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Prohibiting Harmful Practices Against LGBTQIA+ Individuals and Students in Field Placement: Recommendations

Heidi P. Breaux , Veronica L. Timbers , and Bruce A. Thyer 

ABSTRACT

Field practicum is known as the “signature pedagogy” for social work. Though the Council of Social Work Education’s accreditation standards guide the placement processes, research on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+) students shows that this population continues to face discrimination in practicum placements. In this point-of-view article, we present conflicts that can arise when programs do not have explicit conversations with agencies about LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. We discuss current accreditation standards and relevant points from the Code of Ethics that support implementation of specific protections for LGBTQIA+ students and clients in practicum placements. Recommendations are made for addressing barriers of equity now and in future iterations of the EPAS.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Field¹ placement is an internship that must be completed by every Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) student (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2021, 2022). CSWE has long stated that field work is the “signature pedagogy” for social work practice (CSWE, 2022, p. 20). The Education Policy Accreditation Standards (EPAS) describes signature pedagogy as “elements of instruction and socialization that teach future practitioners the fundamental dimensions of professional work in their discipline: to think, to perform, and to act intentionally, ethically, and with integrity” (CSWE, 2022, p. 13). Accordingly, field work brings together the intellectual content and the applied skills of the profession in a supervised experience, forming the professional identity of the student, supporting title protections, and safeguarding the social perception of the profession (CSWE, 2021, 2022).

“Field,” as it is often called in the profession, is a crucial experience for students to put the knowledge they have gained in the classroom into supervised practice prior to graduation (CSWE, 2021, 2022). Each BSW student completes 400 hours and each MSW student completes at least 900 hours of field placement (CSWE, 2021, 2022). This was amended for consideration to be reduced by up to 15% at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic for courses that were completed or partially completed by May 31, 2021, and went back to the full hours requirements for courses that began after May 31, 2021 (CSWE, 2022). Although rare, CSWE has demonstrated instances where they have amended longstanding field processes, taking into consideration widespread societal stressors. In selecting field placements, some programs allow students to choose their own placements, while others give them specified options, and still other programs spend time advising and mutually selecting field placements (Forman, 2022). Factors such as school or work schedule, agency hours, commute, and availability of supervisors contribute to deciding where students get placed for field, although critics

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¹The authors recognize the term ‘field’ is historically related to enslavement, indentured servitude, and other forms of labor injustice. As such, the authors support a change in this terminology as part of social work’s explicit intention to promote anti-racism and equity in our profession. The term ‘field’ is used in this article because it is the current language of the educational policies and accreditation standards, which is referenced and quoted throughout the article.

have argued these can cause undue hardship (Petra et al., 2020). In almost all cases, students have a chance to vet the placement by attending an interview and determining if it is a good fit; however, students may not think to ask about the agencies' policies and practices with LGBTQIA+ clients and employees (Forman, 2022).

LGBTQIA+ is used as an umbrella term for anyone who self-identifies in LGBTQIA+ communities and does not self-identify as heterosexual (being only sexually, romantically, or relationally attracted to someone who identifies as a member of the binary opposite gender) or cisgender (someone who currently identifies their gender identity or expression as matching with the sex they were assigned at birth). This acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual, and by adding a plus sign (+) denotes that the term also is inclusive of many other identities such as, but not limited, to pansexual, demisexual, greysexual, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, gender queer, gender fluid, gender neutral, and any other person who would self-identify (Gold, 2019). While the acronym LGBT first became widely used in the 1990s, different versions have been created to represent the various communities, including acknowledging the difference between sexual orientation or identity, and gender identity or expression (Metzger, 2020). LGBTQIA+ has become the most recent nuanced term that is viewed as socially acceptable, although researchers and publicists are currently collecting data on identities to evaluate in the future if this acronym should be further updated with intentions of creating a term that is as inclusive and representative as possible (Gold, 2019; Metzger, 2020). While LGBTQIA+ may be used to describe an individual within the community, it is important to recognize that the community is not a monolith; therefore, using LGBTQIA+ communities was deemed a better representation of various groups within one umbrella for policy, practice, and academia (Formby, 2020), particularly considering the practice implications described within the article that may affect various sectors of the LGBTQIA+ communities differently.

