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Bullying toward LGBTQI+ students in Australian schools: Understanding teachers' intentions to intervene

Linda Parker^a, Stephanie Webb^a and Jill M. Chonody^b

^aJustice and Society, University of South Australia, Australia; ^bSchool of Social Work, Boise State University, Boise, ID, USA

ABSTRACT

The bullying of sexual and/or gender minority youth at school is a social violence issue that is ubiquitous in most countries. In line with evidence-based practice, teachers are consistently shown to be a critical component of success when addressing this issue; however, teachers' preparedness to respond to sexual and/or gender motivated bullying is under researched. Utilizing components of the theory of planned behavior, a sample of 437 Australian teachers were investigated to determine whether knowledge, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward both sexual and/or gender minorities predicted teachers' intentions to intervene when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied above and beyond sociodemographic factors associated with prejudice. Results of hierarchical linear regression demonstrated that teachers with more positive views of gender minorities and less traditional views related to gender ideologies were more likely to endorse higher intentions to intervene in sexual and/or gender minority motivated bullying. Findings suggested teachers' attitudinal biases inform their professional practices when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied.

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Introduction

Despite an increasingly positive shift in attitudes toward sexual and/or gender minorities in Australia, as evidenced by the recent inclusion of same-gendered couples into marriage laws, prejudice toward sexual and/or gender minorities continues (Ecker et al., 2019). In particular, sexual and/or gender minority youth may be increasingly vulnerable to the negative effects of identity-based social violence, stigma, and marginalization. For instance, during the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, the anti-marriage equality campaign, which was comprised of a broad coalition of religious and politically conservative groups, employed tactics that

CONTACT Linda Parker  Linda.Parker@mymail.unisa.edu.au  Justice and Society, University of South Australia, Australia.

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included the nationwide distribution of prejudiced misinformation regarding sexual and gender minorities (Thomas et al., 2020). Sexual and gender minorities felt unsafe during the lead up to the vote (Ecker et al., 2019). Frontline youth health services reported unprecedented demand for sexual and/or gender minority specific services, with an estimated 40% increase in young people seeking help to manage the effects of social stigma, trolling and public debate on their human rights (ReachOut Australia, 2018).

Furthermore, a media campaign was used to incite fear about the loss of parental rights and the risk of harm to children should the *Marriage Act 1995* be amended to include same-gendered couples (e.g., “If same-sex marriage becomes law, parents will not have a leg to stand on if they don’t want their kids taught radical sex education and gender ideologies”) (Australian Christian Lobby, 2017). The same political narrative was employed previously to derail the Safe Schools Program (i.e., a nationwide initiative that introduced an inclusive opt-in sexuality and gender diverse curriculum for schools) (Thompson, 2019). The incitement of moral panic to undermine community support for an educational curriculum that is inclusive of sexuality and gender diversity is not a new strategy and has been used for decades by conservative groups to preserve heteronormative curriculum that intentionally aim for exclusion (Thompson, 2019). These recent events have elucidated that sexual and/or gender minority youth are exposed to a myriad of social prejudice, including ongoing structural oppression within the Australian education system. Further, and in line with minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), both overt and covert acts of social prejudice are a consistent antecedent to poor health and wellbeing outcomes for sexual and/or gender minority youth.

Research substantiates that sexual and/or gender minority students are disproportionately affected by bullying relative to their heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2020). It is estimated that most sexual and/or gender minority students have experienced some form of bullying at school (Kosciw et al., 2020). Additionally, studies have shown that youth who are victims of identity-based bullying are at an increased risk of adverse health and psychosocial outcomes compared to their peers who are bullied more generally and those who are not bullied at all (Sinclair et al., 2012). Specifically, sexual and/or gender minority students remain marginalized within educational settings and are at an increased risk of absenteeism, disengaged learning, and other negative educational outcomes because of bullying that occurs in hostile learning environments (Kosciw et al., 2013; United Nations Education, Scientific & Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016). An Australian report found that more than one-third of sexual and/or gender minority students at secondary school report having taken time off school due to feeling unsafe (Hill et al., 2021). Gender minority

students are more likely to report feeling unsafe at school (Hill et al., 2021; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Ullman, 2017), more likely to engage in safety behaviors (i.e., “skipping” school and hiding from peers to escape harassment), and report a higher frequency of victimization experiences disproportionate to what is reported by both sexual minority and cisgender students (Hill et al., 2021).

