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A Comparison of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Sexual Minority Students and Issues in Schools With and Without Gay Straight Alliances

Kelli Ranae Otis Brus

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A COMPARISON OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUAL MINORITY STUDENTS AND
ISSUES IN SCHOOLS WITH AND WITHOUT GAY STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Educational Specialist Degree

Kelli Ranae Otis Brus
University of Northern Iowa
May 2009

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' attitudes toward sexual minority students (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students) and issues related to this population of students. A sample of 166 high school teachers from schools with and without gay-straight alliances (GSAs) were compared on several measures to determine if teachers from schools with GSAs were significantly more supportive toward sexual minority students and issues than teachers in schools without GSAs. Participants completed research packets containing the Professional Attitude Index Scale (PAIS) (Sears, 1992), a hypothetical situation of homophobia in a classroom for participants to provide a written description of their response, and a set of open-ended questions about their classroom practices. The results indicate that teacher attitudes did not differ significantly based on whether their school had a GSA; however, females and younger teachers indicated significantly more supportive attitudes toward sexual minority students than males and older teachers. When compared to Sears' (1992) original results, teachers indicated more supportive attitudes toward sexual minority students and issues, yet teachers are still less likely to take on counseling or advocacy roles. In response to a hypothetical incident of homophobia in their classroom, teachers were most likely to object to the use of derogatory language, discuss facts and statistics to address the misinformation, and/or explain that everyone is entitled to their opinion. When asked about inclusion of sexual minority issues into the curriculum, many teachers indicated that the topic does not lend itself to the content area and would only discuss the topic if students brought it up. These findings are discussed in relation to the social and emotional impact of a supportive or negative school environment for sexual minority youth.

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This Study by: Kelli Brus

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Degree of Educational Specialist

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

“I could talk to her about anything—except being gay” (Sears, 1992, p. 35). This type of remark is common in the literature regarding students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ; also referred to as sexual minorities) and their thoughts about teachers. Schools tend to be homophobic places where heterosexuality is the normal and assumed way of life (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002), even though it has been estimated that between 4 to 17% of students do not fit under that category (Anhalt & Morris, 1998). According to the 2003 National School Climate Survey, 90% of LGBTQ students reported hearing homophobic remarks (i.e., “that’s so gay,” “faggot,” or “dyke”) frequently or often, 40% report physical harassment because of their sexual orientation, and 65% reported feeling unsafe at school (Kosciw, 2004).

Enduring a school environment that is unsupportive and potentially harmful towards sexual minority students is often correlated with negative behaviors (i.e., substance abuse, dropping out, academic difficulties) and poor mental health (i.e., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem; Anhalt & Morris, 1998). Furthermore, 32% of sexual minority youth attempted suicide, compared to only 7% of their heterosexual peers, as reported in the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Hanlon, 2004). Some ascertain that the most homophobic of all social institutions is the classroom (Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). Teachers are often influential figures in their students’ lives and have great responsibility in shaping what is known and believed based on what they teach explicitly and convey implicitly through verbal and nonverbal behavior (Besner & Spungin, 1995). Given this current scene for LGBTQ youth and the mandate of schools to provide the best education possible in a safe environment (Blumenfeld, 1994), changes must be made to accommodate the needs of all students, regardless of sexual orientation.

Several themes arise in the literature regarding what LGBTQ students need from their teachers: support, information and resources, acknowledgement, and intervention in cases of harassment. Having a supportive teacher was a beneficial experience for students struggling with issues related to their sexuality; some describe a relationship with a teacher as one of their best memories from high school (Kissen, 1993).

The National School Climate Survey (2003) reported that 27% of students identified more than ten faculty or staff members who were supportive, 57.9% identified between two and ten, 8.4% identified one, and only 6.7% identified no faculty or staff as supportive (Kosciw, 2004). In their survey of 34 sexual minority high school students, Jordan, Vaughan, and Woodworth (1997) found teachers to be the most supportive adults in school, yet 23.4% of students could still identify at least one staff person who was not supportive. Telljohann and Price's (1993) survey of 120 homosexual youth found that few identified school staff as being major supporters.

Secondly, information and resources (such as where to obtain support or help, contact names and numbers, and education on pertinent LGBTQ issues), is important because when compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ students often have less available information about their sexuality and common feelings, as well as fewer people to consult. In one study, 41.2% of students were able to obtain information regarding sexual orientation from faculty members (Jordan et al., 1997) but in another, 38% of teachers felt it was not appropriate to provide information to students regarding LGBTQ issues (Warwick, Aggleton, & Douglas, 2001).

Third, sexual minority students also need acknowledgement from their teachers in the form of classroom discussion or curricular lessons about LGBTQ issues. Across studies, there is great variability regarding whether sexual minority issues are being discussed in classrooms and if there is a positive representation in the curriculum (i.e., current LGBTQ events, social change movements, literature written by sexual minority authors, LGBTQ figures who have made significant contributions in history, and sex education for those who are LGBTQ [Lipkin, 1994]). Estimates range from a low of 38.2% of students claiming LGBTQ issues have never been discussed in class (Jordan et al., 1997) to a high of 76.2% (Kosciw, 2004). Kosciw (2004) reported that 3.3% of students felt the class discussion was very positive, 49.3% felt it was somewhat positive, 14.5% felt it was somewhat negative, and 2.9% felt it was very negative. A less optimistic finding reported that 50% of females and 37% of males felt discussion of LGBTQ issues in classes was handled negatively (Telljohann & Price, 1993).

Lastly, sexual minority youth need teachers to refrain from making hurtful comments and to intervene and reprimand students making such comments. The National School Climate Survey reported that 2.3% of LGBTQ students heard homophobic remarks from faculty frequently or often, 58.3% sometimes or rarely, and 39.4% never. The same survey found that 3.4% of faculty always intervened when hearing homophobic remarks, 59.2% most or some of the time, and 37.4% never. However, when comparing the frequency of homophobic remarks and teacher intervention to racist remarks, the figures differ. Fewer students reported hearing racist remarks from faculty, with less than 2% hearing them frequently or often, almost 30% hearing them sometimes or rarely, and 68% reporting never hearing racist remarks from faculty. Further, when asked about the frequency of faculty intervening when hearing racist remarks, nearly 40% stated always, 35% most of the time, 27% some of the time, and 0% never (Kosciw, 2004). In other studies, students stated staff intervened less than once a month (Jordan et al., 1997) and students at one high school in Des Moines, IA reported 97% of teachers did not respond when remarks were made in front of them (Carter, 1997). These data suggest that sexual minority groups are still considered “fair game” for discrimination in comparison to other minority groups.

A variety of teacher attitudes toward homosexuality have been identified including preference for detachment, “blaming the victim,” overt homophobia, presumption of heterosexuality, and “good” practice. An attitude of detachment by teachers leads to the absence of LGBTQ issues in the classroom. As reported by Sears (1992), a high school student recalls a teacher stating, “I have no comment--I’m not even going to get into this discussion” during a heated debate in which derogatory comments were made about sexual minorities (p. 33). “Blaming the victim” is related to the idea that if students choose to be open about their sexuality (in terms of self-disclosure, speech, and dress), they are responsible for any harassment they receive (Nairn & Smith, 2003; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001).

Overt homophobia involves teacher encouragement and participation in derogatory bashing of homosexuals, as well as misinforming students about homosexuality and conveying stereotypes and myths. In one study, one-third of sex education classes observed were categorized as such (Buston & Hart, 2001). Another study of health teachers and their practices found that of the 46% who reported explicitly teaching

the topic of homosexuality, 8% taught that homosexuality was wrong (Telljohann, Price, Poureslami, & Easton, 1995). Similarly, Nairn and Smith (2003) reported that 18% of staff had an attitude of fear and dislike towards their sexual minority students.

Those who were classified under the heterosexist presumption taught sex education solely as it related to heterosexuals and did not address homosexuality; Buston and Hart (2001) categorized one-third of classrooms observed as such. Nairn and Smith (2003) also reported that 33% of staff held an attitude of invisibility and claimed they did not know any sexual minority students.

Lastly, teachers who exhibited “good” practice provided sex education pertinent to individuals of all sexualities and homophobic remarks were confronted; one-third of classrooms observed in Buston and Hart’s (2001) study were categorized as such. While the Telljohann et al. (1995) survey of secondary health teachers did not involve observations of classroom practice, teachers reported good intentions for LGBTQ students: 82% of teachers felt they had a responsibility to stop students making homophobic remarks and one-third felt that schools were not doing enough to help homosexual adolescents.

In Sears’ (1992) analysis of prospective teachers, he reported that eight out of ten participants had negative attitudes towards homosexuals, with one third being classified as high grade homophobics. In relating these personal feelings to professional responsibilities as a teacher, only 6% of participants chose to discipline a student for making a homophobic, derogatory comment in a hypothetical classroom situation. In addition, participants limited their professional involvement with LGBTQ youth to activities that were relatively detached, rather than extending their support to activities that required more active commitment on their part.

Much research has been conducted on the presence or absence of an attitude-behavior link, with most results indicating that there is significant variability in the degree to which attitudes predict behavior (Ajzen, 2000). In fact, the correlation between attitude and actual behavior has ranged from .20 (Leippe & Elkin, 1987) to .73 (Fazio & Williams, 1986). A recent meta-analysis on the topic of the attitude-behavior relation has clarified those instances in which the attitude-behavior relation is strongest, including when attitudes are easy to recall, when attitudes are stable over time, when one has direct experience with the

attitude object, when attitudes are reported regularly, when there is confidence in one's attitudes, and when only one side of an issue is considered rather than both sides (Glasman & Albarracin, 2006). Yep (1997) states that "attitudes predispose people to act in certain ways; they influence human behavior" (p. 51). Yep goes on to state however, that while general consensus implies that attitudes guide human behavior, there is considerable debate about this relationship. When looking more specifically on the attitude-behavior relation as related to attitudes about sexual minorities, Sears (1997) reports that there has been a lack of research dedicated to assessing the behavioral outcomes of specific attitudes. Herek (1984) found that people who held negative attitudes about homosexuality reported less personal contact with people who were gay or lesbian. Attitudes are important in studying teacher's reactions to LGBTQ students because they often cause people to operate in certain ways and can drive behavior. In addition, attitudes are learned and enduring (Yep, 1997), which is important to consider for teachers who hold negative attitudes about homosexuality and their potential influence on young adults who are often just beginning to form attitudes about many topics. It is also useful to know that attitudes exist on an individual as well as a societal level (Herek, 1986); therefore, teachers may be homophobic or heterosexist independently and/or teach in a school that is institutionally homophobic or heterosexist based on policies that are adopted and enforced, curriculum that is implemented, and teaching behaviors or practices that are encouraged or discouraged.

