

EXPLORING THE STATE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This study examines perceptions of religious discrimination in social work education among a religiously heterogeneous, national sample of professionally affiliated graduate students. The results indicate that theologically liberal and mainline Christians perceive low levels of discrimination to exist, on a par with those who report no faith affiliation. As posited, however, evangelical and theologically conservative Christians reported significantly higher levels of religious discrimination. Relationships between orthodox beliefs, spiritual motivation and perceptions of religious discrimination are also explored. The implications of these findings are discussed as they intersect the NASW Code of Ethics and the CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.*

Key words: *Spirituality; Religion; Discrimination; Diversity; Social Work Education*

INTRODUCTION

Social work has begun to make significant strides moving toward a more inclusive, religiously tolerant profession. This change has been engendered by many factors. Philosophically, postmodernism has effectively illustrated the limits of Enlightenment-based rationalism, which, in turn, has helped to legitimate a space for spirituality in public and academic discourse. A substantial body of research—numbering well over 1,600 studies—now testifies to a general association between religion and a wide array of salutary outcomes (Johnson, 2002; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001). Interest in spirituality has increased among the general public (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Gallup & Jones, 2000) and surveys suggest that most clients desire to use their religious and spiritual strengths to help ameliorate problems (Bart, 1998; Larimore, Parker & Crowther, 2002; Mathai & North, 2003; Rose, Westefeld & Ansley, 2001).

In addition to the strengths innate in various faith traditions, growing acknowledgement exists that faith traditions foster distinct cultural worldviews (Koenig, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Van Hook, Hugen & Aguilar, 2001). In recognition of this reality, major accrediting organizations, such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO, 2001), which accredits most hospitals in the United States, now recommends the administration of spiritual assessments (Hodge, *in press*). In a similar vein, the recent NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) highlight the importance of developing cultural competence to work effectively with people from various faith traditions.

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Interest in spirituality among social workers appears to be increasing and research indicates that most practitioners are currently addressing religious issues in practice settings (Canda & Furman, 1999; Heyman, Buchanan, Musgrave, & Menz, in press; Murdock, 2004; Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999). In response to interest in the topic, CSWE introduced a new symposium on spirituality at its Annual Program Meeting (APM) and a small but growing body of social work literature addresses the intersection between professional concerns and religion and spirituality (Canda, Nakashima, Burgess & Russel, 1999).

In addition to introducing a spirituality symposium at its APM, CSWE has also revised its Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (2001) to incorporate religion into its understanding of human diversity (Miller, 2001). The CSWE (2001: IIIA.3) standards stipulate that a foundational educational goal is to foster practice that a) demonstrates respect for clients' religious narratives and b) is free of religious discrimination. In keeping with the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) standards that address religion, educational programs are enjoined to make specific and continuous efforts to provide a learning context that fosters respect for religious diversity.

While studies of existing practitioners have repeatedly found that most social workers have been exposed to little or no content on spirituality and religion during their graduate education (Canda & Furman, 1999; Derezotes, 1995; Furman, Benson, Grimwood & Canda, 2004; Murdock, 2004; Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999), the extant data suggests that educational programs are developing a more open stance toward spirituality and religion. Only a handful of programs offered elective courses on spirituality and religion in 1990. By 1995, the number had risen to 17 programs and in 2001, at least 50 programs offered courses on spirituality and religion (Miller, 2001). By 1999, over three-quarters of *US News* ranked social work programs were providing at least some content on spirituality and religion in their educational programs (Kilpatrick & Puchalski, 1999).

These developments can be seen as movement toward a more inclusive professional posture regarding religion. Observers have argued that the traditional exclusion of religious narratives is discriminatory in much the same way that the earlier exclusion of African American and feminists' narratives was oppressive, fostering individual and societal prejudice toward religious people and their narratives (Amato-von Hemert, 1994). Consequently, micro and macro level changes to include spiritual perspectives represent movement toward a more open, inclusive professional discourse. The changes help bring the profession more in line with its ethical standards (NASW Code of Ethics, 1999: 1.05a, b, c, 2.01b, 4.02, 6.04d) as well as fostering a profession that is more reflective of the broader society that it is charged with serving.

A FULLY INCLUSIVE PROFESSION?

In conjunction with these progressive developments, another line of inquiry has appeared in the literature indicating that the perspective of some groups may be particularly at-risk for remaining voiceless in professional discourse. In other words, as the profession's discourse expands to include a number of new voices, some perspectives may continue to encounter bias.

