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A Longitudinal Examination of Homophobic Name-Calling in Middle School: Bullying, Traditional Masculinity, and Sexual Harassment as Predictors

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Objective: Being a target of homophobic name-calling is associated with adverse outcomes for youth. Few studies have examined homophobic name-calling longitudinally among middle school youth. To address this gap, this longitudinal study examined predictors of changes in homophobic name-calling including bullying, sexual harassment, dismissiveness of sexual harassment, and traditional masculinity over the course of 2 years of middle school. ***Method:*** Participants included 1,655 students in 5th–8th grade from 4 public middle schools in the Midwest. The survey assessed demographic characteristics, homophobic name-calling, bullying, sexual harassment, and traditional masculinity across 4 waves of 2 years of data collection. ***Results:*** Homophobic name-calling increased over time; however, the rate of acceleration slowed. Higher within-person and between-person bullying was associated with increases in homophobic name-calling, but increases in dismissiveness of sexual harassment and traditional masculinity were not associated with increases in homophobic name-calling. Increases in within-person sexual harassment were associated with contemporaneous increases in homophobic name-calling. Relations between bullying and homophobic name-calling were especially pronounced for those at high levels of dismissiveness of sexual harassment for both within- and between-person models. ***Conclusion:*** To effectively address school bullying among early adolescents, it is imperative that antibullying policies and prevention programs work to address homophobic name-calling and dismissiveness of sexual harassment.

Keywords: homophobic name-calling, homophobic bullying, sexual harassment, sexual violence, youth violence

Early adolescence is a developmental period during which youth begin to explore their gender and sexual identities, with attitudes and behavior being shaped by their peer groups. Peer groups' involvement in bullying and the use of homophobic epithets can play an important role in developing and maintaining such behaviors (Birkett & Espelage, 2015). Traditionally, male traits have been more valued than female traits (Burn, 2000) and consequently, boys who violate "normative" male traits are more likely to be disparaged by their male peers. Homophobic name-calling serves to shame or exclude lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and gender nonconforming boys from the circle of "accepted, legitimate masculinities" (Phoenix, Forsh, & Pattman, 2003; Stoudt, 2006) and to maintain heteronormativity and heterosexual masculinity (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Poteat, Kimmel, & Wilchins, 2011).

Homophobic name-calling is a form of gender-based harassment, which includes any behavior that serves to reinforce heteronormativity and sexism (Meyer, 2008). It consists of pejorative labels or denigrating phrases aimed at LGBT, or gender nonconforming youth. These youth are often targeted because they behave in ways that are not in line with the gender norms (Geiger & Fischer, 2006). In 2013, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported from a nationally representative sample of 7,800 LGBT middle and high school students that 65% had heard homophobic remarks like "fag" or "dyke" frequently or

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often, and 85% had been verbally harassed in the past year (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2013). In addition, 71.4% of the students, regardless of their sexual orientation, reported frequently hearing "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "That's so gay") at their school, and 56.4% reported hearing negative remarks regarding nongender conformity (e.g., "not acting masculine or feminine enough"). Targets of homophobic name-calling report lower educational outcomes and higher level of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, suicidality, risky behavior including substance abuse, and personal distress (Bucchianeri, Eisenberg, Wall, Piran, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008). To date, homophobic name-calling remains one of the most common forms of bullying regardless of the sexual orientation (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Phoenix et al., 2003) or the gender/sex (Poteat & Espelage, 2005) of the victims. However, few studies have examined changes in homophobic name-calling across the middle school years. Thus, the purpose of this longitudinal study is to examine predictors of changes in homophobic name-calling across two years of middle school.

The Link Between Bullying and Homophobic Name-Calling in Middle Schools

Bullying and homophobic name-calling often begin at an early age. The middle school years are a time when adolescents typically explore their sexual and gender identity, and they become aware of their sexual attraction between 10 and 12 years of age (D'Augelli, 2006; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Scholars have proposed the bully sexual violence pathway where bullying is a precursor to homophobic name-calling which is then a precursor to sexual violence (Basile, Espelage, Rivers, McMahon, & Simon, 2009; Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). More specifically, Espelage, Basile, De La Rue, and Hamburger (2015) found from a sample of 979 fifth to seventh graders that middle school boys who reported higher levels of bullying also reported higher levels of homophobic name-calling 2 years later. Evans and Chapman (2014) used latent class analysis to establish clusters of bullying behaviors, including biased-based bullying among a sample of 3,379 rural elementary, middle, and high school students. They found that the rates of bullying by "being called gay, lesbian, or queer" peaked at almost 20% in fifth grade, and dropped to 14%–16% by seventh through tenth grade. However, the cross-sectional nature of this design could not eliminate the potential cohort effect; thereby warranting a longitudinal investigation of homophobic name-calling. Understanding how bullying predicts changes in homophobic name-calling during the early years of middle school is critical to developing effective and developmentally appropriate prevention (Birkett & Espelage, 2015).

