ihara, Chonody, & Krase, 2013). One commentary that laid out 10 steps to infuse gerontological content highlighted the importance of including faculty in this process, and that educator interest and passion would be critical to the success of gerontological social work programs (Holody & Kolb, 2011).

What has/has not worked

One of the ways of attempting to address the difference between student interests in gerontological work compared to other practice areas is to include more ageing content and material in educational programs. Integrated gerontological content improves three key components of social work students' ability to work with the older population: gerontological skills, knowledge, and perceptions about ageing (Cummings & Adler, 2007; Lee & Waites, 2006). However, other studies show that simply including gerontological material will not necessarily address the issue of student disinterest. One particular study in the United States that sampled attendees at a Social Work Student Policy Practice Forum found that ageing content did not increase the chances of students being willing to accept a job in gerontological social work (Curl et al., 2005). Yet, while some authors also argued that gerontological content had no positive impact on students' career aspirations (Olson, 2003; Rogers et al., 2013) there are those who argued it *does* (Gutheil, Heyman, & Chernesky, 2009; Wang et al., 2013). This particular point might be related to the fact that gerontological content improves student perceptions of both older people and the ageing process, which is often argued as a possible predictive factor for seeking aged care employment (Glambos & Curl, 2013; Rogers et al., 2013).

It is apparent that improving social work education in relation to gerontological material and student perceptions is a challenging process. Specific and integrated content improves student skills and knowledge but does not necessarily affect career choices. However, issues surrounding ageing and the older population are not the only areas which social work education is struggling to address. Sex, sexuality, and gender identity also require the same critique and attention.

LGBT and social work education

As noted earlier, developing cultural competence is an important part of social work education aiming to impart the knowledge, practice skills, and reflective capability in students that allows them to work with a diverse range of people. A necessary part of developing cultural competency, and one that is often absent from social work education, is the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities (Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). Authors Van Den Bergh and Crisp set out to define attitude, knowledge, and skill components that relate to LGBT populations. These authors defined attitude as consisting of self-reflection, reflection on previous contact, and active participation in self-development. Knowledge in this context, according to the authors, consists of an awareness surrounding the use of language, demographic characteristics and an understanding of the historical and contemporary impact of discrimination. They argue that culturally competent practice with sexual minorities needs to include a suitable level of skills to ensure an informed use

of support systems and service provisions (Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). These suggestions target a broad array of social work skills and processes, with the attitude and self-reflective capacity of the student being centrally important. Just as with gerontological content, the student's perception of the client population and ability to challenge negative stereotypes and personal bias is a key component of developing competent social workers.

Student perceptions

While efforts to develop these elements of culturally competent practice within social work education have received little research attention, there have been attempts to examine student and faculty perceptions towards sexual and gender minorities. A survey of social work students from the United States ($N=172$) found a low level of phobia towards LGBT people, and in fact reported a high level of positive attitude towards this community (Logie, Bridge, & Bridge, 2007). However, the authors reported that the students had a low level of cultural competency for working with sexual and gender minorities, with 42% of the participants lacking adequate knowledge. It was noted that students were not actively seeking out educational or practice opportunities with LGBT people (Logie, Bridge, & Bridge, 2007), which could suggest that, potentially, there were higher levels of homophobia than the survey first reported. Alternatively, while social work education encourages students to critically self-reflect in relation to personal biases and preconceptions, LGBT-related stigma may still exist (Johnson, 2014). This author, who identifies as queer, reflects on how heterosexism and heteronormative attitudes are common in the culture of social work education (Johnson, 2014).

