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Exploring Attitudes of Future Educators About Sexual Minority Youth

Fifty-two secondary teacher candidates from a Canadian university completed questionnaires assessing levels of homophobia, knowledge of homosexuality, and perceptions of professional issues related to sexual minority youth. The level of homophobia in this sample was lower than in earlier studies with teachers, and lower homophobia was found to be significantly related to higher professional commitment and willingness to assist sexual minority students. As well greater knowledge of homosexual issues was significantly related to lower levels of homophobia, and men had significantly more homophobic attitudes than women.

Cinquante-deux stagiaires d'une université canadienne ont complété des questionnaires évaluant les préjugés contre l'homosexualité, les connaissances sur l'homosexualité et les perceptions des enjeux professionnels liés aux jeunes appartenant à une minorité sexuelle. Cet échantillon a démontré moins de préjugés face à l'homosexualité que ceux des études précédentes impliquant des enseignants; or, un rapport significatif existe entre des niveaux peu élevés de préjugés face à l'homosexualité d'une part, et un plus grand engagement des jeunes membres d'une minorité sexuelle et une volonté accrue de leur venir en aide d'autre part. Un lien significatif existe également entre des connaissances plus importantes relatives aux enjeux touchant les homosexuels et des niveaux moins élevés de préjugés face à l'homosexualité. Finalement, les hommes ont démontré, de manière significative, plus d'attitudes homophobes que les femmes.

Research on how effectively school systems deal with issues of sexual orientation of students is sparse. Although adolescence is a time when questions of sexual orientation often emerge (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1995), little research has been conducted on what measures are taken to help students cope with such issues. Most research (Barrett & McWhirter, 2002; Price & Telljohann, 1991) in this area examined the efficacy and willingness of community and school counselors to address these issues adequately. Teach-

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ers, who are the most likely to be aware of students who are struggling with questions about sexual orientation, appear to be neglected in this area of research. Because teachers are in daily contact with students, it is important to address their willingness and ability to aid all students effectively. More specifically, examining the attitudes of teacher candidates provides insight into the beliefs of emerging educators and whether their education is effectively preparing them to assist students who have questions about sexual orientation.

Homoprejudice and Peer Victimization

Early definitions of homophobia were based on the fear of being in close quarters with homosexual men or women (Weinberg, 1972). However, research (Shields & Harriman, 1984) found that participants who scored high in homophobia on the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men (Herek, 1983) tended not to exhibit physiological responses that were characteristic of phobics. The researchers hypothesized that social pressures to conform to sex-coded roles may better explain the perpetuation of negativity toward people with a homosexual orientation, rather than an actual phobia. Thus Logan (1996) suggested the use of the term *homoprejudice* instead of homophobia in order to emphasize how such discrimination is based on prejudice. The term *homoprejudice* is, therefore, used in this study to describe anti-homosexual attitudes, responses, and behaviors.

Homoprejudiced beliefs can often result in overt behavior. Herek (1988) defined antigay violence as words or actions that are intended to harm or intimidate individuals because they are lesbian or gay. His study found that antigay violence caused physical harm and psychological damage to the victim. Herek believed that discrimination experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people was unique in that it tended to be overt and unofficially condoned in governmental, religious, and social institutions. Therefore, this research highlighted the importance of focusing on public institutions such as schools, where discrimination against GLBT students appeared to be common and overt, even though many Canadian school jurisdictions now have antiharassment policies that include sexual minority students.

The need for effective support in schools for sexual minority youth is apparent from research that found that 27% of GLBT youth reported being physically hurt by a peer because of their sexual orientation (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998) and more than half of a sample of GLBT youth were verbally abused in high school (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). As well, other research (Balsam, Beauchaine, Mickey, & Rothblum, 2005; McFarland, 1998) has shown that GLBT youth were almost three times more at risk of suicide than their heterosexual peers and siblings.

In the Canadian context, Temple (2005) did an extensive review of high school textbooks in Quebec from five subject areas and found that 95% of the content ignored same-sex relationships. When these relationships were mentioned, 80% of the references were negative. Other authors in Alberta (Wells, 2005; Wells & Tsutsumi, 2005) have addressed this oppressive environment for sexual minority students by recommending various methods for creating "safe zones" and other GLBT-positive programs to provide better protection for these youth.

