PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS TOWARDS DIFFERENT TYPES OF BULLYING AND THE LIKELIHOOD THEY WILL INTERVENE

**Abstract**

To increase the likelihood a preservice teacher would intervene into a bullying situation, it is necessary to understand their attitudes towards and beliefs about different types of bullying. Results from this study indicate preservice teachers respond to different types of bullying in different ways. They are more likely to rate bullying directed towards one’s sexual orientation as serious and important in which to intervene; however, compared to other types, they are more likely to intervene into physical bullying. There were no differences between female and male preservice teachers’ responses. The attitudes and beliefs that most greatly predicted the likelihood of intervention included empathy towards the victim, believing it was important to intervene, and having the self-efficacy to do so. Suggestions how professional preparation programs can use this information to design learning experiences that better prepare preservice teachers’ and increase the likelihood they would intervene into bullying are shared.

**Introduction**

Bullying is an unfortunate and recognized occurrence in schools nationwide. A 2011 National Education Association (NEA) survey of 5,064 teachers and educational support staff reveals 62% of participants had witnessed bullying two or more times in the last month and 41% had witnessed bullying at least twice per week (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O’Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2011). A 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance report indicates 19.9% of high school students were bullied within the last 12 months (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010) and a 2012 National Center for Health Statistics study reveals 37% of sixth graders reported being bullying (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). A 2011 National School Climate Survey shows a decline in victimization based on sexual orientation; however, overall levels of anti-lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender language and experiences of harassment and assault remain the same (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) and a 2012 GLSEN and Harris Interactive report indicates 26% of elementary school students heard others make homophobic bullying remarks.

The prevalence of bullying in schools is not without consequences. In an extensive review of the literature on bullying, Swearer, Espelage, Vaillaincourt, and Hymel (2010) cite short- and long-term outcomes for both bullies and victims including academic problems, psychological issues, and social relational problems. Specifically, bullying has been linked to anger, aggression, violence, externalization of problems, and later delinquency and criminality (Olweus, 1993). Victimization has been linked to illness, school avoidance, poor academic performance, suicide ideation, and long-term difficulties including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (McDougall, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2009). Also, being a witness to bullying (i.e. a bystander) has been associated with damaged relationships and social mistrust as well as heightened levels of anxiety (Carney, Hazler, Oh, Hibel, & Granger, 2010; Carney, Jacob, & Hazler, 2011).

Making an impact on the prevalence of bullying in school settings requires making an impact on future teachers. In order to increase the likelihood a preservice teacher would intervene into a future bullying situation, it is necessary to understand their attitudes towards and beliefs about intervening into different types of bullying situations. In the current study, this author investigated preservice teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about different types of bullying situations and the likelihood they would intervene. Also studied were gender differences in responses and the relationship between attitudes and beliefs with likelihood of intervention. Finally, the author investigated differences in responses when the bullying situation was verbal bullying related to one’s sexual orientation as compared to physical bullying, verbal bullying (in general), and relational bullying. With this information, professional preparation programs can design learning experiences that better meet preservice teachers’ needs and hopefully increase the likelihood they would intervene into or work towards the prevention of bullying in a future school setting. Suggestions as to how to design such experiences are shared in the discussion.

**Literature Review**

**Bullying Defined**

A new definition of bullying, referred to as the uniform definition of bullying, has emerged and expands on another popular definition developed by Olweus (1994). According to the uniform definition,

Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, and Lumpkin, 2014, p.7).

This new definition embraces the idea that bullying does not have to be a repeated event to be a considered bullying. Also, it excludes dating and sibling violence, addressing the critique that the context and nature of dating and sibling violence is different than peer violence (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). Splitting these types of violence allows researchers to separate out the data and work towards a better understanding of the patterns and dynamics involved (Gladden et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding differences between the new and older definition, other key concepts remain the same, including the mode and types of bullying. Modes include direct and indirect. Direct bullying is aggressive behavior that occurs in the presence of the target. This can include, but is not limited to, acts such as pushing/shoving or name-calling. Conversely, indirect bullying is aggressive behavior directed at a target who is not present. Aggression in this capacity may include spreading rumors or sharing false or harmful information about the victim electronically (Gladden et al., 2014; Olweus, 1994). Regarding types of bullying, there are three main types: physical, verbal, and relational. Physical bullying refers to physical aggression such a punching, pushing, tripping, and spitting. Verbal bullying refers to oral or written communication intended to cause harm such as threats, taunting, name calling, offensive hand gestures, or degrading notes/messages. Relational bullying refers to behaviors intended to harm the relationship or reputation of the targeted youth such as ignoring or isolating the youth, excluding him or her from activities, or posting images or derogatory comments in an electronic space without the youth’s permission (Gladden et al., 2014; Olweus, 1994).

