Preparing Social Workers to Confront Social Injustice and Oppression: Evaluating the Role of Social Work Education

Rachel W. Goode, Mariah Cowell, Dielle McMillan, Tonya Van Deinse, and Courtney Cooper-Lewter

Since the presidential election of 2016, bias-related incidents, hate-filled rhetoric, and extremist violence have been increasing in the United States. Because social workers are often working with individuals and communities affected by these incidents, practitioners may have increasing responsibility to confront social injustice and oppression. However, limited evidence on the preparedness of social workers to assume this responsibility, particularly among those who are still students, exists. To address this gap, this study used focus group and survey data from the Diversity and Oppression Scale to explore the preparedness of MSW students (N = 22) to confront oppression. Six themes were identified as integral to student experiences in their programs: (1) social worker responsibility to confront oppression, (2) use of dominant group discourse on oppression, (3) variation in faculty preparation and comfort, (4) a focus on knowledge of oppression versus skills and process, (5) role of personal responsibility and experience in student preparation, and (6) strategies to increase student preparedness to confront oppression. Factors identified to enhance students’ level of preparedness include faculty opportunities for development, changes to the explicit and implicit curriculum, and creating a formalized way to integrate topics on oppression and diversity into all facets of the curriculum.

KEY WORDS: advocacy; oppression; social injustice; social work education

In the month following the November 2016 presidential election, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) tracked 1,094 bias-related incidents (Beirich, Hankes, Piggott, & Schlatter, 2016), of which anti-immigrant, anti-black, anti-Muslim, and anti–lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) bias accounted for the vast majority of incidents. Moreover, from 2016 to 2018, SPLC reported a 22 percent rise in the number of hate groups (for example, primarily white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups) and a 17 percent increase in hate crimes in the United States that were largely motivated by racial, religious, and LGBTQ bias (Beirich et al., 2016; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018). In addition to this uptick in overt displays of racism and other bias-related incidents, 60 percent of Americans believe that the presidency of Donald J. Trump has made race relations in the United States worse (Malloy & Smith-Rubenstein, 2018).

Scholars have argued that living in times of racial and political unrest will require activism on behalf of social workers (Jeyapal, 2017). Due to the increase in bias-related incidents, social work practitioners and educators may be “called on more than ever to speak out against policies and political rhetoric that threaten the lives and well-being of vulnerable and historically oppressed people” (Greenfield, Atteberry Ash, & Plassmeyer, 2018, p. 427). However, these conversations may risk being avoided due to concerns that social justice, inclusion, and equity may be partisan (Greenfield et al., 2018). For example, social work faculty may experience institutional pressure to maintain neutrality and avoid taking stands on political issues for fear of not appearing objective or impartial (Greenfield et al., 2018). However, according to the National Association of Social Workers’ (NASW) Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (NASW, 2015), social
workers are called to be change agents and challenge structural and institutional oppression to build inclusive communities and organizations. Maintaining silence or neutrality may risk preserving systems of oppression and negating the profession’s values.

Although NASW provides leadership and guidance on advocacy and lobbying—including drafting policy recommendations (for example, Affordable Care Act integration, Medicare reimbursement), writing letters, and making statements to the current administration on a range of policy concerns—several scholars acknowledge the need for a professionwide reawakening and a radical conviction to confront oppression (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Jeyapal, 2017). Arguably, this call for a reawakening may be a direct challenge to the profession’s current emphasis on individual and micro-level interventions (Mattocks, 2018). For example, Corley and Young (2018) reviewed social work interventions in four prominent social work journals between 2005 and 2015. Of the 1,690 articles reviewed, nearly 66 percent of articles proposed an individualistic intervention, rather than addressing oppressive structures and systems. By only focusing on individual-level interventions, social workers may risk preserving societal and political conditions that further the disparities faced by members of marginalized communities (Corley & Young, 2018).

Reorienting the social work profession to confront oppressive structures and dismantle systems that promote discrimination begins with the education of social work students. Previous research has shown that students begin their social work education with a strong commitment to social justice advocacy (Hancock, Waites, & Kledaras, 2012; Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006), and that social work education has a positive impact on students’ commitment to social justice advocacy and to client empowerment (Van Soest, 1996; Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006). However, social work students have also reported limited opportunities to learn and apply social justice theories, and a perceived disconnect between the skills that promote social justice and the skills that need to be developed for clinical practice (Bhuyan, Bejan, & Jeyapal, 2017).

