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## The impact of homophobia and transphobia on the professional development of LGBT social workers during graduate school

Emily K. Lusenhop  
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Emily Lusenhop  
The Impact of Homophobia and  
Transphobia on the Professional  
Development of LGBT Social  
Workers During Graduate School

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory study was undertaken to determine the extent to which LGBT social workers experience homophobia and transphobia during the course of their Master's education. Secondly, this study examined the cumulative impact that homophobia and transphobia have on the professional development of LGBT social workers during their graduate education.

Using semi-structured interviews with LGBT Master's level social work students, as well as graduates of Master's of Social Work programs, the study found that all 12 participants experienced oppression in the form of homophobia and/or transphobia at some point during their education. The study explored three major areas in which oppression took place: within the classroom and curriculum, during field placements, and within the context of supervision.

The study concluded that discrimination and oppression based on the sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBT social work graduate students is widely prevalent, although it varies in degree and magnitude. In addition, this study found that half of the respondents felt like their experiences of oppression related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity during social work graduate school had a negative impact on their overall professional development. A quarter of the respondents felt that learning to overcome homophobia and/or transphobia ultimately made them stronger clinicians. Therefore, this study suggests that further research on the professional development of LGBT social workers is necessary and critical so that graduate schools can better support their students who identify as LGBT or as part of the LGBT community.

**THE IMPACT OF HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA ON THE PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF LGBT SOCIAL WORKERS DURING GRADUATE SCHOOL**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Emily Lusenhop

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2013

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Discrimination and expressions of homophobia and transphobia against LGBT individuals continue to be issues in our society despite recent legislative actions that advance the rights of gay and transgender people to marry, to obtain housing, and to be protected in the workplace, to name a few. This is no less true within the profession of social work itself, and oppression against LGBT social workers continues to be a problem.

After reflecting on the current literature regarding the professional development of social workers, as well as thinking critically about the unique experiences of LGBT individuals, I became interested in learning more about how identifying as LGBT impacts social work clinicians. More specifically, I explored the following research question: *To what degree do LGBT social work clinicians experience homophobia and/or transphobia during their education as graduate students, and how do these experiences impact their professional development?*

In order to understand the topic that this research addresses, one must first understand a few key terms used throughout this study. For the purpose of this research, "cisgender" is used to describe the gender identity of individuals who do not identify as transgender. Cisgender usually indicates that an individual's gender identity is synonymous with the sex they were assigned at birth. Another important term to know is "microaggression," defined as subtle, covert, and underlying aggression towards individuals who are perceived as "different" or "less than."

Microaggressions can be in the form of unwanted gestures or through the use of demeaning language, thoughts, and behaviors.

The most important term to mention is the acronym LGBT, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. I acknowledge that this term may be perceived as too rigid for describing this particular population, instead of using the term queer, for example. The word queer is often used to broadly describe individuals whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation falls outside of socially constructed norms and the term is purposefully vague and lacks clear boundaries. This study does not intend to discount or challenge the use of the word queer by using the term LGBT. Instead, I chose to use the term LGBT because it allows me to set some definitional boundaries, making it easier to understand who might be considered part of the study population, while also discussing the unique and challenging experiences of people who identify outside the constructs of heterosexuality and traditional gender binaries. In closing, I chose to use LGBT rather than queer because, as Gamson (1995) explains, “It is by keeping sexual and gender categories hard and clear that gains are made...As long as membership in this group is unclear, minority status, and therefore rights and protection, is unavailable” (p. 401).

This research topic is relevant to social work because it highlights the particular struggles of individuals in the LGBT community, who often feel marginalized within the larger culture of the United States and possibly within the profession of social work. There is a long and difficult history regarding the subject of sexual orientation and gender identity and their relationship to social work. It was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the DSM and the DSM-IV still contains the diagnosis of “gender identity disorder” (McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008). It should also be noted that the new DSM-V is currently being printed and it may contain updated perspectives on transgender individuals. Regardless,

homophobia and transphobia are as much a part of social work history as they are a part of the history in this country.

This topic is also relevant because it pertains to key aspects of the social work ethical standards and guidelines as outlined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The core values and ethics of social work create a critical foundation that enables social work professionals to address the needs of oppressed and marginalized individuals with dignity and respect. These core values include a commitment to service, social justice, the dignity and worth of every person, the importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Not only should these core values and standards influence how social workers treat their clients, but these ethical standards should also be integrated and applied to the professional development of social workers during their graduate education. Lastly, the NASW Code of Ethics is a tool that social workers, clients, and the community can use to hold the profession accountable, which is why it is so important for graduate schools to examine to what degree they are upholding the principles of non-discrimination in regards to all people, including LGBT social workers.

One of the most relevant Ethical Standards that applies to this study is section 4.02 in the NASW Code of Ethics, which states, “Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of... sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...” (National Association of Social Workers, 2008, pp. 22-23). Clearly non-discrimination is a core social work value that must be upheld in both the classroom and in the field. In order to uphold these ethical standards, graduate schools for social work must be willing to examine how homophobia and transphobia impact the professional development of



their students so that they can take steps to combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

The professional development and training of social workers during graduate school is the foundation upon which these professionals will begin to address the needs of oppressed and marginalized populations. Both the NASW and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) are the governing bodies and policy makers who clearly indicate that the profession must address discrimination, and it is the responsibility of graduate schools of social work to apply and uphold these standards. Therefore, it is critical that graduate level social workers fully learn to integrate the ethical guidelines into their own practice and that they learn to address homophobia and transphobia within their work. It is equally imperative that LGBT social work graduate students have the right to be protected from discrimination in the classroom, in the field, and in supervision. Exploring how LGBT social workers experience discrimination based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is incredibly important because it can hopefully encourage academic programs to better understand the scope of the problem and how it is impacting their students. Social workers who experience homophobia and transphobia during their graduate education may leave with a template for feeling marginalized and misunderstood in a profession that seeks to do just the opposite. The following study will show that LGBT graduate students of social work are deeply impacted by discrimination and that their experiences as graduate students will inevitably influence their personal and professional lives in the future.

Using an exploratory research design and qualitative methods to collect data, I conducted 12 interviews in order to examine the cumulative impact of homophobia and transphobia on social workers during their graduate education. Open-ended questions were used during semi-

structured interviews to gather data about transphobia and homophobia in social work education, during supervision, and in the context of clinical interactions. These interviews also contained questions about each participant's perception of how these combined experiences impacted their professional development. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, and the limitations and biases of this study are clearly discussed throughout this report.

