

SPECIAL TOPIC

Committing to Social Justice: The Behavioral Intention of School Psychology and Education Trainees to Advocate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Youth

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Abstract. The current study explored how graduate students in education, school psychology, and counseling are being prepared to help ensure an equal and safe learning environment for youth identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT). Focus groups were conducted with graduate students in a school of education that has made social justice a cornerstone of its conceptual framework. Focus group questions directed students to reflect on their knowledge and behaviors in addressing social justice issues in schools, and more specifically on issues pertaining to LGBT youth, such as antigay harassment and expression of sexual orientation for youth in schools. Responses were transcribed and organized using the constant comparative process. Broad response themes were organized using the framework of the theory of planned behavior (TPB). TPB postulates that our attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control predict behavioral intention and our subsequent behaviors. Results indicated that although the graduate students had strong positive attitudes to overall themes of social justice, such as race, class, or language, they revealed inadequate attitudes and knowledge of issues faced by LGBT youth. They reported an indifferent or unsympathetic subjective norm in reference to their school colleagues, and barriers to engaging in LGBT advocacy, including lack of administrative support. The TPB model provided a useful organizational framework with which to examine graduate students' preparation and intention for proactive behavior change in schools.

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The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) position statement on sexual minority youth calls for equal access to education and mental health services and the creation of safe schools. The statement calls for establishing nondiscrimination policies that apply to all students, educating students and staff, direct intervention with perpetrators of harassment, and support for those students who are targeted (NASP, 2004). Furthermore, the NASP (2000) *Professional Conduct Manual* indicates that school psychologists “do not engage in or condone practices that discriminate against children, other clients, or employees based on race, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, economic status, or native language . . . and avoid any action that could violate or diminish the civil and legal rights of children and other clients” (p. 22). With similar intent, the American Psychological Association (APA) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* states that psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination based on sexual orientation (APA, 2002).

Despite these recommendations, statistics show that harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) youth in schools remains a significant problem. LGBT youth are almost three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to have been assaulted or involved in a fight in school (Human Rights Watch, 2001). An online survey of LGBT teenagers indicated that over 90% reported being verbally or physically harassed or assaulted because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, appearance, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion, as compared to 62% of non-LGBT teens (Harris Interactive & Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2005). This survey further indicated that LGBT students are three times more likely to feel unsafe at school compared to non-LGBT students.

This situation has not gone unnoticed by school administrators. In a recent survey, only one-third of secondary school principals believed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students would feel safe in their school, and only one-quarter believed transgendered students would

feel safe. Further, although 90% of principals have heard antigay slurs in their school, only 21% have engaged in efforts to specifically foster a safer school environment for LGBT students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). Most schools have an antiharassment and/or nondiscrimination policy, but only half of student, teacher, and principal respondents indicated that their school policy includes sexual orientation or gender identity/expression (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008; Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). In addition to insufficient antiharassment policies, teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and other staff may be inadequately trained to intervene in situations of harassment and advocate for sexual minority youth (Szalacha, 2003; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). These data suggest that additional support and training on issues specific to LGBT youth are needed so educators can more effectively prevent harassment, intervene during harassment situations, and ensure a safe, equal learning environment.

LGBT Youth in Schools: Risks and Struggles

According to GLSEN's *State of the States* report (2004), approximately 75% of students in the United States have no state legal protections in schools from harassment and discrimination based on their sexual orientation. This failure of state policy protection exists despite the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states that individuals are entitled to equal protection under the law (Weiler, 2001). This protection was upheld in *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (1996) in which student Jamie Nabozny was severely assaulted and verbally harassed with antigay vulgarities, and school officials were found guilty of discrimination because they failed to protect Jamie although they often responded to harassment directed at other students (Duttweiler, 1997; Weiler, 2001). Unfortunately, this is not a rare situation. Nearly 20% of LGBT youth reported hearing homophobic remarks originating from their teachers or other school staff (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

Psychologists and educators have an obligation to ensure that all children, including those who are most vulnerable, receive protection from harassment and equal opportunities to learn. Moreover, LGBT youth are among the most vulnerable population in the school. Three-quarters of LGBT youth report feeling unsafe in school, and two-thirds specifically cited their sexual orientation as the reason why they felt unsafe (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). Close to 30% of the youth who felt unsafe had skipped at least 1 day of school in the past month because of safety concerns, and another 30% skipped one class for the same reason. With regard to higher education aspirations as reported by the Education Longitudinal Study (2005), LGBT students were twice as likely to say they were not planning on completing high school or going to college. The LGBT students who reported more verbal and physical harassment were more likely to indicate that they did not plan to go to college, as compared to LGBT students who were not subjected to harassment. LGBT students who reported more harassment had significantly lower grade point averages (GPA) as well, with those students who were *physically* harassed because of their sexual orientation reporting the lowest GPA (mean of 2.6 vs. 3.1; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

There is also a significant effect of marginalization on adolescents' emerging self-concept, affect, and mental health. Estimates suggest that LGBT youth are two to three times more likely than their non-LGBT peers to have attempted suicide in the last 12 months (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Russell & Joyner, 2001). Boys who are bullied and called "gay" are more likely to experience greater psychological distress, verbal and physical abuse, and negative perceptions of school than boys bullied for other reasons (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). LGBT youth are more likely than non-LGBT youth to engage in excessive alcohol and substance abuse (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Loenig, 2008; Garofalo et al., 1998; Russell & Joyner, 2001) and risky sexual behaviors (Garofalo et al., 1998). These behaviors may be a reaction to harassment and perceived or real rejection, and may serve to

temporarily mollify the negative effects of coming out and related psychosocial difficulties (Savin-Williams, 1994).