Attitudes

Because homophobia is usually based on attitudes and incorrect knowledge (Liddle, 1996), it is important to understand the role that attitudes play. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was used as the basis for this study because of its emphasis on reciprocal determinism, which is defined as external environmental events that continually interact with both internal mental events and overt behavior. One type of external event that is central to this theory is observational learning. In relation to the development of attitudes, people can be influenced by direct observation of role models (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) or by indirect, vicarious experiences (e.g., listening to personal stories, reading books). An example of how social and observational learning are related to changes in attitudes toward homosexuality comes from a study (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001) that found that students' attitudes were a function of the dormitory in which they lived. The authors hypothesized that lower homophobia was due to cooperative contact among peers and exposure to students in their buildings who were openly GLBT.

Research on School Counselors and Teachers

The victimization of GLBT youth highlights the lack of support for them in school systems. Teachers, who are on the frontline of the school environment, are in an ideal position to influence positive change for these youth. Although there is little research on teachers themselves, research with school counselors (Price & Telljohann, 1991) found that 80% of counselors believed that counseling a GLBT student would be gratifying, but 20% did not feel competent when counseling sexual minority youth.

One of the few studies to date that directly addressed teacher candidates' attitudes in the United States about homosexual youth found that 80% of their teacher candidates reported negative attitudes toward people with a same-sex orientation, with one third of these teachers classified as *high-grade homophobic* on the Index of Homophobia (IOH, Sears, 1992). This term was defined by Hudson and Ricketts (1980) as any individual scoring between 75 and 100 on the IOH. In addition, those participants who had a GLBT friend in high school exhibited fewer negative attitudes toward homosexuality and had scores in the *low-grade homophobic* range. Last, there was a negative correlation between knowledge of homosexuality and negative attitudes toward homosexuality. However, whether these findings are valid for Canadian teacher candidates is not known.

Gender Differences

Earlier research has consistently shown gender differences in level of homophobia. From three separate studies by Herek (1988) at six universities, heterosexual men expressed more homophobic attitudes than did women. As well, Burn (2000) found that homophobic sayings were used more by male than by female university students. Last, Simon (1995) found that men had more homophobic attitudes toward lesbians. Thus it is important to assess whether these gender differences are present in male and female teacher candidates' attitudes about sexual minority youth.

Rationale for the Current Study

Research on how adequately members of school systems address issues of homosexuality is sparse. Fontaine (1998) conducted a content review of the major journals available to school counselors over an 11-year period and found only 14 articles addressing homosexuality. Of these 14, most were normative essays about GLBT students' needs or discussions of ethical issues related to counselors and HIV clients. Only a small number of the articles contained empirical evidence, and none used a Canadian sample. Therefore, additional research in this area might shed light on what helps and hinders teachers in supporting GLBT students effectively.

Teacher candidates were chosen for this research because it was believed important to know about their beliefs before they enter the profession. Are their personal beliefs about homosexuality related to their attitudes toward GLBT students? Or do their professional responsibilities to ensure the well-being of students override any personal attitudes or beliefs they may hold? Because teacher candidates represent a population that is a direct product of the recent educational system, we believed that this research would highlight the level of preparedness of new teachers to assist GLBT students adequately. This knowledge could then inform teacher educators about possible gaps in their curriculum that need to be filled.

Hypotheses for the Present Study

Many variables could relate to teachers' attitudes toward GLBT students and their willingness to provide assistance and support. The following variables and hypotheses were chosen based on a review of the recent research literature.

1. Past research (Fontaine, 1998) shows that school counselors who reported negative views toward GLBT individuals had never counseled a student on such issues. Although this may be due to GLBT students not being "out" to them, it could also be due to a lack of professional commitment to work with GLBT students. Therefore, it was hypothesized that more positive attitudes toward GLBT students would correlate with higher professional commitment and willingness to assist GLBT youth.
2. Research examining the relationship between current knowledge about homosexuality and attitudes toward GLBT individuals (Fontaine, 1998; Sears, 1992; Wells & Franken, 1987) found that the more knowledge a person has regarding homosexuality the more positive their attitudes are toward this population. Thus it was hypothesized that the more knowledge teacher candidates had about GLBT youth, the more positive their attitudes would be toward GLBT individuals.
3. Because men consistently have shown greater hostility than women toward gay men (Burn, 2000; Herek, 1988; Simon, 1995), it was hypothesized that male teacher candidates would have more homophobic attitudes than female teacher candidates.
4. A problem that has been studied (Burn, 2000) in the school system is the widespread use of homophobic slang terms. Therefore, the current study addressed this social problem qualitatively with teacher candidates by examining how they would deal with students who used homophobic terms, how they thought schools should be handling education about issues of sexual orientation in the classroom, and what