The following chapters discuss the theoretical and empirical basis for this study, the methodology used to explore the research question, the demographic and qualitative findings, as well as a discussion section that attempts to interpret and make meaning of the findings.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The following literature review discusses the theoretical literature and empirical research relevant to the question: *To what degree do LGBT social work clinicians experience homophobia and/or transphobia during their education as graduate students, and how do these experiences impact their professional development?*

The first portion of this chapter reviews the basic tenants of social work education and then the chapter briefly explores the concepts of homophobia and transphobia before reviewing the existing research relevant to this study. Lastly, the final section mentions the major limitations of the current literature relating to my topic and provides a summary of the literature and study objectives.

#### **Social Work Education**

There are several key components of a social worker's graduate education that influence the course of their professional development. Throughout this study, the three main arenas used to evaluate a student's cumulative professional development during graduate school are academic coursework and classroom experiences, fieldwork and internship experiences, as well as advisory and supervision experiences with faculty, staff, and professionals in the field. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) provides written guidelines for the educational components of coursework, field placements, and supervision at length, and these academic

elements represent the cornerstone of a social worker's professional development, regardless of their chosen academic program.

Each student's experience in these different learning environments is greatly dependent on how well the NASW Code of Ethics is assessed and integrated into each area of education. In addition to the NASW Code of Ethics, the CSWE has the responsibility to ensure that graduate schools are preparing their students to be competent professionals who "understand how diversity characterizes and shapes the human experience and is critical to the formation of identity" (Council on Social Work Education, 2008, p. 4). Clearly these guidelines mandate that social workers, as well as those who train them, have an ethical obligation to combat discrimination in the form of both homophobia and transphobia in all aspects of the profession.

### **Homophobia**

The theoretical underpinnings of the word homophobia are complex and discussing its definition within the context of this research question is vital to understanding the theoretical foundation for this study. Weinberg (1970) initially coined the term homophobia and became the first psychoanalyst to identify homophobia, not homosexuality, as a major social problem. He even described it as a "disease" that poses more of a threat to society than homosexuality. Since the term was first introduced, definitions regarding homophobia have been widely debated and critiqued. Homophobia, as Kulik (2009) extrapolates, is the "fear and hatred of nonnormative sexualities and genders" (p. 25). Although the term homophobia has been brought about within the last century, the word itself has come to represent a myriad of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that have been socially constructed across time and space, from the Greco-Roman period, to the Renaissance, to the early twenty-first century (Fone, 2000). For the purposes of this research study, homophobia is defined as the fear of, and negative attitudes and hatred

towards, individuals whose sexual orientation falls outside socially constructed norms of sex, sexuality, and gender.

## **Transphobia**

Recognizing that the unique experiences of individuals who identify as transgender are often overlooked in traditional social work literature, this study also seeks to explore the theoretical roots of gender identity, as well as transphobia, and how it impacts social workers.

Early liberal feminists, such as Kessler and McKenna (1978), highlight the important idea that gender is a socially constructed term and they hypothesize that, “Gender is a social construction, that a world of two ‘sexes’ is a result of the socially shared, taken-for-granted methods which members use to construct reality” (p. vii). This assertion is important because it emphasizes that gender, and therefore transgender, are socially constructed, value laden terms that have different meanings across individuals, cultures, and communities. A major criticism of this liberal feminist perspective is that it provides a rigid definition of gender as a dichotomous expression of masculinity or femininity.

Post-modern literature suggests an alternative way of looking at the topic of gender. Contrary to liberal feminism, post-modern writers such as Bornstein (1995) propose a more inclusive definition of gender and transgender, explaining,

All the categories of transgender find a common ground in that they break one or more of the rules of gender: what we have in common is that we are gender outlaws, every one of us. To attempt to divide us into rigid categories... is like trying to apply the laws of solids to the state of fluids: it's our fluidity that keeps us in touch with each other. It's our fluidity and the principles that attend that

constant state of flux that could create an innovative and inclusive transgender community. (p. 69)

This passage clearly emphasizes the sociocultural diversity and fluidity of identities among transgender people. Bornstein represents a post-modern feminist whose deconstruction of traditional binary gender systems has opened up a door for more inclusive interpretations of the words gender and transgender. Similarly, a recent study by Beemyn and Rankin (2011) backs up this postmodern idea that gender is actually fluid and non-binary. Using an interdisciplinary approach, as well as surveys to collect quantitative data and interviews to collect narrative data, a total of 3,474 individuals completed their survey between 2005-2006 and they found that gender identity varies greatly among transgender individuals (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011, p. 9, 11).

Clearly, the foundations of the terms gender and transgender are incredibly complex and difficult to untangle. Given the complexity of ideas, this study takes a broad approach to defining transphobia. For the purposes of my research questions, transphobia is defined as the fear of, and negative attitudes and hatred towards, individuals whose gender identity falls outside socially constructed norms of gender, sex, and sexuality.

### **Existing Research**

Multiple studies show that LGB<sup>1</sup> individuals in the profession of social work are exposed to varying degrees of homophobia throughout their early years as professionals in a variety of different settings (Aronson, 1995; Fredriksen-Goldsen et. al, 2011; Messinger, 2004). Much of

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the acronym LGB (instead of LGBT) is intentionally used when a study or author did not include transgender individuals within their work. The purpose of this is to highlight the omission of the transgender community and how these individuals have been previously overlooked.

the current research looking at LGB social workers focuses on one particular arena in which homophobic attitudes are prevalent.

First, it is important to review some of the research about social work education and the LGB community. For example, Aronson (1995) discusses the invisibility of lesbians in the social work classroom using a single case design based on her own experiences as a lesbian faculty member in a school for social work. McAllister et al. (2009) highlight the importance of LGB mentorship programs in social work education and, based on the authors' mixed methods study of 43 individuals, they concluded that these programs are clearly needed and must be tailored to the specific goals of each LGB student if they are to be successful (p. 101). Lastly, another important research study conducted by Fredriksen-Goldsen et. al. (2011) used a mixed methods approach to analyze data from 327 social work faculty from the United States and Canada in order to examine their support for including issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in graduate curriculums. Interestingly, their findings suggest that there is more support for curriculum emphasizing lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender clients than there is support for the topics of homophobia and transphobia (p. 28-29). While societal attitudes towards LGB individuals continue to shift, this study seems to suggest that the discrimination faced by these individuals must not be overlooked in the classroom.

