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Understanding teachers' responses to enactments of sexual and gender stigma at school

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Dutch teachers were surveyed about intervening in incidents of student bullying.
- The focus was on bullying related to sexual orientation or gender expression.
- Beliefs, norms, self-efficacy, and intentions to intervene were assessed.
- Greater self-efficacy was associated with stronger intentions to intervene.
- Positive behavioral beliefs were also associated with intentions to intervene.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Although teachers may be in a position to address enactments of sexual and gender stigma among their students, little is known about their motivations to intervene in such situations. We surveyed secondary school teachers in the Netherlands, assessing how beliefs, norms, and self-efficacy were related to their intentions to intervene in two hypothetical situations that involved bullying of lesbian/gay or gender non-conforming students. We found significantly stronger intentions to intervene among teachers who were more confident in their abilities to intervene successfully and who had stronger beliefs that intervening in the situation would produce a positive outcome.

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1. Introduction

Lesbian and gay youth, or those who are gender non-conforming (i.e., whose gender expression does not conform to the social and cultural norms associated with their sex),[1] face specific challenges in the school context. One such challenge is that they are commonly and disproportionately victimized by peers (Friedman et al., 2011; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Robinson & Espelage, 2013). As has been shown by studies from many countries, these exposures to enacted sexual or gender stigma (i.e., expressions of prejudice on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression, respectively; Herek, 2009; Savin-Williams, Pardo, Vrangalova, Mitchell, & Cohen, 2010) are associated with disrupted educational trajectories as well as other serious, negative psychosocial and health outcomes (Collier, van Beusekom, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013). Compounding this

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[1] The focus of this study is on teachers' responses to bullying directed toward students who are either openly lesbian- or gay-identified, or who are gender non-conforming. In developing the study, we drew on a broad range of published literature about the school experiences of sexual and gender minority youth that could inform our own research. When referring to the findings of specific cited studies, we use terminology that most accurately reflects the composition of those studies' samples and those studies' operational definitions of peer victimization (including bullying, verbal and physical harassment, and sometimes with a specifier of bias-related content). We acknowledge that our own research is focused on teachers' responses to a specific form of peer victimization – bullying – directed toward subsets of sexual and gender minority youth, i.e., those who are openly lesbian or gay or who are gender non-conforming.

problem, accounts from adolescents suggest that they do not always receive support from teachers in relation to enacted sexual or gender stigma. Teachers are sometimes personally involved in their own students' victimization; this has been found in settings which are diverse with regard to social attitudes toward homosexuality and gender non-conformity, including Canada (Taylor et al., 2008), the U.S. (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010), Israel (Pizmony-Levy, Kama, Shilo, & Lavee, 2008), and South Africa (Msibi, 2012). At other times, they may fail to intervene when they observe enactments of sexual and gender stigma occurring among their students. For example, in a Canadian national survey, 34.1% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) and 47.4% of transgender students reported that their teachers never intervened when homophobic comments were made (Taylor et al., 2008). In a national survey of U.S. LGBT students, 61.6% said that school personnel did nothing in response to their most recent report of harassment or assault at school (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Despite these findings, previous research also suggests that teachers are potentially important support persons for lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming adolescents (Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; McGuire et al., 2010; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Young, 2011). Teachers play an important role in shaping developmental contexts for adolescents (Eccles & Roeser, 2011) and may be influential in terms of creating and maintaining supportive school climates (Bochenek, Brown, & Human Rights Watch, 2001; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Among U.S. LGBT youth in one national survey, identifying a greater number of supportive school staff members was associated with greater feelings of safety at school (Kosciw et al., 2014). Findings from other cross-sectional studies also suggest teachers' interventions to address enactments of sexual and gender stigma may have an impact beyond individual incidents or students. For example, in a sample of Austrian gay and bisexual men, those who reported that their teachers were more likely to intervene in cases of homophobic harassment also reported feeling more accepted at school (Ploderl, Faistauer, & Fartacek, 2010). Interventions by teachers upon hearing negative comments about sexual orientation or gender identity/expression have likewise been associated with greater perceived safety for gender non-conforming male peers among LGBT and heterosexual U.S. youth (Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012) and greater feelings of safety among U.S. transgender youth at school (McGuire et al., 2010).

While teachers are sometimes in a position to directly observe and intervene when enactments of sexual or gender stigma occur among their students, and their interventions may have a positive impact (Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan, Pereira, & Lichty, 2009; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013), other evidence from research with U.S. LGBT students indicates that the expectation of an ineffective response by teachers leads to students' hesitancy to report incidents of bias-based harassment and assault (Kosciw et al., 2014). The types of teacher responses that LGBT students consider most effective include, in descending order of effectiveness, taking disciplinary action against the perpetrator, contacting the perpetrator's parents, and using the incident as an opportunity to educate the perpetrator or the whole class about bullying; responses such as contacting the victim's parents or attempting peer mediation/conflict resolution are perceived as much less effective (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Taken together, these research findings indicate that teachers may not be consistently supportive of lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming students who are victimized by peers, but also that building teachers' capacities in this area may be of great benefit to students. As others have commented (McGuire et al., 2010), however, to be able to fully support teachers to intervene when they observe enactments of sexual and gender stigma at school, we need a better understanding of their motivations to intervene or the

reasons why they might not intervene. In the present study, we explored teachers' motivations to respond to particular forms of enacted sexual and gender stigma: incidents of bullying on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression occurring among students. This study was conducted among secondary school teachers in the Netherlands, where this specific issue has yet to be explored.