they thought teacher education curriculum should include about GLBT issues.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The 57 participants were secondary teacher candidates from a large Canadian university in Ontario. Participants were recruited from two intermediate/senior class sections of a compulsory course in educational psychology. The researcher spoke briefly about the research in each of these classes and distributed 170 surveys for a return rate of 34%. Volunteers were asked to complete five questionnaires in their own time and return them to the researcher in a sealed envelope.

Participants' sexual orientations were heterosexual (52), bisexual (3), gay (1), and lesbian (1). Because of the small number of sexual minority participants and the possibility of their skewing the results in a positive direction, they were removed from the study. The resulting 52 participants were 40 females and 12 males, which is congruent with the gender ratio in the Faculty of Education. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 45, with a mean age of 26. Ethnicity was Caucasian (45), Asian Canadian (2), Native (1), other (3), and missing data (1). Most of the participants (49) had a GLBT friend or acquaintance.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire assessed participants' age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and experience with a GLBT friend. This questionnaire also posed four qualitative questions. The first question was about how student teachers would handle students in the classroom who used terms such as *fag*, *queer*, *gay*, or *lesbo* as an insult or a way to describe something as negative. The second question asked how schools should deal with the issue of sexual orientation in high school classrooms. The third inquired whether participants thought that the Faculty of Education should include information about GLBT issues and what should be included. Last, participants were asked if they had received any education about these issues in their high school. Answers to these questions were grouped into categories by the first author. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the number of responses for each category.

The Index of Homophobia (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). This measure addresses feelings and emotions that are evoked when participants consider interactions with people who have a GLBT orientation. It is a 25-item measure that uses a 5-point Likert scale from *strongly agree* (0) to *strongly disagree* (4). Some examples of questions from this measure are: "I would enjoy attending social functions at which people with a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender orientation were present," or "I would feel disappointed if I learned that my child was gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender." To score the Index of Homophobia, negatively worded items are first reverse scored. The scoring range is 0-100. Those who score between 0 and 25 are considered *high-grade nonhomophobic*, 25-50 are *low-grade nonhomophobic*, 50-75 are *low-grade homophobic*, and 75-100 are *high-grade homophobic* (Hudson & Ricketts). A few adjustments of wording were made to the original version of this test. For example, words such as *gay*

or *lesbian* were changed to GLBT in order to be more inclusive. As well, the term *clergyman* was changed to *member of the clergy* for the same reason.

This instrument has been used extensively in earlier research (Barrett & McWhirter, 2002; Carney, Werth, & Emmanuelson, 1994). Reliability scores for internal consistency have ranged from .89 (Ben-Ari, 2001) to .94 (Pain & Disney, 1995). Support for construct validity was provided by a correlation of .84 between Index of Homophobia and Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (Pain & Disney). Internal consistency for the present sample was .94. For the purpose of the current study the title was changed to "Feelings about Minority Sexual Orientations" because "Index of Homophobia" might have provoked socially undesirable responses.

Knowledge about Homosexuality (Sears, 1992). A 14-item scale of participants' knowledge about homosexuality through true/false questions was used to address student teachers' understanding about GLBT people. For example, "Homosexuality is a phase which children outgrow" or "According to the APA, homosexuality is an illness." A high score represents greater accurate knowledge about homosexuality. From a search of the current research, no reliability or validity data could be found on this measure.

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Issues Related to Adolescent Homosexuality (adapted from Price & Telljohann, 1991). This measure was originally used to assess the perceptions of school counselors about helping students who are coping with issues or questions about sexual orientation. Therefore, the title was changed to student teachers, and questions related specifically to counseling were eliminated. Of the 28 items, six items that applied to teachers were included in this study. The measure was used to assess how professionally responsible teachers felt in addressing issues with GLBT students. One item measured participants' understanding and methods of acquiring information about sexual orientation by asking them to endorse a number of choices in a prepared list of possibilities. Percentages for these choices were calculated.