Sex Differences and the Maintenance of Masculine Norms

The relation between bullying and homophobic name-calling appears to be stronger among boys than among girls. Literature on the sex differences in bullying and homophobic name-calling consistently found that boys engage in these behaviors more frequently than girls (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002; Poteat & DiGiovanni, 2010). Adolescent males reported that homophobic name-calling is one of the most serious and provocative actions used against one another (Pascoe, 2003; Plummer, 2001). Poteat and Rivers (2010) explored the association between bullying roles (i.e., perpetrators, reinforcers) and the use of homophobic name-calling and found that boys who engaged in multiple bullying roles also reported greater homophobic name-calling. On the other hand, Poteat and Espelage (2005) found a link between bullying and homophobic name-calling for both boys and girls. However, Poteat, O'Dwyer, and Mereish (2012) found that homophobic name-calling increased for boys from seventh through twelfth grade, but decreased for girls over the same time period. In the present study, we examine biological sex as a predictor of changes in homophobic name-calling. Further, adherence to traditional masculinity ideology is also examined as a predictor of homophobic name-calling.

Bullying, Homophobic Name-Calling, and Sexual Harassment

Past studies report that bullying is associated with sexual harassment, which is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and making sexually explicit comments (e.g., Hill & Kearl, 2011). For instance, DeSouza and Ribeiro (2005) reported, from a sample of 400 Brazilian students, that although boys bullied and sexually harassed their peers more frequently than girls, bullying predicted sexual harassment for both boys and girls. From a cross-sectional study of 961 elementary school and 935 middle school students, Pepler et al. (2006) also found a positive link between bullying and sexual harassment. Exploring the same link longitudinally, Pellegrini (2001) determined that boys who engaged in bullying in Grade 6 also engages in sexual harassment by the end of Grade 7.

Recent literature lends considerable support for examining an overlap among bullying, homophobia name-calling, and sexual violence. Sexual harassment frequently entails homophobic name-calling, jokes, and rumor spreading. This is evident in McMaster et al. (2002) study findings, which included a sample of 6th-8th graders, where homophobic name-calling was commonly expressed by both boys and girls. The study also found that same-gender sexual harassment increased in frequency from Grade 6 to Grade 8. A study by Gruber and Fineran (2008), which compared the frequency and impact of bullying and sexual harassment victimization among middle and high school students, found no differences between boys and girls in frequency of bullying and sexual harassment.

Study Hypothesis

The current study examines both the time-variant and time-invariant predictors on individual rates of homophobic name-calling across the middle school years. Therefore, we examined the extent to which bullying, adherence to traditional masculinity ideology, dismissive of sexual harassment, and sexual harassment were respectively associated with longitudinal changes in homophobic name-calling among middle school students. Although several studies have examined the associations between bullying behaviors and individual rates of homophobic name-calling, to our knowledge, no longitudinal studies that examine homophobic name-calling in middle school have considered both within-person

(time-variant) and between-person (time-invariant) variables together. The current study addresses these shortcomings by using a large sample of middle school students to examine both within-person (intraindividual) and between-person (interindividual) differences across four waves.

The overall hypotheses examine associations at the within-person, between-person, and across levels of analyses. It was hypothesized that (H1) there will be positive growth in homophobic name-calling over time; (H2) on average, time-specific within-person increases in bullying, traditional masculinity, dismissiveness of sexual harassment, and sexual harassment will be associated with increases in homophobic name-calling; (H3) on average, higher rates of between-person bullying, traditional masculinity, dismissiveness of sexual harassment, and sexual harassment will be associated with higher rate of homophobic name-calling over time; and (H4) the associations among bullying, traditional masculinity, and sexual harassment on higher rates of homophobic name-calling would be exacerbated (moderated) by dismissiveness of sexual harassment.

Method

Participants

Participants included 1,655 students in fifth to eighth grade from four public middle schools in the Midwest. Longitudinal data were collected over four waves from Spring of 2008 to Fall–Spring of 2009–2010. Ages ranged from 10 to 14 years, with a mean age of 12.8 ($SD = 1.08$) during the first wave of data collection. Students included 50% female ($n = 828$) and the racial distribution consisted of 49.5% African American ($n = 819$), 34.5% European American ($n = 571$), 8.9% biracial ($n = 148$), 3.1% Hispanic ($n = 52$), 1.8% Asian or Pacific Islander ($n = 29$), and 1.6% American Indian or Alaska Native ($n = 26$). These four public schools are situated in a Midwestern school district that where 60.4% of the students are African American, followed by 31.5% European American, 2.6% Asian, 5.1% Hispanic, and .4% Multiracial. Approximately 69.3% of the student population is considered low-income. The chronic truancy rate for the school district is 2.5%. The mobility rate is 30.1% district-wide.