A second major component of most social work graduate programs is some form of internship or field placement. These hands on experiences provide powerful learning opportunities and yet they may pose unique challenges to social workers that identify as LGBT. In one particular exploratory study that used qualitative methods to collect data from 30 lesbian and gay social work students and graduates, Messinger (2004) found that 26 of her participants identified challenges relating to the relationship between their sexual orientation and their field

placement experiences. This author identified some of the common themes from her research as the desire for stronger interpersonal support, such as having a LBG faculty mentor, as well as a desire for increased institutional support, such as education about coming out during the field placement (Messinger, 2004, p. 199). This research clearly indicates that LGB social workers face unique challenges during their internship experiences, such as homophobic attitudes in the workplace, but it does not go so far as to discuss the impact of these experiences or the cumulative impact they may have. One significant limitation of this particular study is that only four of the 30 participants identified as people of color, an unfortunate trend that seems common throughout much of the research on this topic.

Another qualitative study also looked at the connection between recent LGB social work graduates and their field placement experiences, highlighting some of the more positive learning opportunities for LGB individuals during the course of their social work education (Newman, Bogo, & Daley, 2008). These authors found that self-disclosure was a prominent theme throughout their study and that the process of disclosing sexual orientation to field supervisors often lead to positive learning experiences. Given the relatively small sample size for Newman, Bogo & Daley's (2008) study, it is difficult to generalize these results to the larger LGB social worker population. Regardless, this research clearly indicates that the experience of disclosing sexual orientation in the context of supervision and field placements, whether positive or negative, plays an important role in the professional development of social workers.

Clearly, studies regarding homophobia in social work education, field placements, or within the context of supervisory relationships are prevalent. However, research that explores the *cumulative* impact of homophobia and its relationship to LGB social workers is sparse. Thus, this study is intended to begin filling that gap within the research and it will explore homophobia



across a variety of settings, as well as looking at the overall impacts of homophobic experiences during a social worker's early years as a professional. Similarly, this study purposefully discusses transphobia and includes the transgender community because they are valuable and important members of the greater LGBT population.

Lastly, the transgender community is frequently omitted from studies that explore LGBT social workers, despite the fact that researchers often include the “T” in their use of the LGBT acronym. Although existing social work research is largely lacking transgender inclusion, there are a few studies that clearly highlight the ongoing need to discuss the transgender community. Erich, Boutte-Queen, Donnelly, and Tittsworth (2007) collected data from 150 randomly selected licensed social workers from the south and concluded that social workers seldom received education regarding the transgender community. Not only does this lack of education impact each social worker’s future skills as a clinician, but it may also send a message to transgender social workers that their experiences are unimportant and undervalued. After analyzing the diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder (GID) found in the DSM-IV, Markman (2011) also concluded that there should be more education and dialogue about gender identity in schools and that social work ethics must be enforced so that the gender binary can be challenged and deconstructed (p. 324). Almost no research on transgender social workers themselves can be found to date, which only reinforces the concern that social work graduate schools may be neglecting to adequately educate their students about this community.

### **Limitations in the Literature**

Despite the inclusion of the LGBT population in recent social work research, major omissions still exist within the literature. As previously mentioned, transgender individuals are often included in the LGBT acronym and yet sufficient attention is not given to this population.

In addition, the experiences of LGBT people of color are also frequently undervalued and left out of these studies. However, one particular study did an excellent job of highlighting, not only transgender individuals and people of color, but it also looked at the intersectionality of these marginalized identities. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (2011), specifically looked at data regarding discrimination and this report found that,

Discrimination was pervasive throughout the entire sample [6,450 transgender and gender non-conforming study participants], yet the combination of anti-transgender bias and persistent, structural racism was especially devastating. People of color in general fare worse than white participants across the board, with African American transgender respondents faring far worse than all others in most areas examined. (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2)

Clearly, transgender individuals of color face discrimination and the voices of these individuals must be included in future research in order to more accurately represent the LGBT community as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this literature review is meant to explore the current research relevant to the research question: *To what degree do LGBT social work clinicians experience homophobia and/or transphobia during their education as graduate students, and how do these experiences impact their professional development?* Much of the literature discusses social work education, field placements, and other aspects of training. However, future research is needed to understand how these forces combine to influence of professional development of social workers and this study will hopefully shed light on the overall impact of homophobia and transphobia. It will be

equally important to consider the sociocultural diversity of my sample population so that I can more adequately represent the various identities that intersect with LGBT individuals. This literature has provided a foundation for my research study and the next chapter will outline my plans for securing a sample population and the methodology of my data collection.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

This study examined the impact of homophobia and transphobia on the professional development of social workers. In order to explore this topic, this research focused on the following question: *To what degree do LGBT social work clinicians experience homophobia and/or transphobia during their education as graduate students, and how do these experiences impact their professional development?* The most appropriate research design for this question was a qualitative, exploratory study.

Qualitative methods were chosen for a variety of reasons. First, the purpose of this study was to explore the complex intersections between an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity, and their professional identity as a social worker. Utilizing qualitative methods to explore the complex experiences of LGBT social work clinicians provided a more nuanced and well-rounded understanding of this topic, as opposed to using more concrete quantitative methods. Qualitative methods were also used because of the uniqueness of this topic. Much of the current literature discusses homophobia and/or transphobia in social work education, field placements, and in other aspects of training. However, this specific study was needed in order to understand how these forces combine to influence the professional development of social workers and to shed light on the *cumulative* impacts of homophobia and transphobia. In addition, transgender individuals are often included in the LGBT acronym and yet sufficient attention is not given to this population in major research studies. There is a major lack of empirical research

on the relationship between transphobia and the professional development of social workers. Therefore, qualitative methods were chosen because they allowed this research to more accurately capture the unique, diverse, and subjective experiences of the LGBT community without overlooking the importance of gender identity. Additional methodological aspects of this study, including sample characteristics, data collection and analysis methods, and methodological biases are discussed in the following sections.

### **Sample**

The sample population for this study included current social work graduate students, as well as Master's of Social Work graduates who identify as LGBT and/or as part of the LGBT community. In order to meet inclusion criteria, participants also needed to reside within the United States, be 18 years of age or older at the time of the study, and be able to read and understand English.

Demographic questions were used to gather information about each participant's age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and geographic location of residence. In addition, each participant was asked to clarify whether they currently are a social work graduate student or whether they have already received a Master's of Social Work degree.

**Recruitment.** This study utilized non-probability methods of sampling known as convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The method of sample selection for this study was non-probability because I needed to rely on available participants. Three advertising sources were used in order to recruit potential participants and these included: (a) the social networking site Facebook, (b) LGBT Organizations (RU12? Vermont and Outright Vermont), and (c) an email advertisement sent to personal contacts of the researcher. Once participants learned about the study through the advertising sources listed above, they were directed to sign up for the study

by emailing their preferred name and phone number to a confidential email address created for the purposes of this study. Once a participant's information was received, they were called and asked four screening questions. The data from these screening questions was not collected because it was simply used to ensure that participants met eligibility requirements. Once participants answered "yes" to all of the screening questions, they were asked to provide a mailing address so that they could be mailed the Informed Consent Agreement (Appendix A). Two copies of the Informed Consent Agreement were mailed to each participant, along with a self-addressed stamp envelope. Each participant was informed that their agreement must be returned prior to the formal interview. Most interviews were scheduled during the initial phone call with each participant, while some were scheduled through email.