Adolescent victimization of sexual and/or gender minorities has long-term consequences (Özdemir & Stattin, 2011; Reijntjes et al., 2010; Ttofi et al., 2011). It is an antecedent to substance misuse (Fish et al., 2017; Tucker et al., 2016), risky sexual behavior (Robinson & Espelage, 2013), mental health disorders, and suicide (Marshall et al., 2011; Skerrett et al., 2015). In a systematic review of the substantive literature, the probability of being diagnosed with depression later in life was significantly higher for persons with a history of adolescent victimization even when controlling for up to 20 childhood risk factors (Ttofi et al., 2011). Further research has shown that the incidence of suicidal ideation and suicide amongst sexual and/or gender minority youth with evidence of depression is 2.5 times higher than their heterosexual peers with a similar mood disorder (Marshall et al., 2011, pp. 121). These research findings provide compelling evidence to suggest that the overrepresentation of sexual and/or gender minority youth in negative health and psychosocial outcomes may partly be explained by bullying (Collier et al., 2013; Garnett et al., 2014).

Given the stressors that sexual and/or gender minorities are likely exposed to within educational settings, it is important that teachers intervene when sexual and/or gender minority students report bullying or if they witness harassment. Yet, sexual and/or gender minority students overwhelmingly describe teachers as silent bystanders (Kosciw et al., 2013; Ullman, 2021), reporting that teachers often witness their harassment but ignore it and do not provide any social support (Ullman, 2021). Furthermore, teacher inaction on this issue could be perceived by sexual and/or gender minority students as tacit approval of bullying behavior and prejudice (Ullman, 2021) and could compound negative emotional reactions. Sexual and/or gender minority students who report a lack of social support from teachers also report a reduced sense of school belonging and wellbeing (Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Thus, teacher nonintervention could lead to increased social isolation, disengaged learning, and an elevated risk for negative health and psychological outcomes (Williams & Mann, 2017). Previous research substantiates the importance of teacher intervention when sexual and/or gender minority youth are bullied (Collier et al., 2013; Heck et al., 2013; Kosciw et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008; Russell et al., 2001). Conversely, this type of bullying is also less likely to be the target of

intervention (Meyer, 2008; O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017; Vega et al., 2012). Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore factors that may impact teachers' intentions to intervene when sexual and/or gender minority students are bullied.

Teacher intervention for sexual and gender minority students

Across a number of American studies and a review of studies across 13 countries (Collier et al., 2013), bullying was the primary reason cited by sexual and/or gender minority youth as the cause of them feeling unsafe at school. In addition to this, an extensive body of research has shown a high prevalence of school-based bullying that is motivated by sexual and/or gender prejudice (Collier et al., 2013; Friedman et al., 2011; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Kosciw et al., 2020; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Australian schools may be similarly hostile (Hill et al., 2021; Jones, 2016; Jones & Hillier, 2013; Ullman, 2021). In one study, teachers ranked "being gay or seeming gay" as one of the top four reasons for a student to be bullied, and when quizzed about their knowledge of bullying, 91.6% of the teachers endorsed "homophobia" as a factor that can lead children to bully (Rigby & Johnson, 2016). Despite teachers being present to bullying, sexual and/or gender minority students report a lack of teacher support. In a US survey, sexuality and gender diverse students ($N=23,001$) reported that when a witness was present to homophobic remarks, 47.2% of teachers did not intervene, 37.9% acted some of the time, 11.3% took action most of the time, and only 3.6% were perceived to always intervene (Kosciw et al., 2018). Similarly, findings from an Australian study found that a mere 5.2% of teachers were perceived by sexual and/or gender minority students to always positively intervene in the use of homophobic language and less than 6.2% of teachers were reported to always positively intervene when transphobic language was used (Ullman, 2021). Similar to their US peers, Australian sexual and/or gender minority students indicated that 22.1% of teachers took no action when students used homophobic language in their presence, and when students used transphobic language in their presence, 14.1% of teachers did not intervene (Ullman, 2021). In the same study, in a series of open-ended items, students recounted incidences overwhelmingly depicting teachers as passive and complicit bystanders to their harassment. In another Australian study, one in every two young people who identified as a sexual and/or gender minority reported having experienced verbal abuse, and almost one quarter reported being the victim of an assault (Hill et al., 2021). These findings may provide important context to why almost 40% of Australian secondary students report having taken days off school because of feeling unsafe (Hill et al., 2021).

Conversely, teacher intervention in bullying is viewed as social support and perceived by sexual and/or gender minority students to have an ameliorating effect on some of the aversive effects of bullying (Jones, 2016; Kull et al., 2015; Ullman, 2021). Such as fewer school difficulties (Russell et al., 2001), more positive school connections, higher levels of school engagement (Heck et al., 2013; Jones, 2016; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Ullman, 2021), greater participation in extra-curricular activities (Hill et al., 2021), and higher intentions to attend university (Ullman, 2021). Despite these findings and the disparities found across academic outcomes and multiple measures of health and wellbeing, in comparison to heterosexual and cisgender students, research suggests that teachers are *less* likely to intervene in the bullying of sexual and/or gender minorities than in other forms of bullying (Greytak et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008). Given the dearth of research in this substantive area, little is known about why this might be; however, exponential growth in general studies of school bullying points to the consistent link between teacher intervention and countering bullying (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016; Ullman, 2017; 2021). Teachers' professional capacity to counter bullying is dependent on their beliefs, attitudes, perceived barriers, and knowledge (Department of Education & Training, 2015). These elements of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) can be used to frame how teacher characteristics inform intentions to intervene in bullying. The TPB has been used extensively across sectors to explain and predict behavior, emphasizing how intentions can be targeted for change (Ajzen, 2011). More recently, the TPB has also been utilized in studies investigating teachers' intentions to intervene in hypothetical scenarios where sexual and/or gender minority students are bullied (Nappa et al., 2018).