As in other countries, the concerns of LGBT students are a subject of increasing attention in the Netherlands. Research findings indicate that enactments of sexual and gender stigma are common in Dutch secondary school settings (Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013). One strategy being used in the Netherlands to address anti-LGBT discrimination is education about sexuality and sexual diversity, including LGBT identities, within primary and secondary education, which became compulsory for Dutch schools in December 2012 ("Combating Anti-LGBT Discrimination and Violence," n.d.). The Netherlands Institute for Social Research conducted a pilot evaluation study as an initial assessment of the actual implementation and effectiveness of this policy in improving school climate for LGBT youth in the 2012—2013 school year (Bucx, van der Sman, & Jalvingh, 2014). Schools participating in the pilot were funded to implement six program activities, with training and guidance for teachers related to sexual and gender diversity being one of the required elements in addition to others such as giving attention to sexual and gender diversity in regular lessons, providing students with lessons in social interaction, and engaging parents in the program (Bucx et al., 2014). The evaluation study found that in secondary schools, trainings for teachers were often not implemented and, when they were, teachers rated them less positively than the other program activities. Teachers expressed doubts about their abilities to address sexual and gender diversity issues and few felt that the trainings they received were helpful in this regard (Bucx et al., 2014).

In developing this study, we reviewed research from various country settings that addressed potential determinants of teachers' interventions in instances of enacted sexual and gender stigma. We identified several small qualitative studies on this topic. For example, Sykes (2004) addressed teachers' motivations to respond to enacted sexual and gender stigma in interviews with seven American and Canadian physical education teachers, most of whom were themselves lesbian or gay identified. While some of the sexual minority teachers felt too vulnerable to intervene in instances of homophobic victimization among students, others, motivated in part by their personal identification with the victims, shared their own experiences with homophobic discrimination as part of their response to such incidents (Sykes, 2004). McIntyre (2009), who conducted surveys and interviews with 20 teachers in Scottish schools, reported that some teachers were hesitant to discuss LGB issues out of concern that doing so would either further stigmatize LGB students by emphasizing their difference, or alienate and upset their students' parents.

This latter issue — teachers' perceptions of negative reactions from individuals such as parents, colleagues, or supervisors were they to address enactments of sexual and gender stigma — was also identified by O'Higgins-Norman (2009) in a study conducted among Irish secondary school teachers, school administrators, students, and parents. The author suggested that "it was almost as if [teachers] were afraid of what such action [i.e., addressing homophobic bullying] might say about their own sexuality" (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009, p. 390). Teachers, students, and parents in the study concurred that homophobic name-calling was a common occurrence at school, with some teachers saying it occurred with such frequency that they could not address it all the time (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009). Some teachers also reported that bullying on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression was

more difficult to address than other forms of bullying (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009). In another qualitative study, conducted with 15 teachers from one U.S. high school, Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009) reported that, although the teachers expressed concern about the prevalence of homophobic bullying in their school and there had been school-wide efforts to address such bullying, they also tended to "double cast" lesbian and gay students as both victims and aggressors who provoked their own victimization (p. 538). In their responses to the bullying of lesbian and gay students, the teachers emphasized the need to address the perpetrators' behavior, and less frequently discussed providing support to victimized students (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009).

In her qualitative study with a sample of Canadian secondary school teachers, Meyer (2008) identified several factors related to teachers' intervention in cases of gendered harassment (defined as sexual harassment or harassment related to sexual orientation or gender non-conformity). These factors included social (e.g., relationships with colleagues, community values) and institutional (e.g., workloads, school policies, administrative support) influences, as well as internal influences (e.g., personal experiences with discrimination; Meyer, 2008). Likewise, in a review of studies about how teachers perpetuate or counter heteronormativity in schools, Vega, Crawford, and Van Pelt (2012) concluded that teachers are hesitant to challenge heteronormativity due to their personal beliefs or their perceptions of others' beliefs; their fears of disapproval from students, colleagues, and parents; and their lack of professional development on gender and sexuality related topics. Research into teachers' responses to non-bias related peer victimization has also found that teachers' personal beliefs and attitudes (about bullying and aggression generally, or in regard to specific situations), as well as institutional-level factors such as anti-bullying policies and training, all play a role in how they respond (see for example Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008; Grumm & Hein, 2013; Hektner & Swenson, 2012; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Sairanen & Pfeffer, 2011).

Quantitative studies about teachers' interventions in enacted sexual and gender stigma have also been published; we identified two such studies, both of which draw on data collected in online surveys of teachers practicing throughout the U.S. In one of these studies, Perez, Schanding, and Dao (2013) surveyed teachers who were working at the early childhood, elementary, middle/junior high, and high school levels. The focus of this study was on how victim characteristics (i.e., whether lesbian/gay or gender non-conforming, or neither) and victimization type (physical, verbal, and relational) informed teachers' likelihood of intervening in a hypothetical situation, perceived seriousness of the situation, and level of empathy with the victim (Perez et al., 2013). Teachers in the study rated physical bullying of lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming youth as less serious than verbal or relational bullying, whereas they rated physical bullying as more serious in the hypothetical situations in which the sexual orientation and gender expression of the characters were not specified. The participants also indicated slightly less empathy and a lower likelihood of intervening on behalf of lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming youth (Perez et al., 2013).

