Person-organization incongruence as a predictor of right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and heterosexism

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Person-Organization Incongruence among Incoming Social Work Graduate Students as a Predictor of Right-wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, and Heterosexism

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Abstract
Using a sample of 124 incoming social work graduate students, this study examines whether levels of perceived incongruence with social work values and the perceived culture of a graduate social work program significantly correlate with social psychological constructs. The social psychological constructs are associated with maintenance and support for social stratification in general and with prejudicial attitudes based on sexual orientation more specifically. Results suggest that higher levels of cultural incongruence are associated with significantly higher levels of right-wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, hostile heterosexism, aversive heterosexism, and paternalistic heterosexism. Non-significant results emerged for amnestic heterosexism and positive stereotypic heterosexism. Implications for social work education and future research are discussed.
The fit between individuals and their profession has been a topic of research in the academic literature since the 1950s (see, for example, Holland, 1959, 1966). The right job, it is argued, is as much about one’s psychology as about one’s skills and aptitudes. One aspect of this fit is the set of core values that an individual embraces. Research demonstrates that people’s values tend to be congruent with the values that are dominant in their workplace (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994; Holland, 1996); furthermore, higher levels of congruence are associated with increased job satisfaction and commitment (Cable & Judge, 1996; Meir, 1995) and have been shown to coincide with better performance (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999; Kuo, Cheng, & Wang, 2001). Haley and Sidanius (2005) argue that value congruence is not only normative but benefits both the worker and the organization.

Recently, social dominance theorists have demonstrated that a similar fit exists for sociopolitical attitudes associated with social stratification (Pratto & Espinoza, 2001; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2003). Persons who endorse the subordination of others tend to select and thrive in careers that support and reproduce social stratification, while persons who endorse egalitarian attitudes tend to select and thrive in careers that attenuate social inequity (Sidanius, Liu, Pratto, & Shaw, 1994; Whitehead, 1998). Hierarchy-attenuating disciplines, such as nursing, social work, and public health, are more likely to attract more egalitarian students than hierarchy-enhancing disciplines, such as law and marketing (Sidanius et al., 1994).

The empirical evidence suggests both that self-selection into a discipline is one mechanism by which strong person-organization congruence is achieved (Sidanius, Pratto, Sinclair, & van Laar, 1996; Sidanius et al., 2003) and that at least some percentage of individuals who initially choose a field of study experience cultural incongruence with the values and predominant attitudes of the discipline into which they are entering.
Using a sample of 124 incoming master’s of social work (MSW) students, this study examines cultural incongruence with social work values and the norms of social work education, as well as various social psychological constructs that might be correlated with the incongruence. We anticipate that significant differences will emerge in social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, hostile heterosexism, and modern heterosexism based on the level of cultural incongruence experienced by students.

**Literature Review**

*Social Work as a Hierarchy-Attenuating Field of Practice*

Sidanius and colleagues (2003) have demonstrated that social work is a profession that is perceived to be hierarchy-attenuating among laypersons, not surprising given that the profession’s *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1996) explicitly states that “social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups” (p. 5). Social workers are not expected to create change on behalf of people who already benefit from extant systems of power and privilege; rather, the profession is committed to producing change that benefits groups of people who have traditionally been exploited, dominated, abused, and disadvantaged by the existing and historical group-based systems of hierarchy (Barnoff & Moffatt, 2007; Pearlmutter, 2002; Sünker, 2005). Both the professional literature and central theories of social work advocate for an approach to practice that promotes change in favor of equality, a change which tends to improve the well-being of social work clients (Abramovitz, 1993, 1998).

*Cultural Incongruence among Social Work Students*

Because of social work’s commitment to hierarchy-attenuation, equality, and anti-oppressive practice, it is vital that future practitioners demonstrate a commitment to the
profession’s values and ethics. In social work, the term *gatekeeping* is often used to identify the process for screening students for entry into the profession based on their skills, knowledge, academic performance, character, and commitment to social work values (Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1990; Reynolds, 2004). Gatekeeping helps the profession to differentiate itself by identifying the qualities that are vital to engaging in efficacious and ethical social work practice (Moore, Dietz, & Jenkins, 1998). A student’s suitability can be questioned at any time from the application and admissions process to performance in field placements and coursework to the selection of candidates for graduation (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1990; Morrow, 2000).