Taken together, these studies suggest that the social work curriculum may help students understand oppression and may improve their experiences with clients who experience oppression; however, there may be a gap between social work programs’ stated objectives and the knowledge and skills students have to advocate for social justice. Although there are available resources for social work educators to help incorporate diversity and social justice into the social work curriculum (Nicotera & Kang, 2009; Pulliam, 2017; Snyder, Peeler, & May, 2008; Van Soest, 1994; Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006) and tools to assess student learning in courses on diversity and oppression (Windsor, Shorkey, & Battle, 2015), there is scant research on MSW student perspectives on their knowledge, skills, and affective processes to confront oppression. To address this gap, this study explores student preparedness to confront oppression, identifies opportunities to better prepare students to respond to incidents of social injustice and oppression, and describes aspects of their MSW education that students perceived as most helpful.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

In the fall of 2017 and spring of 2018, the research team recruited MSW students from a large southeastern U.S. university. The research team used flyers, e-mails, and class announcements to recruit students interested in discussing the social worker’s responsibility in confronting oppression. The sample (N = 22) was 74 percent (n = 14) white; 90 percent (n = 19) female; and, on average, 28 (SD = 4.4) years of age (see Table 1). Approximately 42 percent (n = 9) of our sample were first-year, full-time MSW students, and 57 percent (n = 12) were second-year full-time, advanced-standing, or distance education students. All participants were provided lunch to offset the burden of participating.

**Procedure**

The principal investigator (PI) and a research assistant were the joint moderators for the focus group discussion. At the beginning of each focus group, the moderator provided an overview of the study, explaining that each session was audio-recorded and kept on a password-protected and secure computer at the university. Following this explanation, and any additional questions by participants, informed consent was obtained. Following the introduction, participants were asked to complete the Diversity and Oppression Scale (DOS) (Windsor et al., 2015) by paper or online. After survey completion, participants answered a series of semi-structured interview questions (see Table 2) about
social workers’ responsibility to confront oppression, and course and program activities that students perceived as most helpful in enhancing their preparedness to respond to incidents of social injustice and oppression. In total, four focus groups were held, lasting 60 to 90 minutes each. Study approval was provided by the university’s institutional review board (omitted to preserve anonymity).

Measures
The DOS (Windsor et al., 2015) is a 25-item self-report measure that includes four subscales: (1) Cultural Diversity and Awareness (measures student awareness of various oppressed populations), (2) Diversity and Oppression (measures student agreement and disagreement with oppressive policies), (3) Social Worker/Client Congruence (measures student awareness of identity as a social worker), and (4) Social Work Responsibilities in Cultural Diversity (measures student awareness of the role and responsibilities of a social worker in understanding diversity and confronting oppression). The purpose of the scale is to measure student learning about diversity and oppression according to the requirements of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Responses are given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree. Scores range from 25 to 125, with higher scores indicating more agreement with CSWE’s Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) on cultural diversity. Cronbach’s alphas ranged from .63 to .81.

DATA ANALYSIS
DOS
Descriptive statistics (for example, frequency counts, means) were used to analyze sample demographic data. Bivariate inferential statistics were used to examine the relationship between dimensions of the DOS and year in the program. Specifically, DOS scores of students in their first year of the program were compared with DOS scores of students in their final year of the program. Independent groups t tests were conducted to compare the total average scores on the DOS as well as the average scores on each of the four DOS subscales.

Focus Groups
Focus group data were downloaded from the digital audio-recorder, then sessions were transcribed by experienced transcriptionists. Data analysis occurred in two phases. During the first phase, a team of four coders used a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) to code the raw data from the focus groups, resulting in a number of descriptive categories. All coders met to discuss the themes that emerged from the focus group data, and to decide on an initial coding structure. Coders reviewed the initial categories and identified four broad categories, each of which contained several specific topics or subcategories. In the second phase, all transcripts were rereviewed, and the PI and lead research assistant developed a codebook for use for the duration of the analysis. Each coder used the codebook to review assigned transcripts. Then, coders met together and used consensus coding to reach agreement and arrive at a shared operational definition of each code (Hays & Singh, 2012). Constant comparison was used to compare codes for similarities and differences, and to explore within-group variations of the phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Similar codes were grouped together under a single theme. There were consistent themes across groups and thematic saturation was reached.