The second quantitative study, which included U.S. secondary school teachers, examined school and individual factors related to teachers' self-reported intervention upon hearing homophobic remarks at school (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). Teachers in religious and private non-religious schools intervened less often than public school teachers, but no differences by urbanicity or U.S. region were found (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). Teachers with greater self-efficacy for intervening upon hearing homophobic remarks, and who knew LGBT students or other LGBT persons, were more likely to intervene, as were teachers who perceived bullying in general and of

LGBT and gender non-conforming students specifically to be bigger problems in their schools (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). Self-efficacy — generally defined as one's confidence to perform a behavior regardless of any barriers to its performance (Baranowski, Perry, & Parcel, 2002) — has similarly been found to be associated with teachers' greater likelihood of intervening in hypothetical non-bias related bullying situations (Yoon, 2004).

1.1. Applying Integrated Behavioral Model concepts to the study of teachers' responses

In the present study, we used a quantitative approach to explore teachers' intentions to intervene upon observing enactments of sexual and gender stigma, operationalized here as bullying motivated by the sexual orientation or gender expression of the victimized student. We adopted a quantitative approach because the research available on this issue, reviewed above, suggests several factors that are important to teachers' intentions, but has not addressed the relative importance of the different factors. Knowing the relative importance of different factors is necessary for the development of appropriate intervention strategies, and is best explored through quantitative research designs. We organized our investigation using concepts from the Integrated Behavioral Model (IBM; Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). We chose this model because it is a good general model for understanding and predicting behavior and because it encompasses many of the factors identified in the literature as potential determinants of teachers' interventions in sexual and gender stigma enactments (e.g., perceived norms within the school community or confidence in abilities to intervene effectively; Kasprzyk, Montano, & Fishbein, 1998; Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). Use of such a unifying model also promotes understanding of how our findings might differ were the study to be replicated with other samples and in other cultural contexts (Bartholomew, Parcel, Kok, & Gottlieb, 2006).

The IBM includes constructs from Fishbein and Ajzen's Theories of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Planned Behavior (TPB), which have been widely applied to study diverse social and health behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Concepts from the TRA and TPB have guided research into a variety of teacher attitudes and behaviors, such as their work with children with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013); intentions to teach physically active physical education classes (Martin, Kulinna, Eklund, & Reed, 2001); intentions to involve parents in the education of their students (Pryor & Pryor, 2009); and the use of particular teaching techniques in science classrooms (Zacharia, 2003). Notably, these concepts have also guided research into teacher- and school psychologist-trainees' intentions to advocate for LGBT students (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). The IBM also incorporates constructs from other behavioral theories, such as self-efficacy, which the literature suggests is relevant to teachers' responses to bullying behaviors among students (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008).

In the IBM, as in the TRA/TPB, intentions to perform a particular behavior are assumed to be the best predictor of the actual behavior (Kasprzyk et al., 1998). Interventions that incorporate IBM concepts thus focus on strengthening intentions to perform a target behavior. Behavioral intentions are determined by one's attitude toward the behavior (shaped in part by *behavioral beliefs* about what will result from performing the behavior); personal agency, which includes *self-efficacy*; and perceived norms (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). For a depiction of these conceptual relationships as explored in this study, see Fig. 1. Direct observations of our environment, informational resources (e.g., newspapers), and inferences are all sources of the behavioral beliefs that shape attitudes toward a behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Perceived norms
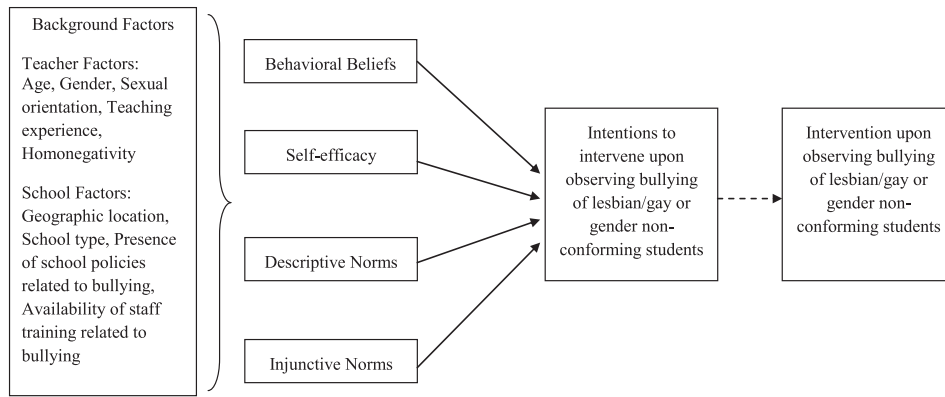
Fig. 1. Conceptual relationships explored in the present study.

consist of both *descriptive norms* (one's beliefs about what others would do in the same situation) and *injunctive norms* (one's beliefs about what salient others think he or she should do). In the present study, we explored teachers' intentions to intervene in bullying incidents motivated by the sexual orientation or gender expression of the victimized student. We explored behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, and descriptive and injunctive norms as potential determinants of intentions to intervene, hypothesizing that those teachers with more positive behavioral beliefs, greater self-efficacy, and more strongly felt norms would report stronger intentions to intervene.