LGBTQIA+ protections are not the same in every state and agencies can be exempt from LGBTQIA+ workplace protections. According the Williams Institute UCLA School of Law (2020), approximately 3.9 million LGBTQIA+ people, age 16 or older, live in states without state-specific protections from employment-based discrimination (Conron & Goldber, 2020). Federal institutions follow federal law, which can supersede state law. One such example was the "Authority of VA Professionals to Practice Health Care" granted nationwide in 2020 to Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare workers to practice over state lines, including in states where they are not licensed to provide care from the VA (Federal Register, 2020). To protect our students and uphold the ethics of the profession, the authors are proposing that individual social work programs and the CSWE Educational and Accreditation Policies later include statements that would require field programs to explicitly ask about policies and practices that affect LGBTQIA+ students and clients, prior to approving field education settings.

In this point-of-view article, we will present the potential conflicts that can arise if field faculty do not engage in explicit conversations with agencies and students about LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. We then discuss how the current EPAS, ethical principles and standards, and recommendations from CSWE's Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (COSOGIE; Austin et al., 2016) support the proposed changes. We conclude with formal recommendations for additions to the EPAS to ensure LGBTQIA+ student and client protections in field education sites. Because the EPAS outline accreditation in the United States, the focus of this article is on changes to U.S.-based social work programs. However, we encourage social work programs around the globe to consider these topics based on their cultural and regional setting.

LGBTQIA+ employment policies

The requirement to ensure equitable treatment and access to resources for all has long been a foundational component of the professional *Code of Ethics* (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021), CSWE competencies (CSWE, 2022), and the NASW indicators of cultural competency in practice (NASW, 2015). However, when looking at agencies for potential field placements, it is important to critically examine if the agency is fulfilling these expectations. For instance,

some field placements are not run by social workers or are not only social work based, such as local nonprofits, libraries, schools, and even macro placements. At times, certain social work agencies may have religious exemptions limiting the equity and inclusion around LGBTQIA+ clients and employees, including faith-based hospitals, emergency shelters, foster care agencies, and more. Consequently, these agencies may have employment policies that do not permit their employees to be “out” about their sexual orientation, gender identity, or be in an open same-gender relationship. As of 2022, some may argue that there are federal employee protections for LGBTQIA+ people, but in organizations with religious exemptions, employees may not be allowed to be open about their identity or relationship status (Piccardi, 2020). While agencies with these exemptions may serve LGBTQIA+ clients, the student placed in the agency may encounter ethical concerns or suffer mentally and emotionally if they identify as or are an ally of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Research indicates adverse experiences among social work students in field who were told to not disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity in their field placement agency (Messinger, 2004; Messinger et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2009). Messinger et al. found that students were left to manage questions about self-disclosure on their own, had to deal with the discomfort of others with their sexuality and gender identity or expression, were exposed to homophobic and transphobic conversations, and witnessed poor practice with LGBTQIA+ clients (Messinger et al., 2019). One such example was a LGBTQIA+-identified student who described being harassed by coworkers in a private lunchroom conversation (Messinger et al., 2019). In another situation, a student mentioned experiences with staff and clients making derogatory comments, assuming the student was heterosexual. While not much research has been conducted directly studying the experiences of LGBTQIA+ social work students in field, one study on LGBTQ social work students highlighted discordant applications between social work values and social work education where students reported having harmful experiences in the classroom (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019). Another study showed that students reported not feeling safe, experiencing violence, and stress in collegiate atmospheres, including from classrooms and institutions, which led to increased alcohol and drug use among gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students (Reed et al., 2010). Woodford et al. (2014) similarly found that negative collegiate experiences for students on the basis of their LGBTQIA+ identity resulted in negative mental health outcomes. All of these findings are important considerations for a profession that consistently touts the vitalness of self-care for those in the field. Furthermore, in a workplace where a student cannot be out or speak about their allyship, they can also experience internal distress, personal harm, and feel unsure how to manage these interactions with their coworkers and clients while their placement and academic advancement is at risk.