Theory of planned behavior

The TPB is a theoretical model that proposes that three factors predict intention to engage in behavior, and intention, in turn, predicts behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The principal premise of the TPB is that behavior is driven by beliefs. As proposed by Ajzen, intentions are informed by (a) attitudes toward the behavior (i.e., thoughts, feelings, and evaluations of the target or expected behavior); (b) subjective norms (i.e., perceived social pressure to either perform or refrain from a behavior); and (c) perceived behavioral control (i.e., perceived barriers or difficulties enacting a behavior). Hence, intentions are understood to be a reasonable proxy for enacted behavior and are, therefore, useful in predicting and explaining future behavior. For instance, teachers report feeling motivated to intervene in bullying of sexual and/or gender minorities but

also identify unsupportive leadership as a barrier (O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017). Thus, intentions are shaped by attitudes along with perceived behavioral control. Teachers' attitudes toward both sexual and/or gender minorities may be a barrier to an intervention. As described by Allport (1935), attitudes are a complex psychological construct that consist of an affective, cognitive, and behavioral component, function on a continuum, and vary in the degree to which they are subject to change. As suggested by the TPB, teachers' attitudes toward sexual and/or gender minority students may influence their willingness to intervene and is evidenced in that teachers' who harbored negative attitudes and less empathy toward sexual and/or gender minorities were less likely to provide support (Perez et al., 2013) and reported lower intentions to intervene (Nappa et al., 2018).

In addition to attitudes, lack of knowledge plays a role. Research has found that a lack of knowledge and training on sexuality and/or gender minority issues may influence teachers' willingness and preparedness to intervene (Guasp, 2009; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016), particularly with regard to homophobic or transphobic bullying (Collier et al., 2015; Meyer, 2008; O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017; Taylor et al., 2016). Moreover, the extent to which this is prioritized is important to intervention. School climate is influenced by both its principal and leadership team (Farrelly et al., 2017; Jones, 2016). Teachers have indicated that when leadership is perceived to be dismissive of sexual and/or gender identity-based bullying, they feel unsupported in their efforts to address homophobic or transphobic bullying (O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2017). Similarly, a positive association was found between participants' perception of their colleagues' intentions to intervene and their own reported intentions (Zotti et al., 2019).

Implementing a social-ecological perspective, bullying may be seen as a product of social prejudice fueled by a complex interplay between social relationships and systems (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). The system is marked by a privileging of heterosexuality that marginalizes sexual and/or gender minorities and perpetuates bullying behavior (Jackson, 2006). This system has been normalized, and people are socialized to believe a narrow narrative about sex and sexuality and gender identity and expression. Further, these traditional views are embedded in conservative frameworks, and as such, socio-political and demographic factors are consistent predictors of negative attitudes toward sexual and/or gender minorities. For example, people with a high degree of religiosity are more likely to hold prejudicial attitudes toward sexual and/or gender minorities (Whitley, 2009). As are people who believe that sexual orientation is learnt behavior (Frias-Navarro et al., 2015), hold rigid views on gender and social roles (Baber & Tucker, 2006), have no relationships with anyone who is a sexual and/or gender minority (Herek, 2009; Hicks & Lee, 2006; Jones, 2016), are male (Herek

& McLemore, 2013), have higher levels of authoritarianism values (Crawford et al., 2016; Duckitt et al., 2010), and are older (Takács & Szalma, 2011). These sociodemographic factors are likely to influence teachers' intentions to intervene when sexual and/or gender minority students are bullied. In this study, we aimed to examine whether teachers' attitudes toward sexual and/or gender minorities, knowledge of sexual and/or gender minority issues, and perceived barriers to a bullying intervention predict their intentions to intervene in the bullying of sexual and/or gender minority students above and beyond known sociodemographic factors.

Methods

Data collection

Four hundred and thirty seven teachers and student teachers were recruited for this study. Participants were recruited via social media, whereby teachers were able to self select into the study. Snowballing methods were also employed whereby persons exposed to the online invitation were asked to share it. To encourage an equal representation of Australian school teachers, Australian government and non-government schools were randomly selected, and a flyer with information regarding the survey was emailed to a cross section of 226 educational institutions from every state and territory. Ethics approval for the research project was approved by the authors' university's Human Research Ethics Committee.