Faculty

Regarding social work educators, two recent surveys from the United States found that certain forms of stigma emanated from the lecturer's perception of sexual and gender minorities. In the first, which surveyed heterosexual faculty, 14% of the sample ($n=303$) held prejudicial attitudes towards people who identify as LGBT (Chonody, Woodford, Brennan, Newman, & Wang, 2014). The second survey returned similar results, with the authors reporting that the majority of the participants ($n=161$) had positive attitudes while a small minority reported negative perceptions towards the LGBT community (Woodford, Brennan, Gutierrez, & Luke, 2013). A web-based survey of both United States and Canadian social work faculty ($n=327$) reported that the majority of staff were supportive of including more LGBT-related content, but that there was less inclination to focus on experiences of stigma and discrimination (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Woodford, Luke, & Gutierrez, 2011). This discrepancy is potentially troubling as, internationally, social work has a professional responsibility to raise awareness and challenge forms of structural oppression that impact on individuals that may result from minority status (AASW, 2010; ANZASW, 2013; BASW, 2012; NASW, 2008) and the education of social workers is a key component in that process. Further troubling findings indicated teaching staff regarded course-related material about transgender issues as not being as necessary as material relating to lesbian, gay, or bisexual experiences (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Woodford et al., 2011), and that transgender discrimination was not a relevant component to include in their curriculum. While a statistically smaller group, transgender people are typically stigmatised, have experienced oppression and discrimination, and arguably need to be included in social work discourses on sexual and gender minorities (Hughes, Harold, & Boyer, 2011; Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim et al., 2011).

Interventions

There have been efforts towards providing educational interventions in relation to LGBT content in social work education. A social work school in Dublin, Ireland collaborated with a local Gay Men's Health Project over providing a training module for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The reports from students following the training showed an increase in understanding, awareness, the ability to identify stigma, along with the confidence to work alongside LGBT populations (Foreman & Quinlan, 2008). While this was just a singular study it does indicate that integrated content and practice experience is a viable strategy for increasing the cultural competency of students to work with sexual and gender minorities. On a similar note, students who identify as LGBT also offer an opportunity to reflect and comment on social work education. A Canadian study where six recent social work graduates (who identified as LGBT) and eight field educators (who had a student who identified as LGBT on placement) were interviewed. It became apparent that there were specific challenges that arose from having an LGBT identity in a social work practice placement (Newman, Bogo, & Daley, 2008). The challenges identified included a fear of prejudice from both social work agencies and from service users. The students identified self-disclosure as being a key part of providing a positive learning experience; however, this may not be a universally applicable solution. The benefit of having a supportive fieldwork educator was also crucial in providing assistance for students in navigating the culture of their agency. Both sets of participants reflected that part of the responsibility for managing students' stress or discomfort lies with the fieldwork educator, along with the educator actively challenging any discrimination that may be present in the culture of their agency. In relation to this reflection, the authors recommend that social work programs provide training for fieldwork educators to better develop LGBT-related competency (Newman et al., 2008).

DOUBLE JEOPARDY?

The limited gerontological content and material on sexual and gender minorities in social work education creates a potential double jeopardy for the older LGBT population. Social workers are often in a unique position to respond to a variety of health and social needs with the older population (Holosko, 1995). As such, practitioners might need to be prepared to face the specific concerns that impact on older LGBT individuals.

Older LGBT persons are likely to be affected by both ageism and heteronormative assumptions, often intersecting in health and social systems. While the majority of older people face challenges from ageism, ranging from prejudice, bias, and even forms of socially sanctioned ridicule (Allen, Cherry, & Palmore, 2009; Kane, 2004), the older demographic is also often seen as a homogenous group, compromising a sense of individual identity, experience, and personal needs (Duffy & Healy, 2011; Hughes, Harold, & Boyer, 2011). Reducing older persons to a single group often makes an assumption that sex, sexuality, and gender identities are not relevant discussions in the context of ageing (Chandler et al., 2004). This limited perspective creates a one-size-fits-all approach that is not useful to productive or beneficial discourses on sexuality, gender or ageing (Chandler et al., 2004; Hughes & Heycox, 2010). A reductionist view on ageing in relation to sexuality often results in perceptions that older people are not interested in close, personal relationships,

a flawed perspective as it these relationships that are often centrally important for older people and help keep them socially connected and integrated with their communities (Chandler et al., 2004; Hughes & Heycox, 2010).