The general consensus in the discipline is that the task of gatekeeping is primarily the responsibility of social work faculty (Currer & Atherton, 2008; Moore et al., 1998; Moore & Urwin, 1990). For professions that involve interaction with vulnerable populations and that require practitioners to adhere to a code of ethics, numerous legal decisions have supported the notion that faculty are expected to fill the role of gatekeepers by determining who is suitable for the profession and who should be denied entrance into the field (Cobb, 1994). As such, CSWE requires social work programs to have procedures for terminating students for both academic and non-academic failures (Koerin & Miller, 1995).

There is, however, disagreement about whether and how to analyze students’ personal values as part of the gatekeeping process (Currer & Atherton; Gross, 2000; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Reynolds, 2004; Ryan, Habibis, & Craft, 1997). Many social work programs evaluate student applications for qualities that go beyond the standard measurements of undergraduate GPA and volunteer experience (Fortune, 2003). Social work programs commonly require students to demonstrate a match with social work values prior to admission and entry into field
placements (Morrow, 2000; Ryan et al., 1997). At all points in the gatekeeping process, schools can evaluate whether students are demonstrating a commitment to the *Code of Ethics*, including adherence to such values as social justice and the dignity and worth of the person (Moore et al., 1998; Moore & Urwin, 1990; Morrow, 2000; Reynolds, 2004). Studies in the U.S. and Australia have found that the most common reason for termination of a student is related to ethical issues and non-conformity to social work values (Koerin & Miller, 1995; Ryan et al., 1997).

Those who function as gatekeepers have the enormous task of determining the point at which a student’s behavior, personal values, or attitudes will not allow for effective social work practice. Thompson (2006) queries whether social work educators must filter out applicants from the start who don’t agree with the values of profession or take time in the university environment to encourage students to analyze their values. Gross (2000) suggests that this is neither a matter of selecting only the students without any prejudice nor countering student opinions so forcefully in the classroom that they hide incongruent attitudes. Rather, he claims that gatekeepers must acknowledge that we *all* have struggles with prejudices and suggests that social work programs provide space for students to consider how their own attitudes and values contribute to oppression and how to manage biased attitudes and values so that they can practice effectively and ethically (Gross, 2000). There is an inherent risk in teaching students to counter discrimination and oppression, since this requires that students face and transform their own personal values and beliefs that maintain systems of inequality and oppression (Gross, 2000; Sullivan & Johns, 2002). Nevertheless, as Moore and Urwin (1990) state, “social work education has a responsibility to affect values in the educational process” (p. 114).

**Potential Social Psychological Constructs Undergirding Cultural Incongruence**

A number of social psychological constructs have potential to correlate with levels of
cultural incongruence with social work values. These include constructs that have been linked with support of systems of stratification in general (right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation), as well as those associated with prejudicial attitudes toward a specific social group (hostile and modern heterosexism). Given that social work is seen as a predominately hierarchy-attenuating discipline, it is logical that increasing levels of cultural incongruence would be associated with increasing levels of each of these constructs.

**Right-wing Authoritarianism (RWA).** RWA is an individual level trait that is characterized by a need for clear-cut distinctions between groups and an understanding of the world that is based upon group-based hierarchies and an unequal distribution of power. The construct emerged out of research on the authoritarian personality and its relationship to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Altemeyer, 1981, 1988, 1996). Those with higher levels of RWA tend to support policies that maintain current distributions of power and to think that people who break the rules of the system should be severely punished (Duncan, Peterson, & Ax, 2003). It is correlated with increased levels of racism, stronger adherence to religious doctrine, and expressions of aggression towards out-groups (Peterson & Lane, 2001). Levels of endorsement of RWA among individuals tend to be similar to that of the surrounding environment or workplace (Duncan et al., 2003; Kurpius & Lucart, 2000), and, over time, become increasingly aligned with that culture (Carlson & Sutton, 1974; McNamara, 1967; Peterson & Lane, 2001).

**Social Dominance Orientation (SDO).** SDO is an individual level trait that plays a central role in explaining how systems of stratification are maintained (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social dominance theory argues that every complex society is organized by systems of social group-based hierarchies in which at least one social group has dominance over others and at least one
group occupies a subordinate position (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The theory suggests that there is variation in the degree to which individuals support group-based hierarchy (SDO), and that SDO plays a direct explanatory role in support for hierarchy-enhancing public policies as well as an indirect explanatory role in various cultural scripts, such as prejudicial attitudes. Empirical evidence suggests, as the theory predicts, that prejudicial attitudes correlate with levels of social dominance orientation as they function as a form of ideological justification for group-based dominance (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; van Laar et al., 1999). In fact, sexism, nationalism, and various forms of racism have all been shown to correlate with social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). People in hierarchy-enhancing careers and undergraduate majors have been shown to have higher levels of SDO as well as more prejudicial attitudes (Sidanius et al., 1994; van Laar et al., 1999).