In addition, without having specific expectations, we explored whether several individual teacher and school factors were related to behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and intentions to intervene. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) refer to such demographic and environmental characteristics as *background factors*. Although background factors are not thought to influence behavioral intentions directly, they can create different exposures to information that in turn lead to behavior-relevant beliefs, influencing behavioral intentions indirectly (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008). Teachers with different levels of experience, who work in different settings, or who have different types of training opportunities, for example, may have had different exposures to information that could influence their responses to enacted sexual and gender stigma. Understanding the role of background factors in this study sample is essential to understanding how findings might differ across samples and contexts (e.g., in societies with less social acceptance of homosexuality and gender non-conformity). We therefore assessed a set of background factors in conjunction with the determinants of behavioral intentions specified by the IBM. The indirect relationship proposed to exist between background factors and intentions to intervene is depicted in Fig. 1.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

Secondary school teachers in the Netherlands were eligible for this study, and were recruited through their schools: To recruit participants, research assistants called officials at 69 schools that were randomly selected from a listing of schools available on the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science website, explained the study, and asked if the officials would be willing to distribute the web-based survey to teachers in their school. Twenty-six school officials agreed and 21 ultimately distributed the survey web link to their school's teachers by email. Surveys were collected over 2 months at the beginning of 2012 (school year

2011—2012). Because the survey was anonymous (teachers were sent an open web link to access the survey), it was not possible to track participation by school. In accordance with Dutch law at the time the study was conducted, ethics board review of study procedures was not required because the research did not involve an intervention; however, participation of the U.S.-based researchers in the project was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the New York State Psychiatric Institute.

A total of 519 survey responses were received. The survey, which was offered in Dutch, took participants 20—30 min to complete on average. The total number of surveys that were analyzed for this study was 343. We excluded a small number of surveys from participants ($n = 3$) whose responses indicated they were not teachers (but rather, other school personnel) or because responses on the study's main outcome measure (behavioral intentions) were missing ($n = 2$). The remaining responses that were excluded from analysis ($n = 171$) were partial completions missing personal demographic information required for the analyses (see Section 2.2.1 below, "Teacher and school demographic information") and for verification of the uniqueness of responses. (Participants who started the survey, exited it without completing it, and returned to it at a later time, for example, would generate multiple responses in the system; we analyzed only the complete survey that we could verify was unique from other responses.) Multiple responses per IP address were allowed, since there was a legitimate reason for multiple surveys to come from a single IP address (i.e., shared devices in a school), but only after inspection of response patterns to ensure that participants were unique. No financial incentive was offered for completing the survey.

The participating teachers were from schools of varying sizes: fewer than 500 students, 17.8%; 500—1000 students, 27.4%; 1001—1250 students, 23.9%; 1251—1500 students, 13.1%; and more than 1500 students, 17.8%. The different educational tracks available to secondary school students in the Netherlands were also represented in the participating schools (schools typically offer more than one track). Sixty-two percent of the teachers taught in schools where the pre-vocational track was offered (*praktijkonderwijs* or VMBO), 59.2% taught in schools where the general secondary (HAVO) track was offered, and 63.3% taught in schools where the pre-university (VWO) track was offered.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Teacher and school demographic information

Participants reported their age, gender (man or woman), sexual orientation (heterosexual/straight, lesbian/gay, bisexual, or other), and the number of years they had been employed as a teacher. Participants were also asked to report information on their schools,

including the postal code in which their school was located (used to identify the school's geographic location within the Netherlands) and the school's denomination (e.g., general, general-special, or denominational). The participating teachers were also asked whether school policies and rules related to bullying/harassment and staff training related to bullying/harassment were in place or had been offered in the current school year.

2.2.2. Homonegativity

Participants completed an adapted version of the Modern Homonegativity scale developed by van Wijk, van de Meerendonk, Bakker, and Vanwesenbeeck (2005) and tested with adults in the Netherlands. Some of the original items were modified so as to capture attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians. This scale consists of nine items (e.g., "Homosexual men and women flaunt their sexual preference") and high scores across the items indicate a high level of homonegativity. The internal consistency reliability of the scale in this sample, indicated by Cronbach's alpha, was .94.[2]

2.2.3. Peer victimization observed by teachers

Participants were asked to indicate whether, in the past year, they had observed students in their school verbally or physically harass one another for any of the following reasons: appearance (e.g., height or weight), gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation.

2.2.4. Intentions to intervene in incidents of enacted sexual and gender stigma

Participants' intentions to intervene were assessed with the aid of hypothetical bullying scenarios. Participants read a brief scenario and were then asked a series of follow-up questions, including, "How likely is it that you would intervene in this situation?" (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely). The scenarios (which are provided in the Appendix) and follow-up questions were originally developed for this study, but modeled after those used in instruments such as the Handling Bullying Questionnaire (Bauman et al., 2008) and the Bullying Attitude Questionnaire (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Yoon, 2004).

Each participant completed questions in relation to one verbal bullying scenario and one physical bullying scenario; we examine each as separate outcome measures of intentions to intervene. The scenarios described the characters' gender as boys or girls but not their gender identity (i.e., as cisgender or transgender boys or girls). The gender of the victim and perpetrator(s) was the same in both scenarios (i.e., female perpetrator and female victim), but participants were randomly presented with alternate versions of the verbal and physical bullying scenarios so that approximately half of the sample received versions of each scenario that contained either male or female characters. Both the verbal and physical scenarios described incidents of bullying that were directly observed by a teacher. Bullying is defined by repeated harassment over time and an imbalance of power between the victim and perpetrator or perpetrators (Olweus, 2010), and was operationalized in these scenarios with contextual information about the social status of the victims and perpetrators and, in the case of the verbal bullying scenario, multiple perpetrators against one victim. We adopted Olweus' definition of bullying due to its widespread usage, allowing us to connect our findings to others across the field of bullying research. The verbal bullying scenario was set in a classroom and involved a victim targeted for gender non-conformity. The physical

bullying scenario was set in the school cafeteria and involved an openly lesbian or gay student. Both scenarios involved the use of homophobic language by the perpetrators, which prior research suggests that adolescents commonly use against those perceived as gay/lesbian and to label non-conforming gender expressions (Chambers, Tincknell, & Van Loon, 2004; Pascoe, 2007; Plummer, 2001).