In the last ten to twenty years, schools have begun supporting sexual minority students through the adoption of policies protecting them from harassment and the formation of groups that support these students. Gay straight alliances (GSAs) are one type of group that have recently been formed in many schools around the nation. Currently there is little empirical research regarding GSAs' effects on students (both sexual minorities and heterosexuals), teachers, and schools (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2003). Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer (2004) studied a variety of schools in Massachusetts and concluded that GSAs typically perform four roles in schools: (1) counseling and support; (2) creating a safe space; (3) raising awareness, providing education, and increasing visibility of LGBT issues in the school; and (4) becoming a part of broader school efforts for raising awareness and providing education to make school safe for LGBT students in school. In the third and fourth roles described above, GSA members often initiate staff training

and development programs, hold assemblies or exhibits, visit classrooms to discuss student rights and laws, establish a Safe Schools Task Force, increase resources in the school library, and urge discussion of LGBT issues in classrooms and inclusion in the curriculum.

Schools in Massachusetts with and without GSAs were compared on several characteristics (Szalacha, 2003). Students were more likely to indicate that staff were more supportive in schools with GSAs (52%) than students in schools without GSAs (36.9%). Also, 24% of students in schools with GSAs reported hearing positive comments from teachers about gays and lesbians, while only 12% of students reported this in schools without GSAs. These findings suggest that GSAs can impact teachers, perhaps leading them to be more positive and supportive towards sexual minority youth. The specific goal of this study is determine whether the presence of GSAs in schools is related to more positive teacher attitudes toward sexual minority students and issues in their classrooms.

Further research is needed on this topic. First, as GSAs are a relatively recent phenomenon, there is little empirical research regarding their effects. Second, it is important to extend Szalacha (2003) and Sears' (1992) research. Similar to Sears' (1992) research, teacher's professional attitudes towards sexual minority students will be examined, however, this research will study and compare current teachers from schools with and without GSAs. In addition, although Szalacha (2003) compares teachers from schools with and without GSAs, only schools in Massachusetts were studied. Massachusetts has been one of the few states where much legislation has been passed advocating a variety of supports in schools for LGBTQ youth. Therefore, in studying schools in the Midwest, where there has been less governmental support for such supports in high schools, teachers may be more impacted by the presence of a GSA rather than other factors. Third, if GSAs are related to an increase in positive teacher attitudes and interactions, it could be suggested that all schools support and encourage student members to form a GSA, due to their positive results.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Research Questions

This research sought to answer two questions: (1) Do teachers in schools with gay straight alliances (GSAs) have more positive attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students than teachers in schools without GSAs? (2) Do teachers in schools with GSAs have more positive attitudes toward LGBTQ issues than teachers in schools without GSAs?

Participants

Participants included 166 teachers (96 females, 69 males, and 1 unidentified, mean age = 43 years) from four high schools in two Midwestern states (School 1, n = 49; School 2, n = 46; School 3, n = 38; School 4, n = 33). The overall response rate was 43.2% (see Table 1). Special and general education teachers from all content areas were included in this study, while administrators and school support staff were excluded. On average, teachers had 16 years of experience. See Table 2 for more information on school demographics

Table 1

Response Rate

Group	GSA	# Distributed	# Returned	Response rate
School 1	Yes	99	49	49.5%
School 2	Yes	92	46	50.0%
School 3	No	106	38	36.0%
School 4	Yes	87	33	38.0%
Total		384	166	43.2%

Table 2

School Demographics

School	GSA	City Population	Grades	Number of Students	% Free/ Reduced Lunch	% Student Ethnicity			
						European American	African American	Asian American	Hispanic American
School 1	Yes	65,000	9-12	1,755	13	76	10	9	5
School 2	Yes	65,000	9-12	1,438	9	80	12	3	5
School 3	No	90,000	9-12	1,690	25	76	11	10	2
School 4	Yes	38,000	10-12	1,125	14	92	3	3	1

Of the four schools, three (Schools 1, 2, and 4) had active gay straight alliances (GSAs), while one did not (School 3). While the goal was to have an equal number of schools with and without GSAs participate, requests to conduct research in several school districts and individual schools were denied. At School 1, 94% of teachers indicated their school has a GSA, while 6% did not know. Unfortunately, no specific information about the GSA at School 1 can be provided, as multiple phone calls and e-mails to school officials were not returned.

In School 2, 96% of teachers indicated their school has a GSA, while 4% did not know. A GSA had formed in 1998, but discontinued due to lack of attendance and involvement within a couple of years. The current GSA at School 2 was formed in 2002 when an openly gay student asked a faculty member to become a GSA sponsor. Then, students wishing to create the GSA followed the necessary school procedures to start an official student group. The student founder of the GSA had experienced harassment based on her sexual orientation and wanted the school to be safe for other sexual minority students. This GSA meets weekly and approximately 12-18 students attend. The group has organized panel presentations, guest speakers, participation in "The Day of Silence" (an annual event in which students vow to remain silent in honor of LGBT individuals and to bring attention to bullying, harassment, and violence of sexual minorities), TV and movie viewings that depict gay issues or characters and discussions of their portrayals in the media, and the promotion of school awareness by making videos and signs. Their mission is to raise awareness of the effects of homophobia on all students and create a safe place for sexual minority youth and their allies.

School 3 currently does not have a GSA. Thirty-seven percent of teachers indicated that their school has a GSA, 18% indicated that their school does not have a GSA, and 45% indicated that they did not know. During the 2003-04 school year, several meetings were held to form a GSA, however, a formal GSA was never established. Several factors may have contributed to this: those students trying to start the GSA graduated, the community already had an established GLBT support group, and the teacher set to be the faculty advisor began teaching only part-time and had personal responsibilities outside of school that interfered with the planning meetings.

At School 4, 97% of teachers indicated that their school has a GSA, while 3% did not know. The GSA at School 4 was formed in August of 2004 after a student expressed an interest to faculty members. Several faculty members approached the school's administration and followed the guidelines for forming a student group. This GSA meets weekly for approximately two hours on a weeknight. Anywhere from 10 to 45 students attend the meetings, with four students as the "executive committee." During meetings, members discuss school incidents, host guest speakers, plan for "The Day of Silence," watch movies, play games, or volunteer in the community. As found on their website, their mission is to "promote tolerance and advocate for the acceptance of diversity regarding sexual orientation and gender identity through education, communication, and social interaction – creating an open-minded, safe, and inclusive environment that supports and empowers all."

Materials

Participants first answered five demographic questions: gender, years as a teacher, age, school where they are employed, and position (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional, guidance counselor). If an individual indicated they were not a teacher, their responses were discarded. To assess teachers' familiarity with support available in their school, they were asked to indicate whether or not their school had a GSA or similar group. Second, participants completed the Professional Attitudes Index Scale (PAIS) (see Appendix A). This scale also was developed by Sears (1992); reliability and validity are undetermined. The PAIS is comprised of 14 statements related to classroom interaction, counseling, student harassment, homosexual teachers, and human rights on a four-point Likert type scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Possible scores range from a low of 14 (negative professional attitudes) to a high of 56 (positive professional attitudes), with each statement assigned between one and four points. Both the vignette (Sears, 1992) and PAIS (Sears, 1992) were used with the author's permission.

Next, teachers wrote a response to a hypothetical situation taking place in their classroom. This vignette was originally used by Sears (1992) in his investigation of the professional attitudes of prospective teachers towards sexual minority students (see Appendix B). Teacher responses were coded by the researcher and relevant themes and patterns of responses were identified. Lastly, participants answered

three open-ended questions regarding how they would respond to sexual minority students, issues, and harassment in their classroom. These questions allowed participants to more fully explain their responses to three of the questions asked in the PAIS and were developed by the researcher (see Appendix C).

Procedure

Permission to conduct research was granted by each school district prior to the recruitment of participants. Survey materials were placed in teachers' school mailboxes. Along with the survey, addressed and stamped envelopes were provided for returning the survey to the researcher. Teachers were asked to return the survey within three weeks and follow-up surveys were sent to those who did not respond by the deadline. To allow the researcher to resend the survey to those who did not respond to the initial recruitment, surveys were coded and matched with teachers' name and school. After the second recruitment mailing, the list of codes and corresponding names was destroyed. A list of those individuals who participated was kept to facilitate a drawing for two gift certificates. Following the drawing, the list of names was destroyed.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The answers to the research questions (1) Do teachers in schools with gay straight alliances (GSAs) have more positive attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students than teachers in schools without GSAs? and (2) Do teachers in schools with GSAs have more positive attitudes toward LGBTQ issues than teachers in schools without GSAs? will be described in the following sections.

Professional Attitude Index Scale

Descriptive analyses were conducted on each of the fourteen questions from the PAIS, as well as the total score. The PAIS measured teachers' attitudes on the subjects of classroom interaction with sexual minority students, counseling with LGBTQ students, student harassment, homosexual teachers, and human rights (see Appendix A). Reliability tests for this scale were conducted and the alpha is .8697. Mean scores for each question were calculated by school and for the entire sample; scores range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Items 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, and 12 were reverse scored, therefore, higher scores indicate positive attitudes toward sexual minority students and issues and lower scores indicate negative attitudes toward sexual minority students and issues. Total scores were calculated as summative scores for individual schools and the entire sample with a possible range of 14 to 56.

Missing values were replaced via the person mean substitution approach (PMS), which replaces missing values with the mean of the participant's completed items. This method has been determined to be a good representation of original data if the number of participants with missing values is 20% or less and if the number of values missing for the scale is 20% or less (Downey & King, 1998). Downey and King (1998) further elaborate that while the percentage of participants with missing values causes some distortion of the data, "the percentage of items missing had a much more potent effect" (p. 189). In this study, the number of participants with missing data is 22.3% and the number of values missing for the scale

is 3.18%. Therefore, while the number of participants with missing data slightly exceeds 20%, the number of values missing for the scale is greatly below 20%, which seems to be of more importance.