Procedure

Parental consent. A waiver of active parental consent was approved by the institutional review board and school district administration. Parents of all students enrolled in the schools were sent letters informing them about the purpose of the study. Parents were asked to sign the form and return it only if they were unwilling to have their child participate in the investigation. At the beginning of each survey administration, teachers removed students from the room if they were not allowed to participate, and researchers also reminded all students that they should not complete the survey if their parents had returned the form. This procedure was followed at each wave of data collection. Students were asked to consent to participate in the study through an assent procedure included on the coversheet of the survey and could skip questions and stop at any time. Students were given a highlighter for participating.

A 95% participation rate was achieved at Wave 1. Retention rates varied between the waves because students had four opportunities to participate in the study. For example, students who did not participate in Wave 2 were not excluded from subsequent waves of administration. Therefore, retention rates were calculated by dividing the lowest rate of participation by the highest rate of participation by grade-level. Retention rates were 78% for sixth graders at Wave 1 through eighth grade at Wave 4, 78% for seventh graders at Wave 1 through eighth grade at Wave 3, and 83% for sixth graders at Wave 2 through seventh grade at Wave 4. Retention rates were not calculated for fifth graders at Wave 1 due to the small sample size ($n = 53$), and eighth graders at Wave 1 due to their single point of administration. The overall retention rate for the entire study was approximately 80%.

Survey administration. Six trained research assistants, the primary researcher, and a faculty member collected data. At least two of these individuals administered surveys to classes ranging in size from 10 to 25 students. Students were first informed about the general nature of the investigation. Next, researchers made certain that students were sitting far enough from one another to ensure confidentiality. Students were then given survey packets and the survey was read aloud to them by trained graduate students. It took students approximately 40 min on average to complete the survey.

Measures

Student self-report measures were administered at four time points separated by 6 months across 2 years from the same individuals over time. Table 1 includes ranges of the study variables, means, and standard deviations across all four waves by sex and for the total sample.

Demographic variables. Students reported on their biological sex (male, female), their grade level (fifth to eighth grade), their age in years, and their race/ethnicity. For race, participants were given six options: African American (not Hispanic), Asian, White (not Hispanic), Hispanic, Native American, and other (with a space to write in the most appropriate racial descriptor).

Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (HCAT). We used the HCAT scale to assess homophobic name-calling (Poteat & Espelage, 2005). This scale contains five items and measures how many times, in the past 30 days, a youth has called other students homophobic epithets. Students read the following sentence: "Some kids call each other names like homo, gay, lesbo, fag or dyke. How many times in the last 30 days did YOU say words like these to . . ." and then were asked how often they said these words to five different types of people, such as a friend, someone [they] did not like, or someone [they] thought was gay. Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*7 or more times*). This scale has yielded scores with strong convergent and divergent validity (Poteat & Espelage, 2005). The reliability ranges from $\alpha = .84–0.85$ ($M = .85$) across all waves. Higher scores indicate greater frequency of name-calling.

University of Illinois Bully Scale (UIBS). The UIBS is an eight-item scale that assesses bullying behavior (Espelage & Holt, 2001). The scale includes items that cover teasing, social exclusion, name-calling, and rumor spreading (Espelage & Holt, 2001). Students indicate how often, in the past 30 days, they engaged in each behavior. Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*7 or more times*). Example items include "I

Table 1
Range, Mean, and Standard Deviation by Total Sample, Sex, and Wave of Administration

Construct	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3		Wave 4	
	Range	Mean (*SD*)	Range	Mean (*SD*)	Range	Mean (*SD*)	Range	Mean (*SD*)
Homophobic name-calling								
Total	1.00–5.00	1.67 (.90)	1.00–5.00	1.83 (.95)	1.00–5.00	1.81 (.95)	1.00–5.00	1.74 (.91)
Female	1.00–5.00	1.58 (.87)	1.00–5.00	1.70 (.86)	1.00–5.00	1.71 (.88)	1.00–5.00	1.65 (.78)
Male	1.00–5.00	1.76 (.92)	1.00–5.00	1.97 (1.03)	1.00–5.00	1.90 (1.01)	1.00–5.00	1.84 (1.02)
Bullying								
Total	1.00–4.44	1.43 (.58)	1.00–5.00	1.44 (.59)	1.00–5.00	1.45 (.62)	1.00–4.11	1.39 (.52)
Female	1.00–4.33	1.42 (.57)	1.00–4.44	1.42 (.56)	1.00–4.11	1.43 (.56)	1.00–4.11	1.37 (.48)
Male	1.00–4.44	1.44 (.60)	1.00–5.00	1.47 (.63)	1.00–5.00	1.47 (.68)	1.00–3.78	1.40 (.56)
Sexual harassment								
Total	1.00–3.40	2.06 (.17)	1.00–4.46	2.06 (.26)	1.00–4.46	2.05 (.23)	1.00–3.38	2.04 (.18)
Female	1.13–3.40	2.05 (.15)	1.00–4.46	2.07 (.26)	1.00–4.46	2.05 (.20)	1.46–3.38	2.05 (.15)
Male	1.00–2.93	1.08 (.19)	1.00–4.23	2.06 (.26)	1.00–3.77	2.04 (.27)	1.00–3.23	2.03 (.20)
Dismissiveness of sexual harassment								
Total	1.00–3.50	2.00 (.45)	1.00–3.75	1.88 (.53)	1.00–3.63	1.87 (.53)	1.00–3.25	1.81 (.54)
Female	1.00–3.50	1.89 (.44)	1.00–3.75	1.82 (.51)	1.00–3.50	1.77 (.48)	1.00–3.25	1.72 (.51)
Male	1.00–3.40	2.10 (.45)	1.00–3.75	1.95 (.54)	1.00–3.63	1.98 (.56)	1.00–3.25	1.90 (.56)
Masculinity								
Total	1.00–4.00	1.92 (.50)	1.00–4.00	1.92 (.56)	1.00–4.00	1.90 (.56)	1.00–4.00	1.92 (.56)
Female	1.00–3.14	1.76 (.46)	1.00–4.00	1.80 (.55)	1.00–4.00	1.75 (.50)	1.00–4.00	1.84 (.56)
Male	1.00–4.00	2.09 (.48)	1.00–4.00	2.05 (.55)	1.00–4.00	2.07 (.58)	1.00–4.00	2.02 (.55)