**Teachers intervening into bullying**

Teachers can play a pivotal role in the prevention or resolution of a bullying situation (Bauman and DelRio, 2005). For example, Frey, Jones, Hirschstein, and Edstrom (2011) found direct links between teachers’ empathy and assertiveness behaviors and bystanding students’ responses to bullying. When teachers intervened, students were less likely to endorse the bullying. Furthermore, Doll, Song, Champion, and Jones (2011), found when teachers quickly respond to bullying, they send a message to other students that bullying is unacceptable, thus creating an anti-bullying classroom environment. According to Holt, Keyes, & Koenig (2011), when teachers take on the perspective that bullying is just “kids being kids,” higher levels of bullying exist. In contrast, when youth sense school staff is supportive, they are more likely to report a greater sense of being part of the school community, higher grade point averages, and greater aspirations for higher education. These findings support the idea that teachers and school staff are largely responsible for the environment students will experience.

Despite the prevalence and consequences of bullying and the research pointing to the positive influence of educators, not all teachers work towards the prevention of or intervention into bullying. Although most school staff report a willingness to intervene, the 2011 NEA report indicates less than 40% were involved in bullying prevention related activities (Bradshaw et. al, 2011). Additionally, Perez, Schanding Jr., and Dao (2013) found educators rated physical bullying related to one’s sexual orientation or gender identity as less serious. They also indicated they had less empathy and were less likely to intervene into this type of bullying as compared to other forms.

Reasons why a teacher will or will not intervene vary widely (Yoon, Bauman, Choi, & Hutchinson, 2011). Boulton (1997) discovered K-12th grade teachers were concerned about bullying, but lacked the confidence to manage it. Hirdes (2010) found differences in responses to bullying that were related to the gender of the teacher. Yoon (2004) found differences in teacher responses depending on the perceived severity of the situation, empathy towards the victim, and efficacy to respond. Yoon and Kerber (2003) found teacher intervention was dependent on the type of bullying taking place. Milburn and Palladino (2012) found some practicing teachers not only lacked the willingness to intervene into bullying involving sexual orientation, but also lacked the knowledge and skills to do so. Meyer (2008) found teachers did not intervene into sexual orientation related bullying because of lack of institutional support from administrators, lack of training, inconsistent response from colleagues, fear of parent backlash, and negative community response. These barriers challenged their willingness and ability to intervene. Craig, Henderson, and Murphy (2000) indicated many teachers do not intervene because they underestimate the prevalence of bullying and the impact of their own beliefs. Given the variability in teacher responses to bullying and their impact on the classroom environment, there is value in understanding how best to prepare preservice teachers to address bullying in their future schools.

**Preservice and practicing teachers’ knowledge about, attitudes towards, and beliefs about bullying**

Like practicing teachers, preservice teachers responses to bullying vary greatly. Moreover, Bauman and DelRio (2005) contend the bullying-related knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of preservice teachers may result in ineffective and even harmful interventions. In a survey of 82 preservice teachers, they found participants were lacking knowledge in the definition and nature of bullying. While most recognized bullying takes on multiple forms, many did not identify key characteristics of bullying including imbalance of power. The researchers contend preservice teachers’ knowledge about this latter characteristic of bullying, the imbalance of power, is critical because it is often associated with repeat offenses. In other words, if the bullying happened once, the preservice teacher should predict it would happen again. Also, the researchers were concerned about the preservice teachers’ high levels of confidence, indicating too much confidence actually quells training-seeking behavior. In another study, Bauman and Del Rio (2006) found variations in how preservice teachers responded to different types of bullying situations. When exposed to six vignettes depicting physical, relational, or verbal bullying, participants indicated they were more likely to take action against a bully when the bullying was physical as compared to verbal or relational. Taking action behaviors included indicating to the bully that the behavior was intolerable, disciplining them, or reporting their behavior to parents and/or a higher authority. There were also differences in how the preservice teacher would respond to the victim. They were more likely to take action for the victim when the bullying was physical as compared to relational. Taking action included behaviors such as comforting the victim or advocating for him or her to be tough. In a similar study, Craig et al. (2000) presented preservice teachers with 18 different bullying scenarios (physical, verbal, and social). Like Bauman and DelRio (2006), they found preservice teachers were more likely to label a situation as serious and as bullying when it was physical as compared to verbal or relational. They also indicated greater likelihood of intervening when it was physical. In another vignette-related study, Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles, and Simmonds (2014) found preservice teachers’ likelihood of intervening into different types of bullying could be predicted by one’s perceived seriousness of the situation, ability to cope, and empathy towards the victim. Finally, Craig, Bell, and Leschied (2011) found preservice teachers rated physical bullying as more serious compared to homophobic, relational, or cyberbullying. Given these findings, it appears preservice teachers respond to different types of bullying in different ways. Continued research into understanding which traits, attitudes, and beliefs predict responses to which situations would be useful to professional preparation programs seeking to make an impact on bullying.