Role of Educators and Training Programs in Enacting Change in Schools

Teachers, psychologists, and counselors play an important role in shaping the lives of youth, including intervening in situations of harassment, inculcating acceptance and appreciation of diversity, and helping to ensure a safe learning environment in schools.

Teachers

The relationships that LGBT youth have with teachers are one of the best predictors of school success. Students with positive feelings about their teachers report significantly less school difficulties related to their LGBT status (GLSEN, 2002; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Mufioz-Plaza, Crouse Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). In their study of well-being among same-sex and opposite-sex attracted youth in England, Rivers and Noret (2002) found that students worried about being gay or lesbian were more likely to seek support from school staff than a heterosexual peer. A positive school climate appears to be among the protective factors for depression and drug use for gay, lesbian, and questioning youth (Espelage et al., 2008).

Given the importance of educators in creating a safe and open learning environment for all students, the question remains as to how well university teacher preparation programs are preparing graduates to meet the needs of LGBT youth. In general, education programs at the college level have been relatively silent on LGBT issues in schools (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003). It is unlikely that teacher candidates will serendipitously develop the knowledge and skills to successfully integrate and advocate for LGBT youth in the absence of specialized training and experiences. In reality, many teachers and school staff remain ignorant of the issues facing LGBT youth, exhibit an outright bias, or remain silent in the presence of LGBT harassment (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Mudrey & Medina-Adams,

2006). Indeed, LGBT students cited the school staff's lack of corrective action as a significant reason why they felt unsafe in schools (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005).

Psychologists and Counselors

Similar to teachers, specialized training in the issues and difficulties faced by LGBT youth may be necessary to enable psychologists and counselors to make positive change. In a study of almost 300 school psychologists, Savage, Prout, and Chard (2004) found that most possess a low-to-moderate level of knowledge related to LGBT issues. Although participants were willing to address such issues, they reported being inadequately prepared and unsure how the concerns of LGBT students presented in academic settings. Graduate training in psychology and counseling should include a focus specifically on LGBT concerns, because of the unique challenges of sexually minorities versus other minority groups (e.g., Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Pearson, 2003). A significant concern is that not all training programs are including coverage of LGBT issues in the coursework. For instance, in the Savage et al. (2004) survey, approximately 85% of participants reported not receiving specific training in LGBT issues in their graduate education. A survey of APA doctoral training programs in clinical and counseling psychology found that only 60.3% and 88.1%, respectively, specifically discussed LGBT issues in a multicultural course (Sherry, Whilde, & Patton, 2005). When asked if the doctoral program used a reliable assessment of students' competency of LGBT issues, only 3.2% and 2.3%, respectively, responded affirmatively.

The lack of training specific to LGBT issues is troubling as research indicates that psychologists and counselors are not free from bias toward LGBT clients. Psychologists' treatment strategies with LGBT individuals can vary based on personal variables of the psychologist, including his or her religiousness (Liszczy & Yarhouse, 2005) and gender (Bowers & Bieschke, 2005). Anti-LGBT biases are best confronted during graduate train-

ing, as the plight of LGBT individuals as an oppressed minority can be readily argued in the context of fostering a moral, ethical, and democratic classroom and society (Pearson, 2003; Taylor, 2002).

Fostering Proactive Behavior in Schools: Predicting Attitude and Behavior Change

After awareness of LGBT issues are brought to light in the graduate classroom, the next step is cultivating attitudinal and belief change that lead to proactive behavior. Historically, LGBT issues and sexual orientation discrimination are presented in the context of a graduate multicultural/diversity class along with topics of race, gender, culture, language diversity, and so on (Sherry et al., 2005). However, with so many diversity issues to address in one class, can important issues related to LGBT oppression and the heterosexist hegemony be brought to light (Athanases & Larrabee, 2003; Tharinger, 2008)? Furthermore, is exposure to knowledge about LGBT oppression sufficient to foster LGBT affirmative attitude change; and if so, will attitude change predict subsequent behaviors that seek to address social injustices for LGBT individuals in schools?

We argue that presenting LGBT issues in graduate training requires more than a cursory review in a diversity class but it necessitates a closer examination of graduate student beliefs and the sociopolitical climate of the schools where they practice. A framework is needed that specifies how knowledge and attitude change in preservice training can be linked to socially just actions in schools. To accomplish this, we employed Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which has been subjected to three decades of research confirming the role that beliefs and social influences hold on behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Madden, Scholder Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992). Briefly, TPB posits that the antecedent to behavior is behavioral intention, and the antecedents of behavioral intention are attitudes toward the behavior and subjective norm (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Madden et al.,

1992). A behavior intention is thought to be a function of salient information or beliefs, which influence attitudes toward the behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). For instance, behavioral beliefs are thought to influence personal attitudes toward the behavior, including the subjective value of the outcome in proportion to the strength of the belief. Normative beliefs are thought to influence the subjective norm, and are determined by the likelihood that important social referents would approve or disapprove of the behavior (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). In addition, TPB proposes that the target behavior must be under volitional control (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Madden et al., 1992). The individual must perceive the be-

havior as under his or her control and not contingent on the presence of other conditions (e.g., time, money, help from others, and so on). Figure 1 presents the path model of TPB.