2.2.5. Behavioral beliefs

Participants' beliefs about the outcomes of intervening in the incident described in the scenario were assessed with an eight-item scale. Items were originally developed on the basis of a literature review, and the same eight items were used in relation to the verbal and physical bullying scenarios. Half of these items were about positive behavioral beliefs (e.g., "I can put a stop to this type of behavior by stepping in") and half were about negative behavioral beliefs (e.g., "If I get involved, the situation will only get worse for [the victim]"); the latter were reverse-scored. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha was .69 for the behavioral beliefs scale in relation to the verbal bullying scenario, and was .77 in relation to the physical bullying scenario, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

2.2.6. Self-efficacy

Participants' level of self-efficacy for intervening in the verbal and physical bullying scenarios was assessed with four items; again, the same four items were used in relation to both scenarios. The items addressed various tasks that might be associated with intervention, e.g., getting support for the victimized student or involving other school staff as indicated. An example item was, "I feel confident in my ability to address [the perpetrator's] behavior" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). For the verbal bullying scenario, the Cronbach's alpha of the four self-efficacy items was .68, and for the physical bullying scenario, the Cronbach's alpha was .75.

2.2.7. Descriptive norms

Descriptive norms – participants' perceptions of what important referent individuals would do in a similar situation – were assessed with two items. These items were, "Most other teachers at my school would intervene if they witnessed a dispute like this" and "Most administrators at my school would intervene if they witnessed a dispute like this" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). For the verbal bullying scenario, the Cronbach's alpha of these two items was .71, and for the physical bullying scenario, the Cronbach's alpha was .76.

2.2.8. Injunctive norms

We assessed injunctive norms around intervening in the verbal and physical bullying scenarios with four items. Each item referred to a different salient referent: the school principal, other teachers in the same school, the parents of the teacher's students, and the teacher's students (e.g., "The principal of my school would expect me to intervene in this situation," 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha values indicated strong internal consistency across the four items; $\alpha = .80$ for the verbal bullying scenario, and $\alpha = .87$ for the physical bullying scenario.

2.3. Analyses

We calculated descriptive statistics on teacher and school demographic information, homonegativity, and peer victimization observed in the school setting. We then assessed whether individual school (geographic location, school type, and presence or absence of policies and staff training related to peer victimization)

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[2] Cronbach's alpha is a statistic used to indicate the internal consistency of items in a scale, or how well the individual items in a scale measure the same construct. Cronbach's alpha values of .7 or greater are generally desirable.

and teacher (age, years of teaching experience, gender, sexual orientation, and homonegativity) factors were associated the theoretical determinants (behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms) and intentions to intervene. We calculated Pearson correlations to assess relationships of the theoretical determinants and intentions to intervene with the continuous variables (i.e., age, years of experience, and homonegativity) or independent samples t-tests to assess relationships with the categorical variables (i.e., geographic location, school type, presence or absence of policies and staff training related to peer victimization, gender, sexual orientation).

Next, the bivariate relationships between the determinants of intentions and intentions to intervene were assessed by calculating Pearson correlations. Pearson correlations generate r statistics, which vary between 0 and 1 (positive correlation) or 0 and -1. The closer the r value is to -1 or 1, the greater the strength of the correlation between variables. Those determinants of intentions that were significantly correlated with intentions to intervene ($p < .05$) were entered into a multiple regression analysis with intentions to intervene as the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the amount of statistical variance in intentions to intervene explained by all the determinants together, as well as the unique contribution of each determinant. All analyses were conducted separately for the teachers' responses to the verbal bullying scenario and the physical bullying scenario. We plotted standardized residuals and leverage values and calculated Cook's distances to detect possible influential points.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive analyses

The final sample of participating teachers consisted of 198 women (57.7%) and 145 men (42.3%). Approximately six percent identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or as another minority sexual orientation. Participants' mean age was 44.5 years ($SD = 11.85$) and their mean number of years of teaching experience was 16.11 ($SD = 11.49$). Homonegativity scores were low on average in this sample ($M = 2.05$, $SD = .68$) and positively skewed, indicating generally tolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gays.

About half of participating teachers reported working in general or general-special (i.e., public) schools (51.3%), with the remainder based in denominational schools (48.7%). 64.4% of the teachers worked in schools located in the most urbanized part of the Netherlands, including Amsterdam (a conurbation known as the Randstad). Most teachers (85.4%) said that policies and rules related to bullying and harassment were currently in place in their schools, however, substantially fewer (42.6%) indicated that staff training related to bullying and harassment had been offered in the current year. Teachers' experiences observing peer victimization in their schools over the previous year, attributed to various reasons, are summarized in Table 1. Three-quarters of the teachers said they had seen students in their school harass others because of their appearance; this was the most commonly observed type of peer victimization. A little more than one-third of the teachers said they had seen students harass others because of sexual orientation; the same percentage said they had seen students harass others because of their gender expression.

Means and standard deviations for behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and intentions to intervene for the verbal and physical bullying scenarios are presented in Table 2. Scores on these variables were negatively skewed, suggesting generally positive behavioral beliefs, high self-efficacy, and

Table 1
Teachers' observations of verbal and physical bullying among students in the past year.

Perceived reason for bullying	% Observed
Appearance	74.9
Sexual orientation	36.4
Gender expression	36.4
Ethnic minority identity	30.6
Gender	12.5
Religion	11.7

positive norms around intervening in the hypothetical scenarios, and strong reported intentions to intervene.