Measures

Sociodemographic variables

Participants were asked to indicate age (in years), sex, sexual orientation, professional position (e.g., teacher or student teacher), religiosity (the degree to which religion influences their beliefs around decision making: 1 = *not at all* to 10 = *completely influential*), close contact with a sexual minority, and close contact with a gender minority. All scales utilized the same 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*) except the religiosity scale.

The modern homonegativity scale (MHS)

To measure attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women, a modified version of the MHS was employed (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). The 24-item MHS is comprised of two parallel subscales with 12-items focusing on attitudes toward gay men (MS-G) and 12-items focusing on attitudes toward lesbian women (MS-L) (e.g., "Gay men/lesbian women have all the rights they need"). Two items were not contextually relevant for an

Australian population (e.g., “The notion of universities providing degrees in gay and lesbian studies is ridiculous.”); therefore, they were removed. The scale was summed for a total attitudinal score with high scores indicating more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. In this study, internal reliability was excellent ($a = .97$).

Transgender attitudes and beliefs scale (TABS)

This 29-item scale measures attitudes toward transgender persons (e.g., “A person who is not sure about being a male or female is mentally ill;” Kanamori et al., 2017). High scores on this measure indicate a higher level of prejudice toward people who are transgender. In this study, the TABS demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($a = .94$).

Beliefs regarding the aetiology of sexual orientation scale (BESO)

To measure beliefs about the etiology of sexual orientation, the BESO was employed (Frias-Navarro et al., 2015). This 8-item scale is comprised of two, four-item subscales: Genetic factors (BESO_G) (e.g., “One’s sexual orientation is caused by biological factors like genes and hormones”); and learned (BESO_L) (e.g., “In many cases, homosexual behaviors are learnt”), and each is summed separately. A higher score on either of the subscales indicates a greater belief that sexual orientation is a result of genetics or social learning, respectively. The Genetic Etiology subscale and Learned Etiology subscale demonstrated good internal consistency ($a = .89$ and $a = .88$, respectively).

Social roles attitudes (SRQ)

To measure attitudes and beliefs about gender and social roles, the SRQ was utilized (Babe & Tucker, 2006). The 13-item SRQ is comprised of two subscales: Gender transcendence (SRQ_GT), a five-item subscale used to assess the extent to which gender is thought about in nontraditional ways (e.g., “people can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex.”), and gender-linked (SRQ_GL): An eight-item subscale used to assess beliefs about whether specific roles are associated with gender (e.g., “for many important jobs, it is better to choose men instead of women”). Items are summed to create an index of Gender Transcendent and Gender-Linked beliefs. Low scores on the subscales indicate more traditional beliefs regarding gender and social roles. In this study, the SRQ_GT and SRQ_GL demonstrated good internal consistency ($a = .85$ and $a = .81$, respectively).

Perceived barriers (SNA_B)

To measure perceived barriers, a modified version of the Student Services (LGBTQ) Needs Assessment was employed (Smith-Millman et al., 2019).

The 11-item SNA_B assesses perceptions of barriers to working with students who are a sexual and/or gender minority (e.g., “To what extent do you agree that a lack of training regarding the needs of LGBTQ youth is a barrier to providing services to them”). These items were previously used within a cohort of school mental health providers and were adapted to be contextually relevant and suitable for investigating teacher nonintervention when sexual and/or gender minority students are bullied (e.g., “A lack of training regarding needs of sexual and/or gender minority students is a barrier to intervening when students who are perceived to be a sexual and/or gender minority are bullied”). Following original scoring instructions, scores were averaged to create a mean score. High scores indicated a higher level of perceived barriers when students who are a sexual and/or gender minority are bullied. In this study, the SNA_B demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .83$)

Knowledge (SNA_K)

To determine knowledge of issues and risks for sexual and/or gender minority students an adapted version of the Student Services LGBTQ Needs Assessment was employed (Smith-Millman et al., 2019). This 13-item scale measures knowledge regarding sexual and/or gender minority issues and risks (e.g., “When compared to heterosexual students, sexual and/or gender minorities are more or less likely to be bullied or harassed at school?”). Items on this scale were adapted for clarity of language (e.g., “Students who are a sexual and/or gender minority are more likely to be bullied or harassed at school when compared to their heterosexual peers?”). Scores were summed for a total knowledge score and high scores indicate a higher level of knowledge. The SNA_K demonstrated good internal reliability in this sample ($\alpha = .85$).

The very short authoritarianism scale (VSA)

The six-item VSA was used to measure authoritarianism values (e.g., “What our country needs most is discipline, with everyone following our leaders in unity;” (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2018)). Scores were averaged to create a VSA mean score according to the original scoring instructions. High scores on this measure indicate a higher level of right-wing authoritarianism values. In this study, the VSA demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = .75$).

