SCHOOL LEVEL PREDICTORS OF HOMOPHOBIC NAME-CALLING & SEXUAL HARASSMENT VICTIMIZATION/PERPETRATION AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH

BY

SARAH J. RINEHART

THESIS
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Adviser:
Professor Dorothy Espelage
ABSTRACT

Using multi-informant, multilevel modeling, this study examines the association between teacher and staff perceptions of school environment and student self-reports of homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization as well as sexual harassment perpetration and victimization. Surveys were conducted with 1,447 teachers and staff and 3,616 6th grade students across 36 middle schools in the Midwest. Bivariate associations between school-level and student self-reports revealed that when teachers perceive their schools as being committed to bullying prevention, students reported less homophobic name-calling perpetration, sexual harassment perpetration, and sexual harassment victimization. Further, when adults reported more positive interactions between staff and students in their school, students endorsed lower levels of homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization and less sexual harassment perpetration. Additionally, higher teacher/staff reported gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment at the school level was correlated with less student reported homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization and sexual harassment perpetration. In a model with all school environment scales entered together, school commitment to prevent bullying was associated with less sexual harassment perpetration; in addition, higher perceived gender equity and intolerance of sexual harassment at the school level was associated with fewer reported experiences of homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization and sexual harassment perpetration. We conclude that efforts to address gendered harassment should include support from the school administration and professional development opportunities for all teachers and staff. Adults in the school should create a culture that is intolerant of sexual harassment and supports equality between the girls and boys in the school.
Keywords: homophobic name-calling, sexual harassment, school climate, multilevel modeling, middle school, teacher
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Victimization/Perpetration Among Middle School Youth

Aggression and harassment in schools is rooted in a school’s environment and culture (Meyer, 2008). The extant literature shows that negative school climate is associated with greater aggression and victimization; additionally, positive school environment is associated with fewer aggressive and externalizing behaviors (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Espelage, Polanin, & Low, in press; Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013, Totura et al., 2009). However, the literature is limited to a focus on individual- or student-level predictors of gendered harassment, with little attention given to the school-level correlates. Given the research on the associations between other forms of aggression and school environment, it is likely that students in school climates that are tolerant of gendered harassment are more likely to experience and perpetrate homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. This study addresses this gap in the literature by examining correlations between teacher/staff reports of school environment at the school level and student reports of sexual and homophobic perpetration and victimization at the individual level.

Social Ecological Framework

Many school-based researchers have applied a social ecological framework to understand how individual attitudes and behaviors are shaped by the complex interactions between students, staff, and school practices (Cohen, 2013; Cohen et al., under review; Basile, Espelage, Rivers, McMahon, & Simon, 2009; Espelage, 2012; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Salmivalli, 2010; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2002). Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) pioneered the understanding of social processes in school environments using an ecological framework model. Bronfenbrenner’s classic work explored the dynamic relations between individuals and the environment in terms of
systems: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A microsystem consists of the relationship between the individual and the environment in a specific setting; in this case, a school. A mesosystem, then, consists of the interrelations between multiple microsystems. Exosystem refers to the larger social structures, while macrosystems are the broader social and institutional patterns of a culture. The interaction of these many systems creates the environment in which students work, learn, and play. In this study, correlates of gendered harassment and positive youth development are examined at the individual (student) level and the microsystem (school) level.

*Gendered Harassment*

Gendered harassment includes any behavior that serves to reinforce heteronormativity and sexism (Meyer, 2008). This type of harassment reinforces heterosexual gender norms and can be psychological, physical, or verbal. Although sex, gender, and sexual orientation are viewed as different aspects of identity, the dominance of heterosexual masculinity often results in the conflation of these ideas (Butler, 1999; Bem, 1993; Sullivan, 2003). As a result of this conflation, gendered harassment may simultaneously target multiple intersecting identities (Meyer, 2008). Therefore, in this study, we examine both homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment as two aspects of gendered harassment.