The overall summative score for the entire sample was 47.95 (SD=5.66), with a range of 30 to 56 (see Table 3). School 1 had the highest summative score of 48.67 (SD=5.41), followed by School 2 with 48.49 (SD=6.15), School 3 with 47.30 (SD=5.97), and School 4 with 46.86 (SD=4.90). By individual question, the highest mean score for the entire sample was for Question 3 ("It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student" [reverse scored]) (M=3.80, SD=.40, with only 0.6% teacher agreement) followed by Question 11 ("Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools" [reverse scored]) (M=3.73, SD=.53, and only 1.8% teacher agreement). The lowest mean score for the entire sample was for Question 14 ("I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women") (M=2.90, SD=.79, 70.9% teacher agreement) followed by Question 4 ("Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher") (M=3.04, SD=.81, 74.5% teacher agreement).

For all schools, the highest mean score was in response to Question 3 ("It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student" [reverse scored]) (School 1 M=3.86, SD=.35; School 2 M=3.77, SD=.44; School 3 M=3.82, SD=.39; School 4 M=3.74, SD=.44.) Furthermore, the lowest mean score was for all schools was in response to Question 14 ("I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women") (School 1 M=2.97, SD=.86; School 2 M=3.02, SD=.83; School 3 M=2.81, SD=.69; and School 4 M=2.71, SD=.71).

Pearson product moment correlations were conducted to determine if participant demographics (i.e., years teaching, age, and whether the school had a GSA) were associated with their reported attitudes on each of the PAIS questions, as well as the summative total. The results of these analyses revealed statistically significant correlations in several instances (see Table 4). Number of years teaching was negatively correlated with Question 2 ("I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom") [$r = -.241$, $p < .01$ (two-tailed)] meaning that fewer years teaching was associated with this practice and more years teaching was not associated with this practice. Teacher's age was negatively correlated with Question 2 ("I

Table 3

Mean Scores and Percentage of Agreement on the Professional Attitude Index Scale (PAIS)

Statement	Mean ^a	Percent Agree ^b
1. Teachers who regard homosexuality in a negative way should be able to request a homosexual student to enroll in another class		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.63	4.8% (n=6)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.58	7.9% (n=3)
Total (n=165)	3.62	5.5% (n=9)
2. I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.19	81.1% (n=103)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.21	84.2% (n=32)
Total	3.19	81.8% (n=135)
3. It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.80	0.8% (n=1)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.82	0.0% (n=0)
Total	3.80	0.6% (n=1)
4. Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.05	73.6% (n=94)
School without a GSA (n=38)	2.99	76.3% (n=29)
Total	3.04	74.5% (n=123)
5. I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.13	82.7% (n=105)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.29	86.8% (n=33)
Total	3.17	83.6% (n=138)
6. I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.69	99.2% (n=126)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.64	94.7% (n=36)
Total	3.68	98.2% (n=162)
7. I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.40	91.3% (n=116)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.29	81.6% (n=31)
Total	3.38	89.1% (n=147)

(table continues)

Statement	Mean ^a	Percent Agree ^b
8. I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.51	95.3% (n=121)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.48	86.8% (n=33)
Total	3.50	93.3% (n=154)
9. I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.46	3.2% (n=4)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.24	13.2% (n=5)
Total	3.41	5.5% (n=9)
10. I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.69	3.2% (n=4)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.50	10.5% (n=4)
Total	3.64	4.8% (n=8)
11. Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.73	1.6% (n=2)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.71	2.6% (n=1)
Total	3.73	1.8% (n=3)
12. Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.70	3.2% (n=4)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.62	5.3% (n=2)
Total	3.68	3.6% (n=6)
13. A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	3.25	85.0% (n=108)
School without a GSA (n=38)	3.12	84.2% (n=32)
Total	3.22	84.8% (n=140)
14. I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	2.92	70.1% (n=89)
School without a GSA (n=38)	2.81	73.7% (n=28)
Total	2.90	70.9% (n=117)
Total PAIS Score ^c		
Schools with a GSA (n=127)	48.15	
School without a GSA (n=38)	47.30	
Total	47.95	

Note. Schools 1, 2, and 4 have a GSAs and School 3 does not have a GSA. Questions 1, 3, 9, 10, 11, and 12 were reverse scored.

^aResponses ranged from 1 to 4: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, and 4=strongly agree.

^bScores of agree (3) or strongly agree (4) were combined to create this category (after reverse scoring).

^cMean responses to individual questions were totaled to create a summative score.

Table 4

Correlations between Demographics and Response to the Professional Attitude Index Scale (PAIS)

Question	Years Teaching	Age	GSA
1. Teachers who regard homosexuality in a negative way should be able to request a homosexual student to enroll in another class	-.042	-.004	-.032
2. I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom	-.241**	-.194*	.011
3. It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student	-.067	-.064	.020
4. Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher	-.058	-.034	-.032
5. I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation	-.042	.007	.088
6. I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation	-.036	-.044	-.041
7. I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student	.032	.029	-.069
8. I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals	-.002	-.123	-.018
9. I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals	.026	.014	-.147

(table continues)

Question	Years Teaching	Age	GSA
10. I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher	-.048	-.040	-.120
11. Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools	-.081	-.140	-.017
12. Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual	-.139	-.165*	-.064
13. A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality	-.020	-.028	-.074
14. I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women	-.137	-.138	-.060
Total PAIS score	-.103	-.106	-.007

*p < .05 ** p < .01

would discuss homosexuality in the classroom”) [$r = -.194, p < .05$ (two-tailed)] and Question 12 (“Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual” [reverse scored]) [$r = -.165, p < .05$ (two-tailed)] meaning that being younger was associated with higher, more supportive scores and being older was associated with lower, less supportive scores. Finally, correlation analyses were also conducted on PAIS questions and whether the school had a GSA, however, no significant findings resulted.

T tests were conducted to determine whether teachers in schools with GSAs differed in their responses to the PAIS from teachers in schools without GSAs. The only PAIS question nearing a significant result was “I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher.” Teachers in schools with GSAs had more supportive attitudes to this question ($M=3.68, SD=.59$) than teachers in schools without GSAs ($M=3.50, SD=.83$), $t(163)=1.90, p=.059$ (two-tailed), $d=.12$.

T tests were also conducted comparing responses by gender (see Table 5). Females had significantly higher, more supportive scores than men in response to Question 3 (“It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student” [reverse scored]) (female $M=3.89, SD=.31$; male $M=3.69, SD=.47$), $t(109.06)=-3.227, p=.002$ (two-tailed), $d=.065$; Question 4 (“Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher”) (female $M=3.18, SD=.80$; male $M=2.85, SD=.80$), $t(162)=-2.639, p=.009$ (two-tailed), $d=.13$; Question 5 (“I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation”) (female $M=3.37, SD=.67$; male $M=2.91, SD=.78$), $t(162)=-4.010, p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.11$; Question 7 (“I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student”) (female $M=3.52, SD=.63$; male $M=3.19, SD=.75$), $t(162)=-3.041, p=.003$ (two-tailed), $d=.11$; Question 8 (“I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals”) (female $M=3.63, SD=.56$; male $M=3.33, SD=.65$), $t(162)=-3.207, p=.002$ (two-tailed), $d=.10$; Question 9 (“I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals” [reverse scored]) (female $M=3.52, SD=.65$; male $M=3.25, SD=.55$), $t(162)=-2.871, p=.005$ (two-tailed), $d=.10$; Question 10 (“I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher” [reverse scored]) (female $M=3.75, SD=.64$; male $M=3.49, SD=.66$), $t(143.92)=-2.487,$

Table 5

Gender and PAIS T-Test

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
1. Teachers who regard homosexuality in a negative way should be able to request a homosexual student to enroll in another class						
Male	69	3.51	.70	-1.755	130.41	.082
Female	95	3.69	.58			
2. I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom						
Male	69	3.05	.90	-1.952	162	.053
Female	95	3.30	.74			
3. It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student						
Male	69	3.68	.47	-3.227	109.06	.002**
Female	95	3.89	.31			
4. Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher						
Male	69	2.85	.80	-2.639	162	.009**
Female	95	3.18	.80			
5. I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation						
Male	69	2.91	.78	-4.010	162	.000**
Female	95	3.37	.67			
6. I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation						
Male	69	3.59	.52	-1.786	139.52	.076
Female	95	3.74	.48			

(table continues)

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
7. I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student						
Male	69	3.19	.75	-3.041	162	.003**
Female	95	3.52	.63			
8. I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals						
Male	69	3.33	.65	-3.207	162	.002**
Female	95	3.63	.56			
9. I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals						
Male	69	3.25	.55	-2.871	162	.005**
Female	95	3.52	.65			
10. I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher						
Male	69	3.49	.66	-2.487	143.92	.014*
Female	95	3.75	.64			
11. Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools						
Male	69	3.65	.51	-1.504	162	.135
Female	95	3.78	.55			
12. Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual						
Male	69	3.55	.66	-2.351	111.75	.020*
Female	95	3.77	.44			

(table continues)

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
13. A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality						
Male	69	3.05	.79	-2.379	162	.019*
Female	95	3.33	.70			
14. I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women						
Male	69	2.75	.79	-1.979	162	.050*
Female	95	3.00	.78			
Total PAIS Score						
Male	69	45.86	6.15	-4.052	123.97	.000**
Female	95	49.47	4.80			

*p < .05, ** p < .01

$p=.014$ (two-tailed), $d=.10$; Question 12 (“Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual” [reverse scored]) (female $M=3.78$, $SD=.44$; male $M=3.55$, $SD=.66$), $t(111.75)=-2.351$, $p=.020$ (two-tailed), $d=.09$; Question 13 (“A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality”) (female $M=3.33$, $SD=.70$; male $M=3.05$, $SD=.79$), $t(162)=-2.379$, $p=.019$ (two-tailed), $d=.12$; and Question 14 (“I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women”) (female $M=3.00$, $SD=.78$; male $M=2.75$, $SD=.79$), $t(162)=-1.979$, $p=.050$ (two-tailed), $d=.12$; and the total score (female $M=49.47$, $SD=4.80$; male $M=45.87$, $SD=6.15$), $t(123.97)=-4.052$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.89$.

While many of the mean scores for PAIS questions significantly differed from each other, several are practically as well as statistically significant (see Table 3). These practically significant results include the mean to Question 3 (“It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student” [reverse scored]) ($M=3.80$, $SD=.40$) was significantly higher than the mean scores for Question 2 (“I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom”) ($M=3.19$, $SD=.82$), $t(164)=-10.010$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=-.6079$; Question 4 (“Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher”) ($M=3.04$, $SD=.81$), $t(164)=12.971$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.7619$; Question 5 (“I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation”) ($M=3.17$, $SD=.75$), $t(164)=11.342$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.6325$; Question 6 (“I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation”) ($M=3.68$, $SD=.50$), $t(164)=3.094$, $p=.002$ (two-tailed), $d=.1224$; Question 7 (“I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student”) ($M=3.38$, $SD=.40$), $t(164)=8.088$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.4342$; Question 13 (“A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality”) ($M=3.22$, $SD=.75$), $t(164)=10.724$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.5854$; and Question 14 (“I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women”) ($M=2.90$, $SD=.79$), $t(164)=14.482$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.9046$. Therefore, while it is important that teachers feel able to work with their sexual minority students, it appears that they are less

comfortable with other aspects of sexual minority issues in schools that are equally or more important to student feelings of safety, acceptance, and equality.

