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Embracing Our Values: Social Work Faculty Progressivism in a Conservative World

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Abstract

Social work faculty have an ethical imperative to engage in policy and political practice. While the literature indicates that a progressive-liberal tradition exists within social work, few studies have specifically looked at faculty political inclination and even less at their social welfare policy preferences. This descriptive study used an online survey to look at the party affiliation and political ideology of United States (U.S.) based social work faculty and the influence that these have on the social welfare policies faculty prefer. The study finds that U.S. based social work faculty are affiliated with the Democratic party (78.1%) and on the liberal side of the political continuum (86.4%). Descriptive statistics show that, overall, the social policy preferences of American social work faculty reflect the progressive paradigm more than the restrictive

paradigm (M = 6.06, SD = 1.23 for progressive items and M = 2.63, SD = 1.54 for restrictive items). Multivariate regression analysis results indicate that political ideology is the strongest predictor of social welfare policy preferences among study participants (β = .307, p < .01). The implications of these findings for social work education, including the alignment of a progressive ideology with social work values and ethics, are discussed.

Introduction

America is politically divided. In response to the murder of George Floyd, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has amplified the message that "Social Work is Political" and that "there is no such thing as a non-political social worker" (NASW, 2020). The current political divide, and the call to action from NASW, raises the question: on which side of the divide do social workers fall and what role should social work education play in advancing political themes? The literature indicates a history of progressivism shared by both social work practitioners and students (Gasker & Vafeas, 2003; Murdach, 2010). However, there is a dearth of research into social work educators' policy preferences (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Weiss et al., 2002). Thus, this study explores the political affiliation and ideology of social work educators, and the impact of faculty political ideology on social work education, social work practice, and social work identity.

Determining the political ideology of social work educators is particularly essential given the political climate. Currently, attempts are underway within state legislatures to pass laws, under the guise of fostering intellectual freedom and limiting indoctrination, that request faculty and students to identify their political beliefs (Andrade, 2021). As Wehbi and Turcotte (2007) note: "...whereas alternate perspectives may have been tolerated at one point in time, changes in the broader context, including the growing privatization of social services and the growing dominance of neoliberalism on a world-wide scale, are increasingly making dissent a more

challenging endeavour" (para. 5). Thus, determining social work educators' ideological perspectives will assist in preparing social work education to address the existential threat to academic freedom in the political and social climate.

Education itself is a political act, and, by nature, is not politically neutral (Freire, 1970). Additionally, social workers, and thus social work educators, are ethically obligated to engage in political practice. The NASW Code of Ethics ethical standard 6.04 Social and Political Action demands practitioners to advance policies that address social justice and meet basic human needs (NASW, 2021). The NASW Code of Ethics also outlines six core values for social work practitioners, ensuring that the social work profession is a values-based profession. Concurrently, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) require that students are competently prepared to engage in policy practice (CSWE, 2022). It is therefore incumbent on social work educators to regularly challenge students to explore political and policy themes, which are significantly impacted by value systems and ideology.

Given the cultural and social implications of an educator's ideology, and the limited knowledge base in the literature, this descriptive study seeks to address the following questions: what are the political affiliations and political ideologies of social work faculty, and what impact do they have on social work faculty policy preferences? To address the identified questions, an online population survey of educators was completed.

Literature Review

Ideology

Ideology is a "fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that (1) explains and (2) evaluates social conditions, (3) helps people understand their place in society, and (4) provides a program for social and political action" (Ball & Dagger, 1995, p. 9). These four functions combined move beyond ideas and beliefs to guide political, social, economic, and educational policies (Ball &

Dagger, 1995; Gutek, 2010). The conservative-liberal ideological continuum is a common way of thinking about how people should be served by social welfare programs (Jansson, 2011). Contemporary conservative ideology is characterized as being reluctant to change, thriving on tradition (Gilbert & Terrell, 2010), and viewing people as being quite capable of taking care of themselves (Abramovitz, 2021). Present-day liberal ideology is characterized as being open to change, progressively looking for solutions (Kirst-Ashman, 2013), and viewing the government as the best mechanism for providing services and opportunities (Abramovitz, 2021).