**Informed Consent Procedures.** In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant, everyone in the sample population was required to read and agree to the terms outlined in the Informed Consent Agreement (Appendix A). Prior to collecting any data, a thorough Human Subject Review application was submitted and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E for HSR approval letter).

Several precautions were taken to ensure the confidentiality of the sample population. All transcripts were assigned a pseudonym upon transcription, along with a corresponding number. Once the transcript was assigned a pseudonym, the identifiable information of each participant was stored in a separate, locked location. All electronic data and transcripts are being kept in password-protected files on a password-protected computer. All other data and recordings will be kept secure for three years as required by Federal regulations and, after that time, they will be destroyed or continue to be kept secured as long as needed. When no longer needed, all data will be destroyed.

**Risks and Benefits of Participation.** Because this study explored the personal topics of sexual orientation and gender identity, there was a low to moderate risk that participating in this study might have evoked feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, or sadness for some of the individuals who were interviewed. Participants might have benefited from participating in this study because they were able to vocalize and share experiences that they might never had the opportunity to share before. Participants may have found that they were able to contribute meaningful information to this study, which might help influence how other social work clinicians think about the impact of homophobia and transphobia on the profession.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected between February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013 and April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013 using a semi-structured telephone interview containing six demographic questions (Appendix B), 11 open questions, and a series of five pre-determined follow up questions used at my discretion (Appendix C). The entire process was designed to take no longer than 45 minutes. Before participants could complete the demographic questionnaire and telephone interview, they had to agree the informed consent procedures outlined in the Informed Consent Agreement, which was mailed to their preferred address. Participants were given one copy to sign and return, along with one copy to keep for their records. Once each participant returned their signed Informed Consent Agreement, they were called during the pre-scheduled interview time in order to answer the demographic questions and the open-ended questions.

The qualitative data for this interview was collected through semi-structured interviews that were conducted over the phone. Using the speakerphone function on a cell phone with an Android operating system, interviews were recorded using GarageBand, a recording program found on Apple computers. These interviews were saved as podcasts and then downloaded into

Itunes for easier playback and storage. I completely transcribed each recorded interview (with names and any identifying information removed) and, upon completion, I reviewed each transcript for accuracy and assigned it a pseudonym. The demographic data of each participant was labeled according to the corresponding pseudonym assigned to each participant's transcript.

The open-ended questions asked during interviews were designed to illicit subjective, personal information about the cumulative impact of transphobia and/or homophobia on the professional development of social workers. These questions addressed a range of themes including supervision, social work education, career choices, the process of coming out to clients, and the participant's perception of how homophobia and/or transphobia impacted their professional development.



## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore the degree to which LGBT social workers experience homophobia and transphobia during their graduate education. In addition, this research explores how these cumulative experiences impact their professional development. This chapter contains findings that are based on 12 interviews conducted with current LGBT social work graduate students, as well as LGBT individuals that have already received their Master's degree in social work. Interviews were conducted over the phone, fully transcribed, and then coded using thematic analysis. Demographic information was collected first and the next portion of the interview focused on the extent to which individuals are experiencing, or have experienced, homophobia and transphobia as a social work graduate student. Specific information was then gathered about the three major learning components of a social worker's graduate education: academic coursework and classroom experiences, fieldwork and internship experiences, as well as advisory and supervision experiences with faculty, staff, and professionals in the field. Lastly, the interview concluded by collecting data about how all of these experiences impacted the student's professional development and how they imagine these experiences might impact them in the future. The findings in this chapter will be presented in the same order in which the interview was conducted.

## Demographic Data

A total of 12 individuals answered all of the demographic questions and the open-ended questions during the telephone interviews. Two thirds of the sample population (66.66%) are students currently enrolled in a social work Master's degree program and the remaining one third (33.33%) are professionals who have already received their Master's degree in social work. All of the study participants reside in the Northeast portion of the United States.

The individuals in this study used six different terms to describe their sexual orientation, including *lesbian, queer, gay, bisexual, pansexual, and straight*. Four out of the 12 (33.33%) participants used two terms to describe their sexual orientation.

In addition, participants reported their gender identity in at least 14 different ways, including: *female, woman with a transgender history, male, trans male, FTM [female to male], a guy, cisgender, gender queer, woman, a gay guy, questioning my fluidity, transgender, male to female spectrum* and one person stated "I use female pronouns." Several participants used between two and five terms to describe their gender. Three (25%) participants might be considered transgender, while the remaining nine (75%) participants might be considered cisgender based on societal norms.

These participants range in age from 23-58 years old, with the median age being 30. All of the participants identified their race as either white, Caucasian, or both. The lack of participants who are people of color is a major limitation to this study and it also mean that the results from this study cannot be generalized for the larger LGBT population within the United States. The four individuals who disclosed their ethnic identity described themselves using the following terms: Jewish, Ashkenazi, mixed Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino heritage, German and

Russian. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, which are used throughout this paper in order to protect confidentiality.

### **Extent of Homophobic Experiences**

After providing demographic data, study participants were asked about the extent to which they experienced homophobia during their graduate education as a social worker. Although the magnitude of their experiences varied in degree, the majority of participants (N=10) specifically indicated that they experienced homophobia in some form. The other two participants expressed that this was a difficult question to answer because of the intersectionalities between their sexual orientation and gender identity. Laura, a self identified lesbian and woman with a transgender history, answered this question by explaining, “It’s complicated for me because there is so much intersecting between transphobia and homophobia and the conflation of sexuality and gender identity.”

For the participants who reported experiencing homophobia during their graduate education as a social worker (N=10), their experiences varied in magnitude and frequency. For example, Kam stated that she experienced homophobia but that “it was a rare occurrence” and Sophie said, “I haven’t really experienced overt homophobia, it’s been like covert homophobia.”

Other participants expressed more severity and a higher frequency of their homophobic experiences during graduate school. Jan provided many examples of experiencing homophobia and discussed a memory when she came out as a lesbian to a fellow student who then “started quoting the bible and told me that I would be judged by god upon my death at the gates of heaven.” The magnitude of this experience seemed to be particularly big for Jan who stated, “that was just so powerful for me as a social worker... Sometimes, even though many of us experience discrimination in some form, we don’t then generalize or have empathy for others.”