*Hostile Heterosexism.* One form of prejudicial attitudes that continues to be documented among social work and human service practitioners and students is anti-lesbian and anti-gay attitudes (Crisp, 2006; Newman, Dannenfelser, & Benishek, 2002). These attitudes have historically been referred to as homophobia, but more recent prejudice researchers have termed them either old-fashioned homonegativity (Morrison & Morrison, 2002) or hostile heterosexism (Walls, 2008a), the latter being the term we have chosen to use within the context of this study.

Based on ideologies that pathologize homosexuality, hostile heterosexism has emanated from a number of sources including religious beliefs (homosexuality as immoral and sinful), cultural constructions of hegemonic masculinity (homosexuality as weak and submissive), and natural law (homosexuality as unnatural). Higher levels of hostile heterosexism have been linked to evaluating same-sex couples as being less emotionally stable, less able to have strong parenting potential, and less able to provide a caring home to adoptive children than opposite-sex
couples (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Social work practitioners with less than affirmative attitudes may minimize or exaggerate the importance of sexual orientation in their client’s life (Messing, Schoenberg, & Stephens, 1984) or devalue lived experiences by changing the topic or cutting short a client’s discussions of sexuality (McHenry & Johnson, 1993). Crisp (2006) has argued that heterosexist attitudes reduce the effectiveness of services and result in inferior treatment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients.

*Modern Heterosexism.* Modern heterosexism is a less overtly pathologizing, yet still prejudicial, cluster of attitudes toward lesbian women and gay men. The construct has emerged out of modern prejudice theory that is based on the idea that the expression of prejudicial attitudes toward historically marginalized groups changes based on history and social context, particularly in response to the successes of social movements. For example, overt expressions of racism, sexism, and heterosexism that were much more prevalent in the recent past of the U.S. have decreased (Bachrach, Hindin, & Thomson, 2000; Farley, 1997; Jones, 1999) and been replaced by forms of prejudice that are much more subtle and covert (McConahay, 1986; Swim, Aiken, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Walls, 2008a, 2008b). Rather than proclaiming that homosexuality is perverse or sinful, as might be done with hostile heterosexism, modern heterosexists might deploy suggestions that lesbians and gay men are militant, demanding too much, too quickly (aversive heterosexism). They might argue that discrimination against the lesbian and gay community is a thing of the past (amnestic heterosexism), or that while they have nothing against gay and lesbian people, they would not want their daughter to be a lesbian because it would make her life harder (paternalistic heterosexism). They might also endorse positive stereotypes of the community (positive stereotypic heterosexism).

**Method**
Participants

The study’s participants were incoming graduate students enrolled in a two-year MSW program in their first quarter in the program. Data collection occurred during the third and fourth weeks of class so as to allow new students to acclimate to the environment and get a better sense for the values of social work and the culture of the graduate program. Of the 143 participants enrolled, 132 agreed to participate in the study, representing a 92.3% response rate. Eight records were dropped due to missing data on either one of the questions used for construction of the dependent variable or on more than one question per scale for the independent variables. Multiple imputation by chained equations (van Buuren, Boshuizen, & Knook, 1999) was then used to replace missing values in the remaining 18 records that had no more than one missing answer per scale, leaving a usable sample of 124 participants.

Slightly more than 93% (n = 116) of the sample identified as female, and 9.7% (n = 12) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning. In terms of urbanicity, 38.7% (n = 48) were suburban, 26.6% (n = 33) were from small cities and towns, 23.4% (n = 29) were from cities, and 11.3% (n = 14) were from rural communities. In terms of religion, 21.8% (n = 27) identified as liberal or mainline Protestants, 21.8% (n = 27) as secular, 18.6% (n = 23) as conservative or evangelical Protestant, 17.9% (n = 21) as other religions, 12.1% (n = 15) as Catholic, and 8.9% (n = 11) as Jewish. For undergraduate majors, 40.3% (n = 50) reported having a psychology degree, either singularly or in combination with another major, 40.3% (n = 50) reported having a sociology, anthropology, or other social science degree, and the remaining 19.4% (n = 24) reported having a non-social science degree.