TPB has been used to predict attitudinal and behavioral change in a variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, shopping and purchasing behaviors in marketing research, charitable giving and philanthropic activities, engaging in high-risk sexual or drug behaviors, participating in physical activity, and intent to commit traffic violations (for reviews, see Armitage & Christian, 2003; Armitage & Connor, 2001; Cooke & Sheeran, 2004; Hardeman et al., 2002). TPB also been applied to the study of attitude and behavior change in

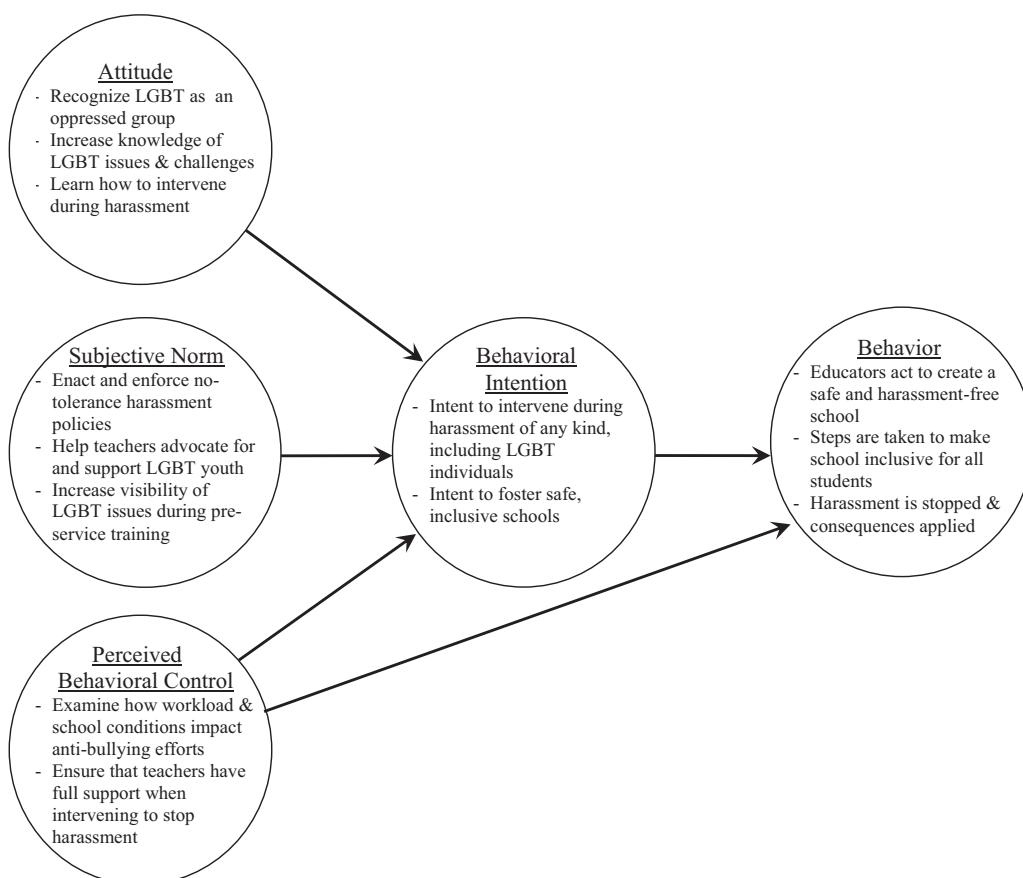


Figure 1. The Theory of Planned Behavior presented in a hypothetical path model intended to promote advocacy and prevent harassment of LGBT individuals in schools.

schools, such as predicting teacher attitudes and willingness to integrate special education students in their classes, with beliefs about inclusive education, positive teacher referents, and principals' support being the most important predictors of effective teaching behavior (Marino-Driscoll, 1997; Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). TPB has also been successful in predicting positive academic achievement for African American students (Davis, Johnson, Miller-Cribbs, & Saunders, 2002). Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and Williams (2002) applied TPB to research on decision making among African American freshman high school students with regard to their intention to graduate. Students reported on their intention to stay in school, attitude toward finishing school, subjective norm (the extent to which important people in their life expected them to finish and would be disappointed if they did not), and perceived behavioral control to overcome any obstacles to finishing school (such as needing to work to bring income to the family). Results indicated that students' attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived control predicted whether the student finished their second year, as well as graduated from high school 3 years later.

TPB has not been applied to the study of sexual minority youth in schools. However, it appears to be a suitable framework in which to assess beliefs and behavioral intention of advocacy toward LGBT individuals, given its focus on attitudes, recognition of social norms, and perceived behavioral control. For instance, it would be advantageous to assess school professionals' knowledge and beliefs about sexual stigmatization, heterosexism, and sexual prejudice (Herek, 2004) as a means of predicting attitudes and behavior intention to address harassment and social injustices directed toward LGBT individuals.

The goal of the current study is to evaluate the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of graduate students in a college of education toward sexuality minority youth and harassment directed at his population. Students' perceptions and attitudes of LGBT youth and their own behaviors in schools to ensure safe, antiharassment learning environments are ex-

plored. Analyses of student responses are organized using the TPB model to help guide intervention strategies and address deficiencies in current training.