RESULTS
DOS Scores
Average total scores on the DOS were 100.76 (SD = 9.32), indicating that participants had moderate
to moderately high agreement with the CSWE EPAS requirements on cultural diversity. Final-year students had slightly higher DOS total scores ($M = 101.67, SD = 9.69$) compared with first-year students ($M = 99.75, SD = 9.44$), but differences in mean scores were not statistically significant ($t(15) = 0.412, p = .686$). Our power to detect significant differences in means was limited due to small sample size. In addition, descriptive analysis of participant responses indicated that our sample had mean scores of 38.11 ($SD = 7.17$) on the Cultural Diversity and Awareness subscale (max score: 55), 38.06 ($SD = 3.21$) on the Diversity and Oppression subscale (max score: 40), 9.74 ($SD = 2.10$) on the Social Worker/Client Congruence subscale (max score: 15), and 14.47 ($SD = 0.96$) on the Social Work Responsibilities in Cultural Diversity subscale (max score: 15). Subscale scores were consistent between first-year and final-year students (see Table 3).

**Focus Groups**

Six themes emerged from the groups: (1) social worker responsibility to confront oppression, (2) use of dominant group discourse on oppression, (3) variation in faculty preparation and comfort, (4) focus on knowledge of oppression versus skills and process, (5) role of personal responsibility and experience in student preparation, and (6) strategies to increase student preparedness to confront oppression. Each theme is described below and illustrated with representative quotations.

**Social Worker Responsibility to Confront Oppression.** To begin our discussion, participants spent time defining the role of a social worker in confronting oppression. Across all focus groups, participants expressed that social workers have an ethical responsibility to confront oppression and social injustice. Participants voiced that this responsibility should be at the core of our practice, regardless of whether the work is macro or micro in nature. In their reflections, participants discussed that the first role of the social worker is to name the oppression and to make others aware of what may be happening. One participant described her opinion in this way:

> It is an ethical responsibility to [confront oppression] while you have your social worker cap on, but also outside in your personal life. I feel like taking the identity of being a social worker and taking on that role means making the commitment to combat oppression in whatever ways it shows up, big or small, and in whatever ways you’re capable of doing . . . so I think, for me personally, it’s not only while I’m working with a client in a professional space but in my personal life and in my relationships [and at] the grocery store. Anywhere I come into contact with other people, it is my responsibility.

**Use of Dominant Group Discourses on Oppression.** Participants observed that instruction, particularly from majority populations (for example, white, cisgender, heterosexual), risks taking the perspective of the majority culture and excluding other marginalized groups, including those with multiple and intersecting identities. A first-year, full-time MSW student expressed,

> I will say that a lot of our oppression activities are centered around white students . . . even like our direct therapy class . . . the book is talking to a white person becoming a therapist, and this is how you will be culturally competent when dealing with minority clients, and I think that is problematic because there are not obviously only white people be-

**Table 2: Focus Group Questions**

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>1. Tell me about the experience you received in your coursework that has been part of your preparation in confronting oppression?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Do you have fears about confronting oppression once you leave your MSW program? Probe: Do you feel like there was anything that was missed in the curriculum?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What do you view as the social worker’s responsibility in responding to oppression?</td>
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<td>4. What is the experience of being a social worker like in this administration?</td>
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<td>5. What activities do you feel comfortable doing (in response to justice and oppression)? Probe: What about these activities makes them feel comfortable to you?</td>
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<td>6. What activities in your coursework do you feel prepared you for the field?</td>
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<td>7. What activities in field placement do you feel prepared you for the field?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Where are some opportunities for growth in your social work education that will aid your preparedness?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Tell me about the experience you received in your field placement that has been part of your preparation in confronting oppression?</td>
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coming therapists . . . to center the conversation around a way where you’re teaching white students about oppression that still gives the white students the privilege in the space.

In addition, participants expressed concerns that there were not enough opportunities provided during class time to acknowledge the experiences of oppression that may be among the students. Participants acknowledged how being members of various marginalized groups, including identifying as a racial and ethnic minority, having a disability, or managing a mental health diagnosis, may have created the desire to pursue a career in social work and may still impact one’s daily life. Moreover, several participants discussed the challenges of attending class lectures and participating in classroom discussions about certain forms of oppression, but not having the lived experiences of oppression acknowledged in the room by the instructor. One participant described this in the following manner:

So often . . . you talk about it as if the people in the room have not experienced those things and . . . people have experienced the things we’re talking about probably every single day in class . . . so . . . yeah, really making it human and rather than like at a distance, like “this is what oppression is over here and we are totally separate from that,” because we’re not.