The mean to Question 6 (“I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation”) ($M=3.68$, $SD=.50$) was significantly higher than the mean scores for Question 8 (“I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals”) ($M=3.50$, $SD=.62$), $t(164)=4.271$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.1794$; and Question 9 (“I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals”) ($M=3.41$, $SD=.62$), $t(164)=5.603$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed), $d=.2690$.

Vignette

In the vignette, teachers were asked to respond to a hypothetical incident of homophobia in their classroom (see Appendix B). Each participant’s response to the vignette was coded by the researcher and placed in fourteen categories (see Table 6). Participants’ responses often covered multiple categories, therefore n exceeds the number of participants. The most common response to the situation described in the vignette was to object to Paul’s derogatory language, with 66.9%. Some example responses included:

- “Calling gay men and gay women dykes and fags and queers is inappropriate and not allowed in my class or anywhere on campus.”
- “First of all, let’s address the derogatory terms you just used, Paul. Those phrases are just as prejudicial and hurtful as racial slang terms. They are totally inappropriate for class discussion.”

Discussing facts, statistics, and theories about AIDS to prove Paul’s comments inaccurate was the second most common response, with 41.0%. For example:

- “I would use the ‘teachable moment’ to educate them on the statistics of who really suffers from AIDS and correct the perception that it is a ‘gay’ disease.”
- “Many people who are not gay also carry the AIDS virus. AIDS is often spread through shared needles, sex between members of the opposite sex, and from mother to child in birth.”

Table 6

Responses to Vignette

Response	% Answering
Object to Paul's use of language and derogatory terminology	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	69.5% (n=89)
School without GSA (n=38)	57.9% (n=22)
Total	66.9% (n=111)
Provide AIDS facts, statistics, theories to prove that Paul's comments were inaccurate	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	39.1% (n=50)
School without GSA (n=38)	47.4% (n=18)
Total	41.0% (n=68)
Explain that everyone is entitled to their opinion	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	24.2% (n=31)
School without GSA (n=38)	26.3% (n=10)
Total	24.7% (n=41)
Lead a discussion about diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, labeling, etc.	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	16.4% (n=21)
School without GSA (n=38)	18.4% (n=7)
Total	16.9% (n=28)
Explain that all individuals deserve respect, regardless of sexual orientation	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	14.8% (n=19)
School without GSA (n=38)	13.2% (n=5)
Total	14.5% (n=24)
Compare Paul's comments about AIDS and homosexuality to other diseases or conditions	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	10.2% (n=13)
School without GSA (n=38)	5.3% (n=2)
Total	9.0% (n=15)
Ask Paul to empathize with AIDS victims and their family members (i.e., how would you feel?)	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	8.6% (n=11)
School without GSA (n=38)	5.3% (n=2)
Total	7.8% (n=13)

(table continues)

Response	% Answering
<hr/>	
This situation would not happen in my class	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	10.2% (n=13)
School without GSA (n=38)	0.0% (n=0)
Total	7.8% (n=13)
Make a religious argument (i.e. God does not work that way)	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	7.8% (n=10)
School without GSA (n=38)	2.6% (n=1)
Total	6.6% (n=11)
Talk to Paul privately after class	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	7.0% (n=9)
School without GSA (n=38)	5.3% (n=2)
Total	6.6% (n=11)
Ask the class what they think about Paul's comments	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	3.9% (n=5)
School without GSA (n=38)	13.2% (n=5)
Total	6.0% (n=10)
Discuss homosexuality (i.e. statistics, that sexual orientation is not a choice, etc.)	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	3.1% (n=4)
School without GSA (n=38)	15.8% (n=6)
Total	6.0% (n=10)
Ask a counselor or GSA member to become involved	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	7.0% (n=9)
School without GSA (n=38)	0.0% (n=0)
Total	5.4% (n=9)
Homosexuality is not a topic for discussion in school	
Schools with GSAs (n=128)	1.6% (n=2)
School without GSA (n=38)	2.6% (n=1)
Total	1.8% (n=3)

Explaining to the class that everyone is entitled to their opinion was the third most common response, with 24.7%.

- “I would point out that ‘Paul’ is entitled to his opinion- however his remarks are offensive and not appropriate.”
- “Paul, I appreciate the fact that you have an opinion that you want to share with the class. You are welcome to share your opinion— without using derogatory terms and loaded words.”

Less common responses to the vignette included “have a discussion about diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, labeling, etc.” (see examples quotes in Table 7), “explain that all individuals deserve respect, regardless of sexual orientation,” “compare Paul’s comments about AIDS and homosexuality to other diseases or conditions,” “ask Paul to empathize,” “this situation would not happen in my class,” “make a religious argument,” “talk to Paul privately after class,” “ask the class for other opinions,” “discuss homosexuality,” “involve the counselor, GSA, or equity counselor,” and “homosexuality is not a topic for school.”

Table 7

Example Quotes from Vignette Themes

Theme	Example Quotes
Object to Paul’s use of language and derogatory terminology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Calling gay men and gay women dykes and fags and queers is inappropriate and not allowed in my class or anywhere on campus.” • “First of all, let’s address the derogatory terms you just used, Paul. Those phrases are just as prejudicial and hurtful as racial slang terms. They are totally inappropriate for class discussion.”
Provide AIDS facts, statistics, theories to prove that Paul’s comments were inaccurate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would use the ‘teachable moment’ to educate them on the statistics of who really suffers from AIDS and correct the perception that it is a ‘gay’ disease.” • “Many people who are not gay also carry the AIDS virus. AIDS is often spread through shared needles, sex between members of the opposite sex, and from mother to child in birth.”

(table continues)

Theme	Example Quotes
Explain that everyone is entitled to their opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would point out that ‘Paul’ is entitled to his opinion—however his remarks are offensive and not appropriate.” • “Paul, I appreciate the fact that you have an opinion that you want to share with the class. You are welcome to share your opinion—without using derogatory terms and loaded words.”
Lead a discussion about diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, labeling, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...I would have allowed the class to discuss homosexuality from an educated opinion pointing out society’s ignorances!!!” • “We would have a discussion with the class about diversity and the human experience (all of us having different genetics, make-up, and experiences which give us our identities) and it is not fair to take away the validity of others.”
Explain that all individuals deserve respect, regardless of sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...I might discuss the issue of everyone being a person with feelings and a right to be free from personal attacks.” • “No one deserves to die from such a horrible illness and there may be people in the class with relatives touched by AIDS.”
Compare Paul’s comments about AIDS and homosexuality to other diseases or conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would ask if everyone who gets sick with, say, cancer deserves it.” • “What about other STDs, like gonorrhea or herpes? What about diseases like hepatitis that can also be sexually transmitted?”
Ask Paul to empathize with AIDS victims and their family members (i.e., how would you feel?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We would talk about how they would feel if someone used a word that makes up their identity in a derogatory way.” • “He should try to put himself in their shoes and show some empathy.”
This situation would not happen in my class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “First of all, I have a great deal of trouble envisioning this scenario in a classroom setting—the hallways, maybe.” • “First, as an experienced teacher, the above hypothetical conversation between Mary and Paul would likely never occur in my class, since <u>before</u> any discussion ever took place, everyone would be informed of the ‘ground rules.’”

(table continues)

Theme	Example Quotes
Make a religious argument (i.e. God does not work that way)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Use the WWJD [what would Jesus do] argument.” • “Let’s talk about a God who punishes people with illness. That’s not the kind of God I choose to believe in. My cousin, a Christian and son to my uncle, Pastor _____, doesn’t believe AIDS is a punishment for him or his partner either.”
Talk to Paul privately after class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would state to Paul: ‘I would like to speak to you after class.’” • “I would follow up with the offending student after class to further clarify expectations.”
Ask the class what they think about Paul’s comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hopefully, I would have the presence of mind to ask the class to dissect the vitriol that had emerged from Paul’s mouth. ...I would rely on students to shut him down—and I am confident they would.” • “I would open the conversation to the entire class. Allowing them to speak/state their opinions.”
Discuss homosexuality (i.e. statistics, that sexual orientation is not a choice, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What is important to remember is that homosexuality is not a <u>choice</u> any more than heterosexuality is a <u>choice</u>. No one wakes up one day and says, ‘Today, I am hereforewith going to be gay.’” • “I would submit evidence/articles which indicate that homosexuality is not a ‘choice.’”
Ask a counselor or GSA member to become involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Seek input for total class discussion from GSA or counselor.” • “I would also make contact with the school counselor to get additional direction and help for dealing with this student/situation.”
Homosexuality is not a topic for discussion in school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “People’s sexual orientation is not public information and shouldn’t be a subject in a public school.” • “You are not to say such things in here and move on.”

T tests were conducted to determine whether teachers in schools with GSAs differed in their responses to the vignette from teachers in schools without GSAs (see Table 9). Teachers in schools with GSAs were significantly more likely to indicate involving the counselor, GSA, or equity counselor ($M=.07$, $SD=.257$) $t(127)=3.099$, $p=.002$ (two-tailed), $d=.07$) and claim that the situation described would not happen in their classroom ($M=.10$, $SD=.303$) $t(127)=3.789$, $p<.001$ (two-tailed), $d=.10$, when compared to teachers in the school without a GSA. Teachers in the school without a GSA were significantly more likely

to indicate discussing homosexuality as a response to the situation described in the vignette ($M=.16$, $SD=.370$) $t(42.018)=-2.046$, $p=.047$ (two-tailed), $d=-.13$. Comparing by gender, female teachers were significantly more likely to object to language use (female $M=.73$, $SD=.45$; male $M=.58$, $SD=.50$), $t(136.83)=-1.986$, $p=.049$ (two-tailed), $d=-.15$ and explain that all individuals deserve respect regardless of sexual orientation (female $M=.20$, $SD=.40$, male $M=.06$, $SD=.24$), $t(157.45)=-2.814$, $p=.006$ (two-tailed), $d=-.14$.