**Gender**

Gender and stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes have been hypothesized to make a difference in whether or not a preservice or practicing teacher will respond to or label a situation as bullying. This premise is rooted in early literature pointing to females as being more empathetic than males (Spence & Helmreich, 1978); thus, females or those leaning towards feminine sex roles would be more likely to hold a broad definition of bullying and be more likely to intervene (Craig et al., 2000). Craig et al. (2000) studied both the influence of preservice teachers’ gender and stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes on likelihood to label a situation as bullying. Attributes of agency were attributed to masculine qualities; attributes of communion were attributed to feminine qualities. Neither, gender nor stereotypical attributes were found to be associated with differences in how bullying situation were labeled. In contrast, Yoon et al. (2011) found female practicing teachers were more likely to take action than male teachers given a hypothetical verbal bullying situation. Taking action was defined as working with the bully or victim, enlisting other adults, and disciplining the bully. Similarly, Hirdes (2010) found female teachers were more likely to take action in a variety of bullying situations as compared to males. Taking action included talking with or finding support for the victim. When the bullying situation was relational, female teachers were also more likely to work with all parties involved. Given these mixed findings, there is value in continued research into whether or not there are gender or gender-associated differences in how preservice teachers respond to bullying. If differences were confirmed, it could mean professional preparation programs should consider modifying bullying related instruction such that it attends to all parties.

**Research Questions**

According to Pajares (1992), teachers’ cognitive appraisals and beliefs determine their interactions with students. In an extensive review of the literature on teacher beliefs, he concluded the study of preservice and practicing teachers’ beliefs was the “single most important construct in educational research” (p. 329). This means there is value to investigating preservice teachers attitudes towards, beliefs about, and likelihood of intervening into bullying so that professional preparation programs can design appropriate instruction that will hopefully lead to a reduction in the prevalence of bullying. To that end, the research questions for the current study were as follows:

RQ1: Do preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and intentions to intervene into a bullying situation vary depending on the type of bullying?

RQ2: Are there gender differences in likelihood to intervene into different types of bullying situations?

RQ3: Do preservice teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about a bullying situation predict the likelihood they will intervene? Which attitudes and beliefs predict?

**Methods**

**Participants and Recruitment**

With Institutional Review Board approval, participants were a sample of convenience as they were students recruited from the researcher’s course, *Organization and Administration of School Health Programs*. This course is required for preservice teachers working towards their health education endorsement. The course is offered once per academic semester.

Participants were recruited three semesters in a row between 2011-2012. Participation was voluntary; students were given the option to complete the assessment or an alternative activity. Points towards a final course grade were awarded for either choice. All chose to participate in the study.

**Study Design and Procedures**

The assessment, a survey, was administered during the second week of the course. To avoid bias resulting from the researcher also being the instructor, the researcher’s colleague read a description of the study and provided the students with a link to the assessment while the researcher was out of the room. To maintain confidentiality, participants were not asked to provide their names.

**Measures**

The assessment was a 28-item electronic survey. Two questions were demographics, age and gender. Twenty-four questions were the same set of six questions presented after four different scenarios in which a power imbalance exists between two students. The more powerful student is the bully; the less powerful student is the victim. Each scenario presented a different type of bullying: verbal, verbal but directed towards sexual orientation, relational, and physical. Scenario 1 is identical to one appearing in Bauman, Rigby, and Hoppa (2008); the other three scenarios were patterned off the first. In all situations, the victim is left feeling angry, miserable, and/or isolated after a repeated, negative action. The scenarios are as follows:

1. A student is being repeatedly teased and called names by another, more powerful student. The more powerful student has successfully persuaded other students to do the same as much as possible. As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and/or often isolated. (Verbal bullying.)

2. A student is being repeatedly teased and called slang names referring to *sexual orientation* by another, more powerful student. The more powerful student has successfully persuaded other students to do the same as much as possible. As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and/or often isolated. (Verbal bullying – sexual orientation focus.)

3. A student repeatedly excludes certain other students from both play and classwork group activities. This student, who appears to be perceived as popular, also has successfully persuaded other students to do the same as much as possible. As a result, the victims of this behavior are feeling angry, miserable, and/or often isolated. (Relational bullying.)

4. A student, who appears to have a powerful social influence, repeatedly pushes and trips another student. Sometimes the student threatens to beat up the other student. As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and/or often isolated. (Physical bullying.)

After reading each scenario, participants rated their agreement, on a scale of 1 to 7, with statements pertaining to their attitudes towards and beliefs about the situation as well as the likelihood they would intervene. These questions related to the seriousness of the situation, importance of intervening (i.e. duty), empathy towards the victim, efficacy of intervening, self-efficacy to intervene, and likelihood of intervening (See Appendix). Respectively, these questions made up the following six variables: seriousness, duty, empathy, intervention efficacy, self-efficacy, and intervene. With the exception of intervention efficacy, similar variables were also studied by Bauman and Del Rio (2006), Craig et al. (2000), Yoon and Kerber (2003), and Yoon (2004) in the context of bullying scenarios but in different variable combinations. Though the questions and scales used in the current research were different, these three studies served as an inspiration to look at attitudes, beliefs, and predictive relationships regarding different types of bullying.