Political Ideology and Affiliation in Social Work Literature

Studies into social work and politics in the United States (U.S.) have typically centered around the rates and types of political participation among social work practitioners and social work students. In fact, the literature has identified that social workers are more politically active than the general population and tend to participate in political activities that require lower levels of political engagement, such as voting (Domanski, 1998; Ezell, 1993; Felderhoff et al., 2016; Hamilton & Fauri, 2001; Mary, 2001; Ritter, 2007; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010; Wolk, 1981). However, there is a subset of political social work literature that has explored the political ideology and policy preference of social work practitioners and students. Studies regarding U.S. based practitioners' ideology and political affiliation find that social workers tend to identify within a liberal-progressive paradigm and are largely affiliated with the Democratic Party (Ritter, 2007; Rosenwald, 2006; Smith-Osborne & Rosenwald, 2009; Stoeffler et al., 2021).

Similarly, studies into American social work student ideology and affiliation find that social work students tend to identify within a liberal-progressive approach (Ringstad, 2014), especially if their primary interest is in poverty (Stoeffler et al., 2021). While students tend to start slightly more conservative, through the process of social work education and field experience, their views become more liberal (Castillo & Becerra, 2012; Cryns, 1977; Perry, 2003; Schwartz & Robinson, 1991). However, there is a body of

literature that argues that social work education must prevent marginalizing students identifying within a conservative paradigm (Framm & Miller-Cribbs, 2008; Lerner, 2020), a notion that is explored in greater detail in the implications section of this paper.

While the referenced literature related to social work students and practitioners finds that social workers identify as progressive, there is limited literature related specifically to the political leanings of social work faculty. In fact, Mary's (2001) is the most recent study to specifically address political ideology of social work faculty and finds that faculty support a social reform perspective for social policy and overwhelmingly disagreed that effective social work requires social workers to remain non-partisan. Although there is limited data regarding social work faculty's political leanings, the literature related to political ideology and affiliation among all academics find that academics increasingly lean left (Abrams, 2016; Langbert et al., 2016). However, the limited and dated research specifically regarding the political ideology and political affiliation of social work faculty requires reappraisal to see if the trend among faculty in general is indicative of social work faculty. While social work students, social work practitioners, and faculty in higher education typically align within a progressive paradigm, the institution of higher education is structured differently. Traditionally, theoretical perspectives and pedagogy utilized in social work education tend to arise from a conservative paradigm (Robbins et al., 2019). Similarly, higher education, while typically perceived as a liberal institution, also tends to be structured in a neoliberal and conservative manner (Carey, 2021; Schraedley et al., 2021). For example, institutions of higher education tend to operate in a self-serving fashion to maintain student enrollment, appease donors, and perpetuate administrative and faculty hierarchies. Both social work education and the academic institutions in which social work education occurs have a conservative nature that runs counter to the progressive ideology that is typically expressed by social work students and social work practitioners. It is anticipated based upon the above stated literature that social work faculty will identify as liberal-progressive and support progressive policies. However, without additional study, it is

impossible to determine where social work educators are currently positioned on this progressive-to-conservative spectrum.

Social Welfare Policy Preferences

Social policy preferences are of immense importance, as a nation's economic system and social safety net are among the greatest factors in determining the amount of poverty in a nation (Rainwater & Smeeding, 2003; Rank, 2021). While a liberal-progressive slant to policy positions exists for students and practitioners, there are relatively few studies that have examined policy preferences, and the evidence has not always been definitive (Weiss, et al., 2005). Social work students have shown support for a welfare-state, but the level of support has varied from middling to committed (Weiss, et al., 2002).

Methods

A list of all the accredited social work programs in the United States was obtained from the CSWE website. Every program webpage was searched to acquire the names and email addresses of all the full-time social work faculty. An email invitation was sent from the first author explaining the survey and welcoming participation through the survey link. To increase the participation rate, two subsequent emails were sent at two-week intervals. This study also received approval by the Institutional Review Board of the first author.