Individuals who affirm traditional, mainstream tenets of various faith traditions, referred to by some as "people of faith" (French, 2002; McCarthy, 1996), tend to be significantly under-represented in the helping professions and other professional occupations (Woodberry & Smith, 1998). For instance, evangelical Christians, broadly defined, may be the largest religious minority in the United States, accounting for perhaps 25% of the population (Green, Guth, Smidt & Kellstedt, 1996; Hutchison, 1999). Yet, a study of full-time faculty ($N = 280$) at 25 social work schools in 12 Southeastern states—an area where evangelical Christians are disproportionately located—found that only 3% of social work educators were evangelical Christians (Sheridan, Wilmer & Archeson, 1994). Similar demographic under-representation has been documented in psychology (Bilgrave & Delury, 1998; Shafranske, 2001) and many other culture shaping arenas, such as television, media, and academia (Hunter, 1991; Woodberry & Smith, 1998).

While various theoretical frameworks, based upon class, epistemology, and oppression theory, have been advanced to account for the under-representation, they all predict that mainstream, traditional believers and their narratives are at-risk for discrimination in forums in which people of faith are particularly under-represented (Gouldner, 1979; Hodge, 2003a; Hodge, 2003c; Hunter, 1991; Ressler & Hodge, 2000). When representatives of minority viewpoints are largely absent, then projects are often constructed in a biased manner. Had African Americans been sufficiently represented in medical settings, for example, it is doubtful that Black Americans would have been used as human guinea pigs in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment (Jones, 1993). Similarly, the lack of women in academic circles fostered the creation of moral development theories that were biased against women (Gilligan, 1993).

Consistent with this view, a number of content analyses have documented bias toward evangelical Christians and other people of faith in some media forums (Kerr, 2003; Lindsey & Heeren, 1992; Skill & Robinson, 1994; Skill, Robinson, Lyons & Larson, 1994) and various educational and professional texts (Bellitto, 1996; Glenn, 1997; Hillocks, 1978; Larson, Milano & Lu, 1998; Sewall, 1995; Vitz, 1985). Similarly, a number of vignette studies using experimental manipulation have documented discrimination among various samples of helping professionals (Gartner, Harmatz, Hohmann, Larson & Gartner, 1990; Neumann, Thompson & Woolley, 1991; Neumann, Harvill & Callahan, 1995; Neumann & Leppien, 1997a; Neumann & Leppien, 1997b), including psychologists ($N = 356$) in charge of admissions to APA accredited graduate programs, who discriminated against evangelical Christians in their admission decisions (Gartner, 1986). As might be expected, Christians, just like women, teach at lower quality universities than their professional accomplishments would predict (Rothman, Lichter & Nevitte, 2005).

It is important to note that discrimination is not necessarily intentional. Most male academics, for example, did not deliberately set out to construct moral development theories that were biased against women, or deliberately discriminate against women in their hiring decisions. Rather, distinct presuppositional frameworks or, to use Kuhn's (1970) term "paradigms," form based upon the worldviews of dominant groups. These frameworks function to highlight data that is congruent with the dominant worldview

while discounting information that is incongruous with the dominant paradigm. Just as the under-representation of, for example, women in academic circles fostered the creation of moral development theories that were biased toward females (Gilligan, 1993), the under-representation of people of faith fosters the creation of moral development theories that are biased toward traditional theists (Richards & Davison, 1992). Unless conscious efforts are made to pursue minority perspectives, paradigms are inevitably constructed that discount the narratives of minority groups, particularly in areas where value conflicts occur (Wambach & Van Soest, 1997).

A few studies have explored religious discrimination in social work forums. Using a vignette methodology, one national study found that, in aggregate, Veteran Affairs social workers ($N = 131$) discriminated in favor of liberal Christianity and against evangelical Christianity in their professional decisions (Neumann, Thompson & Woolley, 1992). Content analysis of some leading journals (Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Hodge, 2002) and textbooks (Cnaan, et al., 1999; Hodge, Baughman & Cummings, in press) found that the perspective of evangelical Christians was either essentially omitted from discussion or depicted in a biased manner that was inconsistent with how evangelical Christians would tend to self-describe.