Method

Setting and Participants

To assess the likelihood that our graduate students would behave in a manner that promotes social justice for LGBT students in schools, we ran 12 focus groups with 81 graduate students enrolled in various education programs. The study was conducted in the context of a school of education in a very large urban-based, public university located in the northeastern section of the United States. The School of Education offers nine graduate programs and five are represented in the sample. According to the Board of Examiner's Report of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education in 2004, the School of Education's students and faculty identify strongly with the concept of social justice, which is prominent in their conceptual framework. Coursework aligned with the school's mission and conceptual framework demands attention to diversity issues and realities of social justice. A majority of graduate students come from families with low to moderate income and racial minority status. A spring 2004 survey of entering School of Education candidates found that over 26% reported a total family income of less than \$25,000 and 41% reported an income that ranged between \$25,000 and \$49,999. Fifty-nine percent of the college study body identifies as nonwhite (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006) and 60% of the participants in this study identified as nonwhite.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participant sample. The overwhelming majority (83%) of the graduate students in teacher preparation programs (Early Childhood, Childhood, and Special Education) were employed as teachers. Participants in the Early Childhood Program taught in state-funded special education preschools ($n = 10$) or in community day care programs ($n = 6$). Graduate students from the Childhood and Special Education programs taught in elemen-

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the
Graduate Student Participants

Characteristic	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	67	83
Male	14	17
Age		
20–29	47	58
30–39	16	20
40–49	14	17
50 and older	4	5
Program (master's level)		
Early Childhood Education	24	30
Childhood Education	16	20
Special Education	14	17
School Counseling	18	22
School Psychology	9	11
Race ^a		
Caucasian	40	52
African/Caribbean		
American	20	26
Hispanic/Latino	8	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	3
Multi-ethnic	2	3
Other	5	6
Sexuality ^a		
Heterosexual	72	93
Homosexual	5	6
Bisexual	1	1

^aNote. Totals do not add to 81 because some respondents omitted this item.

tary ($n = 24$) and high schools ($n = 5$) throughout the city. The majority of participants from the School Counseling Program (78%) were teaching in either elementary ($n = 12$) or middle schools ($n = 2$) while completing their graduate degrees. The schools in which participants taught were located in densely populated urban neighborhoods where the socioeconomic status of families ranged from middle to low. These schools served racial, ethnic, and language minority children. None of the school psychology students were teaching, but all were engaged in a 15-hr consultation practicum in elementary schools. In

contrast to the field sites in teacher preparation programs and counseling, 6 of school psychology students engaged in practica in suburban middle class schools serving majority populations.

Materials

Focus-group open-ended questions.

The following questions were read aloud to the graduate students in the focus groups. Data gleaned from Questions 1 and 2, although pertinent to our research agenda, are not relevant for the purposes of this article and are not presented in the results.

1. The words *social justice* appear on every syllabus. What does social justice as prescribed by our conceptual framework mean to you?
2. Describe a situation in your school that demonstrates a social justice issue you have observed or witnessed in your school.
3. How do LGBT issues come up in your school or classroom?
4. What would you do if the following scenarios occurred in your school:
 - a. You see on a student's notebook, "Fags/dykes go to hell"?
 - b. You hear one student call another a "fag" or "dyke"?
 - c. A student came to you for advice about coming out to parents?

Demographic form. Following each focus group, participants completed an anonymous demographic form comprised of questions pertaining to their gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, school experience, and area of study. Participants completed the demographic form after the interview because the form contained an item requesting information on sexual identity. Researchers believed that seeing this item before the focus group session might provide a cue to the nature of the research.

Procedures

Focus groups were conducted with small cohorts of 5–10 graduate students led by

a facilitator. This type of group is well suited to explore and reflect on multiple perspectives and opinions, and to assess the scope of subjects' knowledge on a particular subject (Creswell, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Mertens, 2005). Rather than relying on a structured question and answer format, focus groups permit participants to react to one another, providing richer data than might emanate from a single interviewer–subject format (Kruger & Casey, 2000). Of particular interest to current researchers was the possibility that an interactive discussion of social justice as it relates to LGBT youth would provide participants with a safe space to voice their attitudes and experiences.

We solicited 18 full-time faculty teaching in the graduate division through an e-mail explaining the purpose and parameters of the study. Researchers asked faculty to volunteer 1 hr of class time for their students to participate in a focus group designed to assess students' attitudes toward social justice. Six professors teaching nine graduate classes, who were not members of the research team, volunteered class time. Researchers used maximum variation sampling to select five classes from the pool of nine to achieve greatest variation across programs. Maximum variation sampling allows researchers to find common patterns among graduate students from a variety of programs (Glesne, 2006). The researchers endeavored to obtain a sample of students that represented the breadth of the graduate programs offered at the college. The programs selected included Early Childhood Education, Childhood Education, Special Education, Counseling, and School Psychology. Three additional programs were not included because of their low enrollment. One program with adequate enrollment did not offer class time for this research.

Once the classes were selected, it was necessary to divide classes into two or three subgroups to permit all students to contribute. The focus groups ran during class time but not in the presence of the professor of record. This was done to alleviate student concerns that their participation would somehow affect their course standing. Participants were provided

with written informed consent that explained that they were under no obligation to participate, could cease participation at any time, and that the course instructor would have no knowledge of their participation decision or responses. Although the professors knew the general purpose of our research, they did not pass this information along to their students. Instead, professors asked students to participate in the focus groups to assist faculty examining the effect of the School of Education's conceptual framework.