Procedure

The researchers provided information on the general purpose of the study, assured the
participants that their answers were anonymous and their participation was voluntary, and
provided each potential participant with a project information sheet that had been approved by
the university’s Institutional Review Board. After reviewing the project information sheet,
questionnaires were distributed to every student. Two envelopes were provided, and students
were instructed to return either a completed questionnaire or a blank questionnaire (if they chose
not to participate) to the first envelope and a completed lottery form to the second envelope for
the lottery drawing.

Measures

In addition to demographic questions, the survey included scales to measure the social
psychological constructs discussed above. All scales used have been psychometrically tested to
ensure adequate reliability and validity. They include the Social Dominance Orientation scale
(SDO; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale
(RWA, Altemeyer, 1981, 1988), the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG-S;
Herek, 1984, 1988), and the Multidimensional Heterosexism Inventory (MHI; Walls, 2008a,
2008b). Cronbach's alphas were .83 (SDO), .91 (RWA), .88 (ATLG-S), .93 (MHI-Aversive), .91
(MHI-Amnestic), .97 (MHI-Paternalistic), and .91 (MHI-Positive Stereotypic). All scales used a
7-point Likert scale and were recoded so that higher scores represent greater endorsement of the
construct the scale is measuring. In addition, in order to provide some degree of comparability
across scales, final scores calculated for each scale were standardized to a range from 1 to 7 by
dividing the total raw score for the summed scale items by the number of items on the scale.

To capture cultural incongruence with social work values and the perceived culture of the
graduate social work program, the authors devised a nine-item scale to tap into potential areas of
dissonance. The response set for the nine items was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly
Disagree to Strongly Agree. All items were coded such that higher levels of agreement indicated greater levels of cultural incongruence. The items can be found in Appendix I. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale in the current sample is .69.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics. SDO scores ranged from 1 to 4.69 with a mean of 2.04 (SD = .64). Scores ranged from 1.22 to 5.48 for the RWA with a mean of 2.56 (SD = .74). For the ATLG-S, we found scores ranging from 1 to 6, with a mean of 2.01 (SD = .92).

Turning our attention to the four subdomains of modern heterosexism, we find participant scores ranged from 1 to 6 on the MHI aversive heterosexism subscale with a mean of 2.14 (SD = 1.11). For the MHI amnestic heterosexism subscale, scores ranged from 1 to 4 with a mean of 1.59 (SD = .69). The full range of potential scores – from 1 to 7 – was present in the sample on the paternalistic heterosexism subscale of the MHI, which had a mean of 2.82 (SD = 1.90). For the last modern heterosexism subscale, measuring positive stereotypic heterosexism, we found a range from 1 to 4.5 with a mean of 2.34 (SD = 1.09). Finally, with regard to the scale capturing cultural incongruence, scores ranged from 1.25 to 5.25. The mean score was 2.67 and the standard deviation was .76.

With the exception of the paternalistic heterosexism subscale of the MHI, the ranges of the scales were truncated so that the highest levels of the attitudes were not present in the sample. This is most likely a product of having a sample of social work graduate students among whom one might expect to find scores at the lower ends of the scales given the constructs that the scales examine. While this truncated variability seems logical given the sample, it does pose an issue of statistical power. As such, we anticipate that the tests of significance utilized will be conservative in their results.
Inferential Statistics. To determine if cultural congruence theory has the ability to differentiate between groups of incoming social work students, we divided the participants into three categories based on their cultural incongruence scores. We identified the 33rd and 66th percentile scores and categorized the participants as either low incongruence, middle incongruence, and high incongruence. This resulted in 45 participants falling into the low incongruence category, 35 into the middle incongruence category, and 44 participants into the high incongruence category. Using STATA 9.2, we first ran a MANOVA to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the groups of students on the combination of the dependent variables using the Pillai-Bartlett trace criteria as it has been shown to be the most robust statistical test against any violations of assumptions (Olson, 1974, 1976; Stevens, 1979). Following that, we ran seven separate one-way ANOVAs to determine if significant differences emerged in the individual variables of interest based on incongruence category. Table 1 summarizes the bivariate correlations between the study's measures, and Table 2 summarizes the findings for the individual ANOVAs. Figure 1 contains graphs for the variables where statistical significance was found.