Noting that the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) requires social workers to eliminate and prevent discrimination based upon religion, another study examined perceptions of religious discrimination among social workers (Ressler & Hodge, 1999). This study found that respondents ($N = 222$) who were theologically conservative were more likely to report experiencing religious discrimination in social work than were theological liberals. This study, however, was characterized by a non-random sampling procedure, a low response rate, and other limitations that raise questions about the veracity of the results.

Given the exploratory nature of much of the existing work, further research is needed to ascertain the extent of religious discrimination in social work circles (Belcher & Cascio, 2001; Bergin, Payne & Richards, 1996; Clark, 1994; Denton, 1990; Gilbert, 2000; Harris, 1998; Ressler & Hodge, 1999). As noted above, religious discrimination is an issue of ethical concern for all social workers (NASW Code of Ethics, 1999: 1.05a, b, c, 2.01b, 4.02, 6.04d). Further, the importance of the topic is underscored by the increasing attention devoted to religion and spirituality in professional forums.

Accordingly, this study builds upon Ressler and Hodge's (1999) earlier study of religious discrimination. Given the importance of social work education in terms of shaping the profession's discourse (Cnaan, et al., 1999), and Clark's (1994) implicit call for research on religious discrimination in social work education, this paper explores students' perceptions. More specifically, this study explores the extent to which students personally experience religious discrimination in their social work programs and the extent to which religious discrimination is perceived to be a problem in respondents' social work programs. Based upon the extant literature, it was hypothesized that students who self-identified as members of more traditional faith traditions, such as evangelical Christianity, would report higher levels of religious discrimination than students who self-identified as members of more liberal traditions, such as theologically liberal Christianity.

Also explored is the relationship between spiritual motivation, orthodoxy and the two dependent variables (i.e., personal experience of religious discrimination and the extent to which religious discrimination is perceived to be a problem in the respondent's social work educational program). However, because of the apparent lack of previous studies on these two constructs, no hypotheses were posited regarding the four relationships. The method used to conduct this study is discussed next, beginning with the operationalization of the three independent variables and the two dependent variables.

METHODOLOGY

Operationalizing faith tradition, spiritual motivation and orthodoxy

As implied above, the study incorporated three independent variables: faith tradition, spiritual motivation, and orthodoxy. To assess individuals' self-identified faith affiliation, two items were adapted from the General Social Surveys (Davis, Smith & Marsden, 1998). Individuals were asked, "Thinking about your religious faith, would you describe yourself as Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other type of faith, or no faith at all." If respondents self-identified as Protestants, they were asked if they self-identified as theologically liberal, mainline, evangelical, or "fundamental" Christians. These categories are widely regarded as reflecting relatively discrete faith traditions (Smith, 2000). Due to the pejorative connotations associated with the use of the term "fundamentalists" (McGrath, 2002), the term "theologically conservative" is used to describe these respondents, which serves as a counterpart to the term theologically liberal.

To operationalize the concept of orthodoxy, Fullerton and Hunsberger's (1982) six-item Christian orthodoxy scale was used. This scale is generally considered to exhibit good reliability and validity (Paloutzian, 1999). In this study, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .80 was obtained with self-identified Christians. In keeping with Fullerton and Hunsberger's (1982) recommendations, respondents were coded as either affirming orthodox or non-orthodox beliefs.

Spiritual motivation was measured with Hoge and Carroll's (1978) six-item intrinsic scale. The intrinsic measure is one of the most widely used measures in the psychology of religion and is generally considered to be reliable and valid (Burriss, 1999). The intrinsic scale can be considered a measure of spiritual motivation for individuals who ascribe to a faith tradition (Hodge, 2003b). In this study, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .91 was obtained. The theoretical range for the scale is 1 to 7, with higher values indicating higher levels of spiritual motivation.

Operationalizing religious discrimination at the personal and program levels

In addition to demographic variables, the survey included two dependent variables to assess the degree of religious discrimination in social work education. To measure the extent to which individuals had personally experienced religious discrimination, individuals were asked the following dichotomous item, "Have you personally experi-

rienced discrimination due to your religious beliefs in your social work program?" To measure the extent to which religious discrimination was perceived to be a problem in social work education, individuals were presented with an 11-point scale on which 0 represented the complete absence of religious discrimination in the respondent's social work program while 10 represented a program in which religious discrimination permeated every aspect of the program (Hodge & Gillespie, 2005). Potential respondents were then asked, "To what extent, if any, is religious discrimination a problem in your social work program?"