Open-Ended Questions

Teachers were asked to respond to three open-ended questions, which allowed them to more fully explain their responses to questions on the PAIS (see Appendix C). Open-ended question number one ("What topics about homosexuality would you encourage and include in your classroom discussions or curriculum? What topics about homosexuality would you discourage from being discussed in class?") allowed them to more fully explain their response to Question 2 on the PAIS ("I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom"). Open-ended question number two ("How would you respond if a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning student talked with you about their sexual orientation?") allowed a fuller response to Question 5 on the PAIS ("I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about their sexual orientation"). Lastly, open-ended question number three ("If you agree or strongly agree with the statement: 'I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals,' why do you feel students need to be disciplined for these types of remarks? How would you discipline this student? If you disagree or strongly disagree with this statement, why do you feel students do not need to be disciplined for these types of remarks?") allowed a fuller response to Question 8 on the PAIS ("I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals").

Question One. Each participant's response to this question was coded by the researcher and placed in categories (fifteen categories for topics that would be encouraged [see table 10a] and eight categories for topics that would be discouraged [see Table 10b]); participants' responses often covered multiple categories, therefore n exceeds the number of participants. The most frequent response was that topics regarding homosexuality would not be encouraged for two reasons: these topics "do not arise in class or do

Table 8

Correlations between Demographics and Vignette Themes

Vignette Theme	Gender	Years Teaching	Age	School	Perceived GSA	GSA
Object to Paul's use of language and derogatory terminology	.138	-.061	-.016	-.079	-.156*	-.104
Discuss AIDS facts, statistics, theories to prove that Paul's comments were inaccurate	.123	-.149	-.180*	.061	.066	.071
Explain that everyone is entitled to their opinion	.125	-.107	-.106	-.071	.008	.020
Have a discussion about diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, labeling, etc.	-.033	-.058	.024	-.033	.048	.023
Explain that all individuals deserve respect, regardless of sexual orientation	.144	.057	.121	.016	-.044	-.020
Compare Paul's comments about AIDS and homosexuality to other diseases or conditions	-.107	.082	-.009	-.190*	-.068	-.072
Ask Paul to empathize (i.e., how would you feel?)	.113	-.008	-.114	-.108	-.119	-.052
This situation would not happen in my class	-.152	.087	.122	.014	-.119	-.159*

(table continues)

Vignette Theme	Gender	Years Teaching	Age	School	Perceived GSA	GSA
Make a religious argument (i.e. God does not work that way)	-.110	.097	-.015	-.124	-.144	-.088
Talk to Paul privately after class	-.062	-.123	-.186*	-.036	-.004	-.030
Ask the class for other opinions (i.e. what do you think about Paul's comments?)	.064	.003	.044	-.053	.079	.163*
Discuss homosexuality (i.e. statistics, that sexual orientation is not a choice, etc.)	.064	-.096	-.020	.062	.152	.224**
Involve the counselor, GSA, or equity counselor	-.060	.071	-.042	-.072	-.098	-.130
Homosexuality is not a topic for school	-.153*	-.001	.052	-.041	.010	.034

*p < .05 **p < .01

Table 9

Vignette T-Tests

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Object to Paul's use of language and derogatory terminology						
GSA	128	.70	.46	1.281	57.05	.206
No GSA	38	.58	.50			
Male	69	.58	.50	-1.986	136.83	.049*
Female	96	.73	.45			
Provide AIDS facts, statistics, theories to prove that Paul's comments were inaccurate						
GSA	128	.39	.49	-.911	164	.364
No GSA	38	.47	.51			
Male	69	.35	.48	-1.433	150.26	.154
Female	96	.46	.50			
Explain that everyone is entitled to their opinion						
GSA	128	.24	.43	-.262	164	.794
No GSA	38	.26	.45			
Male	69	.19	.39	-1.553	157.61	.123
Female	96	.26	.46			
Lead a discussion about diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, labeling, etc.						
GSA	128	.16	.37	-.290	164	.773
No GSA	38	.18	.39			
Male	69	.19	.39	.540	163	.590
Female	96	.16	.37			

(table continues)

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Explain that all individuals deserve respect, regardless of sexual orientation						
GSA	128	.15	.36	.258	164	.797
No GSA	38	.13	.34			
Male	69	.06	.24	-2.814	157.45	.006**
Female	96	.20	.40			
Compare Paul's comments about AIDS and homosexuality to other diseases or conditions						
GSA	128	.10	.30	.921	164	.359
No GSA	38	.05	.23			
Male	69	.13	.34	1.421	116.21	.158
Female	96	.06	.24			
Ask Paul to empathize with AIDS victims and their family members (i.e., how would you feel?)						
GSA	128	.09	.28	.668	164	.505
No GSA	38	.05	.23			
Male	69	.04	.21	-1.520	162.25	.130
Female	96	.10	.31			
This situation would not happen in my class						
GSA	128	.10	.30	3.789	127	.000**
No GSA	38	.00	.00			
Male	69	.13	.34	1.943	101.96	.055
Female	95	.04	.20			

(table continues)

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Make a religious argument (i.e. God does not work that way)						
GSA	128	.08	.27	1.460	102.40	.147
No GSA	38	.03	.16			
Male	69	.10	.30	1.425	109.61	.157
Female	96	.04	.20			
Talk to Paul privately after class						
GSA	128	.07	.26	.383	164	.703
No GSA	38	.05	.23			
Male	69	.09	.28	.883	163	.379
Female	96	.05	.22			
Ask the class what they think about Paul's comments						
GSA	128	.04	.20	-1.590	44.30	.119
No GSA	38	.13	.34			
Male	69	.04	.21	-.778	163	.437
Female	96	.07	.26			
Discuss homosexuality (i.e. statistics, that sexual orientation is not a choice, etc.)						
GSA	128	.03	.18	-2.046	42.02	.047**
No GSA	38	.16	.37			
Male	69	.04	.21	-.778	163	.437
Female	96	.07	.26			
(table continues)						

Question	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Ask a counselor or GSA member to become involved						
GSA	128	.07	.26	3.099	127	.002**
No GSA	38	.00	.00			
Male	69	.07	.26	.856	163	.393
Female	96	.04	.20			
Homosexuality is not a topic for discussion in school						
GSA	128	.02	.13	-.432	164	.666
No GSA	38	.03	.16			
Male	69	.04	.21	1.758	68.00	.083
Female	96	.00	.00			

*p < .05, ** p < .01

not fit into the curriculum” (19.9%) and “no topics about homosexuality would be encouraged” (12.3%). Furthermore, 7.6% of responses indicated that teachers would only encourage “topics related to the curriculum or class discussion.” On the other hand, 5.1% of responses indicated that “any and all topics” related to homosexuality would be encouraged. Of those responses that indicated specific topics, the greatest percentage would encourage “social acceptance, respect, and tolerance” of sexual minorities, followed by “gay rights and history,” “causes of homosexuality;” “social discrimination, prejudice, homophobia, harassment, or hate crimes” against sexual minorities; “LGBT relationships and families;” “health issues” related to sexual minorities; “current events” of sexual minorities or organizations; “coming out stories and real-life examples” of sexual minorities; “language” when referring to sexual minorities and what constitutes derogatory language; and “common misconceptions and myths” of sexual minorities.

When asked to indicate which topics related to homosexuality would be discouraged from classroom discussions, 14.6% of responses indicated that all topics would be discouraged. On the other hand, 13.5% of responses indicated that no topics would be discouraged. Specific topics that would be discouraged from class include: explicit discussions about sex; discriminatory comments; arguments based on religion; arguments based on whether homosexuality is right or wrong; personal problems with individuals who are sexual minorities; revelations of homosexuality; or relationship issues.

Question Two. Question two asked teachers to identify how they would respond if a sexual minority student wanted to talk with them about their sexual orientation. Each participant’s response was coded by the researcher and placed in eight categories (see Table 11). Participants’ responses often covered multiple categories, therefore n exceeds the number of participants. The most common response was to “let them [sexual minority student] talk and just listen” (28.5%). Some example responses include:

- “If he/she is comfortable enough and trusting enough to seek me out for a discussion, I’m comfortable enough to listen sincerely and respectfully.”
- “I always let them know that I am here to listen if they need to talk.”

Table 10a

Topics Related to Homosexuality Teachers would Encourage in their Classroom

Topic	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
None- these topics do not arise in class or do not fit into the curriculum	17.1%(n=14)	23.8%(n=15)	23.9%(n=11)	15.6%(n=7)	19.9%(n=47)
None- No topics would be encouraged	6.1%(n=5)	9.5%(n=6)	17.4%(n=8)	22.2%(n=10)	12.3%(n=29)
Other topics (i.e., politics, religion, terminology, prevalence, etc.)	9.8%(n=8)	7.9%(n=5)	15.2%(n=7)	6.7%(n=3)	9.7%(n=23)
Social acceptance, respect, tolerance	6.1%(n=5)	9.5%(n=6)	4.3%(n=2)	13.3%(n=6)	8.1%(n=19)
Gay rights and history	9.8%(n=8)	7.9%(n=5)	2.2%(n=1)	8.9%(n=4)	7.6%(n=18)
Only topics related to the curriculum or class discussion	4.9%(n=4)	6.3%(n=4)	8.7%(n=4)	13.3%(n=6)	7.6%(n=18)
Causes of homosexuality	2.4%(n=2)	4.8%(n=3)	8.7%(n=4)	11.1%(n=5)	5.9%(n=14)

(table continues)

Topic	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Social discrimination, prejudice, homophobia, harassment, hate crimes	9.8%(n=8)	6.3%(n=4)	2.2%(n=1)	2.2%(n=1)	5.9%(n=14)
Any and all topics would be encouraged	6.1%(n=5)	7.9%(n=5)	2.2%(n=1)	2.2%(n=1)	5.1%(n=12)
LGBT relationships and families	9.8%(n=8)	1.6%(n=1)	4.3%(n=2)	2.2%(n=1)	5.1%(n=12)
Health issues	4.9%(n=4)	1.6%(n=1)	6.5%(n=3)	0.0%(n=0)	3.3%(n=8)
Current events	4.9%(n=4)	4.8%(n=3)	0.0%(n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	3.0%(n=7)
Coming out stories and real-life examples	3.6%(n=3)	3.2%(n=2)	0.0%(n=0)	2.2%(n=1)	2.5%(n=6)
Language	3.6%(n=3)	1.6%(n=1)	2.2%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)	2.1%(n=5)
Common misconceptions and myths	1.2%(n=1)	3.2%(n=2)	2.2%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)	1.7%(n=4)
Total	100%(n=82)	100%(n=63)	100%(n=46)	100%(n=45)	100%(n=236)