Data Collection

Participants completed an online survey containing a demographic questionnaire and the Welfare Policies Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003). Excepting the items on the demographic questionnaire, questions used a seven-point Likert scale with participants rating their level of agreement with each statement using "1" to indicate strong disagreement and "7" to indicate strong agreement.

Instruments

A demographic questionnaire collected participant information about full-time faculty status, current position/title, participant age, gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, political ideological identification, income level, number of years of faculty service, primary practice areas of interest, primary areas of teaching interest, state social work licensure status, NASW membership, geographic region of their institution, context of their institution, level of religiosity, personal experiences with poverty, and professional activities. The demographic questions served as the independent variables. This study also used the 21-item Welfare Policies Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003), which is "constructed to assess support for progressive and restrictive welfare policies" (p. 42). Progressive policies advocate for improvement or reform as opposed to restrictive policies that seek to maintain the status quo or limit or reduce the application. These items served as dependent variables.

Data Analysis

SPSS (v.22) was used for data analysis. Descriptive univariate analysis calculated means, standard deviations, and ranges for each variable. Principal components factor analysis was conducted and Cronbach's alpha was calculated to ensure the items fit together in the same manner as in Bullock, et al. (2003). Pearson's r correlational analysis was used to determine the relationship between variables studied. Independent variables significantly correlated with the dependent variables were included in the regression analysis. The first regression analysis showed that many of the coefficients were not significant. After removing coefficients that were not significantly associated, regressions were conducted on the remaining variables.

Findings

Sample demographic characteristics

1,037 full-time faculty members (72.8% women, 26.4% men, 0.4% other, 0.4% no response) of CSWE accredited social work programs participated in this study. This constituted a 17.8% response rate of the 5,810 surveys sent. 74.9% were White (Non-Hispanic Caucasian), 12.1% were African American/Other Black (Non-Hispanic), 5.3 % were Latino/Hispanic, 3.9% were Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.3% were American Indian/Native American, and 2.5% identified as other groups/unknown. 86.4% self-identified as being on the liberal political ideological continuum (30.3% extremely liberal; 45.1% liberal; 11.0% slightly liberal), 9.4% identified as moderate, middle of the road, and 4.2% were on the conservative political ideological continuum (0.1% extremely conservative; 1.8% conservative; 2.3% slightly conservative). 78.1% affiliated with Democrats (70.2% Democratic; 7.9% lean Democratic) and 3.5% with Republicans (2.0% Republican; 1.5% lean Republican). 11.1% had an affiliation as Independent, and the remaining 7.2% chose other.

Factor analysis

The factorability of the 21 items in the Welfare Policy Questionnaire (Bullock, et al., 2003) was examined. The items grouped into two factors, progressive and restrictive, and factor analysis loaded the same as in the Bullock, et al. (2003) study, further demonstrating the usefulness of this instrument in measuring social policy preferences. In the Bullock, et al. (2003) study the Cronbach's alpha was .79 for the progressive subscale and .84 for the restrictive subscale; in this study they were .89 and .85 respectively.

Means comparison

Welfare policy preferences

The study participants (social work faculty) strongly favored progressive over restrictive welfare policies. Participants agreed with all twelve of the progressive items and disagreed with all nine restrictive items. Table 1 shows the mean scores for each item.