Sample procedures and characteristics

Consistent with other researchers seeking to obtain a religiously heterogeneous sample (Ressler & Hodge, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, et al., 1997), perceptions were solicited among two diverse professional organizations: National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW). Random sampling, stratified by state to ensure geographic representation, was used to obtain the NASW sub-sample while systematic sampling was used with the NACSW sub-sample. Given the low response rate obtained in some previous studies using mailed surveys (Canda & Furman, 1999; Furman, et al., 2004; Ressler & Hodge, 1999), a telephone methodology was used since this approach tends to produce higher response rates (Babbie, 1998). Calls were placed in the spring semester to ensure as many students as possible had completed at least one semester of social work education and up to eight attempts were made to reach potential respondents. Among contacted individuals, a response rate of 86% ($N = 303$) was obtained with the NASW sub-sample and a rate of 93% ($N = 88$) was obtained with the NACSW sub-sample.

Analysis was conducted to explore possible demographic differences between the NASW and the NACSW sub-samples. No significant differences emerged. As expected, however, significant differences did occur regarding the three independent variables: faith tradition, orthodoxy, and spiritual motivation. Relative to the NACSW sub-sample, the NASW sub-sample was comprised of significantly less Protestants (35% vs. 92%; $\chi^2 = 86.36$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$) and among self-identified Protestants, higher levels of theologically liberal (40% vs. 9%) and mainline Christians (36% vs. 22%) and lower levels of evangelical (20% vs. 60%) and theologically conservative Christians (4% vs. 9%; $\chi^2 = 39.84$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$). Regarding orthodoxy, the NASW sub-sample was significantly less likely to report orthodox beliefs (50% vs. 96%; $\chi^2 = 54.50$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Similarly, in terms spiritual motivation, the NASW sub-sample reported a significantly lower mean score compared to the NACSW sub-sample ($M = 4.68$ vs. $M = 6.61$; $t = -18.38$, $df = 389$, $p < .001$).

Given the homogenous demographic nature of the two sub-samples, the two sub-samples were combined to create a single religiously heterogeneous sample. The demographic characteristics for the single sample are reported as follows. The mean age was 35.00 ($SD = 10.30$) and 86% ($N = 338$) were females. Most respondents were either married (46%, $N = 181$) or single (37%, $N = 146$), while the remaining individuals

opted for a number of additional categories (e.g., divorced, widowed, partnered). Approximately 76% ($N = 298$) were white, 9% ($N = 35$) African American, 5% ($N = 19$) Hispanic, 4% ($N = 16$) Asian, 1% ($N = 5$) Native American, and 3% ($N = 10$) selected "other" while the remaining respondents declined to answer the question. Of note is the fact that respondents had completed, on average, 4.07 ($SD = 1.71$) semesters of social work education (counting their current semester as one) and 5.36 ($SD = 5.80$) years in the profession. Particularly notable among these characteristics is the duration of the exposure to social work education, a finding that suggests that the sample is well situated, as a group, to answer questions pertaining to their educational programs.

Data analysis

Given the relatively few missing values (i.e., generally < 2% for all variables), missing data were not considered to be a problem (Kline, 1998). To retain sample size, the series mean was used with applicable variables. In instances where the independent or dependent variable was missing values, listwise deletion was used (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). For regression models, the studentized and standardized residuals were computed along with deviance, $DF\beta$, and Cook's Distance statistics, with examination of these statistics indicating that the data generally fit the models well based upon widely used criteria (i.e., 95% of studentized, standardized and deviance values between ± 2 and $DF\beta$ and Cook's Distance < 1), unless noted otherwise below (Field, 2000). Similarly, VIF values were examined to ensure that multicollinearity was not a problem ($VIF < 10$) (Morrow-Howell, 1994). For models using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), tests were conducted to ensure that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was supported (Field, 2000).

Reported directly below are the results of the analysis. Relayed first are the findings between the three independent variables (faith tradition, orthodoxy, and spiritual motivation) and the first dependent variable, personal experience of religious discrimination. This is followed by a presentation of the results for the three independent variables and the second dependent variable, the extent to which religious discrimination is a problem in social work education. For each relationship, bivariate results are reported first followed by the multivariate findings.