**Results**

**Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20 was used to analyze the data. Reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha value of .87 for the attitude, beliefs, and likelihood of intervention questions as a whole. Alpha values for the seriousness, duty, empathy, intervention efficacy, and self-efficacy variables across the four scenarios were .54, .52, .74, .68, and .84, respectively. The alpha value for the likelihood of intervention was .74.

**Participants**

There were 67 participants. Ages were grouped in five-year segments. The majority (92.5%) fell into the 18-22 years old (35.8%), 23-27 years old (41.8%), and 28-32 years old (14.9%) brackets. Gender was split fairly even; 56.1% (n=37) were male, 43.3% (n=29) were female, and .6% (n=1) did not indicate. Education levels were as follows: high school (38.8%), associate’s (37.3%), bachelor’s (16.4%), master’s (4.5%), and no reply (3%).

**Attitudes, Beliefs, and Likelihood of Intervening into Different Situations**

The purpose of the first research question was to investigate whether there was a difference in preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and likelihood of intervening into different types of bullying situations. A one-way, repeated measures (or within subjects) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to explore differences in attitudes, beliefs, and intentions for the different scenarios. There was a significant effect for the type of bullying on *seriousness*, Wilks’ Lambda = .54, F (3, 64) = 17.90, *p <* .0005; *duty*, Wilks’ Lambda = .77, F (3,64) = 6.30, *p <* .001; *empathy*, Wilks’ Lambda = .68, F (3, 64) = 10.28, p< .0005; *intervention efficacy*, Wilks’ Lambda = .48, F (3, 64) = 23.10, *p <* .0005; and *intervene*, Wilks’ Lambda = .88, F (3, 64) = 2.70, *p =* .05. Partial eta-squared values were .46, .28, .33, .52, and .11 respectively. See Table 1 for descriptives including means and standard deviations.

Using guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988) (.01 = small, .06 = moderate, and .14 = large effect), these results suggest very large effect sizes. There was not a significant effect for the type of bullying, as depicted in the scenarios, on self-efficacy. These results suggest the type of bullying (verbal, verbal with a sexual orientation focus, relational, and physical) did not have an effect on most of the preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and intentions to intervene into a bullying situation. Because there were statistically significant differences, paired samples t-tests were used to make post hoc comparisons between the scenarios, using the Bonferonni test, for five of the six variables. The results are as follows:

**Seriousness.** Significant differences were found between bullying scenario 1 (verbal) and 2 (verbal – sexual orientation focus), scenario 1 and 3 (relational), and scenario 1 and 4 (physical). A visual scan of mean scores in Table 1 reveals participants rated scenario 2 as more serious than any of the other scenarios. This means the preservice teachers perceived bullying directed towards one’s sexual orientation as the most serious. General verbal bullying was rated the lowest.

**Duty.** Significant differences were found between bullying scenario 2 (verbal – sexual orientation focus) and 3 (relational), and scenario 2 and 4 (physical). A visual scan of mean scores in Table 1 reveals participants rated scenario 2 as more serious than any of the other scenarios. Relational bullying was rated the lowest. This means the preservice teachers perceived it was important to intervene into a situation in which the bullying was sexual-orientation in nature, but less so when it was a relational issue.

**Empathy.** Significant differences were found between bullying scenario 1 (verbal) and 4 (physical), scenario 3 (relational) and 4, and scenario 2 (verbal – sexual orientation) and 3. A visual scan of mean scores in Table 1 reveals participants rated scenario 4 as the highest and scenario 3 the lowest. This means the preservice teachers were more likely to intervene into a physical versus a relational bullying situation.

**Intervention efficacy.** Significant differences were found between bullying scenario 1 (verbal) and 4 (physical), scenario 2 (verbal – sexual orientation) and 4, and scenario 3 (relational) and 4. A visual scan of mean scores in Table 1 reveals participants rated scenario 4 as the highest and scenario 1 the lowest. This means the preservice teachers felt intervening into physical bullying would more likely resolve the situation as compared to when it was verbal.

**Intervene.** Significant differences were found between bullying scenario 2 (verbal) and 3 (relational), and scenario 3 and 4 (physical). A visual scan of mean scores in Table 1 reveals participants rated scenario 4 as the highest and scenario 3 the lowest. This means the preservice teachers would be more likely to intervene when the bullying was physical as compared to when it was verbal.

**Gender Differences in Likelihood to Intervene**

The purpose of the second research question was to investigate whether there were gender differences in likelihood to intervene into different types of bullying situations. A mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance showed no significant interaction between male and female’s likelihood to intervene into any of the bullying scenarios, Wilks’ Lambda = .98, F (3, 62) = .48, p = .70, partial eta squared = .02. There was not a main effect for the type of bullying, Wilks’ Lambda = .90, F (3, 62) = 2.43, *p =* .07, partial eta squared = .11. See Table 2. The main effect comparing gender was not significant, F (1, 64) = .006, *p =* .938, partial eta squared = .00, suggesting no difference in likelihood to intervene into different types of bullying situations based on gender.