In several focus groups, participants expressed that these occurrences perpetuated feelings of invisibility and created distance and a false sense of separation between the students and the experience of oppression.

**Variation in Faculty Preparation and Comfort.**

Several participants reported that the degree of their instruction to confront oppression may be dependent on faculty comfort to talk about oppression and discrimination. For example, within all the focus groups, participants reported how conversations about diversity and oppression were conducted from the perspective or lens of the faculty instructor. Thus, if participants were in courses where faculty instructors were confident and engaged in advocacy or identified as a member of a marginalized group, conversations about confronting oppression and social justice tended to be more frequent. The converse was also true (for example, when faculty were not engaged in social advocacy or were not a member of a marginalized group, conversations about social justice were less frequent), and participants expressed concerns about the disparate nature of instruction on these matters. One student expressed her thoughts this way:

It really depends on the professor. I’ve had very different experiences based on the coursework, the class that I’m in. Based on the coursework, based on the readings, and then talking to classmates that have, like, a different professor for a class, and I think that one thing that is frustrating is that it depends on the professor that you have and their comfort discussing it and the value that they place on it. . . . Like how far they are willing to engage and let a discussion go even if students are interested in it.

Participants also stated the importance of self-examination for faculty members, and their willingness to explore how privilege and oppression interact and shape social work practice and fac-

Table 3: Diversity and Oppression Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total (N = 21*)</th>
<th>Final Year (n = 12)</th>
<th>First Year (n = 9)</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total score</strong></td>
<td>100.76 (9.32)</td>
<td>101.67 (9.69)</td>
<td>99.75 (9.44)</td>
<td>t(15) = 0.412, p = .686</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subscales</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Diversity and Awareness</td>
<td>38.11 (7.17)</td>
<td>38.50 (6.38)</td>
<td>37.63 (8.48)</td>
<td>t(16) = 0.250, p = .806</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity and Oppression</td>
<td>38.06 (3.21)</td>
<td>37.90 (4.04)</td>
<td>38.25 (1.98)</td>
<td>t(16) = –0.224, p = .826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker/Client Congruence</td>
<td>9.74 (2.10)</td>
<td>10.09 (2.30)</td>
<td>9.25 (1.83)</td>
<td>t(17) = 0.854, p = .405</td>
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<td>Social Work Responsibilities in Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>14.47 (0.96)</td>
<td>14.36 (0.92)</td>
<td>14.63 (1.06)</td>
<td>t(17) = –0.572, p = .575</td>
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*Missing data from one focus group participant who did not complete the scale.
ulty–student engagement in the classroom. One participant offered the following reflection:

Honestly, if the faculty don’t have that openness to learning and doing that internal reflection . . . it’s really frustrating because that is a lot, what we’re expected to do and what we’re asked to do . . . but I think it’s honestly kind of dangerous in the classroom, because . . . it doesn’t create a learning environment that . . . is really true to social work and . . . it’s not an . . . environment where everyone can learn. So I think . . . if a professor is not willing to confront their own . . . biases and their own areas of growth . . . then it’s difficult for the rest of the class to do that.

**Focus on Knowledge of Oppression versus Skills and Process.** Participants reported receiving instruction to improve their awareness of issues of social justice, but believed they needed additional tools to confront oppression and injustice. Participants did acknowledge that providing a foundation for all students to understand the history, nature, and form of oppression in the context of the United States is essential. However, some participants felt this foundational instruction was not sufficient to provide the skills to confront oppression. When reflecting on her experience, a participant said the following:

We’ve had a lot of really great discussions and things like that. I hope that the school also gives us really tangible things and skills. And that might just be coming from my background as a white student that didn’t grow up thinking about all these issues and things like that. But yeah, I wish I had more tangible skills, like when people tell me about being an ally or something and I want to be an ally, but what does that look like, if that makes sense?