The value of data gleaned from focus groups is often determined by the skill of the facilitator (Glesne, 2006). Facilitators were five professors who were members of a School of Education committee studying the issues of LGBT youth in schools. Each had at least two prior facilitation experiences and prepared by reading *Moderating Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Group Facilitation* (Greenbaum, 2000). Focus group methodology and standardized procedures were arranged beforehand. Facilitators began each group by reading a short introduction, and then asked the open-ended questions in the order presented in the Materials section. However, as much as possible they attempted to remove themselves from the discussion. Facilitators posed additional questions to clarify statements or encourage elaboration. From time to time, it became necessary to redirect tangential discussions, involve a silent participant, and provide time limits. A debriefing with participants occurred either immediately or during the next class session after the focus group took place. Each focus group was audio recorded; the debriefing was not. During the debriefing, which lasted from 10 to 25 min, a researcher provided participants with our research questions, asked for comments, and responded to questions about the research and the School of Education's social justice agenda.

Data Analysis

Graduate students in school psychology who were not present during the focus group transcribed the audiotapes. Working separately, the two primary researchers read tran-

scripts, listened to tapes, and selected responses in the form of phrases, sentences, and key concepts that pertained to components of the TPB model. Using a deductive process, researchers placed relevant responses for the first group in one of the TPB components (attitudes, subjective norms, or perceived behavioral control) that reflect broader belief systems shown to predict behavioral intention (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Responses for subsequent groups were placed into the components of the model in the same manner. Interrater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of reviewer agreements within each component of the TPB model by the total number of agreements and disagreements for the entire response set for that component. Interrater reliability across components for this stage of data analysis was .78 for attitudes, .80 for subjective norms, and .79 for perceived behavioral control. The researchers then achieved consensus through discussion on all but three responses.

The second phase of data analysis used the constant comparative process for data analysis (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Once all the relevant responses were fitted to the TPB model, the primary researchers working separately coded the responses within the components into inductively derived subthemes. Researchers tallied similar subthemes within the group and then compared each group to the previous group to ascertain if similar subthemes were present. If responses from the next group shared common characteristics with previously obtained responses, it was placed in the same subthemes. New subthemes were added as they emerged and subthemes that did not remerge were eliminated. Constant comparison of data continued in this way within each component until no new subthemes emerged. In order for a subtheme to remain in a component, it had to appear at least once across three different focus groups. Responses that occurred in less than three focus groups were treated as outliers and not included. Each researcher arrived at subthemes separately. Similar to the first phase, interrater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of reviewer agreements within

each subtheme of the TPB components by the number of agreements and disagreements for the entire response set for that subtheme. Interrater reliability was then averaged among the subthemes of each TPB component, resulting in reliability coefficients of .84 for attitudes, .89 for subjective norms, and .81 for perceived behavioral control.

To authenticate the accuracy of findings, validation procedures were used (Creswell, 2006; Merriam, 1998). One such procedure was member checking to judge the accuracy and credibility of the coding and categorizing process. Researchers brought final subthemes and interpretations back to five focus group participants, one from each program. These participants agreed with all but one subtheme, and after extensive discussion, researchers eliminated that subtheme. In addition, a focus group facilitator but not a primary researcher examined the raw data, coding procedures, and accuracy of subthemes. Interrater reliability was .83 for the final categories. Triangulation confirmed that evidence was consistent and not unique to one particular training program. This was accomplished by ensuring that each final subtheme consisted of coded data from at least three of the five training specializations that participated in the study.

Results

To assess the likelihood that our graduate students would behave in a manner that promotes social justice in schools for LGBT individuals, we employed the TPB model as a framework for analysis of graduate student responses. Student responses were deductively organized into the TPB model as a behavioral belief, normative belief, or perceived behavioral control, and subthemes were inductively derived within the three TPB themes. Table 2 presents the subthemes that emerged from focus group discussions, organized by components of the TPB, and ranked by the frequency of endorsement.

Attitudes

Attitudes in the TPB model are comprised of prior knowledge along with the sub-

Table 2
Frequency of Subtheme Endorsement Across the 12 Focus Groups, in Descending Order

Component	Subtheme	Frequency Count
Attitudes (Behavioral Beliefs)	LGBT not identified as an oppressed group	12/12
	Ignoring LGBT slurs is acceptable	10/12
	Lack of knowledge of LGBT issues	10/12
	LGBT issues are a youthful fad	5/12
	SES in community impacts acceptability of LGBT topics	4/12
	Equate LGBT issues with sexual activity & promiscuity	4/12
Social Norms (Source of Norms)	Religiosity (either one's own or that of student body)	3/12
	Administrators	6/12
	Teachers	5/12
	School policies	5/12
Perceived Behavioral Control (Perceived Barriers)	University-based faculty	3/12
	Heavy workload	8/12
	Lack of administrative support	7/12
	Chaotic school environment	6/12
	Lack of resources	5/12

Note. LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered.

jective value placed on the outcome. As indicated in Table 2, in all 12 focus groups, graduate students neglected to spontaneously identify LGBT harassment as an example of social injustice in schools and did not identify the LGBT population as an oppressed group. However, when the topic was introduced with Questions 3 and 4, graduate students acknowledged that LGBT issues do arise in schools. They reported that the term *gay* is frequently used by pupils as a derogatory epithet.

[Being called "gay"] it's the most commonly used phrase in schools, and so many teachers I feel do not reprimand their students for using that expression, and I think it's wrong. It could be offensive.

Despite the ubiquity of the "gay" epithet, 10 of 12 focus groups included graduate students who acknowledged it was acceptable to ignore these comments, whether observed in written form on a pupil's notebook or overheard in the hallway.