upset other students for the fun of it" and "I threatened another student." Reliability of the UIBS for our study across waves ranges from $\alpha = .84–0.87$ ($M = .86$) across all waves. The construct validity of this scale has been supported by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). Scores have converged with peer nominations of victimization (Espelage et al., 2003). Higher scores indicate more self-reported bullying.

Sexual harassment. The American Association of University Women Sexual Harassment Survey (AAUW, 2001) was used to measure the frequency with which students perpetrated sexually harassing behaviors. At Wave 1, they indicated how often they did each item in the past year, and for Waves 2–4 they indicated how often they did each item since the last administration or the beginning of school. The self-report instrument consists of 13 items (e.g., "Made unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks" and "Called someone gay or lesbian"). Response options ranged from 1 (*never*), to 4 (*often*). Reliability ranges from $\alpha = .70–0.84$ ($M = .79$) across all waves. Higher scores indicated higher frequency of sexual harassment.

Dismissiveness of sexual harassment. An adapted version of the National Institute of Justice Survey of Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Sexual Harassment (Taylor & Stein, 2007) was used to measure dismissive attitudes toward sexual harassment. Eleven items assess attitudes toward sexual harassment. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each statement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Example items include "Sexual harassment is just having fun" and "Ignoring sexual harassment will make it go away." Reliability ranges from $\alpha = .68–0.75$ ($M = .71$) across all waves. Higher scores reflected greater levels of dismissive attitudes.

Traditional masculinity. The 12-item Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS; Chu, Porche, & Tolman, 2005) assesses the level of traditional masculinity attitudes held by individuals. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with each statement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Examples of items include "It's important for a boy to act like nothing is wrong, even when something is bothering him." The AMIRS has been shown to be moderately correlated with the Male Role Attitudes Scale (Snell, 1989; $r = .48$), suggesting convergent validity (Chu et al., 2005). Reliability ranges from $\alpha = .76–0.82$ ($M = .80$) across all waves. The higher the score, the stronger the endorsement of traditional masculinity.

Analytic Plan

Bullying and homophobic name-calling have been found to correlate only moderately (Espelage et al., 2012; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). In order to evaluate whether they are distinct constructs, we ran two separate measurement models to confirm that these two scales are not measuring the same construct. First, we fit a one-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with both bullying and homophobic name-calling items. Second, we ran a two-factor model with homophobic name-calling and bullying items as separate constructs. To determine which measurement model fits best, we compared model-fit statistics. Specifically, we used root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and comparative fit index (CFI). Values of .01, .05, .08, and .10 to indicate excellent, good, mediocre, and poor fit for RMSEA respectively and values greater than .95 for CFI to indicate good model fit (Little, 2013; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). To address missing data, all models were fitted using the full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimator in Mplus, thus treating all observed predictors as single-item latent variables. FIML allows each individual to contribute whatever data they have available to the likelihood function; as such, all 1,655 participants were included in the study. Age, sex, and race were three variables we included in our model to adjust for potential bias due to missing data mechanisms (End-

ers, 2010). As such, any bias introduced by missing data associated with these variables (and our main effects) are adjusted for in our models. Under the MCAR or MAR assumptions, FIML has been shown to provide unbiased estimates (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). All individuals in the study had at least one wave of data.