**Ability of Attitudes and Beliefs to Predict Likelihood of Intervention**

The purpose of the third research question was to investigate whether preservice teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about a bullying situation predicts the likelihood they would intervene. Participant responses for each variable were averaged across the four scenarios to investigate whether seriousness, empathy, duty, efficacy of intervention, and self-efficacy predicted intentions to intervene into a bullying situation. A multiple regression analysis, via the enter method, was conducted.

Performing a multiple regression analysis assumes lack of multicollinearity. Multicollinearity exists when more than two predictors correlate very strongly. When this happens, it creates biased estimates between variables. Collinearity diagnostics were performed and they did not reveal violations. In accordance with Pallant (2010), tolerance values were high (above .10) and variance inflation factor (VIF) values were low (below 10), both suggesting the likelihood of multicollinearity (and biased estimates) was low. Moreover, bivariate correlation values were below .70, therefore omission of variables was not considered (Pallant, 2010). Correlations appear in Table 3, tolerance and VIF values appear in Table 4.

The regression analysis revealed participants’ attitudes towards and beliefs about different types of bullying situations predicted the likelihood they would intervene. The total variance explained by the model was 56.1%, F = (5, 61) = 15.57, p < .001. Duty (beta = .30, *p* < .01), empathy (beta = .38, *p* = .001), and self-efficacy (beta = .31, *p* = .001) predicted significantly. Seriousness and intervention efficacy did not predict. (See Figure 1 and Table 4) This means the preservice teachers’ belief it was important to intervene (i.e. duty), empathy towards the victim, and self-efficacy to intervene influenced whether or not they would intervene into a bullying situation. Given the high correlations between these factors, this finding is no surprise. The findings also mean whether intervening will resolve the situation or not is not important, nor is the seriousness of the situation.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate preservice teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards different types of bullying, the likelihood they would intervene, the influence of gender in bullying intervention, and the attitudes and beliefs that predict likelihood of intervention. This section expands on the findings, makes connections to existing research, offers implications for professional preparation programs, and reveals the study’s limitations.

**Attitudes, Beliefs, and Likelihood of Intervening into Different Situations**

Results from the first research question indicate preservice teachers react to different types of bullying in different ways. In other words, their attitudes towards, beliefs about, and the likelihood they would intervene differed depending on whether the bullying situation was verbal, verbal with a sexual orientation focus, relational, or physical. Specifically, they were more likely to feel it was important to intervene (i.e. their duty) or rate the situation as serious when the bullying was verbally directed towards one’s sexual orientation. Conversely, they were more likely to have empathy towards the victim, believe intervening would make a difference (i.e. intervention efficacy), and indicate they would likely intervene when the bullying was physical.

Findings regarding the preservice teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about verbal bullying directed toward one’s sexual orientation both align and contrast with previous literature. They align with the GLSEN and Harris Interactive (2012) study indicating 83% of 1,065 surveyed teachers were committed to keeping their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth safe. In contrast Perez et al. (2013) found the majority of 186 teachers rated physical bullying related to sexual orientation or gender identity as less serious, and teachers were less empathetic towards the victim and less likely to intervene. Similarly, Craig et al. (2011) found preservice teachers rated homophobic related bullying as less serious compared to physical bullying. Reasons why the preservice teachers’ in this study rated verbal bullying directed towards one’s sexual orientation as more serious and more important in which to intervene were not investigated, but it could be the result of a couple factors. For example, it could relate to the improved attitude towards homosexuality in the United States. A 2013 Pew Research study indicates acceptance of homosexuality has increased 10% in the United States, Canada, and South Korea, whereas attitudes remained stable in thirty-six other countries (Wike et al., 2013). It also could relate to the increase in media attention towards sexual orientation related bullying; however, according to Stopbullying.gov (2013), little is known regarding the impact of media coverage of bullying. Another reason could be the diversity of the university the preservice teachers in this study attend or the urban surroundings in which the university resides. The student body at this university has been recognized by a popular media source as one of the most ethnically diverse in the nation. Moreover, celebration of diverse populations and cultures is a component of the university’s baccalaureate goals. Also, the urban environment might have provided a more supportive attitude towards targets of sexual orientation related bullying. According to Goodenow, Szalacha, and Westheimer (2006), LGBT youth in rural communities compared to urban may face particularly hostile school climates. They attribute this finding to the wider array of social niches to which students may belong in an urban school. This means this study’s preservice teachers, compared to preservice teachers in another setting, might rate the scenarios differently. Further research into what prompted the attitudes and beliefs, particularly in a variety of university settings is warranted.