In addition to the personal harm and conflict students may face, agency policies might also limit their experience to learn how to support LGBTQIA+ coworkers. Social work students who conduct their field placement in agencies with no or anti-LGBTQIA+ employment protections do not have the opportunity to practice the values of working in an environment that ensures equal access to resources. Moreover, students in these placements will not get opportunities to know and learn from LGBTQIA+ colleagues, perpetuating heteronormative assumptions in the workplace. For instance, non-LGBTQIA+ students may not get opportunities to address microaggressions or have their own microaggressions corrected, learn how to be an effective ally, or come to notice implicit bias and cisgender-heteronormativity in workplace culture.

Some of these concerns were addressed in recommendations published in 2016 by CSWE’s COSOGIE (Austin et al., 2016). In their “Guidelines for Affirmative Social Work Education,” COSOGIE encourages three specific ways field teams can support protections for LGBTQIA+ student interns. First, they recommend that field teams understand and stay up to date with state and local policies about LGBTQIA+ protections. Second, field teams should develop clear procedures for students to report discrimination or harassment, with information outlining timeliness and confidentiality in responding to such reports. Finally, it suggests field teams “develop policies and procedures related to established field placements in agencies or settings that condone discrimination against TGNC [transgender and gender non conforming]-identified people and/or the use of

reparative/conversion therapies” (Austin et al., 2016, p. 17). While the authors of this article support all these guidelines, we note that at this time they remain only recommendations and that the last recommendation remains at the discretion of the institution rather than an explicit part of accreditation. In other words, CSWE-accredited programs still make their own determination as to if and how field staff and faculty will support student placements related to LGBTQIA+ policies for employees and clients.

Outside of what happens in the placement, an important consideration is that some student interns are offered employment upon graduation if positions are available and the student’s performance was desirable to the agency. Having a student in a field placement where cisgender heterosexual MSW students would potentially be offered a job, but LGBTQIA+ students would not, does not promote an equal distribution of opportunities for postgraduation employment. Understanding that LGBTQIA+ people face unemployment at much greater rates than the national average, and that LGBTQIA+ workers and unemployed people have been further disproportionately negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the social justice issue of placing MSW students at an agency where they could not be hired (Moreua, 2020).

In addition to the ethical issues that can arise for students, discriminatory employment practices can also lead to barriers for clients while limiting who and how interns are allowed to work with LGBTQIA+ clients (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019). For instance, research has shown that LGBTQIA+ clients often seek out LGBTQIA+ counselors and visible allies for services (Colbert, 2021; Elder, 2016, McCullough et al., 2017; Smith & Shin, 2012). While an agency may advertise as serving everyone, it is unlikely members of LGBTQIA+ communities would use an agency where employees cannot be “out” about their identity or where it is known to have religious exemptions. Moreover, if a student intern is in such a placement but cannot be open about their LGBTQIA+ identity, they miss important learning and skill building around appropriate use of self in work with LGBTQIA+ clients.

Assuring appropriate therapeutic approaches with LGBTQIA+ clients

Beyond employment protections for LGBTQIA+ colleagues, it is also vital to examine the therapeutic underpinnings of field agencies. One such dilemma is agencies or organizations that practice conversion “therapy,” also called reparative treatment. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2018) defines these treatment approaches as “interventions purported to alter same-sex attractions or an individual’s gender expression with the specific aim to promote heterosexuality as a preferable outcome” (para. 2). These interventions can include psychotherapy, religious interventions, medical approaches, or aversion techniques (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2015). They include therapies that focus on eliminating or suppressing same-gender attraction, or gender expression or identities that do not align with one’s sex assigned at birth, all of which studies have shown cannot be changed (Beckstead, 2012). While many religiously based and family-oriented social services agencies do not practice conversion therapy, there are certainly social service agencies that do. Cross-referencing providers that specialize in working with LGBTQIA+ communities to ensure they have been appropriately trained in providing affirmative care that is away from pathology and view LGBTQIA+ identities as normative in a positive light, as well as investigate religious organizations, schools, camps, and other agencies that display the importance of heteronormative families consisting only of a father and mother, or even focusing on larger messages like “all kids need a ‘father’ figure” are some “red flags” that should prompt further investigation. Organizations that display promotional literature, welcoming messages, and require regular LGBTQIA+-related competency training of their employees are less likely to perform conversion therapy, even if they are religious or psychotherapy based (Lytle et al., 2014).