To address our study hypotheses, we fit a taxonomy of multilevel growth curve models, using a Poisson distribution to account for dispersion (Singer & Willett, 2003). Specifically, we established, in a series of unconditional models, a plausible growth model for homophobic name-calling trajectories. To determine appropriate growth function for homophobic name-calling, we entered both linear and quadratic effects into the model. Subsequently, we tested our study hypotheses by testing families of conditional growth models (Model 1–Model 5). Although we only integrated interactions that showed statistically significant relations into our final model, we describe our model building process below. All models were nested, and significant reductions in −2 log likelihood were used to test for model fit. All analyses were conducted using Mplus version 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

In Model 1, we allowed linear growth to vary randomly, while quadratic growth remained fixed, with time centered on the first observation. In Model 2, we added demographic variables to control for sex, race/ethnicity, and age at baseline. In Model 3, we tested level-1 within-person parameters, which represent the respective within-person relations among bullying, sexual harassment, dismissiveness of sexual harassment, and traditional masculinity. All time-varying predictors were person-mean centered. As such, each predictor carries *only* within-person variation and is orthogonal to corresponding between-person predictors in Level 2. The stochastic part of the model allows linear time to vary randomly. However, after testing each variable, none of the Level 1 parameters needed to vary randomly. In Model 4, we tested the respective between-person relations among mean bullying, mean sexual harassment, mean dismissiveness of sexual harassment, and mean traditional masculinity. We tested each between-person parameter with the intercept, linear, and quadratic growth rate of homophobic name-calling. In subsequent models, we allowed mean bullying to vary as a function of linear growth. Finally, Model 5 represents the addition of significant interactions. Specifically, we allowed: (a) youths' mean bullying to vary as a function of mean dismissiveness of sexually harassment and (b) within-person bullying to vary as a function of between person (mean) dismissiveness. Nonsignificant interactions were removed from the final model for parsimony.

Results

Measurement Models

As expected, the one-factor bully homophobic name-calling model (i.e., bullying and homophobic name-calling items together) revealed modest fit (RMSEA = .08, CFI = .81) in comparison to the two-factor model (RMSEA = .05, CFI = .93), in which bullying and homophobic name-calling served as separate latent constructs. Given these results, we treated homophobic name-calling and bullying as two separate, distinct, constructs.

Model Results

Preliminary models. Table 2 shows a taxonomy of five nested models. The models are labeled Model 1–Model 5, respectively, beginning with the unconditional growth model. As hypothesized (H1), on average, youths' homophobic name-calling increased over time; however, the rate of acceleration slowed. Specifically, there was evidence of a quadratic population growth rate, such that increases in homophobic name-calling were rapid from Wave 1 and Wave 2, yet began to slow (decelerate) thereafter. Tests of nested models indicated that linear and quadratic fixed effects, as well as random effect of linear time, were significant across youth (see Table 2, Model 1).

Within-person changes. Table 2, Model 3 displays main effects models for within-person relations. As hypothesized (H2), the main effect of within-person bullying indicated that, at times when individuals reported higher bullying then their own mean they also engaged in increased homophobic name-calling ($\beta = .208$, $p < .01$; Model 3). Contrary to our hypothesis, preliminary main effects models indicate that within-person increases in dismissiveness of sexual harassment ($\beta = .027$, *ns*) and traditional masculinity ($\beta = -.057$, *ns*), were not associated with increases in homophobic name-calling. However, in our main effects model, increases in sexual harassment were associated with contemporaneous increases in homophobic name-calling ($\beta = .019$, $p < .01$; Model 3). There was no evidence that these relations (sexual harassment and traditional masculinity) were moderated by bullying or dismissiveness of sexual harassment.

Within-person cross-level interactions. However, as shown by a significant cross-level interaction in our final model (see Table 2, Model 5), subsequent models revealed that within-person bullying varied as a function of between-person dismissiveness of sexual harassment ($\beta = -.159$, $p < .05$). As hypothesized (H4), and displayed in Figure 1, the within-person relations between bullying and homophobic name-calling were especially pronounced for those at high average levels of dismissiveness of sexual harassment. Specifically, these associations were most prominent at lower levels of bullying. For instance, the diamond-marked slope represents the conditional slope for those at higher (one standard deviation above) levels of bullying. These relations are easily compared with individuals at the same level of bullying but who show lower levels (one standard deviation below the grand mean) of dismissiveness of sexual harassment (represented by the triangle-marked slope). Alternatively, one can surmise validly that the effect of dismissiveness of sexual harassment emerges in the context of shifts in one's level of bullying.

Between-person changes. As hypothesized (H3), youth with greater engagement in bullying over time tended to show greater engagement in homophobic name-calling ($\beta = .362$, $p < .01$) compared with those with low levels of bullying. A significant interaction with time indicated that the magnitude of this relation increased as a function of time. Similar to our within-person effects and contrary to our hypothesis, average between-person levels of traditional masculinity were not associated with homophobic name-calling. However, as hypothesized, youth who exhibited higher average rates of dismissiveness of sexual harassment showed comparatively high levels of

Table 2
Parameter Estimates and Standard Errors of Fixed and Random Effects From a Series of Individual Growth Models