Table 10b

Topics Related to Homosexuality Teachers would Discourage in their Classroom

Topic	1	2	School		4	Total
			3			
Explicit discussions about sex	34.6%(n=9)	45.4%(n=10)	40.0%(n=5)		38.1%(n=8)	36.0%(n=32)
Discriminatory comments	19.2%(n=5)	18.2%(n=4)	10.0%(n=2)		14.3%(n=3)	15.7%(n=14)
Any and all topics would be discouraged	7.7%(n=2)	9.1%(n=2)	30.0%(n=6)		14.3%(n=3)	14.6%(n=13)
No topics would be discouraged	11.5%(n=3)	18.2%(n=4)	5.0%(n=1)		19.0%(n=4)	13.5%(n=12)
Arguments based on religion	3.8%(n=1)	4.5%(n=1)	15.0%(n=3)		9.5%(n=2)	7.9%(n=7)
Discussions about whether homosexuality is right or wrong	7.7%(n=2)	0.0%(n=0)	10.0%(n=2)		4.8%(n=1)	5.6%(n=5)
Personal problems, revelations, or relationship issues	11.5%(n=3)	0.0%(n=0)	5.0%(n=1)		0.0%(n=0)	4.5%(n=4)
Other (i.e., genetics, etc.)	3.8%(n=1)	4.5%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)		0.0%(n=0)	2.2%(n=2)
Total	100%(n=26)	100%(n=22)	100%(n=20)		100%(n=21)	100%(n=89)

Table 11

How Teachers would Respond to LGBTQ Students Wanting to Discuss their Sexual Orientation

Response	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Let them talk and just listen	26.9%(n=21)	23.6%(n=17)	31.5%(n=17)	38.7%(n=12)	28.5%(n=67)
Refer them to someone else (i.e. counselor, GSA, student group)	29.5%(n=23)	33.3%(n=24)	22.2%(n=12)	16.1%(n=5)	27.2%(n=64)
Support the student	21.8%(n=17)	22.2%(n=16)	27.8%(n=15)	25.8%(n=8)	23.8%(n=56)
Provide resources or connect them with resources (i.e. information, groups)	9.0%(n=7)	6.9%(n=5)	9.3%(n=5)	3.2%(n=1)	7.7%(n=18)
Other (i.e., encourage abstinence, offer advice, ask questions, etc.)	6.4%(n=5)	4.2%(n=3)	3.7%(n=2)	3.2%(n=1)	4.7%(n=11)
End the conversation and do not discuss the issue	1.3%(n=1)	5.6%(n=4)	0.0%(n=0)	12.9%(n=4)	3.8%(n=9)
Ask about supports (i.e. parents, friends, groups)	2.6%(n=2)	1.4%(n=1)	5.6%(n=3)	0.0%(n=0)	2.6%(n=6)
Refer the student to their parents	2.6%(n=2)	2.8%(n=2)	0.0% (n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	1.7%(n=4)
Total	100% (n=78)	100% (n=72)	100% (n=54)	100% (n=31)	100% (n=235)

The second most common response was to “refer them to someone else” (27.2%), which could include a guidance counselor, a teacher who is a sexual minority, the school’s GSA or GSA advisor, or another student group in the community. Some responses include:

- “I would then likely direct them to someone more qualified in dealing with such matters (i.e. guidance counselor, GLBT coordinator).”
- “If necessary, I would refer the student to a counselor to facilitate family discussion or further support.”

The third most common response was to “support the student” (23.8%). Some responses include:

- “Try to make them feel comfortable and accepted. Ask how I can be of assistance.”
- “I would let them know I care.”

Sample responses from other categories include:

Provide resources or connect the student to resources (7.7%):

- “I would also encourage them to look at online/offline resources to help make healthy choices and decisions.”
- “If they need info—I would help them find resources.”

Other (4.7%):

- “I would urge abstinence first, then safe sex.”
- “I ask open-ended questions like, ‘So what next?’ ‘So is that working?’”

End the conversation and do not discuss it (3.8%):

- “I would say that I am not comfortable talking with them about their sexual orientation, and therefore choose to not have the discussion.”
- “I would not encourage this kind of discussion, nor do I encourage those of a heterosexual orientation. I consider all of this to be personal in nature and none of my business—or within my professional milieu.”

Ask about supports (2.6%):

- “I would find out what supports they had.”

- “Ask if more support/resources may be needed.”

Refer the student to their parents (1.7%):

- “... encourage communication with parents, but not force it.”
- “I would hope I would encourage students to speak with family.”

Question Three. Each participant’s response to question three was coded by the researcher and placed in three groups: (1) reasons students need to be disciplined for derogatory remarks about sexual minorities (see Table 12a), (2) discipline for students making derogatory comments about individuals who are sexual minorities (see Table 12b), and (3) reasons students do not need to be disciplined for derogatory remarks about sexual minorities (see Table 12c). Participants’ responses often covered multiple categories, therefore *n* exceeds the number of participants.

Reasons students need to be disciplined for derogatory remarks about sexual minorities covered seven categories (see Table 12a). The most common response was “derogatory comments do not belong in the classroom,” followed by “students need to be taught acceptance and respect for all individuals,” and “harassment is wrong.” Other responses included “students need to understand the power of language,” “teachers should respond to any derogatory remarks” including those that are homophobic, racist, and sexist, and the “safety [of sexual minority youth] is important.”

Discipline for students making derogatory comments about individuals who are sexual minorities covered seven categories (see Table 12b). The most common response was “verbally correct student in front of the class,” followed by “refer [the offending student] to the office or administration,” and “talk with the student privately.” Less common responses include “detention or suspension” and “involve the counselor.” Many teachers (18.5%) indicated that their response would “depend on the situation and the frequency and severity” of the remarks.

Reasons students do not need to be disciplined for derogatory remarks about sexual minorities covered four categories (see Table 12c). The most common response was that “it is a student’s right to have an opinion;” followed by “these students should not be disciplined, they should be educated,” “discipline

Table 12a

Why Teachers Feel Students Need to be Disciplined for Derogatory Remarks about LGBTQ Students

Reason	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Derogatory comments do not belong in the classroom	18.4%(n=9)	30.2%(n=13)	33.3%(n=11)	25.0%(n=8)	26.1%(n=41)
Students need to be taught acceptance and respect for all	8.2%(n=4)	20.9%(n=9)	15.25%(n=5)	28.1%(n=9)	17.2%(n=27)
Harassment is wrong	14.3%(n=7)	7.0%(n=3)	18.2%(n=6)	21.9%(n=7)	14.6%(n=23)
Students need to understand the power of language	8.2%(n=4)	16.3%(n=7)	18.2%(n=6)	6.3%(n=2)	12.1%(n=19)
Teachers should respond to any derogatory remarks (e.g. racist, sexist)	14.3%(n=7)	9.3%(n=4)	9.1%(n=3)	9.4%(n=3)	10.8%(n=17)
Safety is important	18.4%(n=9)	7.0%(n=3)	3.0%(n=1)	9.4%(n=3)	10.2%(n=16)
Other (i.e., it is against school policy, students need to know how to be good community members, etc.)	18.4%(n=9)	9.3%(n=4)	3.0%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)	8.9%(n=14)
Total	100%(n=49)	100%(n=43)	100%(n=33)	100%(n=32)	100%(n=157)

Table 12b

Discipline for Students Making Derogatory Comments about Individuals who are LGBTQ

Discipline	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Verbally correct student in front of the class	17.1% (n=14)	19.6%(n=10)	27.3%(n=12)	25.0%(n=7)	21.0%(n=43)
Refer to office or administration	24.4%(n=20)	13.7%(n=7)	18.2%(n=8)	17.9%(n=5)	19.5%(n=40)
Talk with the student privately	12.2%(n=10)	29.4%(n=15)	22.7%(n=10)	14.3%(n=4)	19.0%(n=39)
It would depend on the situation, severity, and frequency	22.0%(n=18)	13.7%(n=7)	18.2%(n=8)	17.9%(n=5)	18.5%(n=38)
Other (i.e., ask the student to apologize, take away free time or points, etc.)	14.6%(n=12)	13.7%(n=7)	11.4%(n=5)	14.3%(n=4)	14.1%(n=29)
Detention or suspension	4.9%(n=4)	9.9%(n=5)	2.3%(n=1)	3.6%(n=1)	5.4%(n=11)
Involve the counselor	4.9%(n=4)	0.0%(n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	7.1%(n=2)	2.9%(n=6)
Total	100%(n=82)	100%(n=51)	100%(n=44)	100%(n=28)	100%(n=205)

Table 12c

Reasons Students Should not be Disciplined for Derogatory Remarks about Individuals who are LGBTQ

Reason	School				Total
	1	2	3	4	
It is a student's right to have an opinion	25.0%(n=1)	50.0%(n=2)	100.0% (n=3)	66.7%(n=2)	57.1%(n=8)
These students should not be disciplined, they should be educated	50.0%(n=2)	0.0%(n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	33.3%(n=1)	21.4%(n=3)
Discipline will not make these students more accepting of others	25.0%(n=1)	25.0%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	14.3%(n=2)
The student likely did not mean to be disrespectful	0.0%(n=0)	25.0%(n=1)	0.0%(n=0)	0.0%(n=0)	7.1%(n=1)
Total	100%(n=4)	100%(n=4)	100%(n=3)	100%(n=3)	100%(n=14)

will not make these students more accepting of others,” and “the student likely did not mean to be disrespectful.”

Discussion

The original aim of this research study was to have at least six schools participate, three with GSAs and three without GSAs. After contacting seven school districts, each with multiple high schools, only three districts granted approval, resulting in four participating schools: three with GSAs and one without a GSA. Those that declined participation offered explanations including (1) [we are] “reanalyzing district policy regarding the inclusion of sexual orientation,” (2) the proposal does not meet “the District’s mission and strategic goals,” (3) [we would prefer to have] “as much time as possible be allocated toward direct instruction of our students,” and (4) “the time for the project and the fact that many of the services that your research suggests we should explore already exist in our district and community.” After originally approving the study, two principals changed their minds stating “I double checked the type and scope of the questions on the research survey and do not feel comfortable asking the teachers to participate in this” and “I am sorry I did not understand your research project. X High School will not be participating in the surveys and I am surprised your IRB approved it.” Due to the great deal of power and control administrators have over curricular decisions, the formation of student organizations, and the climate in schools, their attitudes and actions should be considered as well.