[Insert Table 1]
[Insert Table 2]
[Insert Figure 1]

Multivariate Test of Differences. The multivariate test of differences between the three groups of students based on level of cultural incongruence using the Pillai-Bartlett trace criteria was statistically significant \( F(14, 232) = 2.12; p = 0.01 \). Follow-up multivariate comparisons showed that the high incongruence group was significantly different from the average of the low and middle incongruence groups \( F(7, 115) = 3.34; p = .003 \), while the low incongruence group
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was not significantly different than the average of the middle and high incongruence groups 
\(F(7,115) = 1.33; p = 0.24\), nor was the middle incongruence group significantly different than 
the average of the low and high incongruence groups \(F(7, 115) = 1.82; p = 0.09\). Further it was 
determined that the low and middle incongruence groups were not statistically significant from 
one another \(F(7, 115) = 1.05; p = .40\).

**Social dominance orientation.** Participants who were in the low incongruence category 
had a mean SDO score of 1.88 \((SD = .53)\). Participants in the middle incongruence category had 
a mean SDO score of 1.88 \((SD = .54)\), and participants in the high incongruence category had a 
mean SDO score of 2.34 \((SD = .72)\). The ANOVA resulted in a F-score of 8.02, which results in 
a statistically significant \(p\)-value of .0005, and a medium effect size \(\eta^2 = 0.12\).

The post-hoc Scheffe test indicated that participants in the low incongruence category 
were not significantly different than participants in the middle incongruence category \(p = 
1.000\). However, the difference in SDO scores between the low and high incongruence 
categories as well as between the middle and high incongruence categories were both statistically 
significant at the .01 level \((p = .002\) and \(p = .005\), respectively).

**Right-wing Authoritarianism.** Mean scores on the RWA for the low cultural incongruence 
group was 2.43 \((SD = .62)\). For the middle category on cultural incongruence we found a mean 
of 2.34 \((SD = .62)\). Finally for the high cultural incongruence group, the mean was 2.87 \((SD = 
.83)\). We obtained an F-score of 6.89 \((p = .002)\) which indicates statistical significance, with \(\eta^2 = 
0.10\) indicating a medium effect size.

Again, examining the post-hoc Scheffe test, we find the same pattern that emerged with 
the SDO scale. The low cultural incongruence category was not significantly different than the 
middle cultural incongruence category \((p = .829)\), but both the low and middle categories were
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significantly different than the high cultural incongruence category \( (p = .015 \text{ and } p = .004, \text{ respectively}) \).

*Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men.* The pattern that emerged in the mean scores on the ATLG-S for participants in the differing categories of cultural incongruence followed a pattern similar to that found with both the SDO and RWA scores in which the low and middle cultural incongruence category means are similar, while the high cultural incongruence category is significantly higher. The low incongruence category participants had a mean of 1.82 \( (SD = .65) \), the middle incongruence category participants had a mean of 1.79 \( (SD = .62) \), and the high incongruence category participants had a mean of 2.37 \( (SD = 1.21) \). The ANOVA produced a score of 5.63 \( (p = .005) \) which is statistically significant. The effect size is medium \( (\eta^2 = 0.09) \).

Again, similar to the previously identified pattern, the Scheffe tests indicated that those in the low and middle cultural incongruence categories were not significantly different than one another \( (p = .989) \), while they were both significantly different than those in the high cultural incongruence category \( (p = .017 \text{ and } p = .019, \text{ respectively}) \).

*Aversive heterosexism.* On the MHI-Aversive subscale, we found increasing mean scores by category. The means were 1.88 \( (SD = .944) \), 2.02 \( (SD = .98) \), and 2.45 \( (SD = 1.30) \) for the low, middle, and high incongruence categories respectively. The ANOVA F-score of 3.12 \( (p = .048) \) indicates statistically significant differences in aversive heterosexism between the participants in the three categories of cultural incongruence \( (p = .048) \), with an \( \eta^2 = 0.05 \) denoting a small effect size. Unlike the prior scales, however, the Scheffe test indicates that not only are the low and middle categories not statistically significantly different from one another \( (p = .707) \), but neither are the middle and high categories \( (p = .336) \). The difference between the mean of the low and high cultural incongruence categories almost reaches a level of statistical
significance \((p = .051)\) suggesting that it is this difference that drives the significance found in the ANOVA.