Teacher gender and years of teaching experience were not associated with any of the theoretical determinants of intentions to intervene, nor with intentions to intervene. Teacher age was negatively correlated with behavioral beliefs related to the verbal bullying scenario ($r = -.18$, $p = .001$), suggesting that younger teachers held more positive outcomes expectations from intervening in the verbal bullying scenario. Correlations between age and the other variables were not significant. In comparison to their sexual minority counterparts, heterosexual teachers demonstrated significantly more negative behavioral beliefs in relation to the physical bullying scenario, $t(325) = -3.56$, $p < .001$, and significantly lower self-efficacy in relation to the verbal bullying scenario, $t(334) = -2.51$, $p = .013$. In other words, sexual minority teachers expected better outcomes from intervening in the physical bullying scenario and were more confident about their ability to intervene in the verbal bullying scenario.

Unlike the other teacher-level factors assessed, homonegativity was found to be significantly related to all determinants of intentions. The strength of these correlations ranged from $r = -.16$ ($p = .004$) for injunctive norms related to the verbal bullying scenario, to $r = -.23$ ($p < .001$) for behavioral beliefs related to the verbal bullying scenario. According to guidelines from Cohen (1988), the strength of these relationships is in the small (.10) to medium (.30) range. Correlations between homonegativity and intentions to intervene were also significant; $r = -.12$, $p = .031$ for the verbal bullying scenario, and $r = -.13$, $p = .019$ for the physical bullying scenario. Overall, these significant, negative correlations indicate that a lower level of homonegativity (i.e., more positive attitudes toward homosexuality) was associated with more positive behavioral beliefs, higher self-efficacy, stronger descriptive and injunctive norms, and stronger intentions to intervene in the scenarios.

The school factors that we assessed were not significantly related to behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and intentions to intervene in either the verbal or physical bullying scenarios. That is, with regard to the variables of interest, there were no significant differences between teachers from schools located in Amsterdam or other Randstad cities versus elsewhere in the Netherlands, between teachers from general or

Table 2
Means and standard deviations of teachers' behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and intentions to intervene.

	Verbal bullying scenario	Physical bullying scenario
	M (SD)	M (SD)
Behavioral beliefs	4.07 (.43)	4.10 (.46)
Self-efficacy	4.13 (.51)	4.14 (.50)
Descriptive norms	4.00 (.60)	4.10 (.57)
Injunctive norms	4.05 (.48)	4.07 (.49)
Intention to intervene	4.61 (.59)	4.57 (.61)

general-special schools versus denominational schools, or between teachers who reported working in schools where policies and staff training related to peer victimization were present or absent.

3.2. Bivariate relationships of determinants with intentions

Intercorrelations among the teachers' behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and intentions to intervene are displayed in Table 3. For both the verbal and physical bullying scenarios, there were significant correlations among the determinants of intentions, as well as significant correlations between the determinants and actual intentions to intervene. Given these findings, we proceeded to conduct multiple regression analysis entering each of the determinants of intentions into the models (separately for verbal and physical bullying scenarios) as independent variables. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4. Regression analyses were conducted with the full sample of participants given that no influential observations were detected.

3.3. Regression analyses – verbal bullying scenario

Behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, and descriptive and injunctive norms together explained 24% of the variance in teachers' intentions to intervene in the verbal bullying scenario ($p < .001$). Behavioral beliefs ($\beta = .12$, $p = .03$), self-efficacy ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), and injunctive norms ($\beta = .17$, $p = .01$), but not descriptive norms, all made significant independent contributions to the model. Relationships were in the expected directions, with more positive behavioral beliefs, higher self-efficacy, and stronger injunctive norms associated with stronger intentions to intervene in the bullying scenario.

3.4. Regression analyses – physical bullying scenario

For the physical bullying scenario, the independent variables explained 19% of the variance in teachers' intentions to intervene ($p < .001$). Behavioral beliefs ($\beta = .18$, $p = .01$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$) both made significant independent contributions to the model. Neither descriptive nor injunctive norms, however, made significant independent contributions.

4. Discussion

Our findings indicate, first, that secondary school teachers in our sample are observing peer victimization that they believe to be related to students' sexual orientation or gender expression. Just over a third of the teachers surveyed reported observing either type of peer victimization in the past year. This finding suggests that teachers in the Netherlands indeed have a role to play with regard

Table 3
Summary of intercorrelations among behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, descriptive and injunctive norms, and teachers' intentions to intervene.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Behavioral beliefs	–	.44*	.38*	.54*	.36*
2. Self-efficacy	.43*	–	.44*	.46*	.36*
3. Descriptive norms	.25*	.31*	–	.70*	.25*
4. Injunctive norms	.40*	.44*	.59*	–	.34*
5. Intention to intervene	.33*	.45*	.17*	.33*	–

Note. Intercorrelations for the verbal bullying scenario are presented below the diagonal, and intercorrelations for physical bullying scenario are presented above the diagonal.
*$p < .01$.

Table 4
Regression of teachers' intentions to intervene on behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, and descriptive and injunctive norms.

	Verbal bullying scenario			Physical bullying scenario		
	b (SE)	β	p	b (SE)	β	p
Behavioral beliefs	.17 (.08)	.12	.03	.24 (.09)	.18	.01
Self-efficacy	.40 (.07)	.35	<.001	.27 (.07)	.22	<.001
Descriptive norms	−.06 (.06)	−.07	.27	.02 (.08)	.02	.80
Injunctive norms	.21 (.08)	.17	.01	.17 (.10)	.14	.09
R^2		.24	<.001		.19	<.001

to intervening in incidents of such bullying, and should be prepared for handling such incidents in the course of their work.