Intention to intervene

To measure teachers’ intentions to intervene, a new author-created scale was developed based on the 12-item Intentions to Intervene Scale (e.g., “Telling sexual jokes that make fun of women and girls” (Miller et al., 2012)). Items were adapted to be contextually relevant and suitable for

investigating bystander behavior of teachers when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied (e.g., “How likely are you to intervene if you hear a student making homophobic insults toward a student who is perceived to be a sexual minority” and (“How likely are you to intervene if you hear a student making transphobic comments toward a student who is a gender minority”). Items were summed for a total intention to intervene score. Low scores are indicative of low levels of intentions to intervene. In the original scale, Miller et al. (2012) found good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$) within a large US student sample. In this study, the adapted scale demonstrated excellent internal reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Current study

The current study sought to determine if attitudes toward sexual minorities, attitudes toward gender minorities, perceived barriers, and knowledge of issues and risks for sexual and/or gender minority students are predictors of intentions to intervene using a correlational, cross-sectional design. Variables derived from the TPB were used to evaluate their utility in explaining teachers' intentions to intervene in the bullying of sexual and/or gender minority students beyond what is explained by sex, age, sexual orientation, religiosity, beliefs regarding the etiology of sexual orientation, authoritarianism values, beliefs regarding gender and social roles, and degree of contact with a sexual minority. We hypothesized that teachers' attitudes toward sexual minorities, attitudes toward gender minorities, and knowledge of issues and risk factors for sexual and/or gender minorities would predict teachers' intentions to intervene above and beyond already known sociodemographic correlates of prejudice.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (Version 26) predictive and analytics software. Bivariate correlations were conducted to assess the relationship between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. Prior to conducting the planned hierarchical regression, the appropriate assumption testing was undertaken. Preliminary analyses revealed no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. A single multivariate outlier was removed from the data file. A linear regression was employed to determine the unique contribution of attitudes toward and knowledge about sexual and/or gender minorities in teachers' intentions to intervene above and beyond known sociodemographic correlates of sexual and gender minority prejudice. Age, sex, sexual orientation, close contact with a person who is a sexual minority,

authoritarianism values (VSA), attitudes toward gender and social roles, and beliefs about the etiology of sexual orientation were entered at Step 1. Attitudes toward sexual minorities (MHS), attitudes toward gender minorities (TABS), and knowledge (SNA_K) were entered in Step 2.

Results

Demographics

Of the initial 739 participants, 299 had significant missing data on key variables and were removed prior to analyses. An investigation of the data set revealed a single multivariate outlier. The responses of the single multivariate outlier were subsequently removed from the data set when further investigation of the data points provided strong evidence that the data entered was erroneous. Sex was dichotomized as female/male, and one participant who identified as intersex was treated as missing data. The final sample was 437 (389 female, 48 male). Participants were Australian residents aged 18 to 68 years old ($M = 36.48$ years, $SD = 11.55$ years). The majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (84.4%), and most were qualified teachers (77.8%). Further sociodemographic information can be found in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics and teachers' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and intentions to intervene scores.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Age (range 18-68)	36.48	11.55		437
Male			11	48
Female			89	389
Heterosexual			84.4	369
Sexual minority			15.6	68
Contact with sexual minority			80.3	351
Contact with gender minority			37.5	273
Qualified Teacher			77.8	340
Student Teacher			22.2	97
VSA	2.60	0.84		437
Religiosity	2.52	2.56		437
BESO_G	15.72	5.12		437
BESO_L	8.04	4.34		437
SRQ_T	8.4	2.87		437
SRQ_L	15.07	6.27		437
MHS	46.03	20.02		437
SNA_K	154.2	19.86		437
SNA_B	4.21	0.88		437
ITI_Total (range 32-72)	68.12	5.47		437

Note. $N = 437$. SMC = relationship with a sexual minority (e.g., friend, relative etc with a person who identifies as a sexual minority). GMC = relationship with a gender minority (e.g., friend, relative etc with a person who identifies as a gender minority). Relig. = religiosity (The degree to which religion influences decision making). VSA = The Very Short Authoritarianism Scale. BESO = Beliefs about the Etiology of Sexual Orientation Scale. BESO_G = Genetics subscale. BESO_L = Learned subscale. SRQ = Social Role Questionnaire. MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale. TABS = Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale. SNA_K = Knowledge Scale. SNA_B = Perceived Barriers Scale. ITI_Total = Intentions to Intervene in the Bullying of a Sexual and/or Gender Minority Student Scale.

Preliminary analysis

Bivariate correlations were used to assess the associations between key study variables. They are often used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between linear variables of interest. According to Cohen's conventions, the rules of thumb when interpreting correlation coefficients are .10 for a small or weak effect size, .30 for a moderate effect size, and .50 for a large effect size (Cohen, 1998).