Homophobic name-calling is a form of hate language and involves the use of slurs associated with a student’s presumed or assumed sexual orientation, often stated in a pejorative manner. In 2011, 1.3 percent of 12- to 18-year-old students reported being the target of hate-related words regarding their presumed sexual orientation (Robers, Kemp, & Truman, 2013). Homophobic name-calling is correlated with an increase in anxiety, depression, personal distress, suicidality, and other mental health problems (Cochran & Mays, 2000; D’Augelli & Hershberger,
Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted sexual conduct, and can include unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, and physical behaviors that interfere with an individual’s right to receive an equal education (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2011; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2001). Sexual harassment includes both quid pro quo harassment and hostile-environment harassment; both are forms of sex discrimination and are prohibited in schools by Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2001). About half of students in 7th through 12th grade were the victims of sexual harassment at school during the 2010-11 school year, with 56% of females and 40% of males experiencing sexual harassment in person or online (AAUW, 2011). Like homophobic name-calling, sexual harassment is also associated with negative outcomes, including issues with mental and physical health, life satisfaction, and substance abuse (Corbett, Gentry, & Pearson, 1993; Gruber & Fineran, 2007; Hand & Sanchez, 2000; Lee, Croninger, Linn, & Chen, 1996; Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008; Stein, Marshall, & Tropp, 1993; Stratton & Backes, 1997; Tully, 2011).

Both homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment are associated with characteristics of the larger school ecology and are not simply a result of an interaction between the immediate individuals involved in these incidents (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Meyer, 2008; Stein, 1995). In other words, school environment drives homophobic language and sexual harassment. If, within a school culture, students do not feel safe reporting incidents of harassment, and girls’ reports of victimization are not believed as readily as boys’, then an “insidious cycle” of violence is created (Stein, 1995). Additionally, when students observe, imitate, and learn deviant behavior modeled in some school environments, aggressive behavior can increase (Rorie, Gottfredson, Cross,
Wilson, & Connell, 2011). Students can also learn homophobic and social dominance attitudes from those around them, potentially leading to increased levels of prejudice (Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007). Although the connection between school environment and bullying has been analyzed using multilevel modeling, no large-scale studies have examined the school-level predictors of gendered harassment. Therefore, the focus of this manuscript is to identify the school-level characteristics that are associated with student self-reports of homophobic teasing perpetration and victimization, as well as sexual harassment perpetration and victimization.

**School Environment and Climate Predictors**

Although there are many different definitions of school climate, it is consistently described as the character and quality of the school culture or the overall ethos of the environment (Espelage et al., in press). This culture is created through the values, goals, norms, expectations, teaching practices, leadership styles, and bureaucratic structure of a school (National School Climate Council, 2007). School climate influences the incidence of gendered harassment (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Meyer, 2008). Positive school climate can minimize problematic behaviors by promoting safe and supportive environments for youth. A positive school climate includes norms that support safety and respect for all members of the school and includes teacher and staff that model prosocial behaviors for their students (“School Climate,” 2014). Additionally, if students have a positive perception of the school climate, they are less likely to engage in externalizing or aggressive behaviors (Espelage et al., 2000; Goldweber et al., 2013; Totura et al., 2009). On the other hand, a “culture of bullying” or aggression in a school can both encourage aggressive behavior and discourage reporting of aggression by bystanders (Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009; Espelage et al., 2000; Goldweber et al., 2013).

Commonly cited indicators of school climate include both student and staff reports of
their respective willingness to intervene in aggressive situations and administrative support in efforts to prevent aggression in the school (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009; Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, & Bolton, 2008; Espelage et al., in press; Gendron, Williams, Kirk, & Guerra, 2011; Goldweber et al., 2013; Harel-Fisch et al., 2011; Richard, Schneider, & Mallet, 2011; Totura et al., 2009; Waasdorp, Pas, O’Brennan, & Bradshaw, 2011). Although many school climate studies have used student self-report and aggregated student data at the school level, a multiple informant approach that considers both student and staff perceptions of perpetration and victimization is less common in the extant literature. These dual perspectives are important, as student and staff perceptions can differ in significant and telling ways. To address this gap, this study examines staff and teacher perceptions at the school level as correlates of student self-reports of multiple forms of gendered harassment.

In this study, we also examine how specific aspects of school environment may explain rates of gendered harassment in schools. Specifically, we examine how five indices of school environment and climate correlate with perpetration and victimization of homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. These scales include: perceived levels of student and staff intervention when aggression occurs, school commitment to bullying prevention, the positivity of teacher/staff/student interactions, and gender equity and sexual harassment intolerance.

*Student and Staff Intervention*

These factors address teacher and staff perceptions of student and staff willingness to intervene in various bullying incidents. Victimization occurs more frequently and student reported willingness to intervene is lower in schools where students interpret teachers’ intervention efforts as ineffectual (Goldweber et al., 2013; Waasdorp et al., 2011). Therefore, we hypothesized that higher levels of teacher, staff, and student interventions as reported by the
adults would be associated with lower levels of student reported homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment victimization and perpetration.