In general, the participating teachers reported strong intentions to intervene in the hypothetical scenarios of sexual orientation and gender expression related bullying presented to them in the survey. The IBM constructs we studied in relation to teachers' intentions were informative in explaining their intentions to intervene. Self-efficacy and behavioral beliefs were especially important and meaningful across both the verbal and physical bullying scenarios. Teachers who were more confident in their abilities to intervene successfully, and who believed that intervening in the scenario would produce a positive outcome, had stronger intentions to intervene.

The role of norms in relation to teachers' intentions to intervene was less consistent. Although there were significant bivariate associations between the norms and intentions variables, in the multivariate analyses, descriptive norms – perceptions of what other teachers or school administrators would do upon observing the same situation – were not significantly associated with teachers' intentions to intervene in either scenario. Injunctive norms – perceptions of how the school principal, other teachers, parents, and students would expect the teacher to act upon observing the given scenario – were important only in the multivariate analysis with the verbal bullying scenario. It could be that injunctive norms weigh more heavily into individual teachers' calculus regarding whether to intervene when the need for intervention by a teacher is less clear cut, as it arguably was in the verbal bullying scenario in comparison to the physical bullying scenario. In other words, it may be very clear to teachers that it is their role to intervene in situations that involve physical bullying, and so norms matter less in these cases. The role of norms in teachers' responses to different types of peer victimization should be explored further in future studies.

As for the individual teacher and school demographic factors that were assessed in relation to determinants of and actual intentions to intervene, the one factor that stood out as being important was homonegativity, which was measured at the individual teacher level. Those teachers who had less negative attitudes toward homosexuality also had significantly more positive behavioral beliefs related to intervention, greater self-efficacy to effectively intervene, and stronger descriptive and injunctive norms related to intervention. They also reported stronger intentions to intervene. It is possible that teachers with more tolerant attitudes toward lesbians and gays have a higher level of comfort supporting lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming students or discussing sexual orientation and gender expression related issues with their students.

These findings further develop the as-yet very small literature on teachers' responses to enactments of sexual and gender stigma. They support Greytak and Kosciw's (2014) finding that self-efficacy is important to teachers' intervention behaviors. They also complicate previous findings from qualitative studies, reviewed in

the introduction, that suggested perceived norms would exert a strong influence on teachers' thinking about how to respond to enacted sexual and gender stigma. We found self-efficacy and behavioral beliefs to be more strongly associated with teachers' intentions to intervene. It is likely that our assessment of perceived norms in relation to performance of a very specific behavior explains some of the inconsistency of this finding with prior research (e.g., perceived norms in relation to protecting lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming students from harm are likely to be different than perceived norms in relation to discussing sexual and gender diversity issues at school more generally).

Our findings furthermore provide some support for the program theory underlying certain training programs designed to enhance teachers' competency to provide a safe school climate for sexual and gender minority students, given that behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward lesbians and gays were found to be related to teachers' intentions to intervene in sexual orientation and gender expression related peer victimization. For example, Greytak et al. (2013) evaluated a 2-h training workshop for secondary school staff focused on the bullying and harassment of LGBT youth, and found higher self-efficacy for intervening in incidents of bullying and harassment and a stronger belief in the importance of intervening following participation in the training. An evaluation of an online, avatar-based training program for secondary school teachers also found higher self-efficacy and greater intentions to intervene when observing incidents of homophobic harassment after completion of the training (Albright & Shumaker, 2013). Other professional development programs for educators have addressed attitudes toward homosexuality, finding more positive attitudes following the training program (Horn & Sullivan, 2012 as cited in Greytak et al., 2013).

We did not make specific predictions with regard to how background factors might relate to determinants of or actual intentions to intervene in the hypothetical scenarios because, in keeping with the IBM, the influence of background factors should be expressed through the other constructs. However, the participating teachers represented schools that were diverse along several dimensions, and it is somewhat surprising that none of the school variables were significant. As was previously discussed, other studies have found teachers working in schools where anti-bullying policies are in place and who have participated in anti-bullying training programs to have stronger intentions to intervene in bullying incidents compared to other teachers (Bauman et al., 2008; Sairanen & Pfeffer, 2011). Institutional supports have also been suggested to be of importance for educators responding to enacted sexual and gender stigma at school, in particular (Meyer, 2008). Schools in the Netherlands are diverse with regard to their approaches to addressing the needs of sexual and gender minority students. Given the research methods used in the current study, we did not obtain detailed information from the participating teachers about the specific anti-bullying policies in place in their schools (including whether those policies offered enumerated protections to sexual and gender minority students), or about the scope, format, or quality of any anti-bullying training programs in which they may have participated. These may be important issues for future studies in Dutch secondary schools, and could be explored through qualitative research or multilevel modeling designs that could account for the shared variance among participating teachers from the same school.

Our other findings with regard to the individual teacher background factors give some indications as to how results of this study might differ were it to be replicated with other samples or in other settings. While we would still expect to find behavioral beliefs and self-efficacy correlated with intentions to intervene, we might find overall more negative behavioral beliefs among samples of teachers with an older average age, and overall more positive behavioral beliefs and higher levels of self-efficacy in samples with a greater proportion of sexual minorities. Because homonegativity was correlated with all the theoretical determinants of intentions as well as with intentions to intervene, we would expect to find more negative behavioral beliefs, lower self-efficacy, less positive norms, and overall lower intentions to intervene among teachers practicing in areas where there is less social acceptance of homosexuality and gender non-conformity. Teachers working in societies where homosexuality and gender non-conformity are highly stigmatized face many challenges to addressing these issues in school settings (Francis & Msibi, 2011).