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Restrictive Welfare Policy Preferences Items ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.54$)		
If welfare recipients receive 3 warnings or sanctions for not following the rules or taking their caseworkers advice, they should be removed from the welfare rolls (i.e., "three strikes and you're out").	2.57	1.51
Fingerprinting welfare recipients is a good idea because it might help reduce fraud.	2.18	1.61
It is a good idea to put a 5-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare benefits.	2.35	1.53
*No time limits should be placed on the receipt of welfare benefits. People should be allowed to receive assistance for as long as they need to.	3.16	1.84
If welfare recipients don't participate in job training programs their benefits should be reduced.	3.44	1.63
If children in welfare families do not go to school regularly, their benefits should be reduced.	2.66	1.67
Anyone convicted of a drug-related crime should never be eligible to receive welfare benefits.	1.74	1.25
People should only be allowed to receive welfare for two years.	1.59	1.11
After being on welfare for 2 years, recipients who cannot find jobs should work for the government to get their benefits.	3.97	1.70
Progressive Welfare Policy Preferences Items ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.23$)		
Welfare recipients should be able to receive welfare benefits while attending a four-year college program.	6.17	1.12
The federal government should guarantee an income above the poverty level to every person who wants to work.	5.75	1.43
While on welfare, recipients should receive free daycare for their kids and this service should be continued after the primary caregiver is employed full-time until the family is financially secure.	5.96	1.25
Welfare recipients should receive free medical care for themselves, and their kids and this service should be continued after employment is found until the family is financially secure.	6.12	1.15
The federal government should guarantee a job to every person who wants to work.	4.94	1.71
For welfare reform to work, the minimum wage should be increased enough to lift a family of four out of poverty.	6.25	1.19
*Welfare benefits should be completely eliminated.	6.78	0.78
Welfare benefits should be adjusted each year to keep up with increases in the cost of living.	6.01	1.29
Welfare recipients should be able to access education and job training free of charge.	5.88	1.33
To prevent poverty, universal health insurance and other basic necessities should be provided to all working people.	6.42	1.12
*Welfare should not be available to single, teenage mothers.	6.46	1.25

Note:1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat Disagree; 4 = Neither Disagree nor Agree; 5 = Somewhat Agree; 6 = Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree
Note: Disagree ≥ 3.99; Agree ≤ 4.00 * items are reverse scored

Table 1: Mean scores for welfare policy questionnaire items

Multivariate regression analyses

Restrictive policy preferences

The results of the regression to predict restrictive welfare policy preferences revealed seven predictors that explained 16.2% of the variance ($R^2 = .162$, $p < .05$). It was found that the participants' absence of a liberal political

ideological view significantly predicted restrictive social policy preferences (β = -.260, p < .01), as did racial and ethnic category (White) (β = -.115, p < .01), primary teaching interest in field (β = -.115, p < .01), primary practice interest in poverty (β = -.113, p < .01), participating in advocacy (β = -.079, p < .01), and primary practice interest in international social work (β = .70, p < .05). Political affiliation (Democratic) did not significantly predict restrictive social welfare policy preferences (β = -.065, p > .05).

Progressive policy preferences

The results of the regression to predict progressive welfare policy preferences revealed six predictors that explained 16.5% of the variance (R^2 = .165, p < .05).

Variable	B	Standard Error of B	Beta
		Restrictive Policy	
Race/Ethnicity	-.269	.076	-.115**
Political Affiliation	-.161	.089	-.065
Political Ideological View	-.770	.107	-.260**
International Social Work	.203	.094	.070*
Poverty	-.262	.076	-.113**
Field	.277	.077	-.115**
Advocacy	-.157	.066	-.079**
		Progressive Policy	
Political Affiliation	.203	.088	-.082*
Political Ideological View	.898	.105	.307**
Developmental Disabilities	-.336	.125	-.086**
Violence Prevention	.356	.100	.113**
South	-.255	.073	-.113**
Member of Board of Directors	-.103	.065	.051

Note: R^2 = .162 (*p*<.05) for Restrictive Policy. R^2 = .165 (*p*<.05) for Progressive Policy. *p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 2: Multiple regression analyses predicting support for welfare policies

It was found that participants' political ideological view (liberal) significantly predicted progressive social policy preferences (β = .307, p < .01), as did primary practice interest in violence prevention (β = .113, p < .01) and political affiliation (Democratic) (β = .082, p < .05). Having the institution located in the South (β = -.113, p < .01), primary practice interest in developmental disabilities (β = -.086, p < .01) and being a member of a board of directors did not significantly predict progressive social policy

preferences (β = -.051, p > .05). Table 2 above shows the multiple regression analyses predicting welfare policy preferences.

Implications for Social Work Education

The presenting study posed the following questions: what the political ideology and political affiliation of social work faculty are, and what impact political affiliation and ideology have on social work faculty policy preference. In addressing the first question, this study reveals that social work educators overwhelmingly identify within a liberal-progressive political ideology paradigm. Confirming that social work faculty are politically progressive, and that this progressive ideology strongly impacts policy preference, has resounding impact for social work education.