Professional Attitude Index Scale

Based on the results on the Professional Attitude Index Scale (PAIS), teachers from all four schools held largely positive attitudes toward sexual minority students and issues. Scores on the attitude scale for items related to teacher’s professional duties were generally very high and supportive, including working one-on-one with students, maintaining order and discipline, and working with diverse co-workers. For example, less than one percent of the entire sample indicated that it would be difficult for them to deal with an avowed homosexual student, ninety-eight percent would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation, and only five percent would feel uncomfortable if their school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher. Activities that possibly exceeded the professional duties

of teachers received less supportive scores, including proactive counseling roles, discussing homosexuality in class, and working to end discrimination against sexual minorities in the community. For example, 16% of teachers disagreed that they would feel comfortable if a student talked with them about their sexual orientation, 25% disagreed that providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher, nearly 20% of teachers disagreed that they would discuss homosexuality in the classroom, and nearly 30% disagreed that they would work in the community to bar discrimination against sexual minorities.

Sears (1992) found similar results: teachers were more willing to treat sexual minority students fairly and intervene in incidents of harassment than actively counsel students or become involved in community activism. Similar themes were found when compared to Sears (1992), yet the PAIS scores are much more supportive than his original study 15 years ago with prospective teachers (see Table 13). Results from this study were considerably more positive, especially in crucial areas such as discussing homosexuality in the classroom, feeling comfortable if a sexual minority student wished to discuss their sexual orientation, and providing sexual minority students with supportive materials. Getting involved in community support and activism were the only areas that teachers still indicated relatively low levels of support. In general, there seems to be a discrepancy between reported teacher attitudes, which in this case were highly positive toward sexual minority students and issues, and students' reports of how teachers respond, as described by the National School Climate Survey, for example. This issue will be discussed briefly below.

Unfortunately, the research question of whether teachers in schools with GSAs are more supportive towards sexual minority students and issues than teachers in schools without GSAs was unfounded. T test results indicated that the three schools with GSAs did not differ significantly from the school without the GSA on any of the individual PAIS questions, nor total scores. There are several possible explanations for this: (1) teachers in schools with GSAs are no more or less supportive than teachers in schools without GSAs, (2) supportiveness towards sexual minority students is more a function

Table 13

Comparison of Sears (1992) and Current Study Results of PAIS

Statement	Percent Agree	
	Sears (1992)	Current Study
1. Teachers who regard homosexuality in a negative way should be able to request a homosexual student to enroll in another class	37 % (n=93)	5.5% (n=9)
2. I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom	29% (n=70)	81.8% (n=135)
3. It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student	24% (n=62)	0.6% (n=1)
4. Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher	49% (n=121)	74.5% (n=123)
5. I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation	36% (n=93)	83.6% (n=138)
6. I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation	86% (n=219)	98.2% (n=162)
7. I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student	64% (n=162)	89.1%(n=147)
8. I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals	64% (n=159)	93.3% (n=154)
9. I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals	42% (n=107)	5.5% (n=9)

(table continues)

Statement	Percent Agree	
	Sears (1992)	Current Study
10. I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher	52% (n=132)	4.8% (n=8)
11. Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools	26% (n=63)	1.8% (n=3)
12. Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual	22% (n=36)	3.6% (n=6)
13. A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality	62% (n=157)	84.8% (n=140)
14. I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women	32% (n=80)	70.9% (n=117)

of demographic or personal factors than the presence of a GSA, (3) not enough schools were examined in this study, especially those without GSAs, 4) GSAs have little to no effect on teacher attitudes, or 5) GSAs are unique to each school, making it hard to generalize or compare across GSAs.

Significant results were found when comparing and correlating results from the PAIS to demographic information. Women indicated significantly more supportive scores than men on ten of the fourteen PAIS questions, as well as the total score. A recent survey found that 56% of men believe that homosexual behavior is morally wrong, compared to 48% of women (Kaiser, 2001). Furthermore, a variety of empirical studies have shown that women tend to be more empathetic than men (Batson et al., 1996; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002; Schieman & Van Gundy, 2000), other possible reasons women showed more supportive scores include: (1) women are inherently more supportive to the needs of all students, (2) women feel more comfortable working with individuals of a sexual minority, or (3) women are more responsive to efforts of the GSA. Discussing homosexuality in the classroom was related to both years teaching and age; therefore, older teachers and those with more

teaching experience were more likely to indicate that they did not plan to discuss the topic, and younger teachers and those with less teaching experience were more likely to discuss it. Possibly, as our society has become more accepting of sexual minorities, this topic has become more socially acceptable. Older teachers with more teaching experience may not hold these beliefs. In the survey mentioned above, age was investigated in addition to gender; it was found that older individuals are more likely to believe that homosexual behavior is morally wrong when compared to those under 30 (Kaiser, 2001). In this study, age was also correlated with the belief that students who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual themselves, with older teachers more likely to indicate this belief than younger teachers. As our society has become more accepting of sexual minorities, many “myths” have been discredited, however, older individuals may still hold these beliefs.

Vignette

When teachers were asked how they would respond to the hypothetical incident (see Appendix B), responses were quite varied and often included multiple elements. Fourteen categories resulted, with some individual participant’s responses falling into five or more categories. The top three categories are not surprising: (1) derogatory language is not tolerated in school; (2) more information on the topic of AIDS would be provided to illustrate that the percentage of individuals with AIDS is spread across a variety of demographic groups; and (3) teachers would indicate that students are entitled to their opinion on such controversial matters as homosexuality. Several responses that were not as common, but may help contribute to a greater understanding of sexual minorities and allow students to consider their own opinion on such matters include: (1) leading a discussion on diversity, discrimination, acceptance, tolerance, respect, and/or labeling; (2) asking the class how they feel about Paul’s comments; (3) discussing homosexuality in an informative and positive manner; or (4) asking the school’s GSA (or community group) to become involved. Religious arguments and an open expression of the belief that homosexuality should not be discussed in school made up a very small percentage of responses, but may have the most detrimental affect on sexual minority students. Many teachers responded that the situation described would not happen in their class due to their students high level of respect and sensitivity; while this is an

encouraging sign, it is also likely that those situations could be occurring in the hallways, lunchrooms, bathrooms, at home, or elsewhere. Furthermore, although the discrimination and misinformation may not be as blatant as that described in the vignette, it may be more subtle or understated, but still deserving of a teacher response. Overall, the wide variety and scope of potential responses was encouraging, and many teachers were quite creative and innovative. Many responses indicated multiple avenues for dealing with the situation, meaning that many teachers would approach the situation through a variety of angles and base their response on multiple factors. It is wondered how often teachers in schools with and without GSAs attend professional development training on working with sexual minority students, addressing common issues, and incorporating this group into classrooms and curricula.

The statistically significant t-test results conducted on the vignette responses indicate that GSAs may have an impact on classroom dialogue, as being a teacher from a school with a GSA was correlated with the belief that a situation like the one presented in the vignette would not happen in their class. Teachers in schools with GSAs were also more likely to involve the school guidance counselor, GSA, or equity counselor. This finding could be considered three ways: (1) teachers in schools with GSAs are more aware of resources available to them and more likely to utilize them, (2) teachers in schools with GSAs may feel that others in the building are better able to deal with the situation described, and/or (3) teachers in schools with GSAs may feel unqualified or uncomfortable dealing with such matters. Surprisingly, teachers in the school without a GSA were more likely to discuss homosexuality in response to Paul's comments. This indicates that teaching practices may be less influenced by GSAs than teacher's own personal beliefs, at least in this sample.

Open-Ended Questions

When asked which topics regarding homosexuality would be encouraged or discouraged, teachers provided a variety of responses. In terms of encouragement, unfortunately, the most common response was that no topics would be encouraged for one of three reasons: (1) the topic does not lend itself to the subject area (for example, mathematics, physics, chemistry, foreign language, physical education, band, special education, etc.) and it does not "come up" in class, (2) it does not "fit" into their curriculum, or (3) it is "not

appropriate” for school or class discussion. While it is true that many subject areas do not easily lend themselves to certain societal issues, it is hoped that respect for all human differences is expressed as a ground rule for student interaction. Furthermore, students should not necessarily be expected to bring up topics of homosexuality for discussion themselves, especially if they are a sexual minority or are questioning their sexuality. Rather, teachers should assume that they are working with students of a variety of sexual orientations and make an effort to include references or units that include diverse individuals in a positive manner. Perhaps most importantly, however, was that the majority of teachers who indicated that if the topic of homosexuality was brought up in class by students, it would be discussed.

Of the specific topics teachers indicated, “common misconceptions and myths” was one of the least common, yet perhaps one of the most important, as well as “real-life” histories and narratives of sexual minorities. These topics would clear up misunderstandings and stereotypes, as well as provide students with biographical information. Another topic that is also greatly important is discussing “social discrimination, prejudice, homophobia, harassment, and hate crimes” because of the high percentage of sexual minority students who report harassment while in school. Students should know what is considered to be offensive, what constitutes discrimination and harassment, common reasons for homophobia, as well as the consequences for students who conduct in harassment and the psychological damage for individuals who are harassed. It would be interesting to see the discrepancy between topics teachers theoretically would allow for discussion and those teachers actually discuss.

Of the topics that were discouraged, many educators would likely be in agreement with them. For example, teachers indicated that they would not allow explicit discussions about sex (neither homosexual nor heterosexual). Furthermore, teachers indicated they would not allow discriminatory comments, religious arguments, morality discussions, or personal revelations (mainly for reasons of safety). A substantial proportion of teachers indicated that all topics would be discouraged, likely for the same reasons mentioned above (i.e., topic does not lend itself to the subject area, the topic does not “come up” in class, the topic does not “fit” into their curriculum, or the teacher feels the topic is “not appropriate” for school or class discussion).