*Amnestic heterosexism.* For the MHI-Amnestic subscale, we find that the low incongruence category participants have a mean score of 1.48 \((SD = .58)\), while the middle incongruence category participants have a mean of 1.51 \((SD = .51)\), and the high incongruence category participants have a mean of 1.78 \((SD = .86)\). The ANOVA test indicates no statistically significant difference in the amnestic heterosexism scores across incongruence categories.

*Paternalistic heterosexism.* For the third domain of modern heterosexism, the MHI-Paternalistic subscale has a mean of 3.00 \((SD = 2.00)\) for the low incongruence category, a mean of 2.13 \((SD = 1.56)\) for the middle incongruence category, and a mean of 3.19 \((SD = 1.94)\) for the high incongruence category. The F-score of 3.53 on the ANOVA indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores between the three categories, with a medium effect size \((\eta^2 = 0.06)\). In a pattern very different than the previously identified patterns, we find that the low cultural incongruence category is not statistically significantly different than either the middle or high cultural incongruence categories \((p = .115 \text{ and } p = .895, \text{ respectively})\). However, the middle cultural incongruence category mean is significantly different than the high cultural incongruence category \((p = .045)\).

*Positive stereotypic heterosexism.* In our final test of difference with the MHI-Positive Stereotypic, we find means of 2.28 \((SD = 1.05)\), 2.24 \((SD = 1.11)\), and 2.49 \((SD = 1.13)\) for the low, middle, and high incongruence categories, respectively. These differences are not statistically significant \((F = 0.62, \ p = .539)\).

**Discussion and Implications**

Person-organization congruence has been shown in the literature to be a valuable
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predictor of success within organizations and within undergraduate majors, with some scholars arguing that a match between personal and organizational values and political attitudes is beneficial both to the individual as well as to the organization. In this study, we have examined whether differing levels of cultural incongruence with social work values and the perceived culture of a graduate school of social work program is associated with differences in social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, hostile heterosexism, and four subdomains of modern heterosexism, both in the multivariate context as well as individually. The linear combination tested in the MANOVA was statistically significant, and of the constructs explored individually, five of the seven examined were significantly associated with the differing levels of cultural incongruence.

No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of amnestic heterosexism or positive stereotypic heterosexism. This suggests that incoming graduate students who report the greatest level of personal incongruence with the values of social work were no more or less likely to deny the discrimination against lesbian and gay people (amnestic heterosexism) nor endorse positive stereotypes of gay and lesbian people (positive stereotypic heterosexism) than those who perceive the greatest congruence.

However, significant differences did emerge between the groups on social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, hostile heterosexism, aversive heterosexism, and paternalistic heterosexism. The patterns that emerged in the data between the three groups were very similar with the exception of the pattern of paternalistic heterosexism. The general pattern suggests that individuals who experience a low level of cultural incongruence are not significantly different than those who were in the middle category of cultural incongruence, but both were significantly different than those who were in the highest category.
The data suggest that students in the higher cultural incongruence category are significantly more likely to endorse a hierarchical view of the world whereby certain groups deserve to have more power and access to resources than other groups (social dominance). They are more likely to have a stronger tendency toward authoritarian attitudes (right-wing authoritarianism), which includes submission to authority, aggression towards those that are disliked by those in authority, and a strong sense of conventionalism. Finally, they are likely to endorse more discriminatory attitudes toward lesbians and gay men – both those attitudes based in traditional notions that homosexuality is perverse and immoral (hostile heterosexism), as well as those based in the idea that lesbians and gay men are too militant and too demanding of equal rights (aversive heterosexism).

The unique pattern that emerged in the data relates to paternalistic heterosexism. In this case, those who were at the middle level of cultural incongruence had the lowest levels of paternalistic heterosexism. It is important to remember that the questions capturing this domain are couched in such a way so that higher endorsement indicates that the respondent would prefer their child not to be gay or lesbian combined with a justification that their child would experience some type of unfair disadvantage. While the pattern does not mirror the stair step effect of increasing means with each level of increase in cultural incongruence as found in the other variables, the mean of paternalistic heterosexism for the middle level of cultural incongruence is not significantly different than the mean of the low level of cultural incongruence, while it is significantly different than the mean of the high level of cultural incongruence category.