4.1. Limitations

Along with the study's findings, we should note several limitations. This was a cross-sectional study that made use of self-reported data collected via a web-based survey. Although we tried to discourage social desirability bias by allowing teachers to participate anonymously and presenting the survey topic in a neutral way (i.e., a study about teachers' experiences and what they observe in the course of their daily work), some responses may have been affected by self-presentation bias. Strategies used to ensure the participants' anonymity and uniqueness of responses (i.e., use of a general survey URL, no individualized follow-up, no incentives for participation) implied tradeoffs for the survey's response and completion rate. Data are also drawn from a self-selecting, non-probability sample.

The study's measures were limited in several ways. For our outcome measure, we assessed only behavioral intentions, and not teachers' actual behavior. Although there is evidence that behavioral intentions are strong predictors of future behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), we do not know the extent to which the participating teachers' stated intentions to intervene upon observing enacted sexual and gender stigma correlate with their actual past or future behavior. Furthermore, teachers may respond differently in actual, real-life situations than they would in the hypothetical scenarios with which they were presented.

While we separately assessed teachers' intentions to intervene in scenarios involving lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming students, we did not separately assess teachers' attitudes toward gender non-conformity; we measured homonegativity only. In other study measures, such as the hypothetical bullying scenarios, we have used terminology that for the most part upholds gender as a binary construct. We carefully chose everyday language that would be familiar to our target participants given the web-based survey administration method. However, teachers' interactions with students who may further challenge the gender binary (by identifying as transgender but not as male or female, or as genderqueer, for example) is an important area for further study.

4.2. Implications for future research and for teacher education

Several avenues for future research are suggested by this study's findings as well as by those issues that we were unable to address completely here. We found, for example, that the role of norms was different in teachers' intentions to intervene in the verbal and physical bullying scenarios. How teachers might respond differently to verbal versus physical enactments of sexual and gender stigma is a topic that should be explored further, and in conjunction with exploration of how the specific guidance that teachers receive with regard to their responsibilities to victimized students (i.e., school policies or instructions from administrators) influences behavior. We would encourage mixed-method research in this area; in an explanatory mixed-method design, for example,

researchers could present quantitative survey findings back to focus groups of teachers to seek explanation and contextual information related to the findings. We would likewise encourage research designs that would incorporate the perspectives of multiple informants, i.e., comparing teachers' reports with student reports or researcher observations.

The study's findings also have several important implications for teacher education programs and policies aiming to improve school climate for lesbian/gay and gender non-conforming youth. At the level of school policy, guidance for teachers on how to respond when they observe bullying behaviors should be clear with regard to the specific types of behaviors teachers may observe (e.g., name-calling, rumor-spreading, physical fighting). Teachers need to know what constitutes bullying or harassment under their school's policies, so that they can recognize these behaviors, and understand how they will be supported by the school when they intervene upon observing enactments of sexual or gender stigma.

Building teachers' capacities to respond to enactments of sexual and gender stigma in the school environment should be a critical component of teachers' training to engage with sexual and gender diversity issues and to ensure a safe environment for all learners. Although focusing on enacted sexual and gender stigma (i.e., victimization) alone would be insufficient — and we refer the reader to Szalacha's (2004) discussion of the safety, equity, and critical/queer theory paradigms on sexual and gender minority issues in education — doing so may engage teachers to take other actions that affirm and support their lesbian/gay and gender nonconforming students.

Teachers' behavioral beliefs and self-efficacy related to addressing enactments of sexual and gender stigma would seem to be important targets for intervention. Training programs to enhance teachers' abilities to intervene effectively upon observing such incidents should thus not only address best response practices (i.e., what specific actions students say would be helpful), but teachers' beliefs that their actions will have a positive impact and their confidence in their own skills and abilities, which may be developed through observational and active learning techniques. Specific methods to address behavioral beliefs might include behavioral journalism, or role model stories presented as narratives or video clips, in which real students discuss how their teachers' efforts helped them, and real teachers discuss how they were successfully able to manage a situation. Role-plays and other skills-practice opportunities would be appropriate for building teachers' sense of self-efficacy. To enhance teachers' intentions to intervene in future situations they might encounter and increase the likelihood that intentions will translate to behavior, training programs should also give teachers an opportunity to make specific action plans for their future behavior. We hope this study's findings can inform the design and evaluation of such educator-focused interventions that must be one important part of a larger strategy for bettering school climate for lesbian/gay and gender nonconforming youth.

Acknowledgments

Appendix

The following scenarios were used to elicit participants' intentions to intervene in incidents of bullying; items related to behavioral beliefs, self-efficacy, and descriptive and injunctive norms also referred to these scenarios.

Verbal Bullying Scenario — Female Characters Version

You have observed an ongoing conflict among three female students in your class: Mirjam, Kim, and Liesbeth. Mirjam and Kim, who are friends with one another and are among the more popular students in your school, seem to be picking on Liesbeth. Liesbeth is a good student, but does not seem to have a lot of friends, and stands out as being less feminine than many of the other female students in your school. You often observe Mirjam and Kim whispering to one another or laughing at Liesbeth when she comes into class. One day just before you are about to begin class, the three students start to argue, and you hear Mirjam say to Liesbeth, "Why are you such a dyke (Dutch: *pot*)?"

Physical Bullying Scenario — Male Characters Version

Klaas and Maarten are two male students in your school. Klaas is an openly gay student and you know that he is sometimes picked on by other students for this reason. One day you are in the cafeteria while students are having lunch. You see Maarten call Klaas a "faggot" (Dutch: *flikker*) and knock his lunch tray out of his hands, spilling food on Klaas' clothing and the floor.

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