Parameters	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	2.06** (.014)	1.62** (.160)	1.59** (.158)	1.49** (.157)	1.45** (.157)
Linear slope	.100** (.024)	.102** (.030)	.107** (.028)	.083** (.025)	.093** (.025)
Quadratic slope	−.030** (.008)	−.040** (.010)	−.039** (.010)	−.026** (.009)	−.029** (.009)
Sex		−.100** (.027)	−.103** (.027)	−.057* (.023)	−.060** (.023)
Age		.035** (.012)	.037** (.012)	.012 (.010)	.014 (.010)
African American		.193** (.030)	.184** (.030)	.083** (.022)	.074** (.022)
Other		.058 (.040)	.057 (.040)	.056 (.032)	.051 (.032)
WP Shp			.019** (.005)	.015** (.004)	.013** (.005)
WP Dis			.027 (.039)	.059 (.038)	.60 (.038)
WP Bully			.280** (.038)	.241** (.030)	.308** (.035)
WP Tradmas			−.057** (.036)	−.050 (.033)	−.053 (.033)
BP Shp				.017** (.004)	.018** (.004)
BP Dis				.100** (.036)	.107** (.036)
BP Bully				.362** (.023)	.388** (.023)
BP Tradmas				.022 (.028)	.024 (.028)
WP Bully × BP Diss					−.159* (.080)
BP Bully × BP Diss					−.125** (.041)
Random effects					
Intercept between					.49** (.008)
Linear slope	.012** (.003)	.036** (.003)	.034** (.003)	.012** (.002)	.011** (.002)
BP Bully				.042* (.016)	.041** (.016)
Fit indices					
−2LL	−8370.54	−7065.31**	−6789.81**	−.6259.75**	−6243.30**
AIC	16753.07	14146.25	13603.25	12553.50	12526.60
BIC	16789.32	14193.25	13635.11	12652.15	12642.66

Note. WP = within-person; BP = between person; Shp = sexual harassment; Diss = dismissiveness; Bully = bullying; Tradmas = traditional masculinity; AIC = Akaike information criterion; LL = log likelihood; BIC = Bayesian information criterion. Model 1 is an unconditional growth model with random linear growth. Model 2 added effect of control variables (Model 1 to Model 2; $\Delta LR = 1305.2$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .01$). Model 3 added main effects of within-person parameters (Model 2 to Model 3; $\Delta LR = 275.5$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .01$). Model 4 added main effects of between-person parameters as well as random between-person bullying (Model 3 to Model 4; $\Delta LR = 530.1$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .01$). Model 5 added the interactions of within-person bullying and between-person dismissiveness, and between-person bullying and between person dismissiveness (Model 4 to Model 5; $\Delta LR = 16.5$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .01$). Race variables compared with reference group (White).
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

homophobic name-calling over time ($\beta = .100$, $p < .01$; see Table 2, Model 4). This effect did not vary over time (e.g., growth). The magnitude increased slightly in our final model, ($\beta = .107$, $p < .01$; see Table 2, Model 5) and varied as a function of mean (or average) levels of bullying. Further, youth who engaged in higher average levels of sexual harassment showed comparatively higher levels of homophobic name-calling than their peers who engaged in lower average levels of sexual harassment over time ($\beta = .017$, $p < .01$). The magnitude of this effect increased slightly in our final model, ($\beta = .018$, $p < .01$) but did not vary as a function of time or any other predictors.

Between-person interactions. As demonstrated by a statistically significant interaction between bullying and mean levels of dismissiveness of sexual harassment ($\beta = -.125$, $p < .01$; see Table 2), this hypothesized (H4) relation was considerably stronger for individuals who reported high levels of bullying and dismissiveness of sexual harassment. For example, in Figure 2, the square-marked slope shows that individuals at high levels (one standard deviation above) of bullying and dismissiveness of sexual harassment showed higher levels of homophobic name-calling over time, compared with youth at lower levels of bullying and dismissiveness of sexual harassment. Interestingly, the effect for high bullying is similar for those with both high and low dismissiveness of sexual harassment, indicating, again, that dismissiveness of sexual harassment may be a more prominent predictor for those at lower levels of bullying.

Discussion

Several studies have established the association bullying and homophobic name-calling. The current study extends previous research by examining these phenomena across the middle school years using a longitudinal design (Espelage, 2014; Espelage, Basile, et al., 2015; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). As hypothesized, bullying was found to be a predictor of subsequent homophobic name-calling among a large sample of youth over two years of middle school. This result is consistent with a recent cross-sectional study of high school youth, in which youth who were bullies, reinforcers, or assisters were more likely to use homophobic epithets toward their peers (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). The current results suggested that the connection between bullying and homophobic name-calling is well-established in middle school.