Namely, knowing that social work educators identify as liberal-progressive, this article argues that social work academia should take two key steps. Primarily, social work academics should embrace progressivism. Embracing progressivism includes preparing for any educational threats to academic viewpoints, ensuring that social work values and ethics are upheld in the classroom, and unapologetically including progressive theory and pedagogy. Additionally, social work educators should consider the approach employed while embracing a progressive viewpoint. Particularly, educators should not operate in a pedantic manner, should shy away from "group-think," and should avoid hyper-partisanship. While these two implications appear at odds, they are both essential for understanding the identity of social work education and ensuring that social work values are upheld.

Embracing Progressivism

Prepare for Existential Threats

Establishing that social work educators maintain a liberal-progressive stance has implications for understanding and protecting social work academics' overall identity. As noted, the current political landscape is

weaponizing education as part of a culture war (Fischer, 2022). While the political discourse around education is primarily within the context of K-12 schools, educators in higher education must prepare to have their pedagogy and curriculum criticized. The threat comes from the political right, whose viewpoints contrast with those of liberal progressives. Thus, social work educators must prepare for any existential threats posed by policy stances that aim at suppressing liberal-progressive ideals.

Therefore, the first step in preparing for the threat to social work educational values includes identifying that the threat exists. Movements to register political preferences of professors (Guzman, 2021), limit the discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and implicit bias (Bernstein, 2022), and eliminate discussions of LGBTQ+ rights (Schwartz, 2022) are antithetical to social work. Thus, social work academics need to advocate against any policies in federal, state, and local governing bodies that stand in opposition to the values of the social work profession, particularly any policies that suppress educating in an inclusive and supportive manner.

For example, Florida's recent enactment of the Stop WOKE bill, legislation developed under the guise of preventing indoctrination, calls for neutralizing discussion around race, prejudice, and America's history of slavery in K-12 education (Anderson, 2022). The Stop WOKE bill has faced challenges in the American judicial system, which can provide educators a road map for fighting against unjust educational policies through legal and judicial action. However, it is possible that future legislative efforts will have a chilling effect on pedagogy and content central to social work values and ethics. Thus, social work educators should prepare for civil disobedience when state laws conflict with the values and ethics of the social work profession. Educators must also ensure that academic freedom is not merely an ideal but a practice within their departments and institutions which will enable professors to maintain fidelity to their own guiding principles.

Maintain Social Work Values

Through adequate preparation against existential threats to a liberal-progressive stance, social work educators can maintain social work values

throughout social work education. As a values-based profession, social workers are called to adhere to six core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 2021). While these values are not exclusively progressive, components of these values, such as focus on knowledge of systems of oppression, opposing discrimination, and respect for culture and ethnic diversity, are in direct conflict with current political movements to eliminate pedagogy geared towards addressing topics of diversity.

Fortunately, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is affirming the need to incorporate diversity within curriculum. In fact, the 2022 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) consistently demand that social work programs address anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice when preparing future social workers (CSWE, 2022). The incorporation of a significant emphasis on anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices in social work education accreditation documents is in direct contrast to the efforts proposed by governing bodies to silence these liberal-progressive ideals in classrooms. Thus, social work education must maintain a steadfast commitment to these ideals and oppose any movements that challenge to silence these critical components of the social work curriculum. Additionally, programs and educational institutions must evaluate how their own missions align with these inclusive ideals.

Incorporate Progressivism and Diversity in Theory and Pedagogy

As social work educators begin the process of embracing a liberal-progressive viewpoint and adhering to the charge of incorporating anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices in curriculum and courses, educators must reflect on the current theory and pedagogy that are implemented in the classroom. Historically, theoretical perspectives discussed in social work courses are centered in a conservative paradigm (Robbins et al., 2019). For example, many key theoretical perspectives utilized in social work education, such as those of Freud, Piaget, and Erikson, are from a traditional male and Euro-centric worldview. In fact, social work theoretical and pedagogical approaches "...have a long history of engaging in practices that

are racist and that perpetuate white supremacy" (Yearwood et al., 2021, p. i). Thus, social work educators must reappraise their own practices by intentionally incorporating diverse theoretical perspectives and incorporating pedagogy that is responsive and sensitive to the diverse needs of social work students.