RESULTS

Personally experienced discrimination

To test the first hypothesis—that individuals who self-identified as members of more traditional faith traditions would be more likely to personally experience religious discrimination than respondents who self-identified as members of more liberal traditions—a new, five category variable was created consisting of adherents of the four Protestant traditions and those who reported no faith affiliation. Responses were weighted so that the perspective of each Protestant affected the results equally. The no faith category served as a reference group, since those who report no religious faith might be expected to report low levels of experiencing discrimination due to their

religious beliefs.

Chi-square analysis confirmed the first hypothesis at the bivariate level ($\chi^2 = 44.27$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). As hypothesized, more traditional respondents were more likely to report personally experiencing discrimination due to their religious beliefs in social work education. The percentage in each category who reported personally experiencing religious discrimination was as follows: theologically conservative 61%, evangelical 51%, mainline 17%, theologically liberal 8%, and no faith 9%.

Logistic regression was used to test the first hypothesis at the multivariate level. Given the exploratory nature of the study, backwards and forwards methods were used, both of which produced the same model, which is depicted in Table 1 as model 1. The following information is reported for each variable in the model: the coefficient (B), direction of the relationship, Wald chi-square, level of significance, and the estimated odds ratio and confidence limit of experiencing discrimination based upon respondents' religious beliefs.

The results indicated that the first hypothesis was supported at the multivariate level ($\chi^2 = 49.41$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$). Compared to the reference group, those with no faith affiliation, evangelical Christians were approximately nine times more likely to personally experience religious discrimination while theologically conservative Christians were roughly 15 times more likely to experience religious discrimination. No significant differences emerged between those with no faith and theologically liberal and mainline Christians. Gender was also significantly related to the dependent variable, with males being more likely to report encountering discrimination than the reference group, females.

Before testing the second hypothesis, relationships were explored between orthodoxy and spiritual motivation and the first dependent variable. Chi-square analysis indicated that orthodoxy was associated with personally experiencing discrimination at the bivariate level ($\chi^2 = 12.19$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Orthodox believers were significantly more likely to report experiencing religious discrimination than were non-orthodox believers (37% vs. 9%).

Table 1. Odds ratios of personally experiencing religious discrimination in social work education

Model	Predictors	B	Wald χ^2	Sig.	Odds Ratio (95% C.I.)
#1	Gender (Ref = Females)	1.019	4.867	.027	2.772 (1.121, 6.856)
	Faith Tradition (Ref = no faith)				
	Theological Liberal	-.118	.017	.896	.889 (.152, 5.185)
	Mainline	.570	.475	.491	1.768 (.350, 8.937)
	Evangelical	2.202	8.041	.005	9.043 (1.947, 41.459)
Theological Conservative	2.695	8.409	.004	14.808(2.395, 91.549)	
#2	Gender (Ref = Females)	.982	5.171	.023	2.670 (1.145, 6.226)
	Race (Ref = white)	.857	4.940	.026	2.356 (1.107, 5.015)
	Orthodox (Ref = non-orthodox)	1.770	10.468	.001	5.872 (2.009, 17.160)
#3	Gender (Ref = Females)	.850	3.857	.050	2.340 (1.002, 5.465)
	Spiritual motivation	.776	16.309	.000	2.173 (1.491, 3.166)

The results obtained at the bivariate level were supported at the multivariate level ($\chi^2 = 23.77$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$). Compared to the non-orthodox reference group, orthodox believers were roughly six times more likely to report experiencing religious discrimination (see Table 1, model #2). Gender and race/ethnicity were also associated with the dependent variable. Males and people of color were approximately two and a half times more likely to report experiencing religious discrimination than the reference groups, females and whites, respectively.

An independent samples t-test indicated that respondents' level of spiritual motivation was significantly related to personally experiencing religious discrimination ($t = 6.14$, $df = 188$, $p < .001$). Higher levels of spiritual motivation were associated with greater likelihood of personally experiencing religious discrimination in social work education ($M = 6.46$ vs. $M = 5.33$).

Spiritual motivation was also related to personally experiencing religious discrimination at the multivariate level ($\chi^2 = 35.80$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$). As was the case with the above model, backward and forward methods of regression produced the same model, which included gender and spiritual motivation (see Table 1, model #3). Males were more likely to personally experience discrimination due to their religious beliefs in social work education as were those who were more spiritually motivated. Analysis of the residuals for this model, however, indicated the presence of an unduly influential case (e.g., $DFBeta > 1$). Eliminating this case resulted in gender becoming non-significant ($p = .051$) and increased the relationship between spiritual motivation and personally experiencing religious discrimination (i.e., odds ratio increased from 2.173 to 2.747). Reported next are the results for the second dependent variable.