The current findings demonstrated a weak negative association between sexual orientation (SO) and teachers' intentions to intervene, revealing that a heterosexual orientation was associated with lower intentions to intervene. A moderate to large negative association was found between attitudes toward gender and social roles (SRQ), revealing that more traditional views on gender and social roles was associated with lower intentions to intervene. A small negative association was found between authoritarianism values (VSA) and intentions to intervene, revealing that authoritarianism was associated with lower intentions to intervene. A moderate to large negative association was found between beliefs regarding the learned etiology of sexual orientation (BESO_L) and teachers' intentions to intervene, revealing that the belief that sexual orientation is learnt was strongly associated with lower intentions to intervene. Further, a moderate negative association was found between attitudes toward sexual minorities (MHS) and teachers' intentions to intervene, revealing that negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women were associated with lower intentions to intervene. A small positive association was found between age and intentions to intervene, revealing that increased age was associated higher intentions to intervene. A small positive association was found between close contact with a sexual minority (SMC), revealing that close contact with a sexual minority was associated with higher intentions to intervene. A small positive association was found between knowledge of issues and risks for sexual and/or gender minority students and intentions to intervene, revealing that knowledge of issues and risks for sexual and/or gender minority students was associated with higher intentions to intervene. A large positive association was found between attitudes and beliefs toward gender minorities (TABS) and intentions to intervene, revealing that positive attitudes and beliefs regarding gender minorities were associated with higher intentions to intervene. Unexpectedly, sex, religiosity, close contact with a gender minority, beliefs regarding the genetic etiology of sexual orientation (BESO_G) and perceived barriers did not significantly correlate with teachers' intentions to intervene and were excluded from further analysis. (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Bivariate correlations of predictor variables.

Predictor ¹	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1.Age	.087	-.06	.081	.031	.059	.001	-.058	.046	.057	-.096**	-.252**	-.195**	0.75	0.14	.152**
2.Sex_O	-	.051	-.101*	-.1**	.205**	.80	.122**	-.068	.072	.093	-.180**	-.183**	.191**	-.168**	-.128**
3.SEX	-	-	.065	-.045	-.090	-.132**	-.206**	.123*	.134**	-.213**	.102*	.135**	-.190**	.181**	.80
4.SMC	-	-	-	.23**	-.259**	-.165*	-.300**	0.88	-.17**	-.221**	.031	.135**	-.321**	.363**	.177**
5.GMC	-	-	-	-	.210**	-.110	-.163**	.082	-.116*	-.146*	.040	.137**	-.158**	.250**	.090
6.VSA	-	-	-	-	-	.443**	.579**	-.20**	.298**	.511**	-.226**	-.392**	.660**	-.624**	-.198**
7. Relig	-	-	-	-	-	-	.424**	.131**	.140**	.265**	-.135**	-.237**	.386**	-.408**	-.021
8.BESO_L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.297**	.376**	.625**	-.240**	-.411**	.753**	-.771**	-.392**
9.BESO_G	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.191**	-.168**	.086	.230**	.276**	.278**	.088
10.SRQ_T	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.370**	-.137**	-.203**	.384**	-.438**	-.303**
11.SRQ_L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.127**	-.307**	.604**	-.645**	-.410**
12.SNA_B	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.782**	-.315**	.267**	.046
13.SNA_K	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.535**	.467**	.140**
14. MHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.806**	-.322**
15. TABS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.475**
16. ITI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

p*<.05. *p*<.001.

Note. *N* = 437. Sex_O = Sexual Orientation. SMC = close contact with a sexual minority (e.g., friend, relative etc with a person who identifies as a sexual minority). GMR = relationship with a gender minority (e.g., friend, relative etc with a person who identifies as a gender minority). Relig. = Religiosity (The degree to which religion influences decision making). VSA = The Very Short Authoritarianism Scale. BESO_GL = Beliefs about the Etiology of Sexual Orientation Scale, Genetics Subscale. SRQ_T = Social Role Questionnaire – Gender Transcendent Subscale. SRQ_L = Social Role Questionnaire – Gender Learned Subscale. SNA_K = Knowledge Scale. SNA_B = Perceived Barriers Scale. MHS = Modern Homonegativity Scale. TABS = Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale. ITI_Total = Intentions to Intervene in the Bullying of Sexual and/or Gender Minority Students Scale.

Table 3. Hierarchical linear regression on teachers' intention to intervene ($N=437$).

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			
	β	$SE \beta$	β	β	$SE \beta$	β	
Age	.057	.020	.121*	Age	.051	.020	.107**
Sex_O	-1.494	.647	-.099**	Sex_O	-1.412	.629	.094*
SMC	.780	.626	.057	SMC	.045	.600	-.003
VSA	.831	.352	.128**	VSA	1.099	.364	.136**
BESO_L	-.275	.075	-.218**	BESO_L	-.101	.088	-.080
SRQ_GT	.301	.088	-.158**	SRQ_GT	-.213	.087	-.112**
SRQ_GL	-.218	.049	-.250**	SRQ_GL	-.160	.049	-.183**
SNA_K				SNA_K	-.016	.018	.043
MHS				MHS	.041	.022	.132
TABS				TABS	.131	.022	.588**
ΔR^2	.249		.058				
ΔF of change in R^2	20.364		11.800				

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

Note. $N=437$. Sex_O=Sexual Orientation. SMC=close contact with a sexual minority (e.g., friend, relative etc with a person who identifies as a sexual minority). VSA=The Very Short Authoritarianism Scale. BESO_L=Beliefs about the Etiology of Sexual Orientation Scale - Learned Subscale. SRQ_GT=Social Role Questionnaire - Gender Transcendent Subscale. SNA_K=Knowledge Scale. SRQ_GL=Social Role Questionnaire - Gender Learned Subscale. MHS=Modern Homonegativity Scale. TABS=Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale.