It is difficult to surmise why this pattern deviates from the other patterns in the data, and it deserves a closer examination in future research. It could be that those in the low cultural
incongruence category are focusing on the unfairness indicated in the question, while those in the high cultural incongruence category are finding the idea of having a gay or lesbian child problematic, so that each group arrives at similar responses, though through different motivations. However, without additional data, this is merely a supposition.

The other unanswered question raised by the patterns in the data is regarding the lack of statistically significant difference between those in the low cultural incongruence category and those in the middle cultural incongruence category. If the cultural incongruence difference between the two groups is not correlated with social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, or different types of heterosexism, then what is at the root of the difference? What attitudes, beliefs, or experiences might be associated with why one person experiences a mid-range level of cultural incongruence, while another experiences a low level?

A few limitations are worth noting that restrict the generalizability of our findings. First, the study was conducted within the context of only one graduate school of social work. While we had excellent response rates, it is unclear whether the patterns identified herein might hold for other graduate schools or for undergraduate programs. The program where the study was conducted may differ in important ways from typical graduate programs, particularly given that we might anticipate that different programs have their own unique cultures. Future research may want to replicate the study using multiple social work programs to address this limitation.

The second limitation regards the scale constructed to capture cultural incongruence with social work values and graduate social work school culture. The scale has not been empirically tested and validated, and the Cronbach’s alpha for the sample in this study was slightly lower than would be desired. However, given that the authors could not find an existing scale that captured levels of cultural incongruence with social work values and the culture of social work
graduate programs, the decision was made to construct a multiple indicator scale rather than to rely on a single item measure, given the inherent disadvantages of using single item measures.

Finally, other measures of social psychological constructs that might also relate to cultural incongruence, including other forms of prejudicial attitudes—whether old-fashioned or modern—were not included in this study. Possibilities for more general constructs include those from system justification theory, just world theory, and social identity theory, all of which may shed more light on cultural incongruence among incoming social work graduate students.

While this study provides additional evidence that person-organization congruence theory can help differentiate between a set of social psychological attitudes among incoming social work graduate students, the question remains as to how schools of social work might use this information. For students who are experiencing a clash with social work values and what they perceive as the culture of the graduate school, our findings suggest that attitudes about stratification in general or more specifically about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people may be correlated with this incongruence. Educational resources addressing power, oppression, and privilege, as well as information about and experiences with the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community may address the source of these issues if they spring from lack of knowledge and exposure. Providing mentoring by social workers who have successfully negotiated these value conflicts may additionally be helpful. Keeping students engaged who are in the process of discernment is critical to ensure that the sources of dissonance do not go “underground,” where they are not examined, problematized, and challenged (see also Gross, 2000).

While the data available do not allow us to discern whether the experience of incongruence emerged for students because their personally-held values were in direct conflict
with social work values, because of the way in which the social work program responded to their expression of those values, or both, the existence of incongruence among a segment of incoming students can be seen as an opportunity for schools of social work to engage in critical self-reflection on the culture of our educational programs. As part of our ongoing commitment to improvement, we might want to assess whether we have built and support cultures in social work programs – intentionally or unintentionally – where hegemony rules. Do we encourage critical thinking across the spectrum of ideas, always challenging ourselves to assess how those ideas support and build on social work values or how they conflict with the discipline’s values? For example, do we fail to challenge comments that are inappropriate when those comments target privileged rather than marginalized groups? As researchers and educators, we are very clear that faculty also frequently fail to interrupt and challenge inappropriate comments that target marginalized groups (Goodman, 2000) and that these comments – in our experience – happen much more frequently. However, our question is whether jokes or off-hand comments that target privileged groups, such as men, evangelical Christians, or Republicans, are not viewed as problematic and are therefore not examined or challenged.

We are not suggesting that privilege statuses and political ideologies should not be critiqued and examined – we think they absolutely must be if we, as a profession, are committed to the values of social justice, since these ideologies can play a major role in maintaining the oppression of different social groups. Nor are we ignoring that, even if inappropriate, male-bashing comments are qualitatively different than female-bashing comments because of power and social location. We are, rather, suggesting that the failure to interrupt such comments can contribute to perceptions that being a social worker requires compliance to a certain ideology that allows denigration of certain privileged identities – identities that are potentially important
to some social work students and clients. Grappling with the complexity of these types of comments can be an important part of the educational experience for social work graduate students and should be a central part of the ongoing dialogue regarding power, privilege, and oppression.