Considerations When Embracing Progressivism

While some may misconstrue the argument for social work educators to embrace their ideology as a form of advocating for liberal-progressive indoctrination (Will, 2007), a critique often launched at the academy, this article is not that. In fact, it is essential for educators to expose students to various perspectives for students to fully identify their own worldview. However, during this politically divisive time, it is disingenuous and dangerous for educators to appear neutral in the face of significant economic, social, and human rights upheavals.

Thus, this article contends that embracing progressivism will ensure that liberal-progressive ideals are not silenced, which will enable social work educators to maintain fidelity to the values of the social work profession. Yet there are several considerations that social work educators should examine while embracing a progressive ideology. Namely, social work educators must meet their peers and students where they are, guard against the concerns of groupthink, and prevent the profession from being co-opted by partisan politics.

Meeting Others Where They Are

In the process of fully embracing progressivism, social work educators run the risk of appearing self-righteous, which can prevent students from engaging in course discussion that appears politically divisive. Therefore, educators must take steps to avoid presenting liberal-progressive viewpoints in a manner that falls into the academic know-it-all trope. Additionally, social work literature identifies a concern for alienating students who come from a conservative perspective (Framm & Miller-Cribbs, 2008; Lerner, 2020). Thus, educators must uphold the learning

process as a journey of student discovery and not a soapbox for professorial pontificating. However, creating a space for students to explore various political viewpoints does not absolve educators from challenging viewpoints that are counter to the ethical mandates and values of the social work profession.

Fortunately, social work education is already familiar with the concept of preparing practitioners to meet clients where they are. Thus, social work educators can utilize lessons from the person-in-environment (PIE) approach to work with students, colleagues, and the larger community who may hold viewpoints antithetical to progressivism and social work values (Gitterman & Germain, 1980). Utilizing PIE in conversations around progressive topics within classrooms will enable social work educators to explore the diversity of student viewpoints while also allowing students a space to embrace progressive concepts. This in turn will enable educators to encourage students to think critically and reflectively about their political ideology, the profession's values, and the impact these ideologies and values have in the learning process (Rosenwald et al., 2012).

If embracing social work values is fundamental to becoming a social worker, one must consider the responsibilities of the social work academy when a student fails to do so. Clearly, this question is a controversial one, as it suggests that running afoul of the thought police could result in academic dismissal. Yet, if social work is more about its unique perspective than it is about the tools that it often appropriates from other helping professions, then the way social workers think, the positions they hold, and the prejudices they maintain should be considered in schools of social work, despite the grades achieved.

Consider the example of a MSW student who was taught by one of the authors. During the course, the student disclosed to the class that she would not work with LGBTQ+ people, as she believed them to be psychologically and morally damaged. In addition, she said that, if she was forced to work with them, she would try to encourage them to change their behaviors. This student was an academically high achieving student. However, her values were inconsistent with social work. If being a social worker means

supporting the value, dignity, autonomy, and agency of LGBTQ+ clients —as is done with every other person—can someone be, or should someone be permitted to be, a social worker if they embrace values and positions to the contrary? Certainly, every student engages in a process of evolution. That is the very purpose of social work education. However, the profession —and the social work academy—must determine when the formal educational process has ended, and the gate-keeping responsibility begins. In this challenging time, when schools of social work confront reduced enrollments and economic pressures, the academy must act courageously and place the development of social work values, and the adoption of a social work identity, above the enticement of a fuller classroom.

Guarding against Groupthink

While educators should embrace progressivism, they should also remain open to diversity of thought. Failure to explore other viewpoints can lead to groupthink, the blind allegiance to a predominant perspective, which can have an adverse epistemic effect on social work thought (Hahn et al., 2020). Educators risk operating within an echo chamber, discouraging viewpoints grounded in facts.