Regarding ratings for empathy, intervention efficacy, and likelihood of intervening, it is interesting the preservice teachers rated physical bullying the highest and both verbal and relational bullying the lowest. Some of these findings are similar to Craig et al. (2000) and Duy (2013) who found teachers’ indicated greater likelihood to intervene into physical bullying as compared to verbal or relational bullying. Similarly, Bauman and DelRio (2006) found preservice teachers had the least empathy for victims of relational bullying and were least likely to intervene into such incidents. When they indicated they would intervene, their disciplinary actions were much less severe than if the incident was physical. Likewise, Yoon and Kerber (2003) found much less empathy towards and likelihood to intervene among teachers when bullying was relational, as compared to physical or verbal. Also, only 10% of teachers indicated they would take disciplinary action towards a bully in a relational bullying situation as compared to 50% in a physical or verbal situation. These findings, like the current study, repeatedly point to differences in attitudes, beliefs, and intervention responses depending on the type of bullying. They also point to the need to instruct both teachers and preservice teachers on the damaging effects of relational bullying. Per Kawabata, Crick, and Hamaguchi (2013), relational victimization among children is associated with a greater level of emotional distress as compared to physical bullying. While research on methods of prevention of and intervention into relational bullying are finally receiving more attention, much more research is needed (Leff, Waasdorp, & Crick, 2010).

**Gender Differences in Likelihood to Intervene**

Results from research question two indicate there is no difference between female and male preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and likelihood to intervene into a bullying situation. Findings are dissimilar to Yoon et al. (2011) and Hirdes (2010) who found gender-based differences among teachers’ intentions to intervene. They found female teachers were more likely to intervene into bullying than male teachers. Hirdes (2010) attributed response differences to gender socialization, as well as to a research finding made by Green, Shriberg, and Farber (2008) who discovered female preservice and practicing teachers were more likely to rate student problem situations as serious compared to their male counterparts. Findings in the current study, however, are similar to Craig et al. (2000) who found neither gender nor gender-based attributes predicted preservice teachers’ likelihood to intervene into a bullying situation. In that study, they predicted individuals who allied with traditionally social feminine traits would be more likely to intervene. Given the dissimilarities in research findings, it would not behoove professional preparation programs to train preservice teachers in bullying prevention and intervention in different ways based on gender.

**Ability of Attitudes and Beliefs to Predict Likelihood of Intervention**

Results from research question three indicate preservice teachers’ attitudes towards and beliefs about bullying predict whether or not they are likely to intervene into a bullying situation. Of the five variables studied in the current research, empathy towards the victim, importance of intervening (i.e. duty), and self-efficacy significantly predicted likelihood to intervene. Seriousness of the situation and intervention efficacy did not predict. Some aspects of these findings are similar to Yoon (2004) who found practicing teachers’ efficacy to intervene into a bullying situation and empathy towards the victim predicted the likelihood they would intervene. Unlike Yoon (2004), perceived seriousness did not predict and two additional variables (duty and intervention efficacy) were studied. Like the current study, Craig et al. (2000) found preservice teachers’ empathy positively predicted likelihood of intervention; however, their empathy variable was based on a general assessment of one’s empathy towards others as opposed to a specific person in the bullying scenario. Those findings reflect seminal research conducted by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) who found a direct relationship between empathetic tendency and helping behavior. According to their research, persons who are characterized as having higher empathetic tendencies are more likely to be aroused by other people’s emotions. This means preservice teachers with empathetic tendencies might be more likely to intervene into bullying because they relate to the victim’s pain.

Results from research question three suggests professional preparation programs seeking to increase the likelihood a preservice teacher will intervene into a future bullying situation should provide them with learning experiences that foster development of empathy towards individuals involved in a bullying situation, include discussions about the importance of their intervening, and develop their self-efficacy to intervene. Also, based on the results from research question one, these experiences should include exposure to different types of bullying situations.

**Developing empathy.** Empathy-related training could take on a variety of approaches. According to Lam, Kolomitro, and Alamparambil (2001), “Empathy is an individual’s capacity to understand the behavior of others, to experience their feelings, and to express that understanding to them” (p. 162). Similarly, Barrett-Lennard (1959) indicated empathy is the:

active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his communication and meaning, and of translating his words and signs into experienced meaning and matches at least those aspects of his awareness that are most important to him at the moment (p. 2)

In light of these definitions, there are at least four components of empathy: 1) understanding another person’s actions and feelings, 2) experiencing what another person feels, 3) wanting to understand another person’s actions and feelings, and 4) being able to communicate that understanding with that person. These four components could serve as empathy-related training goals with preservice teachers.