**Role of Personal Responsibility and Experience in Student Preparation.** Finally, participants highlighted their growing awareness of the role of personal preparation to increase knowledge and skills to confront oppression. Participants had varied levels of personal experience upon entering their MSW program, including but not limited to experiences with racial marginalization, advocacy work, and previous experience learning to confront oppression in their undergraduate social work training. Several comments made by participants suggested that these experiences were influential, and often did more to prepare them to confront oppression, rather than the limited time spent engaging in graduate coursework. One participant made the following comment:

I want the work that I do to be about confronting oppression within systems of education. And . . . for me, learning how to do that hasn’t come from . . . a skill that is taught in any classroom here. . . . A lot of that comes from my field experience and also . . . looking for outside resources . . . what workshops can I go to and what reading can I do and who are people that are doing this work and . . . creating what’s specific to my needs in terms of how to be what I want to be once I leave . . . I feel like more so I’m just beginning my learning.

**Strategies to Increase Student Preparedness to Confront Oppression.** In all four focus group discussions, participants offered suggestions that may improve their preparedness and provide concrete skills for social justice advocacy. First, participants consistently discussed the importance of placing content related to confronting oppression into all courses, instead of relegating it to a brief survey course. As one participant noted,

I think the stuff we’re learning in confronting oppression should be built into every course. I don’t understand why it’s a separate thing. Like today we’ll talk about oppression, but in our courses we’re talking about people’s lives that are facing oppression on the day to day. So I feel like confronting oppression should be an action course and throughout our whole curriculum we should be talking about confronting oppression.

In addition, participants suggested that another set of courses be developed—courses that would allow students to have hands-on experiences to provide knowledge and skills for social justice advocacy. Finally, participants also encouraged schools of social work to develop trainings and lecture series to help prepare and support faculty and field instructors to instruct students on social justice.
This study examined perceived preparedness among currently enrolled MSW students to confront and respond to instances of oppression and social injustice. In the focus groups, participants reported varied levels of preparedness. These levels were positively influenced by faculty comfort to discuss social advocacy and may be limited by coursework focused on equipping students to understand oppression, rather than to confront it. Participants also reported feeling as if course content on oppression assumed the majority perspective (for example, white, cisgender, heterosexual) and may not acknowledge the lived experiences of oppression among the students. In addition, participants acknowledged the role of personal experiences that occurred outside of the classroom as contributors to their preparation and reported them as even more influential than time spent in their MSW training.

On average, participants demonstrated moderate to moderately high agreement with the CSWE requirements for learning about diversity and oppression on the DOS. These scores are reflective of what was observed in the focus group discussion—our participants demonstrated a clear comprehension of the relationship between the field of social work and the responsibility to confront oppression. There were no significant differences between the DOS scores of first-year versus final-year MSW students. Although these results are encouraging, they may also reflect that students who are drawn to the social work profession may already have some interest and training on matters of social justice or may have lived experience as members of a marginalized or oppressed population.

Overall, participants in our study identified that confronting oppression is the ethical obligation of the social worker, both in professional and personal roles. There has been a long-standing dilemma in the field of social work about how to balance responsibilities to address social issues and reform, while concurrently providing help and engaging in direct social work practice (Mendes, McCurdy, Allen-Kelly, Charikar, & Incerti, 2015; Rome & Hoechstetter, 2010). In their book Unfaithful Angels, Specht and Courtney (1994) argued that in the 1970s social workers abandoned their calling to serve the poor, and a large majority began psychotherapeutic practice primarily serving a white, middle-class clientele. This change may have had a considerable effect on how social workers think about the role of social justice in practice. For example, in a study of over 300 social workers, investigators discovered that participants were more likely to identify their role in social work with their clinical and daily job-related tasks of helping clients and were less likely to endorse an emphasis on social change (Staniforth, Fouché, & O’Brien, 2011).

According to the most recent EPAS (CSWE, 2015), students are supposed to receive training to help them understand the forms of oppression and to understand strategies to eliminate oppressive structural barriers. The results of our research are consistent with other studies suggesting that students are receiving foundational lessons on these matters; however, they lack awareness and training on skills for social justice application in practice in both micro and macro settings (Hudson, 2016; O’Brien, 2011; Olson, Reid, Threadgill-Goldson, Riffe, & Ryan, 2013). For example, in a study using focus group methodology (n = 41), social work practitioners reported being aware of the importance of social justice to the social work profession but reported less clarity on its definition (Olson et al., 2013). Similarly, in another study of social work practitioners (O’Brien, 2011), results revealed that social justice is a part of practice but may be used less frequently to affect change on the macro level. These studies indicate that MSW students may not understand the definition or what is required in social justice advocacy, and social work educators should not assume that the meaning of social justice is obvious to students (Olson et al., 2013).