As noted, the social work profession has a history of supporting oppressive systems (Yearwood et al., 2021). Operating with a groupthink mentality prevents social work educators from reappraising the profession's role in perpetuating unjust ideologies and reconciling the profession's history with its current ethical mandates and values. Thus, embracing a progressive viewpoint does not mean minimizing diversity in discourse, but rather, provides an opportunity to explore various viewpoints and to find areas for commonality and growth, a liberal-progressive ideal in its own regard.

Progressivism Not Partisanship

Social work educators are beholden to social work values and not the value system of any one particularly political party. It is important that social work educators embrace progressivism and not partisanship. Progressivism is support and advocacy for social reform while partisanship is strong

adherence to a particular political party. Political party platforms can and often do change. A classic example is how the Republican party was initially liberal, focusing attention on the federal government's role in ensuring social justice through expanded power, while the Democratic party was conservative; however, between the end of the Civil War and 1936, the parties gradually switched positions (Wolchover & McKelvie, 2021).

While social work educators currently tend to identify with the Democratic party, components of the party's political platform could directly conflict with social work values. Research demonstrates that political ideology is central to both attitudes and behaviors towards human rights and social justice, with liberal-progressive showing decidedly more support (Braun & Arves, 2017). Thus, the salient matter is to adhere to a liberal-progressive ideological perspective and the social work value system, not necessarily to one political party. To avoid confirmation bias and blind partisanship, social work educators need to evaluate the values system within political parties and continue to advocate for policies and platforms that align with the values of the social work profession.

Limitations

The data used are from a larger nationwide online survey in the Fall of 2014. Americans have grown more politically divided in the years since the data was collected (Dimock & Wike, 2020), and it is likely that the results would be even more skewed if the survey were conducted today. A study of this nature will always demand constant reappraisal.

The entire population of full-time social work faculty at CSWE accredited institutions is the target of the study. This population was relatively small and could be identified, constructed, and surveyed. Reliance on websites being current may have caused some full-time faculty to not be identified and included. Self-selection was the final sampling determinant; thus, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the scope of the sample. Additionally, there is always a possibility of social desirability bias associated with self-report.

While the study's findings may inform the pedagogy of social work schools in the U.S, the findings and implications may have little relevance beyond the American experience. Though dramatic political division is hardly unique to United States, the two-party system, unlike parliamentary structures, tends to define issues in binary ways. Thus, the two-party system enhances the likelihood that one party—such as the Democratic Party—will adopt positions on various social issues that align with social work values.

Additionally, the current political times are unprecedented in the United States, especially with respect to the degree of vitriol. In years past, some welfare programs (e.g.., Head Start) would have garnered bipartisan support. But in this age, support for such programs is an indication of one's liberal-progressive agenda, and sometimes the social issue, experience, or movement becomes a target of hostility or violence. Finally, one must not assume that the American social work experience is like that found in other countries. While global social work practice shares common beginnings in both the charity organization society and settlement house movements, over the course of the twentieth century, social work in each country has become a unique entity, fundamentally shaped by its culture, environment, history, politics, resources, and challenges. Thus, future research should address the limitations of this study by using stronger sampling methodologies, stronger research designs, and an exploration of faculty political ideology outside of the U.S.

Conclusion

Social work faculty identify as liberal-progressive in their ideology, and this identification predicts their firm support of progressive social welfare policies. Future research must move beyond this description of the nature and impact of ideology on policy preferences to how the findings translate into pedagogy and teaching philosophy. A roadmap is given for social work faculty to embrace their liberal-progressive identity, which is grounded in the profession's ethical mandates and values.

Many of the practice activities aligned with social work values and ethics (e.g., feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, etc.) are good in themselves, and in many instances, universally and historically regarded as such. Other professional considerations are based in science (e.g., support of LGBTQ+ rights, condemnation of conversion therapies, etc.). Therefore, the political quality of these considerations may have little to do with the issue at hand, but with how the issue is defined and used by each side. This phenomenon suggests that these issues are not innately partisan, and only the political winds have made them so. Consequently, when social work educators take positions to support the poor, discriminated, and marginalized, positions demanded by social work values, they must do so despite the appearance that the individual, department, or profession is acting in a partisan fashion. Maintaining neutrality risks collaboration with discriminatory and oppressive practices. Therefore, actions must be bold and unequivocal.

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