To develop an understanding of another person’s actions and feelings, and the desire to understand, learning experiences that include mentoring could help. Fresko and Wertheim (2006) found appointing 299 preservice teachers as mentors to children who were at-risk increased preservice teachers’ sensitivity to this population and caring about the children as individuals. It also improved their ability to cope with difficult situations. That training was specifically designed to build connections between preservice teachers’ academic studies and mentoring experiences, with an emphasis on learning about the individual child and the social factors influencing his or her performance in school. Professional preparation programs could replicate this form of training via service learning projects that provide preservice teachers with opportunities to get to know and to help children who are both similar and dissimilar to them and who have been involved in a bullying situation. It is also possible a similar impact could be made via realistic case scenarios, guest speakers, or perhaps even avatars. For example, Shrier (2012) found a video game provided an effective forum for students to practice the kind of ethical decision-making skills associated with empathy. Perhaps a similar vehicle could be used to develop empathy or empathy-related communication skills. While the relationship with an avatar would be different than a real person, research has shown students can emotionally connect with an avatar in a computer-aided learning environment (Chen et al., 2012). Another option is through literature. Pytash (2013) found having preservice teachers read a young adult book in which the main character(s) had been bullied allowed them to reconnect to their own experiences at the same age and to develop empathy and compassion for the characters in the book. Regardless of the method used to foster understanding of others feelings and the desire to understand, experiences should be followed up with self-reflection activities that support preservice teachers in making a connection between what they have just learned and their experiences. This type of self-reflection has been deemed essential in the development of interpersonal skills (Bennett-Levy, 2006).

Regarding the development of empathy-related communication skills, past research offers some ideas. For example, Arizaga, Bauman, Waldo, and Castellanos (2005) found training preservice teachers in multicultural sensitivity and interpersonal skills lead to an improvement in empathetic listening skills. That training focused on developing expressive speaking and empathetic listening, both techniques rooted in relationship enhancement therapy (Guerney, 1977). Similarly, early research from Lasseigne and Martins (1979) revealed peer counseling was an effective technique to significantly improve empathy and expression of empathy. Training focused on counseling concepts and techniques including the use of responses to explore feelings and beliefs, empathetic listening, and the importance of non-verbal communication. Based on these findings, professional preparation programs could incorporate peer counseling as a practice technique, using real or case-based scenarios in which someone has been bullied, as a means to increase preservice teachers empathy-related communication skills.

Developing the ability to experience someone’s feelings, the last of the four areas of empathy development discussed here, is complicated. Lam et al. (2011) indicate empathetic behaviors can be expressed with or without the feeling. This means trainings must clearly identify their desired outcome, expressed empathy, actual empathy, or both and then design the trainings accordingly. However, Lam et al. (2011), in their survey of 29 empathy-related training studies, found it remains uncertain as to whether empathy developed in a training environment extends to the natural environment, and if so, for how long? Moreover, they contest existing tools used to measure the feeling of empathy might not be sound and additional research is needed. This should not mean that empathy training is pointless, but given the lack of ability to truly measure what someone is really feeling, training expectations should kept realistic and focus on those empathy skills that can be observed.

**Cultivating a belief that intervening is important.** As for cultivating the second predictor of a preservice teachers’ likelihood to intervene, the belief that intervening into a bullying situation is important (i.e. one’s duty), there are at least two topics professional preparation programs should consider including into bullying-related instruction. First, preservice teachers should be provided, at minimum, with a basic overview of bullying. Second, that overview should include discussions focusing on the professional and legal obligation for teachers to advocate for the safety and well being of their students. A basic introduction to bullying would cover the definition of bullying, known causes, short and long-term consequences, and general methods of prevention. To build credibility into the discussions, information presented should be linked to the current research base. They could also use portions or the complete curriculum of training programs that have demonstrated to make a significant on bullying in schools such as Bully Busters (Horne, Bartolomucci, & Newman-Carlson, 2003), Bully Proofing Your School (Bonds & Stoker, 2000), or the Olweus school-based bullying intervention program (Olweus, 1978). Instruction related to one’s legal obligation to intervene should include state child protection laws and the processes for reporting abuse. Teachers and administrators have the legal obligation to protect students from intimidation and threats and are to act in loco parentis (in place of parents) when children are assigned to their care (Essex, 2011). Failure to do so is considered negligence; however, not all preservice teachers are knowledgeable regarding their legal obligation. In a survey of 183 preservice teachers, (Weimer, 2012) found only 59% and 50% of students correctly answered questions regarding student rights and tort liability, respectively. To develop preservice teachers’ awareness of one’s legal obligation in a bullying situation, professional preparation could include instruction that reviews district and state laws related to bullying and provides them with opportunities to practice reporting processes in the context of case scenarios. Such case-based activities could also be rooted in self-reflection exercises requiring the preservice teacher to explore their feelings regarding the moral obligation to intervene on the behalf of a victim. While this latter activity could be likened to empathy training, it focuses more on the duty related belief versus the more emotionally charged concept of empathy.