Although NASW (2015), the American Psychological Association (APA, 2018), the American Counseling Association (2013), and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2015) all have formal position statements against the use of conversion therapy, these practices have only been banned by legislation for minors in 20 U.S. states (Movement Advancement Project [MAP], 2022).

Consequently, 22 states and 4 U.S. territories have no state law or policy against it, and it occurs at alarming rates internationally. Almost one-third of LGBTQIA+ people identified as living in a state with no law or policy against conversion “therapy” (MAP, 2022). Without legislation to ban these therapies, only those who are licensed face consequences for using them, and even licensing boards are not always able to establish consequences or revoke licensure based on the use of these therapies. This means that nonlicensed individuals, religious leaders, pastoral counselors, and other religious-based service providers can continue to use these approaches with minimal professional risk (Cordero & Carlisle, 2019). Based on a 2019 study, the Williams Institute estimates that 57,000 LGBTQ+ youth across all states will receive conversion interventions from a religious setting by the age of 18 and an estimated 16,000 LGBTQ+ youth in the states where conversion therapies are not banned will receive these interventions from a licensed healthcare provider. For these reasons, the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2021) website calls for legislators and their constituents to take action to enact and enforce this ban in every state.

Having a field placement at an agency that allows conversion therapy or referrals to such therapies places students in an unnecessary ethical situation against their agency and could also confuse students about research-supported approaches. Additionally, agencies who practice conversion “therapy” are not preparing students appropriately. If a student intern learns this modality of treatment, it would be illegal for them to practice it in certain states or may even become illegal to practice in their home state, putting them in a predicament for employment. Even if students want their field placement to be housed in an agency that practices conversion “therapy,” based on the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2021); the NASW statement on “Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) and Conversion ‘Therapy’ With Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals, and Transgender Persons”; and CSWE competencies, schools of social work should be prohibited from allowing it. The NASW statement (2015) is clear that “the practice of SOCE . . . violates the very tenets of the social work profession as outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics (p. 5),” undermining client self-determination and the profession’s commitment to competence, research-informed practice, and social diversity. It also places the student at risk for needing to report unethical practices. As legal and legislative discussions continue, social work field teams should take responsibility to explicitly ask if these therapies are being carried out in all potential field agencies and rule out such placements.

Support from the *Code of Ethics* and EPAS for change

Aspiring social workers and those who have graduated are to regularly review and take into consideration the *Code of Ethics* (2021) when in practice with clients and during collegial interactions. While the code serves as a guide in matters where right and wrong are not clearly defined, there are specific behaviors that can be sanctioned. In serious breaches of the *Code of Ethics* there can be grave consequences, such as state licensing board reviews, litigation, fines, probationary status, or even losing one’s license to practice social work (NASW, 2021). Both students and social workers are expected to follow the code diligently, but for students to adhere to the code, field placements must be in agencies or organizations that provide sufficient opportunities for students to see the *Code of Ethics* modeled and applied in practice.

For instance, standard 6.04 under “Social and Political Action” states that social workers should always promote equitable approaches to resources. Specifically, it states that social workers are to work to guarantee equitable access for all people when it comes to resources for employment, services, assistances for the basic human needs, and development of every person (NASW, 2021, para 1). If LGBTQIA+ employees and interns do not have employment protections they cannot access resources and opportunities to meet their needs. Although there are religious exemptions to protect religious freedom, social work students should be allowed to have all the information to decide if a placement is the best fit for their learning and individual needs.

In the application of this standard, there might seem to be conflict between the protection of LGBTQIA+ students and respect for religious beliefs; however, we are asking for CSWE to implement explicit policies for field teams to ask about LGBTQIA+ protections and to inform all students of the

agency responses so that they can make their own determination of fit. Because not all students are socially out regarding sexual orientation or gender identity, no reason needs to be given based on this information, as students may reject a placement without LGBTQIA+ protections for any number of reasons.

From a social constructionist view, required questions about LGBTQIA+ agency policies not only protect the students' self-determination and prevent discrimination but are also an act of advocacy. If all field teams were asking these questions, agencies would need to reflect on their policies and the possible loss of interns. This mutual discussion could lead to changes and additional protections for student, clients, and employees over time. One may argue that allowing social workers to provide services in agencies where open members of LGBTQIA+ communities are viewed as not fit for paid employment but may only serve as interns would perpetuate existing systems' dominance based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Allowing LGBTQIA+ interns or anyone who may potentially then identify as LGBTQIA+ during the course of their internship to provide unpaid labor to an agency who would not hire them because of their identify based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression should be viewed as unethical and exploitative.