Five items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and were combined for a total score on professional commitment to GLBT students. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of these five merged items was .77. They included: (a) Do you believe it is the role of teachers to assist students who have a GLBT orientation? (b) Assisting GLBT students with issues of sexual orientation would be professionally gratifying; (c) How interested are you in increasing your knowledge and skills to work with GLBT youth? (d) Schools are not doing enough to help GLBT adolescents adjust to their school environment; and (e) School boards should take a strong stand in supporting the rights and needs of GLBT students.

Desirability Scale from the Personality Research Form (Jackson, 1967). This measure was included in the study to check if participants reported socially desirable responses. There are 16 questions included in this measure, which are answered either true or false. Items that are answered opposite to the keyed response set are highly improbable. Examples of questions are: "If someone gave me too much change, I would point it out" and "My life is full of interesting activities." If participants answer in accordance with the specified true/false answers, then it is likely that they are providing responses that they feel are culturally acceptable and not necessarily their own true personal at-

titude. The desired outcome is a balance in endorsement between socially desirable and undesirable responding. Jackson found test-retest reliability for this measure of .86 and internal consistency of .82. The mean score in the present study was 12.7. Both men and women fell at the 55th percentile and were equivalent to a normative sample of officer candidates (12.4) and air traffic controllers (12.4).

Results

Beginning with the Social Desirability Scale of the PRF, the mean was 12.7, which is within the normal range. This result provided some confidence that participants did not respond in socially desirable ways on the other measures in the study. As well, there were no significant correlations between the Social Desirability Scale and any of the other measures.

Attitudes and Professional Commitment

The first hypothesis predicted that more positive attitudes toward GLBT individuals would be related to higher professional commitment toward sexual minority students. A significant negative correlation ($r=-.64, p<.01$) resulted between level of homophobia and professional commitment to GLBT students. That is, as scores on the Index of Homophobia decreased (became more accepting), scores for professional commitment to GLBT students increased. Mean score on the Index of Homophobia was 32.9, which falls within the low-grade nonhomophobic category, indicating a slightly below average amount of discomfort, anxiety, fear or anger when dealing with homosexual individuals (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). The mean score for Professional Commitment to GLBT students was 3.6 out of 5, indicating slightly above neutral. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations of raw scores for these measures.

Attitudes and Knowledge

The second hypothesis predicted that the more accurate knowledge teacher candidates had about homosexuality, the more positive their attitudes would be toward GLBT individuals. As predicted, a significant negative correlation was found ($r=-.45, p<.01$), indicating that the more knowledge teacher candidates had about homosexuality and related issues, the lower their scores were on the Index of Homophobia. A result that was not predicted was a significant, positive correlation between Factual Knowledge and Professional Commitment ($r=.47, p<.01$), meaning that as factual knowledge about homosexuality increased, so did professional commitment to GLBT students. The mean score on the Knowledge about Homosexuality Scale was 11 out of 14 indicating 77% accuracy.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Raw Scores for the Major Variables

<i>Measure</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Index of Homophobia	32.9	18.6
Professional Commitment	17.9	3.5
Factual Knowledge	10.9	2.1
Social Desirability	12.6	2.5

The scale assessing professional commitment also asked participants what were their main sources of gaining information about homosexuality. Of a list of eight possible options where individuals could check all that applied to them, the two most common methods of gaining knowledge were mass media (77.2%) and GLBT friends (77.2%). Other sources included college and university courses (40.4%), textbooks (38.6%), and other school services (21.1%). The three sources of information that ranked the lowest were workshops and conferences (12.3), professional journals (10.5%), and on-the-job training (5.3%).

Attitudes and Gender

Based on earlier research (Simon, 1995), it was hypothesized that male teacher candidates would have more homophobic attitudes than female teacher candidates. Because this was a directional hypothesis, a one-tailed t-test was conducted ($t=1.96, p<.05$) that showed that men had significantly more homophobic attitudes ($M=41.8$) than did women ($M=30.2$).

Qualitative Data

Several qualitative questions addressed how teacher candidates would handle issues of sexual orientation when they arose in a high school setting. The first question asked how teacher candidates would personally deal with students who used homophobic terms such as *fag*, *queer*, *gay*, or *lesbo*. Answers to this question were grouped into the following four categories: (a) immediately reprimand student/give detention, (b) comment on remarks being inappropriate, (c) get the student to choose another word, and (d) educate or help students.