It should also be remembered that this project examines students shortly after they have started their two-year journey toward getting an MSW. We anticipate, and the literature suggests (Dambrun, Guimond, & Duarte, 2002; Guimond & Palmer, 1996), that students at the end of their educational journey will (and should) look very differently in terms of the attitudes that we have examined in this study. Future research needs to examine whether such a shift occurs among social work graduate students and, if so, what undergirds these shifts across the educational experience. Do we, for example, find a decrease in social dominance attitudes that might explain how graduate social work education fosters increased congruence with social work values? Do we find an increase in knowledge about structural and macro-level influences that impact how students come to understand the world around them? Does field education decrease fear and anxiety about populations that experience social problems, or does it make the reality of the lived experience of poverty or homelessness or domestic violence more complex, thereby challenging simplistic and prejudicial explanations?

Much work needs to be done to explore how schools of social work can best produce practitioners who are proficient and who practice in a manner that aligns with the ethics and values of social work. Given that most of the client systems with whom social workers engage experience vulnerability and oppression, it is critical that practitioners live up to the call to challenge both that marginalization and the role that our profession plays in supporting systems of stratification. The better that schools of social work understand how the process of change
occurs and what undergirds that change, the better prepared we will be to meet our ethical obligations to produce culturally competent practitioners.
References


Gross, G. D. (2000). Gatekeeping for cultural competence: Ready or not? Some post and


survey of gatekeeping mechanisms in Australian Bachelor of Social Work programs.

*Australian Social Work, 50, 5-12.*


pressure covariates in survival analysis. *Statistics in Medicine, 18*, 681-694.


Figure 1. Mean Scores on Scales by Cultural Incongruence Category
Table 1

*Bivariate correlations*

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<td>2. RWA</td>
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<td>3. HH</td>
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<td>0.65***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. AvH</td>
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<td>0.67***</td>
<td>0.66***</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>5. AmH</td>
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<td>6. PH</td>
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<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
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<td>7. PSH</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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*Note. SDO = Social Dominance Orientation; RWA = Right-wing Authoritarianism; HH = Hostile Heterosexism; AvH = Aversive Heterosexism; AmH = Amnestic Heterosexism; PH = Paternalistic Heterosexism; PSH = Positive Stereotypic Heterosexism.*

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.
### Comparison of Means and Standard Deviations of Social Psychological Constructs across Levels of Cultural Incongruence

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Low Incongruence</th>
<th>Middle Incongruence</th>
<th>High Incongruence</th>
<th>F-Test</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
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<td>Social dominance</td>
<td>1.88</td>
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<td>orientation$^{a,b}$</td>
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<td>(.54)</td>
<td>(.72)</td>
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<td>Right-wing</td>
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<td>2.87</td>
<td>6.89**</td>
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<td>authoritarianism$^{a,b}$</td>
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<td>(.62)</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
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<td>Hostile</td>
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<td>heterosexualism$^{a,b}$</td>
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<td>(.62)</td>
<td>(1.21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aversive</td>
<td>1.88</td>
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<td>heterosexualism$^a$</td>
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<td>Amnestic</td>
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<td>(.86)</td>
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<td>Paternalistic</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.53*</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
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<td>heterosexualism$^b$</td>
<td>(2.00)</td>
<td>(1.56)</td>
<td>(1.94)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive stereotypic</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>.5391</td>
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<td>heterosexualism</td>
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<td>(1.11)</td>
<td>(1.13)</td>
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</table>

*Note. Standard deviations in parentheses.*

$^a$ Low incongruence category is significantly different or marginally significantly different than high incongruence category. $^b$ Middle incongruence category is significantly different than high incongruence category.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 

Table 2.
APPENDIX I

Cultural Incongruence Scale

1. I sometimes struggle to accommodate both my personal beliefs and the NASW Code of Ethics.

2. My opinions and values often conflict with the ‘mainstream’ culture of [name of graduate social work program].

3. The majority of students I have met at [graduate social work program] have attitudes and beliefs that are similar to my own.

4. I agree with the statement that “Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability.”

5. The majority of students I have met at [graduate social work program] are intolerant of beliefs with which they disagree.

6. It is better to keep my opinion to myself when I know that most others at [graduate social work program] will disagree with me.

7. There is a lot of support for differences in opinions and beliefs at [graduate social work program].

8. The majority of professors I have met at [graduate social work program] are intolerant of beliefs with which they disagree.

9. Disagreement is encouraged in [graduate social work program] classrooms.