The NASW *Code of Ethics* speaks specifically to this issue of employment discrimination, stating that field placements must only be conducted in places that exercise employment equality. Standard 3.09, Commitments to Employers, calls social workers to proactively take actions to remove and prevent workplace discrimination at their organization, worksite assignments, within the employment policies they work under, and in employment practices (NASW, 2021). While agencies may avoid unjust practices such as not hiring or promoting someone on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, it should be clear that not allowing LGBTQIA+ people to be open about their gender identity would be a discriminatory practice that should not be tolerated by the profession. This standard goes on to specify that "social workers should accept employment or arrange student field placements only in organizations that exercise fair personnel practices" (NASW, 2021, para 6).

Standard 2.01, Respect—Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues, states that social workers must avoid criticism of their colleagues in all forms of communication to include negative comments about "race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability" (para. 2). Messinger et al. (2019) noted that these situations can happen in a variety of placements, even those with formal employee protections. If this can take place in agencies with protections, one can imagine the situation is worse in agencies without formal policies around employee protections and corrective action for discrimination.

In addition to the code, the CSWE (2021) develops the EPAS, which outline criteria for field education. The 2022 EPAS specifically state that during field placements students should learn to practice in a way that promotes social, racial, economic, and environmental justice. This statement goes on to name antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion as values that should be modeled and applied in the field setting; therefore, field placements in agencies where there are no employee protections for LGBTQIA+ people or potential connections to conversion therapy would be incongruent with these policies. CSWE's Commission on Education Policy prepares and reviews the EPAS, which are revised at least every seven years. CSWE is also the accrediting body for social work programs. Therefore, MSW programs that are accredited should only have field placements in agencies that adhere to the EPAS (CSWE, 2021).

Looking at some of the specific standards in the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2021), it is clear that social workers should not be a part of supporting discrimination. Standard 4.02 says, "Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability" (para. 1). Some places may conduct conversion "therapy" very openly, whereas others may describe it as something else while still practicing the tenants of conversion "therapy" with clients. Trying to change a LGBTQIA+ client's

identity, and even promote the belief that those who “regress” and commit LGBTQIA+ acts are better off committing suicide than living as queer, is damaging and discriminatory. In 2020, Williams Institute reported that LGB people who have undergone conversion therapy are almost twice as likely to commit suicide. While statistics were not available for the transgender and nonbinary community, data collected from 2016–2018 as part of the *Generations* study, supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health showed that LGB people who experienced conversion therapy have 92% greater odds of lifetime suicidal ideation compared to LGB people who had not experienced conversion therapy (Blosnich et al., 2020). Field departments in social work programs are given the final say if a BSW or MSW intern can be placed at an agency for the field practicum. Even if a student intern does not practice conversion “therapy,” placing a student intern in a placement at a setting where conversion “therapy” or referrals take place, or one where LGBTQIA+ employees are not allowed to live openly in their identity, would certainly be condoning or collaborating with the prohibited discrimination outlines in the *NASW Code of Ethics* (2021).

Currently, CSWE describes accreditation of social work programs as “a system for recognizing educational institutions and the professional programs affiliated with those institutions as having a level of performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and the public they serve” (CSWE, 2022, p. 1). CSWE evaluates each program on competency-based education and adherence to the EPAS to determine accreditation. Competency 1 is to “Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior.” This competency discusses social work’s commitment to antioppressive practice, and although there is not language directly referencing sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, this competency is very clear that decision making by accredited social work programs should always follow the *NASW Code of Ethics* (CSWE, 2022). Furthermore, competency 3 is focused on engaging antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice. This competency explicitly includes language referencing sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression. This competency outlines that social workers (and social work students) must “demonstrate anti-racist and anti-oppressive social work practice at the individual, family, group, organizational, community, research, and policy levels” (CSWE, 2022, p. 5). Equitable practice is not divided into categories of clients, colleagues, and other students, but rather seen at large as to be applied to everyone. Finally, competency 9 calls for social workers to gather and analyze data about practice outcomes to increase effective and evidence-based practice (CSWE, 2022). Placement in an agency that does not offer research-supported services to LGBTQIA+ clients and does not respect the dignity and self-worth of clients, student interns, and employees is in conflict with these professional competencies. Without specific wording to ensure field placements are evaluating how a field education site treats LGBTQIA+ clients and employees, a program can continue to place students in agencies that conflict with achievement of the competencies.