Another participant, Rebecca, spoke at length about her experiences of homophobia and stated that it makes her feel angry to know “that there are homophobic and transphobic microaggressions everywhere.” Finally, Charlotte clearly stated, “I would say I definitely have witnessed and experienced it [homophobia] multiple times throughout my graduate experience.”

As the interviews progressed, participants expanded on these initial answers and told many more stories about homophobia during social work graduate school. However, a few (N=3) of these same participants expressed multiple perspectives about their perceptions of homophobia within graduate school. Georgia spoke about experiencing homophobia but then she also explained, “I also have to say that [my school] is a very affirming place to be compared to the majority of places I have been.” Similarly, Sarah, who attended social work graduate school in the 1970’s, exclaimed, “Of course there were people who were individual people who were homophobic, but in general I felt very able to be open and accepted.”

### **Extent of Transphobic Experiences**

After discussing homophobia, participants were asked to describe to what extent they experience, or have experienced, transphobia during their graduate education. Most of the respondents (N=8) who did not identify along the transgender spectrum indicated that they observed transphobia during their educational experiences. The respondent who attended social work graduate school in the 1970’s simply explained, “There was no awareness in my mind, or on campuses, that there were people who were transgender.” Charlotte did not personally experience transphobia but recalls being part of a transphobic interaction when discussing a client with another colleague who stated, “Well, yeah, for being trans she looks amazing. She looks more feminine than I am.” Charlotte explained that, “it just made me think they really

needed some education on microaggressions... and it definitely bothered me but I didn't even say anything."

All three of the participants who identified themselves along the transgender spectrum reported experiencing transphobia throughout their time as graduate students. Evan reported that there is a lot of transphobia within his graduate school for social work, which he described as "old school in terms of trans stuff." He then explained how this has caused him to experience added stress during his education. In addition, he also discussed the transphobia he experienced at his field placement during his education.

I came out to him [a co-worker at the field placement] over lunch because he had been sharing things about this life and so I came out to him. I think he was talking about a trans patient and I don't remember the context. But he really couldn't wrap his head around it at all. He was like, "Do you mean you have a vagina?" I was like, "Wow! I don't usually discuss my genitals with people I don't know very well." Like it was shocking that he asked that because we have had this growing workplace friendship... I still don't know what to do. I don't know how to handle what he said.

Forest talked about feeling the most transphobia from his professors, who he felt engaged in personal conversations about his gender identity in front of other students.

There is just such a desire from so many people in social work programs to be understanding and to get where you're coming from, that it can be too much sometimes... I feel the most uncomfortable around professors and I think there are reasons for that... They should be able to explore that on a different level and

think about how their sort of privilege and education hinders their understanding of a trans person or a gay person or whatever.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia in the Classroom**

Based on the first portion of the interviews, it became clear that homophobic and transphobic experiences occur in various frequencies and degrees. This portion of the findings is meant to highlight some of the specific examples of how these forms of discrimination manifest themselves in various graduate programs. The most prevalent theme that emerged from this data was the desire for schools of social work to improve their integration of LGBT issues into the curriculum. Georgia felt like the omission of LGBT issues from her courses amounted to an enactment of homophobia, and she expressed frustration that professors sometimes seemed to rely on LGBT students to fill in the gaps.

During coursework at my graduate school, I noticed that I was kind of disappointed and I noticed that LGBT issues weren't really integrated that well into the curriculum. Like in our family therapy class, it was always heterosexual; everything in our education was normed heterosexually... I feel like there's been a lot of times when the students are in the position of having to educate the professors about that... I guess it affects my sense of trust of the people who are educating me and it makes me worry that, because of their blind spots, I will have a lot of blind spots in my own work.

Similarly, Dana also talked about the lack of LGBT courses available for her to take. She even petitioned her program to take a course on LGBT issues outside of the social work department and she was denied the opportunity to take this class.

You get to have a concentration year where you identify your area of interest and then develop skill in that area. But then they don't allow you to go outside of the department, so you can't get any training from gender studies, you can't get any training from the counseling department, you can't get any training that pertains to your degree outside of the social work department. And they don't even offer any LGBTQ related coursework! It's pretty exasperating.

Laura also discussed her concerns about the complexity of integrating LGBT individuals into graduate level, social work curriculums. She was able to acknowledge the attempts of professors to include more LGBT individuals into their classroom content, but she noted that these attempts still fall short.

In the classroom, in an attempt to be inclusive, professors will show film clips or whatnot of homosexual relationships that still yet mirror heterosexual gendered relationships, where one individual is particularly masculine and the other is pretty feminine and they play those gendered roles within the relationship instead of grasping more queer relationships. And, again, it's hard to pick apart the distinction between the homophobia and the transphobia.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia During Field Placements**

The interview also contained open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the relationship between homophobia and/or transphobia in field placements. All 12 of the participants discussed a negative experience with homophobia and/or transphobia during their placements. One of the biggest themes that emerged in terms of field placement experiences was the process and decision about whether or not to come out to staff and clients during the internship.

Sophie worked in a school during her first placement and explained, “I struggled a lot last year when I worked with kids and not being able to come out to them.” After being referred to as a “dyke” by a client, Kam felt that she was forced to come out in her field placement and she expressed,

I was so vulnerable about it, like I just had to talk about it in supervision because it was affecting my work. At that point I wasn’t ready to be out and it forced me to be a lot more vulnerable in a way that I am not necessarily always comfortable and prepared for.

Sarah never received any education or support in graduate school about coming out and found herself having to explore the topic of coming out in field placements on her own. Lastly, Evan feels that it is much easier for him to come out as a gay man during placement but that he has a much more difficult time sharing his transgender identity. He concluded,

I have passing privilege and it raises a lot of questions about who knows and who doesn’t know that I’m trans. It’s almost like coming out would be another way that I am like this anomaly... So one of the big stresses was about how to be out and where and with whom.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia in Supervision**

Homophobia and transphobia in supervision was the third specific area of education explored during this study. The data seems to suggest that the overall perception of each participant’s field placement experience was largely influenced by the attitudes of their placement supervisors. Out of the 12 participants interviewed, three (25%) participants had little to say about their experiences of supervision but six (50%) respondents had homophobic, transphobic and/or negative interactions with their supervisors. The three (25%) remaining



respondents discussed the positive experiences they had with their supervisor regarding their LGBT identity.

All of the participants who experienced a negative supervisory experience during their graduate education as a social worker (N=6) suggested that this had an impact on both their personal and professional development. Sophie concluded, “I had a supervisor last year who just didn’t get it. She was not competent and that did affect me on some level.” Evan also simply stated, “I was trying to figure out my role [as a trans man in placement]. It was stressful and I really needed help but my supervisor was completely useless... The whole thing was agonizingly stressful.” Sarah noted an uncomfortable interaction she had when her sexual orientation came up at her second field placement.