Multivariate analysis

A two-step hierarchical regression was run with teachers' intentions to intervene as the dependent variable. Given the long-standing association between several of the variables and other indicators of prejudicial attitudes, it seemed logical to enter age, sexual orientation, sexual minority contact, authoritarianism values, beliefs regarding the etiology of sexual orientation, and attitudes toward gender and social roles at step one of the regression. Together these variables explained 25% of the variance in teachers' intentions to intervene. Knowledge, attitudes toward sexual minorities, and attitudes toward transgender persons were entered at step two to determine whether these variables explained any variance above and beyond those variables entered at step one. Together the three variables entered at step two uniquely contributed nearly 6% of the variance in teachers' intentions to intervene. Age, sexual orientation, authoritarianism values, attitudes toward gender and social roles, and attitudes toward transgender persons were all statistically significant. According to Cohen's guidelines, attitudes toward transgender persons had a moderate effect, while all the other variables had a small effect. Complete results are in Table 3.

Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the substantive literature by demonstrating that the TPB can help explain teachers' intentions to intervene in sexual and/or gender minority motivated bullying. Teachers who reported lower levels of authoritarianism values, less traditional attitudes and beliefs

toward gender and social roles, were older, a sexual minority, and who endorsed more positive attitudes toward gender minorities were more likely to say they would intervene when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied. Teachers who feel more positive toward gender minorities are more likely to provide support when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied, which is consistent with previous research (Greytak et al., 2013; Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). Moreover, positive attitudes toward transgender individuals was the strongest predictor in our model, while all other significant variables were weak contributors to the explained variance. Considerable research links attitudes and beliefs of bystanders to the enactment of social support (Miller et al., 2012); thus, it is unsurprising that someone who views gender minorities positively would report greater intentions to intervene when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied. However, this finding also suggests that those with more prejudicial attitudes toward gender minorities are less likely to intervene in bullying motivated by gender minority prejudice. This has real-world implications for gender or sexual minority students who fall victim to bullying in schools, given that teachers with negative attitudes are less likely to intervene (Nappa et al., 2018; Zotti et al., 2019). Notably, in the current study, the transgender attitudes and beliefs scale (TABS) was utilized to investigate attitudes toward gender minorities. In keeping with the aim of the research aims, the TABS was employed in analyses as a unified scale. Although outside the scope of this study, future research could benefit from further investigation into the influence of the TABS respective factors on teachers' intentions to intervene.

Contrary to prediction, teachers' knowledge regarding issues and risks related to being a sexual and/or gender minority student, perceived barriers to a bullying intervention, and attitudes toward sexual minorities were not significant in predicting teachers' intentions to intervene. O'Donoghue and Guerin (2017) found that teachers' intentions to intervene were influenced by factors beyond sexual and/or gender prejudice. It may be that as attitudes and beliefs related to sexual diversity are becoming increasingly positive (Webb et al., 2020), teachers' intentions to intervene in sexual and/or gender motivated bullying are not as influenced by sexual prejudice as they once were. However, other factors have emerged as having greater influence. Of particular note, attitudes toward gender minorities uniquely accounted for 6% of the total variance, which suggests that these attitudes may have a unique influence on teachers' intentions to intervene for students who are part of a sexual and/or gender minority.

The prediction that knowledge and perceived barriers would predict teachers' intentions to intervene was not supported. Conversely, previous studies have found that insufficient knowledge and various contextual

factors were barriers to teachers' reported intentions to intervene (Collier et al., 2015; O'Donaghue & Guerin, 2017). Australian teachers and schools have limited access to evidence-based pedagogy on sexual and/or gender minority bullying (McCormack, 2016). Therefore, teachers are likely ill-equipped to understand the influence of heteronormativity and unconscious bias on neither the bullying of sexual and/or gender minority students nor their own attitudes. As such, teachers may overestimate the relative influence of factors such as knowledge and barriers and underestimate the influence of their own attitudinal biases. These results further support the finding that teachers' attitudes are an important component of intentions to intervene and, therefore, future enacted behavior. Sociodemographic variables and social beliefs played a small role in explaining teachers' intentions to intervene. Contrary to expectations, as age increased so did teachers' intentions to intervene. Perhaps, the longer teachers are employed as teachers, the more confident they become, which in turn translates to an increased confidence in addressing bullying. Relatedly, men have been consistently found to have higher levels of sex and/or gender prejudice in previous research (e.g., Chonody & Smith, 2013; Herek, 2009); however, for teacher intervention in sexual and/or gender motivated bullying, willingness to intervene has been found to be influenced more by their colleagues' behavior than gender (Nappa et al., 2018). The current findings are reflective of this in that gender was not a significant predictor in our model. Therefore, in a mostly female workforce, it may be that male teachers feel less pressure to affirm traditional gender norms. Therefore, their intentions are more readily aligned with their professional obligations. On the other hand, teachers high in authoritarianism values endorsed lower intentions to intervene, similar to past research (Lingiardi et al., 2016). This finding has important implications for students attending schools in highly conservative settings and suggests they may be at risk of not receiving support when bullied. Unsurprisingly, teachers who identified as a sexual minority endorsed higher intentions to intervene, suggesting that lived experience as a member of a minority group facilitates greater empathy and fosters increased social activism for other marginalized persons (Pistella et al., 2018).