Religious discrimination in educational programs

To test the second hypothesis—that individuals who self-identified as members of more traditional faith traditions would report religious discrimination to be a more pervasive problem in social work education than respondents who self-identified as members of more liberal traditions—a univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The five category variable, consisting of the four Protestant traditions and those who self-identified as adherents of no faith, was used as the grouping variable. The no faith category served as the reference group for the planned comparisons.

Analysis revealed the second hypothesis was confirmed at the bivariate level ($F = 14.16$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Tukey's post-hoc test revealed that theologically conservative ($M = 5.73$) and evangelical Christians ($M = 5.08$) reported that religious discrimination was a significantly more pervasive problem in social work educational programs than did those with no faith ($M = 2.22$) and mainline ($M = 2.73$) and theologically liberal Christians ($M = 2.99$). An examination of the planned comparisons revealed no difference in perceptions between those with no faith and theologically liberal and mainline Christians. Conversely, the perceptions of both theologically conservative ($p = .001$) and evangelical Christians ($p < .001$) differed significantly from those held by individuals of no faith.

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the second hypothesis at the multivariate level. None of the independent variables meet the requirements for inclusion in the model, however, resulting in coefficients identical to those reported above.

An independent samples t-test indicated that orthodox status was associated with perceptions regarding the extent of religious discrimination as a problem in social work education ($t = 3.89$, $df = 92$, $p < .001$). Orthodox believers reported that religious discrimination was a significantly more pervasive problem than did non-orthodox believers ($M = 4.26$ vs. $M = 2.79$). As was the case above, none of the independent variables meet the assumptions required for ANCOVA.

Finally, analysis was performed to explore the relationship between spiritual motivation and the extent to which religious discrimination is perceived to be a problem in social work education. Analysis revealed that a significant relationship existed between the two variables ($r = .302$, $p < .01$). The more spiritually motivated the respondent, the greater the degree to which religious discrimination was perceived to be a problem in the respondent's social work educational program. Conducting a partial correlation procedure to control for the effects of other variables resulted in essentially the same coefficients. The findings are summarized and discussed next.

DISCUSSION

In light of the growing interest in religion and spirituality in educational and other professional spheres, this study explored the extent to which students personally experience religious discrimination in their social work programs and the extent to which religious discrimination is perceived to be a problem in social work education. Compared to respondents who self-identified as members of more liberal traditions, such

as theologically liberal Christianity, it was hypothesized that students who self-identified as members of more traditional faith traditions, such as evangelical Christianity, would report a) a greater likelihood of personally experiencing discrimination due to their religious beliefs and b) that religious discrimination is a more pervasive problem in their social work educational programs.

Both hypotheses were confirmed. Theologically conservative and evangelical Christians reported significantly higher levels of religious discrimination, both personally and in their programs, compared to theologically liberal and mainline Christians. Interestingly, no difference in perceptions emerged between those with no faith affiliation and theologically liberal and mainline Christians.

This study also explored the relationship between orthodoxy, spiritual motivation and perceptions of religious discrimination, although no hypotheses were made due to a paucity of prior research using these two independent variables. Analysis revealed that both variables were significantly associated with perceptions of religious discrimination. Orthodox beliefs and higher levels of spiritual motivation were associated with higher levels of perceived religious discrimination, both personally and at the educational program level.

Implications for social work education

The results have important implications, perhaps particularly for social work education. As noted in the introduction, a foundational goal of educational programs is to foster practice that is devoid of religious discrimination and is respectful of clients' faith traditions (CSWE, 2001: IIIA.3). Educational programs are also required by CSWE to make specific and continuous efforts to provide a learning context that fosters respect for religious diversity.

The results suggest that programs may be doing an effective job of fostering an educational context that is characterized by respect for individuals who are theologically liberal and mainline Christians. Perceptions among adherents of these two faith traditions were not significantly different from those with no faith affiliation. This finding, in tandem with low absolute levels of perceived discrimination, suggest that educational programs may well be fostering an inclusive milieu for members of these two faith traditions. While further research is needed to assess whether or not students are being equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to work effectively with clients from theologically liberal and mainline Christianity, the results raise the possibility that educational programs are fostering an inclusive, respectful environment for members of these two faith traditions.