Despite the term “anti-oppressive” appearing 11 times throughout the 2022 EPAS, there is no definitive connection made that following our professional *Code of Ethics* and educational learning competencies would mean disallowing accredited programs to approve field placements in professional environments where conversion “therapy,” referrals, or anti-LGBTQIA+ employees policies take place. CSWE allows for certain decisions to be made by the accrediting organization while others are left to the program. There is an important difference between condemning a practice and discouraging a practice. Understanding that social work students enter their field placement with hopes of spending at least the next few decades in the profession, addressing this matter proactively during their education is needed for lasting change in the future. Therefore, it makes the most sense to start with field placement. Although “speaking out against” conversion “therapy” is aligned with the profession, accrediting organizations should take a strong stance clearly prohibiting this practice, including in field placement with policies that harm LGBTQIA+ clients and colleagues. A clear prohibition of field placements in settings where conversion “therapy” happens, where referrals to conversion “therapy” are allowed, or where LGBTQIA+ employees are not allowed to be open about their identity or relationship status, should be explicitly disallowed by the CSWE effective

immediately to align students' practice with the NASW *Code of Ethics* (2021). Pending this change, individual social work programs can and should take it upon themselves to develop such policies independently.

Within this critical examination and based on the antioppressive focus multiple times throughout the entire EPAS, it would seem valid to assume that placing students in field education agencies where use of conversion "therapy" or LGBTQIA+ workplace discrimination would certainly not allow students the skills needed to master this competency. As mentioned above, the EPAS is explicit that "the field setting is where students apply human rights principles from global and national social work ethical codes to advance social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2022, p. 14). Just as field agencies without employee protections violate this standard, field placements engaging in any aspect of conversion "therapy" would also be in violation of this standard.

Suggested changes to the EPAS

In Accreditation Standard 3.3—Field Education, section 3.3.4, which discusses identification and approval of field education settings, we suggest this addition: "The program describes the field education program's processes for ensuring protections for LGBTQIA+ student interns, employees, and clients when approving field settings."

In section 3.3.5, which discusses the program's process to place students and to support student learning and safety throughout field, we suggest the inclusion of the following statement to be added under "The program describes the field education program's process for: informing students about discrimination protections and limitations related to antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) and how to report concerns or violations to the field education program."

The authors understand that field settings will have their own training and policies related to discrimination in the workplace; however, students should be informed by the field education program of their rights as students and how the program will support them if they report concerns about the field agency's engagement with LGBTQIA+ clients and employees. Moreover, having an explicit requirement for field programs to discuss this with students offers another level of accountability to guarantee the field setting is not exempt from LGBTQIA+ protections.

Conclusion

With the growth of online degree programs and students being frequently tasked to find their own placements, the absence of formal requirements to inform students of field agency employment policies seems contrary to our ethical care of students. It also does not model social justice and self-determination in a broader sense. Field teams need to be aware of the above research and give serious thought to explicitly asking about protections for LGBTQIA+ employees and interns, even as changes to the EPAS are discussed. Prominent mental health leadership in other organizations outside of social work have come forwarding banning and condemning conversion "therapy," and while this is not explicitly banned, social work as a profession continues to promote LGBTQIA+ competency. Recommending best practices for affirming care, while at the same time not simply banning practices that directly harm LGBTQIA+ people, permits social injustice. Based on tenets of field from the NASW *Code of Ethics* and EPAS, it is clear that CSWE should ban the use of agencies as field placements that conduct, refer to, or promote conversion "therapy" and do not allow LGBTQIA+ employees to be open about their identity. Collectively, we suggest that CSWE consider taking a stronger stand and move from recommendations for competency considerations to prohibiting (without question) harmful practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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