Graduate students also stated that they believed sociocultural factors make it easier or

harder to discuss LGBT issues in schools. Some of these factors include religiousness (their own and the school population), diversity in school environment, and socioeconomic status of the community (with wealthier communities being more accepting of discussing LGBT issues than poorer communities).

In most focus groups, graduate students recognized their own lack of knowledge of LGBT issues, and some expressed their desire for more resources and referral options. They reported that pupils are often confused by LGBT terms and seek answers from their teachers, but the graduate students were unsure what content, and at what age, was appropriate to discuss with their pupils.

I have quite a few gay and lesbian students, most of them are very confused, and there's a lot of self-loathing . . . it amazes me how misinformed some of these kids are.

Although some graduate students acknowledged the need for additional training and resources to work with LGBT youth, other's comments suggested less favorable atti-

tudes. Several graduate students suggested the term *sexual orientation* to connote sexual activity and promiscuity, and thus supported their beliefs that LGBT issues should not be discussed in schools as such discussions would condone sexual activity. Other graduate students were unsure how to reconcile their personal and religious beliefs that they believed were antithetical to supporting LGBT-identified youth.

I'm still not out of my biases yet . . . having grown, you know, with the biblical meaning of gayness, I guess that it's sinful . . . so I wasn't as comfortable as I could be in order to help that population.

Similarly, if pupils cite religious or personal beliefs in schools supporting an antigay bias, graduate students were unsure how, if at all, they should challenge them. Further, several graduate students characterized youth identifying as LGBT as a "fad" or "phase," and would respond to pupils coming out to them as if this was a transient state.

Although opinions varied, it was evident that the majority of graduate students lacked a positive and proactive attitude toward improving the school environment for LGBT youth. There were also several graduate students who vigorously supported the right of free speech in schools, even if that free speech was used to oppress marginalized groups and prevent equal access to education. These responses suggested that some graduate students struggled with value conflicts such as the protection of individual rights, even if those rights are inadvertently damaging to others.

Subjective Norm

The likelihood that social referent groups important to the individual would approve or disapprove of the behavior contributes to predicting behavioral intentions (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Generally, individuals are motivated to comply with the desires of important referent groups. The social referents cited by graduate students included college faculty and school staff.

As indicated in Table 2, when asked to describe what they might do in the situation of harassment of an LGBT youth or a pupil com-

ing out to them, the graduate students often referred to the actions of their social referents, such as other teachers, administration, or school policies. The graduate students cited zero-tolerance policies for harassment and their duty to uphold equal educational opportunities. Some graduate students recognized the heterosexism of the school curriculum, while also acknowledging they were unaware of the heteronormativity of schools until it was pointed out by their graduate school faculty. Thus, to the degree that graduate students observe important social referents upholding anti-harassment policies and targeting heterosexism, they would be more likely to endorse behavioral intentions that modeled these behaviors.

However, the overwhelming majority of graduate students reported that there was little or no support from school staff to intervene in situations of LGBT harassment or a pupil coming out to them. Half of the focus groups commented that they would not have administrative support to intervene directly with LGBT harassment or related issues with pupils. Instead, graduate students stated they would report the harasser to the administration for discipline and refer the coming-out pupil for counseling. Only one teacher trainee reported that she would first comfort the coming-out student, acknowledge the gravity of the decision, and provide empathetic support.

In addition, there was a sense of diffusion of responsibility among many of the graduate students. Graduate students perceived their subjective norm in the schools (i.e., other teachers and school staff) as too busy or indifferent to the challenges faced by LGBT youth.

It is my understanding that my job there [is] as a teacher strictly just to teach them math and science things.

There is kind of a hands-off mentality . . . there are teachers [who] are very committed to the students beyond school but a lot are just about teaching and when stuff comes up that is not within that realm or [the topic is] a little sensitive they might just nicely brush the kid off.

One teacher trainee reported that a colleague was uncomfortable consulting with her about an LGBT-identified youth because of the youth's sexual orientation. Several gay-identified teacher trainees reported that they were hesitant to come out to their colleagues for fear of punitive consequences from administration, faculty, student body, or community. Thus, the schools where graduate students are completing their training are not perceived as a supportive and safe environment to engage in conversation and advocacy for LGBT youth and staff.

Furthermore, there was little evidence that support was being provided by university-based supervisors and faculty related to LGBT issues in schools. Several graduate students reported that LGBT topics were never discussed in their coursework, or were only perfunctorily regarded. This means that most of the graduate students were not exposed to an LGBT-affirmative subjective norm in either the schools where they work or the universities where they train.

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which the behavior under consideration is perceived as completely under the person's control and not contingent on the presence of other conditions such as time, money, or assistance from others (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Given that graduate students' attitudes and subjective norms appeared unlikely to predict proactive support for LGBT youth, it was also unlikely that the graduate students found advocacy for these youth within their behavioral control. Indeed, graduate students reported they would have a difficult time intervening in the situation of LGBT harassment. As indicated in Table 2, many attributed this to a heavy workload, chaotic school environment, lack of resources, or lack of administrative support (e.g., backing up the teachers with appropriate pupil disciplinary action, when needed). Others reported that teacher seniority and status was an important determinant of whether they could speak

out on LGBT issues. Thus as new teachers, they felt powerless.

I think it's the type of situation where I probably wouldn't speak openly without backup or resources . . . like the gay and lesbian alliance.