Concurrently, the results also suggest that educational programs may have some difficulty meeting CSWE standards for traditions such as evangelical and theologically conservative Christianity. Adherents of these two traditions reported high levels of personally experiencing religious discrimination and perceived religious discrimination to be a relatively pervasive problem in social work education. These findings are consistent with other studies that have documented bias toward evangelical Christianity in social work forums (Cnaan, et al., 1999; Hodge, 2002; Hodge, et al., in press;

Neumann, et al., 1992; Ressler & Hodge, 1999; Ressler & Hodge, 2003). For example, a content analysis of 71 textbooks used at influential social work programs found that evangelical Christian narratives were rarely depicted in the surveyed texts and in cases where they did appear, the narratives were not depicted as evangelical Christians themselves would tend to self-articulate (Hodge, et al., in press). Rather, evangelical beliefs and values were depicted in a disparaging manner as seen through the lenses of the dominant culture. As Amato-von Hemert (1994) states, the exclusion and misrepresentation of religious narratives fuels discrimination and bias among social workers in much the same way that the previous exclusion of black and feminists' narratives fostered bias toward African Americans and women (Furman, Perry & Goldale, 1996; Pellebon, 2000).

To be in compliance with the CSWE educational standards, the above material implies that educational programs need to make specific and continuous efforts to foster a learning context that fosters respect for evangelical Christianity. Qualitative data suggests that many evangelical Christians do not feel free to be themselves in educational settings and must deny essential aspects of their being, a dynamic that may foster psychological harm (Ressler & Hodge, 1999; Ressler & Hodge, 2003).

Programs might consider ways to create "safe zones" for students who are evangelical Christians. For example, faculty members who are evangelical Christians might be encouraged to disclose and discuss spiritual narratives in classroom settings in the same manner that other members of other cultural groups are encouraged to discuss their perspectives (Cain, 1996). Sharing such perspectives helps to support evangelical Christian students and other people of faith by making faith-based concerns visible and by facilitating discussion of related issues, not to mention helping all students become more knowledgeable regarding the beliefs and values necessary to engage in culturally competent work with evangelical Christian clients.

To address the under-representation of evangelical Christians in social work education (Sheridan, et al., 1994), consideration should be given to hiring more faculty from this cultural group (Gartner, 1985; Haynes & White, 1999). As Van Soest and Garcia (2003) observe, a balanced and inclusive faculty sends the message that the program is committed to diversity and exposes others to a healthy diversity of voices and perspectives. The lack of literature acquainting social workers with evangelical Christian narratives underscores the need for more material representing this perspective. Attention should also be directed toward dismantling any systemic barriers that may prevent the publication of narratives or the hiring of faculty from this population (Neumann, et al., 1992; Ressler, 1998). The end goal should be a profession that a) reflects the diversity of society and b) equips its members to work with the diverse cultural groups that comprise the underlying society it is ethically mandated to serve.

Limitations

The findings should be understood within the context of the study's limitations of which the most prominent may be generalizability. Although the study explored perceptions among a religiously heterogeneous sample comprised of two national samples

of graduate students, it is also important to emphasize that the findings cannot be generalized to all social workers or even all social work graduate students, particularly given that roughly 60% of graduate students in accredited social work programs are unaffiliated with either NASW or NACSW (T. Lennon, Director of Information Services, CSWE, personal email communication, February 4, 2004). It also bears reiterating that the study was based upon perceptions of discrimination rather than experimental manipulation or the observation of discrimination.

More research is needed to map the contours of religious discrimination among other populations. Theory suggests that traditional Catholics and Latter-Day Saints, for example, might also report elevated levels of religious discrimination (Hunter, 1991). More work is needed to assess the relationship between orthodox beliefs, spiritual motivation and religious discrimination. Studies are also needed to explore whether students are being equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to conform with the profession's ethical and educational standards.

CONCLUSION

As noted in the introduction, social work has made significant strides toward developing a more inclusive profession. It is important to emphasize that these changes represent an important professional advancement that enables the profession to better serve clients and achieve greater congruence with its ethical and educational standards. For some religious groups, the profession appears to have moved toward a more inclusive stance. Yet for others, the profession's stance remains largely exclusionary. The challenge is to build upon the advances that have been made to include those who are still experiencing discrimination.

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