My second placement was at...an inpatient unit and it did come up and my supervisor totally freaked...and there were many supervisors like that. There was another supervisor, a male supervisor, and I felt like he was very inappropriately getting off on talking about it- not interested in the issues but more interested in the details.

When Forest had a challenging conversation with his supervisor regarding a client who identified as transgender, it made him less likely to seek out his supervisor’s support in general, hindering some of his learning objectives.

My field supervisor is not super experienced in LGBTQ issues, which is why I wanted to work with the trans client because I thoroughly disagreed with what she was telling me to do with that person...I feel like if I had someone with expertise in the field, or personal experience, it would have helped alleviate my concern and I guess I didn’t go to her as much, which really stinks because I am not a

social worker yet, I am not a therapist, and I don't have all the answers. I had to start asking my own therapist for professional advice on what I should be doing and the experience caused me to look for help elsewhere.

On the other hand, three (25%) of the respondents discussed their positive supervisory experiences about LGBT issues and how this has been an important part of their development as social work professionals. Charlotte explained, "This year my supervisor and I have spent a lot of time talking about the kind of trauma that can come along with transphobia and homophobia. Those have been really productive conversations." Jan was also able to openly discuss her LGBT identity, as well homophobia with her supervisor, explaining, "You know, it [supervision] was incredibly positive. Both my advisor at my program and my field supervisor-I was able to be open and I just experienced incredible support from both of them."

### **The Impact of Homophobia and Transphobia on Professional Development**

Finally, the last portion of the telephone interview was designed to help assess how the cumulative experiences discussed above impact a graduate student's overall professional development during their social work education. All 12 participants reported that their experiences with homophobia and/or transphobia impacted their professional development in some way during the course of their Master's level training. Each participant was asked, "How have your experiences of homophobia and/or transphobia impacted your professional development as a social worker?" Georgia responded by saying,

The instruction I am getting is informed by homophobia, so it is not as helpful as I would like it to be... [My school] is probably better than most places but, at the same time, there is so far to go because the bar is set so low. I feel worried that I haven't learned well in those areas.

Dana expressed anger as she concluded that her ability to become a well informed graduate level social worker has been hindered by her program's lack of support, experiences, and coursework in relation to LGBT issues, homophobia and transphobia.

I kind of experience a level of being stifled, because there is not exposure to queer theory or anything like that... The way I see things is you take theory and then you can either accept or reject parts of theory and that's kind of how you define yourself in relation to the work that you do. So if you're not given that theoretical framework, then you cannot define yourself as a practitioner in the field.... And how unethical is it that they are pounding social work ethics into you but not offering a single f---ing class on LGBTQ stuff... I almost quit [my program] pretty much straight away but unfortunately it's the only social work program in the state, so it was really my only choice.

Evan paused before answering this last question, and then he began to touch upon how experiencing transphobia and homophobia during graduate school negatively impacted both his personal and professional development.

That is a good question and I feel like there is always something that people don't understand about me... I feel like I always have this anxiety of- I can't be my full authentic self and people think I am being very authentic. I am but there is some big thing, this weighty thing that if people were to learn that I am trans, then they might feel like I've kept something from them... but it changes how they think about me and so that's why I've kept it from them. This is one way that transphobia during grad school has impacted my professional development as a social worker.

Sophie's last answer to this question raises the question of who is being overlooked and who should be addressing these concerns regarding the professional development of LGBT social workers.

The institution is not focusing on their [LGBT] students' well being at all. If they were to do so, it would be a much less homophobic and transphobic situation to go into. I thought that being in a school for social work, I wouldn't experience it but that's not true. I have defiantly experienced a tremendous amount of microaggressions and covert homophobia and I feel like that could have been avoided if the institution was more accountable for a their part in this.

Charlotte also raised questions about what graduate schools and researchers overlook in regards to LGBT students and research studies: bi-phobia. She explained how the lack of support and discussion around bi-phobia negatively impacted her professional development.

Across the research topic, what I've seen and what I've read, there is little research on bi-phobia in the workplace, such as assuming that the gender or sex of your partner delineates your sexual identity. I think that generally that is an area that that gets dropped in a lot of the research and within social work, within placements, and as a general topic.

It should also be noted that negative experiences of homophobia and transphobia during graduate school did not necessarily have an entirely negative impact on the professional development of LGBT social workers. Several respondents (N=4), talked about the positive outcomes that came out of learning how to deal with oppression during their graduate education.

When asked how experiences of homophobia impacted Jan's professional development as a social work student, she exclaimed,

Hugely and positively. I mean, that's kind of weird thing to say because, while it was hard at the time and harmful, you kind of "walk through the fire" and it helps you become that much more empathetic and understanding.

Sarah also felt like her challenging experiences with homophobia during graduate school had some positive impacts on her professional development

In a weird way, it has made me stronger and kind of more invincible. I'm not afraid to fight or advocate for anybody. And I always question authority and structures in society. I am very aware of always needing to advocate for change, so I guess it's impacted that in a big way. I've gone after things that I never would have gone after had I not experienced that.

Forest discussed how his experiences with transphobia did not entirely have a negative impact on his professional development either.

I mean, I think it [transphobia] certainly had its hindrances but overall it has helped me understand marginality more so than I would have otherwise. And I think I am able to relate to certain experiences, of certain clients, on a better level that I could have before.

Lastly, Rebecca succinctly summarized, "I think I am grateful for my experiences and professional development because of the lens that I have on the world now."

## **Summary**

This chapter summarizes and presents the findings of the 12 interviews with LGBT social work graduate students and LGBT Master's graduates. The 11 open-ended questions used throughout this interview, along with a series of pre-determined follow up questions used as needed, were designed to elicit information about the impact that homophobia and transphobia

had on the professional development of social work graduate students. Participants expressed a range in the frequency and intensity of their experiences. They provided valuable information about how LGBT discrimination is manifested in the classroom, during field placement experiences, and in supervision. In addition, each participant provided their own interpretation of how these cumulative experiences have impacted their professional development during their education as graduate students. The next chapter will discuss these findings and the implications of this data.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the cumulative impact that homophobia and transphobia have on the professional development of LGBT social workers during their graduate education. The diverse perspectives and narratives of the LGBT individuals in this study were gathered during telephone interviews, and the study was designed to elicit in-depth information about the participants' experiences with homophobia and/or transphobia. The findings in this study provide valuable information about a population that is often overlooked in both practice and research. Lastly, this discussion section connects the study's findings with the theoretical information presented in the literature review.