Although participants in our study received course instruction on diversity and oppression that met the requirements of the current EPAS (CSWE, 2015), results indicated that participants wanted more in-depth classes and a sequence of coursework and field placement experiences that provide specific skills to increase their ability to engage in social advocacy. These desires may reflect the needs of a generation of students who have matriculated into social work programs in an era marked by an increased recognition of systemic inequities, including health disparities, mortality rates, and class inequity (Bilal & Diez-Roux, 2018; Putnam, 2015). Most recently, scholars have recommended providing students additional training on racial microaggressions in social work practice (Otuyelu, Graham, & Kennedy, 2016) and using intergroup dialogue as a method to increase
students’ advocacy related to social justice (Lopez-Humphreys & Dawson, 2014). Future research may need to explore methods to increase social justice advocacy in a larger sample, and in schools of social work in rural and urban educational settings, to better understand necessary curriculum changes that may better address these needs.

**Implications for Social Work Education**

The results of our study revealed participant concerns about the centering of dominant group courses in the current course curriculum. To combat this, Lerner and Fulambarker (2018) encouraged educators to design classroom environments with concrete strategies such as having students create name cards with their pronouns and including content around intersectionality to help students understand the complexity of social identities. Also, when setting ground rules, the authors encouraged educators to rethink the use of phrases such as “safe space,” which is a term that can risk catering to students with dominant social identities. Alternatively, by creating classroom guidelines around the term “brave space,” the tone can shift to provide room for the centering of non-dominant voices (Lerner & Fulambarker, 2018).

Furthermore, incorporating and centering critical race theory (Pulliam, 2017); establishing anti-oppressive social work practice frameworks (Hines, 2012); and establishing diversity committees and cultural events to help facilitate student, faculty, and staff education (Ando, 2016) are additional tools to instruct students in social justice advocacy.

Although our initial purpose was to describe course activities that students perceived to be most helpful, our results revealed something unexpected. Rather than listing specific course activities, students in our sample consistently described how the contributions of faculty members (for example, being comfortable discussing social justice, being a member of a marginalized group) in the classroom were significant factors in their ability to receive instruction on social justice topics. Accordingly, it may be even more important to ensure faculty preparation and comfort in ability to discuss methods of social advocacy. To explore this further, Funge (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample (n = 13) of tenure-track social work educators with PhDs in social work (or a related field) to explore their perceptions regarding their responsibility to meet CSWE educational standards to prepare students to promote social justice in their practice. The results indicated that faculty participants were provided with no support or guidance to meet this standard and may face institutional challenges to teaching social justice content in their classes (for example, few structured opportunities to engage with colleagues about teaching, nonexistence of a doctoral training course on social justice). Thus, graduate social work programs may also need to consider how to provide the additional support needed to equip all faculty members to teach content related to oppression and social justice, and not overburden faculty members of color or those who hold marginalized identities (Funge, 2011). Doctoral programs in social work may benefit from incorporating additional coursework and content related to social justice into the curriculum; this may provide future social work faculty members with increased knowledge and skills to effectively train social work students to confront oppression.

**Limitations**

This research study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small, and the study was conducted with a sample of students who were from the same accredited social work program located in a university town in the southeastern United States. This may limit the generalizability of findings and may not represent the experience of social work students who are in other geographic regions, or in schools that may be larger or smaller in size. An additional limitation was that our sample comprised over 70 percent of students who identified as white and were discussing their experience in a school of social work where the majority of the faculty are also white. This limited racial and ethnic diversity may also limit the generalizability of our findings, particularly to schools of social work where there are larger numbers of racial and ethnic minority students and faculty. Finally, we also may have encountered selection bias in our sample; students who elected to join this research study may have greater interest and commitment to social justice. Despite these limitations, this is the first study that has explored the perceived preparedness of social work students to advocate for social justice, particularly due to the recent increase in racism and bias-related incidents since the 2016 presidential election.
CONCLUSION
Study participants reflected a desire to increase their preparation to actively engage in confronting oppression and in social justice advocacy. With a considerable increase in bias-related events, the results of this study suggest that social work students and faculty may need additional training to increase their ability to intervene and address issues of social injustice. Future research should investigate the necessary components for preparation in a larger and more diverse sample and recruit from various schools of social work to further explore this phenomenon.

REFERENCES
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