The most commonly occurring category, with 38 responses, involved stating how such comments were inappropriate. For example, "we don't use words like that in my classroom." The next largest category (16) went further than just commenting on the inappropriate word and included educating or helping students through large class discussions about the issue (e.g., "explain to the student that the terms are comparable to ethnic, body type, or religious slurs"). Another category (10 participants) involved getting students to choose another word to describe how they were feeling. Eight participants stated that they would immediately reprimand the student or give detention (e.g., "I would ask the student to stay after class"). The total amount of response frequencies reported here are larger than the total sample size because many participants gave multiple answers to each question.

Participants were also asked how they thought schools should be dealing with issues of sexual orientation in the secondary school classroom. Responses were coded into the following six categories: (a) provide outside supports for GLBT students; (b) promote general understanding, tolerance, and acceptance; (c) talk about it; (d) have clear policies; (e) provide training, education, and support for staff; and (f) nothing. Approximately half the participants (27) felt that the best way to deal with these issues in the classroom was to talk about them (e.g., "should have mandatory seminars or assemblies"). The next most common theme (17) was to promote general understanding and acceptance of student diversity not specific to sexual orientation (e.g., "the schools should allow for diversity but not encourage a student either way"). Ten participants

felt that schools should provide outside supports for GLBT students such as talking with counselors, encouraging diversity groups, and having GLBT safe zones. Six teacher candidates believed that schools should provide training, education, and support for staff (e.g., support openly gay teachers). Four participants noted that schools should have clear policies such as administrative and top-down policies, whereas three students thought that schools should not do anything.

Another question asked whether participants had received any education about GLBT issues in their high schools. Most participants (48) said that they had received no information or education in this area. Nine students said that they had received minimal education in a health or family studies course.

A final question addressed whether participants felt that teacher education should include information regarding GLBT issues in its curriculum, and if so, what they thought should be included. Five participants stated that it should not be included in the curriculum, three were undecided, and 49 thought that information should be included (e.g., "how to help a student who discloses to you," "how we can deal with it and how to discuss it with students," and "make elective courses that discuss it mandatory").

Discussion

Attitudes and Professional Commitment

Finding a significant negative correlation between lower levels of homophobia and higher levels of professional commitment to helping GLBT students is congruent with past research (Fontaine, 1998) that school counselors who held positive attitudes toward sexual minority students had a higher level of professional commitment to those students. However, the current study is the first to confirm this relationship in a sample of teacher candidates. For the current study, the mean on the Index of Homophobia was 31.5 (*low-grade non-homophobic*). In contrast, Sears' (1992) sample of teacher candidates had a mean of 65 (*low-grade homophobic*). This large difference in means could be due to improved understanding and acceptance about GLBT youth that has occurred over the last decade. However, it is also possible that this difference is related to the geographical location and related cultural differences of the two samples. For the current study, the sample was from a Canadian province where gay marriage is currently legal, whereas the sample used by Sears (1992) was from the southern United States where same-sex marriages are not legal and there may be greater discrimination and prejudice against sexual minorities.

Attitudes and Knowledge

Greater knowledge about homosexuality was found to be significantly correlated with lower scores on the Index of Homophobia. This result corresponds with earlier research with teacher candidates and undergraduate students (Patton & Mannison, 1993; Sears, 1992; Walters, 1994) that found that factual knowledge of minority sexual orientations was related to a less negative attitude toward GLBT students. It is likely that negative attitudes toward GLBT individuals often stem from inaccurate stereotypes and myths. Thus the greater factual knowledge an individual has, the less likely he or she is to endorse such stereotypes. Moreover, because a relationship was also found between

greater factual knowledge and increased professional commitment, it is likely that the enhanced understanding gained from this factual knowledge allowed these teacher candidates to feel more willing to assist these students. Of course, it is also possible that individuals with positive attitudes may seek out or be more receptive to this knowledge.

Participants in the current study reported that their main sources of gaining information on homosexuality were mass media, GLBT friends, and college and university courses. This result differs from earlier research (Price & Telljohann, 1991), where the most commonly cited resources were professional journals, mass media, and workshops/professional conferences. This difference is probably the result of two separate samples with teacher candidates relying on mass media and school counselors relying on professional sources. In addition, over the last 15 years, there has been some change in the portrayal of sexual minorities with more gay-positive television series and movies that may be contributing to this generation of teacher candidates having more accepting attitudes toward sexual minorities. As well, because the current sample had relatively low homophobia and relatively high factual knowledge, it may be that they also received their accurate information from having GLBT friends.