This discussion will begin with a summary of the following key findings: 1) The extent of homophobic and transphobic experiences, 2) intersectionality between sexual orientation and gender identity, 3) homophobia and transphobia in the classroom, during field placements, and in supervision, 4) and the overall impact of homophobia and transphobia on professional development. This section will conclude with a brief discussion of the study's limitations, as well as the implications and conclusions that arose from this research.

#### **Extent of Homophobic and Transphobic Experiences**

A major component of this study explored the extent to which participants experienced homophobic and transphobic experiences during their social work graduate education. Study participants supported the major findings in the literature by Aronson (1995); Fredriksen-

Goldsen et. al (2011); and Messinger (2004); that LGBT social workers face oppression in the form of homophobia and transphobia in a variety of settings during graduate school. A majority of the study participants (N=10) indicated that they experienced homophobia, varying in both frequency and magnitude. All of the participants who identified along the transgender spectrum (N=3) reported experiencing transphobia, while many (N=8) participants reported observing transphobia, even though they did not identify as transgender themselves. These findings seem to suggest that this study is both relevant and applicable to a population of students who are enrolled at graduate schools across the United States.

### **Intersectionality Between Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Oppression directed towards individuals who identify outside the confines of heterosexuality is clearly supported within literature and within the findings of this study. Similarly, discrimination against transgender individuals is gaining attention and finally being documented, as seen in the research undertaken by Beemyn and Rankin (2011). For those social workers that identified with a marginalized sexual orientation, as well as a marginalized gender identity, the intersectionality of their identities created complex layers of oppression that were hard for them to untangle. Of the three participants who identified as transgender, all discussed the intersectionality of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Both the current literature and the findings in this study indicate that further research regarding oppression, as it occurs for those with complex intersecting sexual and gender identities, may be of great value to LGBT social workers.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia in the Classroom**

Many of the study participants discussed their experiences with homophobia and transphobia as it related to graduate social work coursework and classroom experiences. While



some participants noted the lack of LGBT curriculum, others discussed enactments of oppression by other students or professors in the classroom. A small number of participants even indicated that they had no access whatsoever to course content related to LGBT clients or theoretical teachings regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and LGBT discrimination. These findings are supported in the writings of Fredriksen-Goldsen et. al. (2011), who reported that, of the 327 social work faculty in their study, there was less support for including homophobia and transphobia into curriculums, as opposed to general information related to LGBT clients. Similarly, the findings in this study related to transphobia in the classroom are also supported in the research conducted by Erich, Boutte-Queen, Donnelly, and Tittsworth (2007), who found that social workers in the south rarely receive any education about the transgender community. While it is important to note that their research and the findings in this study come from two different geographic regions, there is enough evidence to suggest that issues related to the transgender community are often left out of the social work classroom to various degrees.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia During Field Placements**

As previously discussed in the findings chapter, almost all of the LGBT social workers in this study faced homophobia and transphobia during their graduate field placement experiences. These instances of homophobia and transphobia may have come from fellow colleagues, field supervisors, and other agency personnel. Participants discussed being asked inappropriate personal questions regarding their genitals, as well as being questioned about their sexual orientation or their desire to come out in field placements. These findings were consistent with Messinger (2004), who found that 26 of her participants identified challenges relating to the relationship between their sexual orientation and their field placement experiences. A major

limitation to the current literature, as well as to this study, is the small amount of data related to transgender social workers, as well as transphobia in field placements.

### **Homophobia and Transphobia and Supervision**

Similar to experiences of homophobia and transphobia in the classroom and in field placements, the findings from this study indicate that LGBT social workers also face oppression in the context of supervision. Half of the study participants had homophobic, transphobic and/or negative interactions with their supervisors. It is equally important to note that supervision can also mitigate the effects of oppression towards LGBT social workers when supervisors are well informed and open to discussing issues of sexuality and gender identity. Newman, Bogo, & Daley (2008), found that self-disclosure was a prominent theme throughout their study and that the process of disclosing sexual orientation to field supervisors could lead to positive learning experiences. This literature backs up the findings within this study that suggest positive supervisory relationships can lead to positive growth and professional development among LGBT social workers.

### **The Overall Impact of Homophobia and Transphobia on LGBT Social Workers**

As discussed in the literature review, there are very few empirical studies that explore the cumulative impact of homophobia and transphobia on the professional development of social workers. Respondents in this study were asked questions that related to this cumulative impact and they were also asked to consider how the overall impact of their graduate experiences might impact their future career choices as a social worker.

Although all 12 participants noted that their experiences of oppression would impact them in some way, it was interesting to learn that several participants felt like their experiences of homophobia and transphobia ultimately had a positive impact on their professional

development. Some participants mentioned that they felt more able to connect with clients who also face discrimination and oppression, and some participants summarized their professional development as strengthened because of how they learned to overcome such oppression. Because this study is limited in both its sample size (N=12) and its scope, additional research is clearly needed to further assess the cumulative impact of oppression towards LGBT social workers during their education as graduate students.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this research were that the sample size was small (N=12) and thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. In addition, the sample was racially homogenous (all 12 participants identified as either white or Caucasian) and only three of the participants identified along the transgender spectrum. This study was also limited in its geographic diversity of participants, because all respondents currently live in the Northeastern portion of the United States.

Another limitation to this research included the broad questions and qualitative methods of the study that allowed each participant's interview to vary in length and in the depth of their responses. Despite this inherent methodological limitation, the interviews gave each participant the opportunity to provide personal and meaningful information that provided a great breadth of data.

### **Implications and Conclusions**

Implications of this study include the need for more research about LGBT social work clinicians and their experiences of discrimination within this profession. While studies exploring specific aspects of a student's graduate education are important, it is critical that future researchers explore the cumulative and long-term impacts of homophobia and transphobia.

Future research studies focusing on the cumulative impact of educational experiences could be used to help graduate schools of social work enhance their curriculum, strengthen their advising, and refine their field placement process in an attempt to better educate and support their LGBT students.

Investigating the overall professional development of LGBT social workers may allow graduate programs to take a more proactive stance towards addressing oppression and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Evidence in the literature and in this study's findings indicate that LGBT social work graduate students face unique obstacles that hinder their ability to learn and grow in the same ways as their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Therefore, graduate schools of social work must be willing to address and tailor their programs to meet the needs of LGBT students and clinicians.

Social workers have the unique obligation of holding non-discrimination as a core professional value and graduate schools of social work have the opportunity to help teach their students how to uphold these standards. Although graduate schools for social workers have a long way to go in order to adequately support their LGBT students, growing societal acceptance of LGBT individuals suggests that now is the time to make advancements in education so that all graduate students feel equally prepared and supported on their journey to becoming a professional social worker.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Agreement

Dear Participant,

My name is Emily Lusenhop and I am a graduate student from the Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a research study in order to fulfill the requirements of my Master's thesis. This research explores how experiences of homophobia and/or transphobia impact social workers during their graduate education. The purpose of the study is to explore the cumulative impact of homophobia and/or transphobia on a social worker's professional development.