**Improving self-efficacy to intervene.** As for improving self-efficacy, the third predictor of a preservice teachers’ likelihood to intervene, past research, again, provides some insight. According to Bandura (1992), self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p.3). He indicates self-efficacy is influenced by four main sources: 1) mastery experiences, 2) vicarious experiences provided by social models, 3) social persuasion, and 4) somatic and emotional states. In the case of seeking to improve preservice teachers self-efficacy to intervene into bullying, this means they will need opportunities to practice bullying intervention skills, to observe others successfully intervening, to be exposed to positive messages about the prevention and intervention into bullying, and to learn how to redirect stress in a positive direction. Such types of training have been identified as a means to improve teachers’ and preservice teachers’ self-efficacy to intervene into and/or prevent bullying. For example, Benitez, Garcia-Berben, and Fernandez-Cabezas (2009) found significant improvements in preservice teachers’ self-efficacy to confront bullying situations after receiving training on how to respond to bullying using different strategies. Similarly, Newgent, Higgins, Lounsbery, Behrend, and Keller (2011) discovered meaningful increases in teacher’s knowledge, skills, and efficacy after partaking in training rooted in the aforementioned Horne et al. (2003) *Bully Busters*, a bullying prevention training series. In that study, the teachers in were trained in bullying prevention strategies, recognizing the bully and the victim, helping victims, and relaxation and coping skills. Similarly, AUTHOR (2014) found authentic learning exercises embedded into a professional preparation course and rooted in professional standards lead to an increase in preservice teachers’ self-efficacy to perform bullying prevention activities. These activities included reviewing and revising bullying policies, designing bullying-related faculty trainings, and planning for a school health council whose focus was bullying prevention and intervention. In all of these research studies, case studies, role-playing, and self-reflection provided the forum for a preservice teacher to build the self-efficacy he or she will need to intervene into bullying in a future school setting.

Overall, training is key when seeking to increase the likelihood that a preservice teacher will intervene into a future bullying situation. Sairanen and Pfeffer (2011) found a significant difference in intention to intervene among teachers trained versus those not trained. Craig et al. (2011) learned preservice teachers viewed bullying as a serious concern; however, those who had received training in prevention were more concerned and more likely to indicate they would respond with confidence to a bullying situation. Nicolaides, Toda, and Smith (2011) found preservice teachers lacked knowledge about and confidence to intervene into and/or prevent it; but, they desired intervention and prevention training, including specific skills such as developing school bullying policy. These findings suggest training focusing on bullying prevention and intervention could be an effective means to improve preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and likelihood to intervene into bullying in a future school setting. In end, the goal should be to foster appropriate attitudes and beliefs and to empower preservice teachers to make bullying intervention related decisions based on sufficient, reliable, relevant, and valid information.

**Limitations**

There are at least three major limitations to the findings in this study. First and foremost, the situations presented in the scenarios were hypothetical; therefore, there may be discrepancies between how a preservice teacher would respond in a real situation. Exposing preservice teachers to real bullying situations via video could be a way to gather data that more closely resembles how they would respond. Second, the preservice teachers in this study attend a diverse university in an urban setting. It is possible their responses might differ from preservice teachers in other settings. Additional research should compare responses of preservice teachers from different types of settings. Third, the sample size was modest. A larger sample size could potentially reveal different or more accurate results. Despite these limitations, results from the current study reinforce findings in the literature and point to areas in need of attention.

**Conclusion**

In order to increase the likelihood a preservice teacher would intervene into bullying situation, it is necessary to understand their attitudes towards and beliefs about intervening into different types of bullying situations. Results from this study indicate preservice teachers respond to different types of bullying in different ways. They are more likely to rate a bullying situation directed towards one’s sexual orientation as serious and important in which to intervene; however, they are more likely to intervene into a physical bullying situation as compared to any other type of bullying. Findings indicate no difference between female and male preservice teachers’ attitudes towards, beliefs about, and likelihood to intervene. Overall, the attitudes and beliefs that most greatly predicted the likelihood a preservice teacher would intervene included empathy towards the victim, believing it was important to intervene, and having the self-efficacy to do so.

Findings from this study highlight opportunities for professional preparation programs to positively influence preservice teachers attitudes towards and beliefs about bullying. Previous research bestows means by which to develop preservice teachers’ empathy and empathy-related communication skills, knowledge about the importance of intervening into bullying based on known consequences and state regulations, and the skills to intervene into or to prevent bullying with confidence. Training can make a difference in whether a not a preservice teacher intends to respond to or work towards the prevention of bullying (Craig et al., 2011; Nicolaides, Toda, & Smith, 2011; Sairanen & Pfeffer, 2011). Professional preparation programs can play a pivotal role in this effort, and thus contribute towards the reduction of bullying and its consequences.

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**Appendix**

**Bullying belief and attitude questions**

1. How serious is this bullying situation?

not serious :\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: very serious

1. How empathetic do you feel towards the victim?

not empathetic :\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: very empathetic

1. Intervening in this situation will resolve the bullying problem.

not likely :\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: very likely

1. Intervening in this situation is

not important :\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: very important

1. I have the skills to intervene in this bullying situation.

strongly disagree:\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: strongly agree

1. How likely are you to intervene into this bullying situation?

not likely :\_\_\_1\_\_:\_\_\_2\_\_:\_\_\_3\_\_:\_\_\_4\_\_:\_\_\_5\_\_:\_\_\_6\_\_:\_\_\_7\_\_\_: very likely