Attitudes and Sex

Consistent with earlier research (Burn, 2000; Herek, 1988), men reported more homophobic attitudes than women, although both sexes were low in homophobia. This finding needs to be interpreted with caution because of the small number of men in the current study. However, because these men were similar to US samples, it may be that Canadian teacher education programs should consider alternative curriculum for men when they are developing awareness programs for dealing with sexual minority youth in schools. It may be helpful to address specific prejudices or fears that men have about working with GLBT youth.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative questions provided further insight into level of homophobia and professional commitment of teacher candidates to GLBT youth. It is important to note that almost all the participants indicated they would do or say something to counter a student who used terms such as *fag* or *queer* as a way of insinuating something negative. Because teachers are in steady contact with students, they can have a large effect on the tone of the environment for GLBT students. This finding offers a positive outlook for future school atmosphere, with most teacher candidates in the sample considering homophobic terms unacceptable.

More positive findings came from questions that asked if and how secondary schools and teacher education should be addressing the issue of various sexual orientations. Concerning secondary schools, 96% of the sample believed that secondary schools should be dealing with issues around sexual orientation. As well, most participants (86%) thought that GLBT information should be included in teacher education curriculum. Considering that most teacher candidates (84%) received no education about this topic in high school, it is encouraging that such a high number of participants were interested and

willing to learn more about the topic. Because this study highlighted the relationship between greater factual knowledge and positive attitudes toward GLBT individuals, it is a positive finding that so many of these teacher candidates were motivated to learn more about this underrepresented population.

Limitations

It is important to address the findings from the present study in the context of possible limitations. First, because of the voluntary nature of the recruitment method, it is possible that those who chose to participate already had more positive attitudes toward GLBT individuals and were more interested in the particular subject matter. Another limitation is the small number of male students who participated and the low return rate. The low return rate may have been due to no incentive being given for completion of the questionnaires, no follow-up request to potential participants, and too many questionnaires. As well, the changes made on the IOH to make it more inclusive of bisexual and transsexual people may have compromised the validity of this standardized instrument. The relatively high score on the test of factual knowledge also may have been due to the test being too easy for this highly educated group of participants. A final limitation is that the teacher candidates had minimal experience in the classroom. Thus they had to guess what their professional commitment to GLBT students would be, which made it difficult to gauge truly the level of professional commitment they would show to these students in the future.

Implications for Teacher Candidates

Although the study had these limitations, some implications can still be drawn for teacher candidates. As noted above, peer victimization and verbal abuse toward GLBT youth occur frequently in high schools (D'Augelli et al., 2002). Those who are training to be teachers in secondary schools have a unique opportunity to address these problems and combat them. Gaining factual knowledge and increasing professional commitment toward such students will increase the likelihood of such changes occurring. The more positive teacher candidates' attitudes are about homosexuality, the greater are the chances that they will want to act to create a more positive environment for GLBT youth. Moreover, if student teachers do not allow derogatory slang terms in their classrooms, this could have a positive effect on the school environment for GLBT youth.

It is imperative that teacher education programs fully prepare their teacher candidates by providing them with a comprehensive understanding of GLBT issues as a mandatory part of their curriculum. This means having a consistent philosophy of inclusive teacher education that is pervasive throughout the curriculum. As well, it would be helpful for teacher candidates to learn techniques to counsel sexual minority students who come to them for assistance. Because teachers have such pivotal roles in the lives of their students, it is important for them to be proactive in improving attitudes toward GLBT youth.

The victimization of GLBT youth and the high level of suicide attempts in this population (Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; Balsam et al., 2005; McFarland, 1998) are extremely concerning for educators. Improvements in attitudes are necessary not only for staff, but for other students as well. Because teachers have a

responsibility to be role models for students, they can teach by their own actions. Applying Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and observational learning, if teachers demonstrate open, accepting, and nondiscriminatory attitudes toward GLBT youth, then it is more likely that students will follow this example. The goal would be to create an inclusive educational experience for all students. Such attitude changes could help to lessen the oppressive environment experienced by many GLBT youth, and in turn improve their educational experiences during their high school years.

Note

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Annual Congress of the Canadian Association for Studies in Women and Education, May 2005, London, Ontario. Correspondence about the article should be addressed to Dr. Susan Rodger, Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada, N6G 1G7; e-mail: srodger2@uwo.ca

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