Graduate students also cited liability issues (e.g., losing their job) in giving advice about LGBT-related issues to youth, advising or consoling a coming-out pupil, and disclosing their sexuality to their pupils.

If I, even myself as being a gay teacher, I have to be very careful of my homosexuality . . . I cannot disclose it in a way to kids that they know . . . I could lose my job.

To this end, some graduate students, particularly those in early childhood education, reported that they would seek parental permission and/or administration approval before discussing LGBT-related issues, such as reading a classroom story about two mommies or daddies, or talking about the same-sex headed household of one of the children in their class. Other graduate students, especially those working in older grades, admitted they would just "brush over" the LGBT issues, rather than directly addressing them.

I would feel afraid to give any kind of advice on the basis of . . . it sounds kind of stupid, but being held liable.

Graduate students admitted that if they witnessed antigay harassment, they might admonish the pupil for teasing or using inappropriate words while avoiding the LGBT theme altogether. This appeared to be a means to address the outright harassment while avoiding the controversy of advocating for (or appearing to endorse) issues related to LGBT identification.

Discussion

Focus groups conducted with graduate students in education, school psychology, and school counseling yielded information regarding their attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control about social justice issues in schools, and more specifically, those pertaining to LGBT topics. Graduate students reported positive attitudes about fostering so-

cial justice in schools with regard to race, socioeconomic status, class, language proficiency, special education status, and gender. However, their beliefs as elicited during the groups did not initially include consideration of LGBT harassment as an example of social injustice in schools. It was not until the topic was raised by the investigators that some (but not all) graduate students acknowledged that LGBT harassment and bias is an impediment to learning and therefore a social justice issue.

In addition, graduate students' beliefs and attitudes toward ensuring a safe learning environment for LGBT youth did not include recognition that intervening in the presence of explicit or implicit harassment was necessary. Some students struggled with value judgments such as the protection of individual rights (e.g., freedom of speech) even if the expression of these rights are inadvertently damaging to others. Although not explicitly stated, this ethical dilemma may have arisen as a by-product of the School of Education's social justice orientation, in which individual rights and freedoms and equal access are vigorously supported. Further, some graduate students' struggled with how to reconcile their own personal belief systems and individual freedoms from their professional practice, particularly if their beliefs were antithetical to an LGBT-affirmative stance. This suggests that preservice training may need to address these ethical or values dilemmas further to help graduate students develop a professional identity congruent with a social justice orientation.

The subjective norm for the current sample was unfavorable when challenging school environments to be more LGBT affirmative. Students described an unsympathetic culture of school colleagues and administration with regard to LGBT issues—and this lack of collegial support included being uncomfortable disclosing their own sexuality to coworkers. The subjective norm for graduate students also included university-based classes, and the results suggested that university faculty were somewhat more encouraging and insistent on proactive social justice behaviors of their graduate students, although, according to the graduate

students, the faculty did not always disclose this type of advocacy in their own practice or present such issues in class.

Given the unfavorable attitudes and lackluster support from important referent groups, it was not surprising that graduate students did not believe the ability to foster a more socially just, LGBT-affirmed environment was within their perceived behavior control. Students reported barriers to acting in an LGBT-affirmative manner, including unsupportive administration, lack of knowledge of LGBT issues (including sexual orientation and identity development), and possible censure or disaffection from colleagues or administration. There appeared to be significant overlap between the subjective norm in the schools and the perception of voluntary behavioral control to effect change. Graduate students noted that their lack of seniority, untenured status, and ineligibility for union support (given their rank as novice teachers or unpaid interns) left them feeling powerless to challenge the social injustices in the classroom or school.

Evaluation of the TPB Framework in Understanding Social Justice Advocacy

The TPB model provided a practical framework within which attitudes, obstacles, and group processes can be examined to predict behavioral intention. Rather than simply look at attitudinal change, TPB also examines how the socionormative environment and contextual barriers can affect behavior. In the case of training graduate students to be more proactive in addressing social justice concerns, it is likely that changing attitudes alone (by enhancing knowledge through traditional pedagogical methods) is insufficient. Rather, training also requires a consideration of the subjective norm within the institution in which the advocacy is to occur, as well as one's perceived behavioral control in light of contextual barriers. Much of the training for graduate students in education occurs in school settings, which may be disconnected from insights gained in the college classroom. The results suggest that both school and university envi-

ronments need to be carefully considered, and social justice advocacy is most likely to occur when attitudes and sociocultural climate are harmonious between the two.

Figure 1 depicts a hypothetical TPB model illustrating how training in schools of education, in partnership with the schools, might better prepare trainees to advocate for and engage in LGBT-affirmative behavior. For example, curricula focusing on sexual orientation identity development, harassment and violence statistics perpetrated toward LGBT individuals, and skills training to intervene during antigay harassment can help to develop attitudinal beliefs in line with an LGBT-affirmative orientation. Schools of education are well positioned to work with schools in which their graduate students are placed to develop antiharassment policies and to provide support and training to teachers to intervene during harassment. Another way to model a supportive subjective norm is having students observe university faculty and school staff working together to create safe, harassment-free school environments. Schools of education can also help schools examine their policies, school conditions, and work loads, and work with administrators to ensure that teachers have full support to intervene in situations of harassment. Doing so would help improve teachers' perceived behavioral control to create safe learning environments. Collectively, all of these steps are likely to increase the behavioral intention to act in a more LGBT-affirmative manner and prevent harassment.