Results also suggested that youth who were more likely to be dismissive of sexual harassment displayed higher levels of homophobic name-calling, which demonstrates an overlap between sexual harassment and homophobic attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, the association between bullying and homopho-

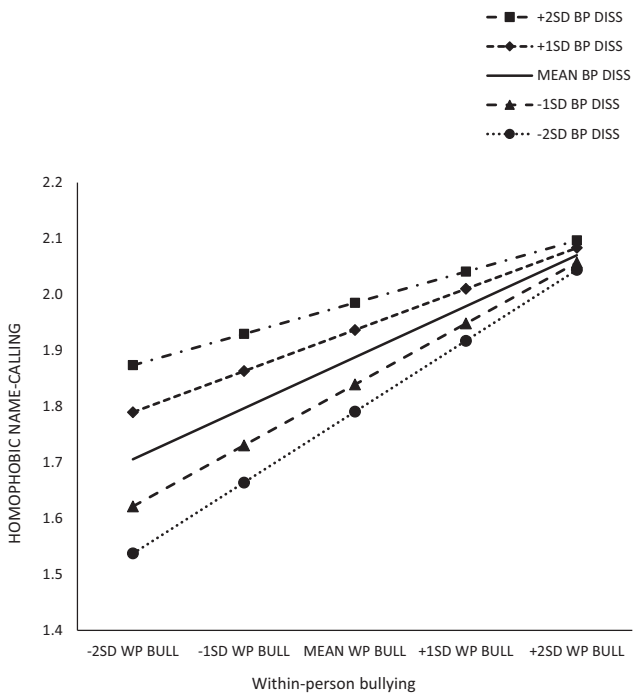

Figure 1. Cross-level interaction between within-person bullying and between-person dismissiveness of sexual harassment on individuals rates of homophobic name-calling. −1 *SD*, +1 *SD* = minus one and plus one standard deviations below or above the mean. −2 *SD*, +2 *SD* = minus two and plus 2 standard deviations below or above the mean.

bic name-calling was strongest for youth with high levels of dismissiveness of sexual harassment. Homophobic epithets, jokes, and name-calling are one of many forms of sexual harassment (see McMaster et al., 2002), and youth who are dismissive of sexual harassment might be at an elevated risk of engaging in harassing behaviors.

Limitations

Despite the numerous strengths of the current study, several limitations need to be noted. First, the data were self-report and collected from one community. Given that gender-based aggression is a public event, it would be important to do some observational studies. Second, gender expression or sexual orientation was not assessed; thus, it is not clear whether the trajectory of homophobic name-calling during middle school varies for LGBT or gender nonconforming youth. Third, the assessment of homophobic name-calling in the current study was limited to face-to-face name-calling. We did not include other relevant forms of homophobic name-calling, such as those that occur in the social media. For example, Prati (2012) found that homophobic bullying consisted of verbal, physical, property issues and cyberbullying among a large sample of Italian high school youth. Finally, we did not assess attitudes toward sexual harassment among the adults in the schools. Findings in the extant literature suggest that youth who are dismissiveness of sexual harassment report that adults in their buildings are also dismissive (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein, & Espelage, 2013).

Research Implications

Studies that have examined changes in homophobic name-calling among middle school youth in a longitudinal design are limited. Our findings suggest that more research is needed in this area in order to fully capture the risk and protective factors associated with onset and changes in the use of homophobic epithets. It is particularly important for future studies to identify and explore moderators at multiple system levels that might exacerbate or mitigate the bullying-homophobic name-calling link such as peer and teachers' willingness to intervene, consistent enforcement of school rules against bullying and harassment, and so forth. Given the importance of dismissiveness of sexual harassment as a moderator between bullying and homophobic name-calling, it is critical that future studies of middle school youth examine what is driving the dismissiveness of sexual harassment as well as sexual harassment behaviors themselves. For example, there is some hint in the literature that when adults are intolerant of sexual harassment, students tend to report less homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment (Rinehart & Espelage, 2016). However, there is simply not enough research with this young population to pinpoint the causal mechanisms by which these attitudes are shaped by various players, like peers, teachers, and families.

Clinical and Policy Implications

Our findings combined with the extant literature substantiate the overlap and association between bullying and homophobic name-calling (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Espelage et al., 2012; Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010). Although state legislators have increasingly passed antibullying policies (Espelage, 2014),

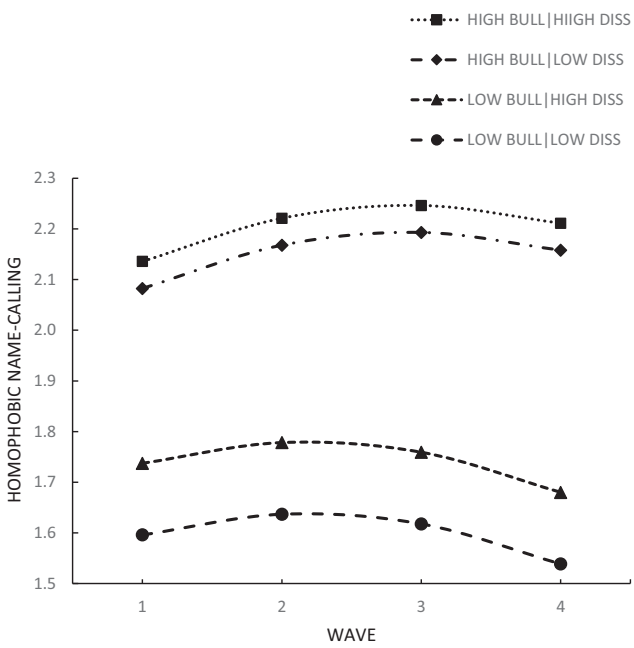

Figure 2. Level 2 interaction between bullying and dismissiveness of sexual harassment on individual rates of homophobic name-calling over time. High = 1 standard deviation above the mean; Low = 1 standard deviation below the mean.

there have been few efforts made to include homophobic name-calling in antibullying policies, particularly for middle school students (Espelage, 2013). Despite the efforts expended to address school bullying, the effectiveness of the programs, especially in middle schools, have been modest (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). This is troubling, given that the prevalence of bullying is highest in early adolescence (Robers, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015), and effective prevention and intervention strategies are least effective in middle and high school (Yeager, Fong, Lee, & Espelage, 2015).