When asked how teachers would respond if a sexual minority student wished to discuss their sexual orientation, a majority of the responses were very positive. A majority of teachers indicated they would let the student talk and provide a listening ear, while many indicated they would “support” the student. Many did not define the type of support they would provide, but others were more specific and indicated that they would show support by letting the student know that (1) they were “there for them” if they ever needed to talk or discuss matters with them in confidence, (2) they were not alone and that many individuals feel similarly, and (3) any type of derogatory comments in their classrooms or hallways will not be allowed. It is encouraging that some teachers were willing to provide students with resources that may help them feel more connected with other sexual minorities or students who are questioning their sexuality (i.e. support groups on/off campus, websites [GLSEN, Iowa Pride Net, etc.], or teachers who are sexual minorities). Unfortunately, very few teachers indicated that they would ask the student about their supports, including parents, friends, or groups that they feel comfortable discussing issues related to their sexual orientation. This is very important as many sexual minority students feel very isolated and disconnected (Anhalt & Morris, 1998; Munoz-Plaza, 2002) and may have a negative relationship with their parents or family members (Remafedi, 1987; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002). In this case, it would be important to help provide the student with support from other individuals or groups and monitor the student for depression, anxiety, or signs of suicide. A great majority of teachers indicated that if a student came to them with issues related to their sexual orientation, they would refer the student to someone else. Many teachers indicated that they have little to no expertise in working with sexual minority students and would be unsure as to how to respond. If done in a supportive, non-dismissive way, this would be an appropriate response. However, if teachers respond by just giving them the name of the guidance counselor or GSA, students may not feel supported and may not reach out in this manner again. With over one-fourth of responses indicating referral to another individual, it is wondered how often and to what degree teachers are provided with professional development regarding working with this student population and ways to support them.

The only areas of concern in response to the question of how teachers would respond to a sexual minority student were “ending the conversation and not discussing the issue” and “referring the student to their parents.” By ending the conversation, students are given the message that they will not be supported in their school, that there is something wrong with them, and that they should not feel this way. This could further contribute to depression, anxiety, and isolation, which affects many sexual minority students. Furthermore, the student does not get any of the support or information they were originally seeking. Referring students to their parents is another complicated issue as parents respond in a variety of ways. For example, at one end of the spectrum the parent(s) may be very supportive and understanding, while at the other end, they may ask their child to leave the home and cut all ties with them. Furthermore, sexual minority students may feel the need to get support from members in the school (friends, teachers, GSA or support group) before they feel comfortable talking with their parents. Therefore, it is a matter in which students should not be rushed.

On the last open-ended question, teachers were asked to indicate whether they feel students who make derogatory remarks about sexual minority students should be disciplined for these comments and if so, why and how should they be disciplined. Most teachers responded with important reasons when asked why students need to be disciplined for making derogatory remarks about sexual minorities, including that: (1) derogatory remarks do not belong in the classroom, (2) students need to be accepting and respectful, (3) harassment is wrong, (4) students need to understand the power of their language, and (5) safety is important. Furthermore, some teachers indicated that they would respond to a derogatory remark about sexual minorities the same way they would if a racist, sexist, or ableist remark was made. Unfortunately, no responses were targeted at protecting the emotional welfare of sexual minority students. For example, while the belief that “safety is important” addresses physical welfare, no teachers indicated that they would be concerned for sexual minority student’s sense of isolation, unworthiness, anxiety, and depression if derogatory remarks were made.

When asked how students should be disciplined for derogatory remarks, the majority of teachers indicated they would verbally correct the student in front of the class, refer the student to the office, or talk

with the student privately. Correcting the student in front of the class versus talking with the student privately allows the other students to know that the comment was derogatory and inappropriate, yet speaking privately with the offending student may make it more likely that he/she absorbs the reason why it was offensive without being shamed in front of his/her peers. Referring the student to the office could mean many different consequences based on the school and administration; for example, students may receive a blanket consequence (detention, Saturday School, etc.), the trip to the office may be the only form of discipline, or the principal and teacher may collaborate together on what would be appropriate for the student. It is wondered how equipped principals are in dealing with this type of situation and if teachers send students to the office mainly to avoid dealing with the situation. Many teachers indicated that their response to the offense would depend on the situation, severity, and frequency of derogatory comments. The positive aspect of this type of response is that teachers should be flexible and respond to matters based on many factors, yet the negative aspect is that remarks may have to be very severe or frequent to warrant a response. Fewer teachers would assign detention or suspension for derogatory comments and fewer still would involve the school's guidance counselor. Guidance counselors should be considered an appropriate resource in matters such as this, as they often have training or expertise in working with individuals experiencing distress.

Very few teachers indicated that they do not feel students should be disciplined for making derogatory remarks about sexual minorities. Of those who did, the most common response was that it is a student's right to have an opinion. All students have a right to their opinion, however, if they use their opinion to degrade a population of students in a public school, it has become the school's responsibility to protect that population. The next most common response was that students should not be disciplined, they should be educated. As the word "discipline" has many meanings ranging from punishment to education, it is hoped that discipline in schools does include an educational aspect. Only a handful of teachers indicated that discipline will not make students more accepting or that the student did not likely mean to be disrespectful; these opinions make it difficult to support sexual minority students.

Limitations

This study is subject to a variety of limitations. First, the response rate was fairly low (43.2%) and the sample size was small (N=166) (see Table 1). Therefore, teachers with specific characteristics may have been more likely to return the survey, which could have skewed results. In addition, the schools that granted research approval may have been characteristically different than the schools that denied approval. Secondly, people generally want to be considered socially desirable, therefore, participants may have completed the survey materials more positively than what is representative of their actual behavior. Third, there were not as many schools participating in this study as initially desired; furthermore, there was an unequal proportion of schools with and without GSAs (3:1). These two factors lessen the likelihood that the sample was representative of the Midwestern population and makes comparisons between schools with and without GSAs difficult. Fourth, the characteristics and history of the GSAs was greatly varied: one GSA had recently been formed within the last school year; one school had had a GSA previously that had disbanded, but then a new GSA had been formed two years previously; and the one school that did not have a GSA currently had a GSA several years previously. Lastly, while many researchers believe that attitudes are indicative of actual behavior, many disagree and have found that the attitude-behavior link is variable and unreliable (Ajzen, 2000; Leippe & Elkin, 1987).

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research should continue to be conducted on the topic of sexual orientation and schools. More specifically, common types and functions of GSAs should be examined nationwide (including quality, visibility, factors that led to the creation, and school and community reception to the formation of GSAs), the systematic effects of GSAs (for GSA members, nonparticipating students, school climate, teachers, administrators, and the curriculum), administrator and teacher actions and behaviors toward sexual minority students and issues, other school initiatives that support sexual minority students, and the frequency, quality, and effectiveness of professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators on the topic of sexual minority students and issues and the inclusion and support that should be provided to these students in schools. As mentioned above, self-report methods have their drawbacks

(mainly that one wants to appear favorable; therefore, their reported behaviors do not match their actual behavior), therefore, future research should also include a component of classroom and school observations. As there appears to be a difference in how teachers and students report teacher attitudes and responses, this discrepancy should also be studied.

Implications for School Psychologists

The results of this and similar studies have a number of implications for school psychologists on individual and system-wide levels. First, some school psychologists work with students individually, therefore, they should be aware of the ways to respond and work with students of all sexual orientations, be able to provide resources and contact information, refer students to groups within or outside of the school that may provide support, or provide short or long term counseling. Secondly, individual teachers may consult with the school psychologist on working with and supporting sexual minority students or about how to deal with incidents of bullying, harassment, or homophobia in their classroom. Third, student(s) may contact the school psychologist looking for support or information on how to start a GSA. Fourth, on a systems-wide level, administrators may ask the school psychologist to conduct teacher in-services or trainings on sexual minority students and issues that may be relevant in the school setting. Fifth, the school or district may wish to examine their school climate and thus consult the school psychologist in developing or choosing an assessment tool to be administered to students, staff, teachers, and/or the community, as well as the subsequent analysis of the assessment results. Based on the results of a systematic assessment, the school may consider a school or district-wide intervention to address school climate, bullying, discrimination, or harassment; the school psychologist could develop an intervention to address these problems or research published programs, then work to implement and evaluate the program. Given the variety of opportunities school psychologists have to be involved in the educational experience of sexual minority students and issues in schools, it is crucial that they are aware of the difficulties this population faces, ways to consult with teachers and administrators on these issues, and intervention possibilities that would increase the likelihood that all students receive the education they deserve in a safe and accepting environment.

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APPENDIX A

PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE INDEX SCALE (PAIS)

Please read each statement carefully and circle the response that applies to you using the following format:

	SA Strongly Agree	A Agree	D Disagree	SD Strongly Disagree
1. Teachers who regard homosexuality in a negative way should be able to request a homosexual student to enroll in another class	SA	A	D	SD
2. I would discuss homosexuality in the classroom	SA	A	D	SD
3. It would be difficult for me to deal fairly with an avowed homosexual student	SA	A	D	SD
4. Providing a homosexual high school student with supportive materials is appropriate for a teacher	SA	A	D	SD
5. I would feel comfortable if a student talked with me about his or her sexual orientation	SA	A	D	SD
6. I would discipline a student for harassing another student suspected of having a homosexual orientation	SA	A	D	SD
7. I would openly disagree with a faculty member who made a disparaging comment about a suspected homosexual student	SA	A	D	SD
8. I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals	SA	A	D	SD
9. I would ignore student jokes about homosexuals	SA	A	D	SD
10. I would feel uncomfortable if my school hired an openly gay or lesbian teacher	SA	A	D	SD
11. Homosexual persons should not allowed to teach in the public schools	SA	A	D	SD
12. Adolescents who know several homosexual teachers will be strongly influenced to be homosexual	SA	A	D	SD
13. A teacher must work in school to lessen prejudicial attitudes about homosexuality	SA	A	D	SD
14. I would work in my community to bar discrimination against homosexual men and women	SA	A	D	S

Adapted from Sears (1992) and used with permission.

APPENDIX B

VIGNETTE

Assume that you are teaching at your grade level within a public school in this state. You are leading a discussion about current events. Today's topic is AIDS. After several minutes of give-and-take discussion among students in the class, the following dialogue occurs:

Mary: *I think it's too bad that all these people are so sick and are going to die. I just think...*

Paul (interrupting): *Those fags and dykes get what they deserve. What makes me mad is that we're spending money trying to find a cure. If we just let God and Nature take its course, I won't have to worry about any queer bothering me.*

Mary: *I never thought of it that way before.*

All the students turn and look at you. Briefly state how you would most likely respond in the space provided below. Please write legibly.

APPENDIX C

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Question #1:

- a) What topics about homosexuality would you encourage and include in your classroom discussions or curriculum?
- b) What topics about homosexuality would you discourage from being discussed in class?

Question #2:

How would you respond if a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning student talked with you about their sexual orientation?

Question #3:

- a) If you agree or strongly agree with the statement: "I would discipline a student for making a derogatory remark about homosexuals," why do you feel students need to be disciplined for these types of remarks?
- b) How would you discipline this student?
- c) If you disagree or strongly disagree with this statement, why do you feel students should not need to be disciplined for these types of remarks?