While this simplistic attitude towards older people and older LGBT populations compromises their sense of identity, culture, and ways of living (Hughes & Heycox, 2010), it is also concerning when considering the social and personal issues impacting on this demographic. A recent survey on the experiences of older LGBT individuals in Chicago ($N=210$) found that a large majority of the participants reported experiencing discrimination related to their LGBT identity (Brennan-Ing, Seidel, Larson, & Karpiak, 2014). The same survey found that, on average, older LGBT people had been required to access medical and social services more than twice in the past year (Brennan-Ing et al., 2014) indicating that social workers are often involved in the lives of this population. A review of the issues that LGBT individuals face in the United States mental health system found that a lack of staff training and knowledge often resulted in clients feeling as if they had to be “closeted” about their sexuality (Lucksted, 2004). The same study also reported that participants came across negative stereotypes in medical settings that LGBT people were HIV positive, sexual predators, or confused about their sexual identity (Lucksted, 2004). This pathologising of LGBT identity in mental health systems may be affecting the standard of care for LGBT patients, and is indicative of the need for more education and training around sexual and gender minorities (Lucksted, 2004). Similarly, frustration at the lack of LGBT knowledge in service providers was reported in a study that used a narrative analysis of interviews with 11 LGBT participants living in a Canadian city (Kidd, Veltman, Gately, Chan, & Cohen, 2011). On the same theme, an Australian study that used a narrative analysis with four older lesbian women who worked in the health care sector found that, within this field, workers often witnessed discrimination towards LGBT people, or experienced it themselves (Hughes & Kentlyn, 2015). One of the participant narratives in this research noted that, often, age-based discrimination obscured and devalued sexuality and individuality within the health care sector, highlighting how age-based stigma can intersect with sexuality and identity in multiple ways.

Older LGBT individuals in residential care also face challenges relating to this double jeopardy. Multiple authors have argued that residential facilities assume heterosexuality in their residents, and that these facilities often have limited understanding of the unique issues facing LGBT individuals, especially the health needs of transgender people (Ehrenberg, 1996; Fronek, 2012; Hughes & Heycox, 2010). Homophobia has been reported as a common occurrence for individuals living in residential care (Ehrenberg, 1996) and that opportunities for sexual expression are often limited due to ageist perceptions that sexuality in older people is perverted, uncommon, or even non-existent (Chandler et al., 2004). Even if this heteronormative assumption is not universal across residential facilities, LGBT adults have expressed concerns about entering residential care due to the belief that they will face discrimination and prejudice (Johnson, Jackson, Arnette, & Koffman, 2005). Fearing to enter a residential facility can create undue stress on older LGBT people, and even potentially place them in dangerous situations due to hesitance in seeking social service supports. An Australian study that used semi-structured questionnaires with 19 service

providers and six members of the LGBT community on the topic of end-of-life care found there were barriers for older LGBT people receiving appropriate health care due to discrimination, and a general lack of knowledge (Cartwright, Hughes, & Lienert, 2012). The authors suggested that providing education on the needs of ageing LGBT people was a key step in addressing this limitation within the health care system. In Australia, government policy has been enacted to help address this double jeopardy. In 2013 the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Ageing and Aged Care Strategy was designed by the Federal Australian government in 2013, which is committed to ensuring high-quality, culturally appropriate aged care for all LGBT people. The strategy comprises six goals, each with detailed actions to follow from the implementation of the policy. Goal four is particularly relevant to social work education: “LGBTI-inclusive aging and aged care services will be delivered by a skilled and competent paid and volunteer workforce” (Department of Health and Ageing, 2013, p. 3). It is important therefore that social work education in Australia, and in wider Australasian settings, prepares social workers to be knowledgeable and skilled in working with older LGBT people, and contributes to the success and development of policies such as these.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: A WAY FORWARD

Critical pedagogy provides a key perspective that aids social work education in addressing the limitations of gerontological content and LGBT awareness. This is an educational framework consisting of three principles: understanding and engaging with the political and economic realities of everyday life; that students and educators challenge social, environmental, and economic structures; and that educators and students repeatedly question their own roles and positions in society (Kirylo, Thirumurthy, Smith, & McLaren, 2010; Pishghadam & Medidani, 2012).