According to intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew et al., 2011), even indirect intergroup contact can promote empathy, leading to fewer expressions of prejudice and increased social support. Most notably, overt homophobia is viewed less tolerably in Western countries (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Therefore, given the high endorsement of teachers' intentions to intervene, it may be that permissibility of overt sexual prejudice influences how teachers perceive their response to bullying motivated by sexual prejudice. In contrast, in the final model, teachers' attitudes toward

gender and social roles significantly predicted teachers' intentions to intervene. Studies have highlighted that in comparison to sexual prejudice, people are slower to accept expressions of gender diversity (e.g., Norton & Herek, 2013). That is, the acceptance of sexual minorities may have become more normalized in society because there has been a discourse about sexual minorities for a greater time period; however, gender minorities have not had that same level of community acceptance. Therefore, the association between teachers' attitudes toward gender minorities and teachers' intentions to intervene suggests gender ideologies could be a barrier to providing support in bullying motivated by sexual and/or gender prejudice.

Limitations

Findings from this study should be considered within its limitations. Firstly, causation can not be inferred from correlational data. Secondly, this study assessed teachers' intentions, and intentions do not always lead to actual behavior (Ajzen, 2011). However, the study design incorporated various individual and contextual factors implicated in teachers' intentions to intervene the bullying of sexual and/or gender minority students, which reduces the discrepancy often found when bullying is conceptualized differently by teachers and students (Rigby, 2018). Thirdly, the use of convenience sampling may have led to disproportionate amount of the sample with high intentions to intervene. Finally, a disproportionate number of female teachers participated in this study. While this gender split closely reflects the proportion of male versus female teachers (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2020), additional research is needed to garner a greater understanding of how male teachers may differ from female teachers in their intentions to intervene.

Implications and future research

Our findings point to the need for additional implicit bias training for teachers and student teachers. Previous research points to the importance of educational components in changing negative attitudes toward sexual minorities and human rights that are afforded to them by society, i.e., same-sex family rights (Webb et al., 2020). The implications from this study suggest that interventions that seek to change attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge may provide a positive contribution to teachers' willingness to intervene if a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied. In particular, attitudes toward gender minorities had the largest effect in the model. As social norms and mores around gender continue to shift and increased

acceptance of the fluidity of gender is becoming more accepted, ensuring that teachers are working from both a place of knowledge and empathy is quintessential to creating cohesive and supportive educational settings. Intervention during a situation of harassment or bullying may make the difference in future negative health and social outcomes for sexual and gender minorities, including substance use, suicidality, and mental illness.

Utilizing evidence-based practice methods, a combination of implicit bias training and knowledge development activities should be established for teachers and should commence in pre-service training. Knowledge alone may not be enough to shift attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. Rather, combining this type of training with empathy building activities, self-reflection, and implicit associations tests, which can raise an individual's awareness of bias, may begin to create those needed shifts in thinking and beliefs. However, trainings cannot stop there. Teachers and student teachers also need training on how to intervene in different scenarios. Confidence in intervention increases when an individual knows how to make a difference. Specific scripts, role-plays, and challenging encounters should be enacted to give participants a chance to practice and learn. Future research should seek to test such a model to determine changes in attitudes and beliefs with a longitudinal component that establishes if teachers were willing and able to implement the intervention strategies. Triangulating these data with student experiences would provide a multifaceted perspective on how interventions are working or not working with the educational system.

Conclusion

This study extends previous research by exploring the role of specific attributes that inform Australian teachers' intentions to intervene when a sexual and/or gender minority student is bullied. This research demonstrated the importance of attitudes toward gender minorities and understandings of gender norms. Specifically, teachers' attitudes toward gender minorities emerged as the most salient factor in predicting teachers' intentions to intervene and has important implications for pre-service training and professional development for current teachers. Overall, these findings provide critical information that inform evidence-based pedagogical practice to establish affirmative and inclusive school environments that are responsive to the bullying of students with a sexual and/or gender minority identity.

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