To effectively address school bullying among early adolescents, it is imperative that antibullying policies work to address homophobic epithets, teasing, and name-calling (Espelage, 2013, 2016). Putting these measures into effect in middle school can minimize the escalation of negative educational and psychosocial outcomes, as well as gender-based violence (e.g., sexual harassment, teen dating violence), which typically emerge in high school (Temple, Shorey, Tortolero, Wolfe, & Stuart, 2013). Bullying in middle school has been found to be an antecedent to sexual harassment in high school, which is largely driven by the use of homophobic slurs (Espelage et al., 2012; Espelage, Basile, et al., 2015). In addition, bullying and gender-based violence share similar risk factors, such as lack of empathy (Endresen & Olweus, 2001) and attitudes supportive of aggression (Boulton, Trueman, & Flemington, 2002). These are typically reinforced and maintained in similar peer contexts (Dishion & Owen, 2002; Espelage et al., 2003). As such, antibullying and violence prevention programs in schools need to target these multiple risks, which can decrease the risk of bullying, as well as other forms of victimization that co-occur or occur subsequent to bullying (Hamby & Grych, 2013).

There is a growing body of research, which points to important links among adolescents' social, emotional, and academic competencies (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, & Vesely, 2014). Studies suggest that youth who demonstrate social emotional competence are more eager to learn (Rudasill, Gallagher, & White, 2010) and are perceived to be more cognitively advanced (Garner, 2010). Recent findings also indicate that social emotional competence is also associated with increased pro-social behavior and decreased problem behaviors, such as bullying and homophobic name-calling (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2015; Espelage, Low, Van Ryzin, & Polanin, 2015). Indeed, effective prevention efforts consist of a wide range of instructional practices, from direct instruction and group discussions, to opportunities for self-reflection and role-plays (Tobler & Stratton, 1997). Second Step (Committee for Children, 2008), a social-emotional learning (SEL) program, comprises various activities and instructions that promote positive interpersonal skills, encourage respectful forms of communication, and discusses various forms of bullying (e.g., bias-based bullying). In a 3-year randomized clinical trial of the Second Step Middle School Program implemented in 36 school districts, Espelage, Low, Van Ryzin, et al. (2015) reported a significant decrease in self-reported delinquency over the first two years, which was linked with decreases in bullying, cyberbullying, and homophobic name-calling. Such findings represent an important contribution to school-based bullying prevention programs. Considering that school practitioners (e.g., counselors, school psychologists, and social workers) are in the forefront of addressing adolescent behavior problems, they need to first recognize that homophobic name-calling is not an isolated event. Rather, it is a precursor to later bullying and aggressive behavior. Practitioners should also support the application of SEL programs in the school and encourage using the complete program, rather than selecting only a few lessons from the curriculum (Espelage, Low, Van Ryzin, et al., 2015).

It is also important for school practitioners, along with other school officials, to consider students who may serve as bystanders and defenders against bullying and homophobic name-calling. Practitioners need to understand how to work with bystanders and defenders in efforts to promote safer schools for LGBT and gender nonconforming students. Recently, scholars have recognized the important role of bystanders (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012), which should also be considered in antibullying efforts. A study by Poteat and Vecho (2015) found that sex, courage, altruism, and number of LGBT friends were independently associated with defending behavior. These findings are also consistent with the aims of SEL programs in fostering the development of related attributes such as empathy, perspective-taking, and social skills. Moreover, practitioners need to identify best practices for motivating and supporting students to intervene when they observe homophobic behaviors or hear homophobic remarks in school (Poteat & Vecho, 2015). Finally, Gay-Straight Alliances in schools that foster a positive school climate for all youth can increase sense of safety among LGBT youth, as well as increase their likelihood of improved health and educational outcomes such as reduced truancy, fewer injuries at school, and fewer suicide attempts (Burdge, Snapp, Laub, Russell, & Moody, 2013; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, Schwab-Reese, Ranapurwala, Hertz, & Ramirez, 2015).

Conclusion

Homophobic name-calling was found to increase over the middle school years, suggesting that this population should be the target of research on gender-based harassment. High school is simply too late to start tracking these behaviors. Bullying prevention programs need to include discussions on the use of homophobic epithets and harmful effects of homophobic name-calling, and address why youth are dismissive of sexual harassment.

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