Limitations

An obvious question is to what extent are the results generalizable to other schools of education. Our focus groups were conducted at a public university situated in a large urban center with liberal sociopolitical leanings. In addition, our school of education has adopted a strong social justice orientation as a component of the conceptual framework, which suggests that students may promote more favorable opinions of social justice than graduate students without this orientation in their training. We would predict similar if not more

conservative viewpoints from other graduate programs unless those programs have adopted curriculum and policy regarding advocacy for LGBT individuals. Additional research utilizing colleges with differing geographic locations, public and private, as well as a broad range of cultural, religious, and sociopolitical views, is necessary.

Another limitation of the current study is the use of a sample with predominantly childhood and early childhood graduate students, as well as special education, counseling, and school psychology students. The number of graduate students preparing to work with middle childhood or adolescent youth was relatively low. It is possible that graduate students who choose to work with older children may have differing expectations and attitudes regarding LGBT youth than those who chose to work with younger children. The current findings support the assumption that LGBT issues are relevant for teacher trainees serving students across a broad range of age groups. For example, graduate students working in early childhood and childhood settings talked about children enrolled in their schools with same-sex headed households, as well as children in their classes who displayed atypical gender expression. Future studies examining teacher training in LGBT issues should include analyses of responses by the age of students they are being trained to serve.

Other limitations include the lack of random assignment of students to focus groups, as well as lack of random selection of classes and training programs drawn from the total graduate student body in the school of education. It is possible that the faculty who agreed to participate held more favorable attitudes to LGBT issues, and may have conveyed these attitudes in class. Further, because the groups were conducted using preexisting classes, there may have been group dynamics that either facilitated or hindered participation among students. Future research using focus groups should attempt to randomly assign participants to rule out group effects because of familiarity. In addition, future studies should attempt to link

student responses to their demographic profile using methodology that protects anonymity while allowing for further disaggregation of responses by the students' demographic information (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religiousness, and field of study).

Conclusions and Future Directions

The results of the focus groups provided evidence that graduate students did not view themselves as change agents in the schools and were unlikely to act to correct an LGBT-related social justice issue. Students cited institutional barriers, lack of subjective norm that is LGBT affirmative, ambivalent attitudes, and insufficient knowledge as the reasons behind their disinclination. The results did not imply that the graduate students were unwilling or resistant to address this social injustice; rather, many appeared naïve of the issues and difficulties faced by LGBT youth, lacked experience in negotiating complex social justice issues in schools, and may not have been heretofore compelled to contemplate these difficulties. The results were similar to those of practicing school psychologists, who reported overall positive attitudes toward LGBT individuals and reported they were willing to address LGBT issues in schools, but also acknowledged they were unaware of how LGBT issues presented in schools (Savage et al., 2004).

Future research is needed that examines how training can best prepare graduate students in education to advocate for all youth regardless of their personal beliefs or subjective norm. For instance, graduate student attitudes toward LGBT youth can be modified through classroom-based instruction, experiential learning, fieldwork, and multimedia that challenge students' beliefs and assumptions (Taylor, 2002). School-based interventions can help adjust the subjective norm to be more LGBT affirmative and address the barriers to perceived behavioral control. For example, antidiscrimination and antiharassment policies that include protections for LGBT students, supportive principals and administrators, and

teacher sensitivity training are effective in helping teachers create safer schools (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005). Research is needed to address how best to alter the subjective norm of the school, especially in those communities with strong biases against certain populations.

In addition, the TPB framework needs to be evaluated to ascertain how well it discriminates among graduate students whose attitudes are LGBT affirmative and who engage in advocacy behaviors versus those students who do not. It is important to examine the fit and robustness of the TPB model in explaining not only differences in advocacy attitudes, but also the intention to engage in advocacy *behaviors*. If the TPB model is successful in predicting advocacy behaviors in graduate students, it can then be used to evaluate graduate curriculum to identify the best practice in training. Furthermore, the model can be used to evaluate the school climate, and subsequently design curriculum and professional development as needed.

Schools can play a significant role in preventing the negative effects of harassment and bias and enhancing resiliency of LGBT youth. Schools can establish strong anti-harassment policies, provide ongoing training to teachers and students regarding bias toward sexual minorities and societal heterosexism, and offer increasing support to LGBT youth (Peters, 2003). School administrators play a vital role in establishing the climate of acceptance among all school members. Efforts to improve school climates for LGBT youth will require administrative endorsement and support. Likewise, administrators in schools that have failed to create a safe and inclusive climate and fair access to education for all students should be held accountable.

Schools of education have the responsibility for inculcating leadership and a commitment to advocacy in the next generation of teachers, school psychologists, and counselors. NASP's (2004) position statement on sexual minority youth and the APA ethical principles (2002) mandate that psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination based on sexual orientation. Furthermore, NASP's po-

sition statement prescribes that school psychologists take steps to stop harassment, create antiharassment policies, and educate students and faculty on issues related to sexual minorities. School psychologists and counselors, in particular, need training that prepares them to identify and help marginalized and oppressed groups. Psychologists and counselors ought to be aware of the negative consequences more likely to be suffered by LGBT, and should take a leadership position in schools and universities to promote safer climates. School psychology training programs can work with schools of education to assist teacher preparation programs in providing the training necessary for graduate students to advocate for safer schools for LGBT youth. We would argue that not only is this a moral imperative, but, similar to the positions offered by Applebaum (2003), Nichols (1999) and Strauss (2005), schools have an obligation to ensure equal educational opportunity and protections under the law.

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