Critical pedagogy challenges traditional educational models that regard students merely as receptacles of established facts, and instead advocates for transforming institutionalised students into reflective individuals with a critical curiosity about society, power, inequality and a desire to pursue social change (Ku, Yuan-Tsang, & Liu, 2009). Critical social theory, and critical social work, rely on self-reflection and the challenging of typical assumptions and bias as key processes of transformative learning (Morley, Macfarlane, & Ablett, 2014). Transformative learning builds upon a critical pedagogical approach by challenging existing paradigms; critically engaging in emerging alternatives; and encouraging action based on new ways of thinking (Witkin, 2014). Importantly, the emphasis on action and change is central to critical social work theory as practitioners have an obligation to not only understand, but also to challenge, critique and evoke emancipatory change (Morley et al., 2014). However, social work education, like many teaching industries, can fall prey to traditional, top-down, banking-based systems of learning (Ku et al., 2009).

The process of deconstructing and examining central assumptions is central to critical pedagogy (Pennell & Ristock, 1999). We argue that social work educators need to engage in this process with students to prepare them for working with older and LGBT individuals.

Furthering this goal, critical gerontology is a framework for examining, not only the ageing process, but also challenging how social and cultural constructs of ageing impact on an individual's economic, political, and personal wellbeing (Freixas, Luque, & Reina, 2012). This approach questions normative constructions of the life course, and attempts to be as inclusive as possible of diversity and difference (Ray, 2008). Critical gerontology is not only suited to exploring the ageing process, but also actively incorporates different intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This intersectional analysis of social, cultural, and political power structures not only aids social work education in deconstructing the process of ageing, but also gives students and educators the capacity to examine how sexuality and gender might impact on the life course of older adults (Chambers, 2004; Freixas et al., 2012; Ray, 2008). The role of critical pedagogy is to focus on encouraging the understanding of structural forms of oppression, actively challenging existing oppressive power structures while also working to generate self-reflectivity amongst students. It is this final component, critical self-reflection, which can help translate awareness and attitudes into skills for practice. As social work students and practitioners learn to challenge negative preconceptions, and recognise their own personal bias and fears, it can lead to anti-ageist practice that does not assume a heteronormative lifestyle.

In keeping with the principles of critical pedagogy, social work educator and researcher Rowntree (2014) has built upon McNay's (2004) "situated intersubjectivity" model, originally devised to better comprehend both symbolic and material dimensions of gender. Located within a queer theoretical framework in which sexuality is understood as *performed and fluid* rather than *fixed*, Rowntree applies the model to examine both cultural and structural components of this social axis with social work students. This approach aids, not just theoretical examinations of sexuality discourses, but provides a means to encourage social work students to critically reflect on and challenge heteronormative assumptions.

Arguably, action is required at all levels of learning to create substantial change in this area of social work education. This action can include challenging existing student and faculty perceptions and prejudices, incorporating relevant, appropriate, and critical course content, and to foster critical curiosity and engagement in students.

CONCLUSION

As we have discussed, there is an emerging awareness of the need to generate interest and competency for social work practice with older LGBT people. In relation to gerontological content, there have been investigations into faculty perceptions and expertise, the validity of integrating gerontological course content and practice opportunities, and efforts to address negative student perceptions about age and ageing. Sexual and gender content has received less investigation, but there have still been efforts to explore how educators and students perceive LGBT+ populations. It is clear from the concerns that some older LGBT people face that social work education arguably needs to address the critical intersection between ageing and sexual identity. However, the relationship between the inclusion of specific content, student perceptions, and employment aspirations is contestable, and further research is required to explore the validity of these interventions. Research in the area of social work education and sexual and gender minorities is also needed, especially

to address the lack of diversity in studies that see the LGBT community as a homogenous group. We believe that the examination of, not only ageing, but of the inclusion of diverse sexual and gender identities, needs to be included in future education-based research. We suggest using approaches akin to critical pedagogy to address these limitations in social work education and to inform new research approaches in this field.

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