To participate in this study, you must be a social work graduate student enrolled in a Master's degree program OR you must have received a Master's degree in social work. You must also be 21 years of age or older, be able to read and write in English, and you must identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT) and/or as part of the LGBT community.

Prior to receiving this Informed Consent Agreement, you either emailed or called me to express interest in this study, and you voluntarily provided contact information where you can be reached. I first called to ask you four screening questions in order to ensure that you meet all eligibility requirements. The data from the screening questions was not collected, as it was used as an initial screening tool meant to ensure your eligibility. If you choose to sign and return this Informed Consent Agreement, you will then be called a second time during the pre-determined interview time we agreed upon. First, you will be asked to answer 6 demographic questions. Next, you will be asked 11 open-ended questions and you may also be asked a series of follow up questions chosen from a pre-determined list. These follow up questions may be used to elicit additional or clarifying information in response to your answers.

Telephone interviews will be recorded, downloaded onto a password-protected computer, and then transcribed. A pseudonym will be given to your transcript and, upon transcription of each interview, your preferred first name and phone number will be stored separately from the data in a locked container. All data will be reported in aggregate format. Individual quotes that are used to illustrate findings will be presented in a manner that will not identify any individual.

Because this study explores the personal topics of sexual orientation and gender identity, there is a low to moderate risk that participating in this study could evoke feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment, or sadness. Possible benefits from participating in this study include having the opportunity to vocalize and share your experiences. Compensation will not be provided for participation in this study, which should take no longer than 45 minutes.

Confidentiality will be assured in a number of ways. Once your interview has been recorded and transcribed, your preferred name and phone number will be stored separately from the transcripts in order to ensure confidentiality. Only my research advisor and myself will have access to your specific demographic data and the entire transcript of your interview. All identifying information will be removed from the interview transcripts prior to showing them to

my research advisor. In addition, the data from this study will be presented in aggregate format, and illustrative quotes will be de-identified. Your transcript will be assigned a pseudonym in order to disguise brief quotes or vignettes used in publications or presentations. All data from the demographic questions, as well as the transcripts from your telephone interview, will be kept in a secure location for a period of three years as required by Federal guidelines.

During the telephone interview, you are cautioned not to provide unnecessary personal identifying information such as the specific name of your graduate school or placement, along with other personal information such as your last name. In addition, if you have direct experience working with clients, you are reminded to abide by all NASW Codes of Ethics regarding confidentiality and the disclosure of a client's personal information.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to answer any of the demographic questions and any of the questions during the telephone interview. You may withdraw from the study by stating that you wish to withdraw at any point during the telephone interview or by contacting me at the email address or telephone number below. If you choose to withdraw, any data or audio-recordings will be deleted immediately. Once the telephone interview has ended, you will have until April 30, 2013 to withdraw from this study.

If you have any additional questions or concerns throughout this study or if you have questions prior to signing this agreement, please feel free to contact me directly. Should you have any concerns about your rights or about any aspect of the study, you are encouraged to contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

Signature of the Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B

### Demographic Questionnaire

*READ to each participant: "The following questions will be used to collect demographic data.*

*You may skip any of the questions you feel uncomfortable answering. "*

**1. What is your age?**

**2. Which of the following best describes you? (Choose one of the following options)**

- a) I am a graduate student currently enrolled in a social work Master's degree program.
- b) I have graduated from a social work Master's degree program and I am currently employed as a social worker.
- c) I have graduated from a social work Master's degree program and I am NOT currently employed as a social worker.
- d) Other (Comment Box)

**3. Please indicate how you describe your racial and ethnic identity.**

**4. What term or terms do you use to describe your gender?**

**5. What term or terms do you use to describe sexual orientation?**

**6. In what geographic region of the country do you currently live in?**

- a. -Northeast
- b. -Midwest
- c. -Southeast
- d. -West coast
- e. -Northwest
- f. -Southwest
- g. -Alaska or Hawaii

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

1. During your education as a social work graduate student, to what extent did you [or have you] experience *homophobia*?
2. During your education as a social work graduate student, to what extent did you [or have you] experience *transphobia*?
3. How do you think your professional experiences of homophobia and/or transphobia during your graduate education will impact [or have impacted] your future career choices as a social worker?
4. During your graduate education, how did you learn to handle the issue of coming out to clients?
5. How have homophobia and/or transphobia impacted your experiences of supervision during your graduate education?
6. How have homophobic or transphobic experiences affected your choice of job settings?
7. How have homophobic or transphobic experiences affected the type of work you choose to do?
8. Do you feel that homophobia and/or transphobia has affected your work with clients?
9. How have your experiences of *homophobia* impacted your professional development as a social worker?
10. How have your experiences of *transphobia* impacted your professional development as a social worker?
11. Please share with me any additional information regarding your experiences of homophobia and/or transphobia, as a social worker, that you think would be important to include in this study.

Follow up Questions for Telephone Interview to be Utilized at Researcher's Discretion

1. Can you please clarify what you meant when you said, \_\_\_\_\_ ?
2. What was the outcome of that experience?
3. Can you please elaborate on that answer more?
4. At what point in your professional development did that experience occur?
5. Can you please provide an example?

## Appendix D

### Referral Sources for Participants

#### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- According to their website, “The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a 24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.”
- **Phone (in crisis):** 1-800-273-TALK
- **Website:** <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

#### The Trevor Project (Crisis Support Services)

- The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals.
- **Phone/Trevor Lifeline (in crisis):** 1-866-488-7386
- **Phone (non-emergencies):** 310-371-8845
- **Website:** <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

#### National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)

- According to their website, NCTE is a “social justice organization dedicated to advancing the equality of transgender people through advocacy, collaboration, and empowerment.” Their website has useful resources and articles that you may find helpful.
- **Phone:** 202-903-0112
- **Website:** <http://transequality.org/>

#### The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

- According to their website, the mission of this organization is to “build the power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community from the ground up.”
- **Phone:** 202-393-5177
- **Website:** [www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org)

#### National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI): Multicultural Action Center – Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Resources

- This website provides a diverse range of resources and articles relating to the mental health and well being of the LGBT community.
- **Website:**  
<http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=Resources&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=144809>

## Appendix E

### HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

December 29, 2012

Emily Lusenhop

Dear Emily,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Regarding your question about the informed consent, you have addressed issues in this revision. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your very interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett'.

Marsha Kline Pruett, M.S., Ph.D., M.S.L.  
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Claudia Bepko, Research Advisor