*School Commitment to Bully Prevention*

This factor assesses a school’s overall commitment to harassment prevention implementation, including the involvement of administrators, staff, and teachers. Some school researchers argue that aggression is less prevalent in schools where the school administration and staff work together to prevent harassment and address it when it occurs (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Studies also indicated that school leaders, including principals, are critical change agents in creating safe schools (Astor, Benbenishty, & Estrada, 2009). Accordingly, we hypothesized that self-reported student levels of homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment would be lower in schools where teachers and staff perceive the administration as supportive of aggression prevention efforts and where they themselves see bullying prevention as a priority.

*Positive Teacher-Staff-Student Interactions*

This factor assesses the school staff’s perception of the connectedness of the school, including the quality of the relationships among staff, teachers, students, and parents. Students who experience less school connectedness were more likely to report peer victimization (Espelage et al., 2000; Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005; Goldweber et al., 2013). Therefore, we hypothesized that more positive teacher-staff-student interactions would be associated with less homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment.

*Gender Equity and Intolerance of Sexual Harassment*

This factor measures teacher commitment to gender equity and intolerance of harassment. A recent study by Espelage et al. (in press) suggests that increased endorsement of gender equity and intolerance for sexual harassment by teachers is significantly correlated with fewer student
self-reports of bully perpetration and peer victimization. Specifically, increased gender equity reports were associated significantly with less bullying, aggression, and victimization, and greater willingness to intervene. Additionally, when staff and teachers treat boys and girls differently or are dismissive of sexual harassment, students report experiencing more victimization and less willingness to seek help (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein, & Espelage, 2013). Thus, we hypothesized that greater gender equity and intolerance of sexual harassment would be associated with lower rates of sexual harassment and homophobic name-calling.

**Current Study**

This study adds to the literature in several respects. Specifically, it draws from the self-reports of a large sample of 6th graders and attempts to identify how school environment is associated with gendered aggression as it is emerging within this age group. Additionally, although other studies have focused on bullying and peer victimization, this study focuses on gendered harassment in terms of homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. To date, we are not aware of any studies that examine school-level influences on homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. Another strength of this study is its inclusion of multiple informants to assess school climate measures. Teachers and staff were surveyed for their impressions of the school environment and students reported on their own experiences with homophobic name-calling and sexual harassment. Because teachers do not witness all instances of aggressive behaviors, collecting student reports is important. By the same token, students are not always privy to the full view of school climate, especially in terms of principal and staff support; therefore, surveying the adults is instrumental in creating a cohesive sense of the social climate of each school at both the individual and the microsystem level.
Additionally, we used multilevel modeling to capture the associations between school environment and gendered harassment. Due to the nesting of individuals within schools, student reports are not independent from each other. Consequently, students’ reports are dependent within schools. Multilevel modeling captures this lack of independence by automatically adjusting standard errors as part of the process of model estimation (Raudenbush & Byrk, 2002). Furthermore, multilevel modeling accounts for differences between schools and between individuals by modeling data through both fixed and random effects. When random effects are significant, it indicates that the association between the exogenous and endogenous variables varies across schools.

To summarize, the existing literature provides us with the sense that school environment is connected to students’ experiences of aggression; this understanding of the literature is situated in the context of a social-ecological framework. This study aims to expand and improve upon the extant literature by examining the correlation between school-level variables of teacher/staff-reported school environment and student-level rates of homophobic teasing and sexual harassment perpetration and victimization; these outcome variables are not as commonly explored as those of bullying and aggression more generally. This study improves upon the extant literature by the use of multi-informants (teachers, students), the use of scales rather than single-item indicators, and the use of multi-level modeling to examine the correlates of teacher/staff perceptions and student behavior.

Method

Participants

A total of 3,616 6th grade students across Illinois and Kansas middle schools participated in the surveys (Table 1). The students ranged in age from 11 to 13 years old, but most students
were 11 years old (Illinois = 75.8%, Kansas = 78.4%). A slight majority of students were male in both Illinois and Kansas (Illinois = 51.2, Kansas = 52.9). In Illinois, Blacks (33.5%) and Latino/as (33.1%) constituted the majority of students surveyed. Most students in Kansas schools were Latino/a (35.2%) or White (30.4%). Overall, 73% of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch across both states. Illinois students indicated that 20.2% of their mothers graduated from college compared to 15.7% of mothers of Kansas students. A large portion of students from Kansas, however, either did not know their mother’s education or left this item blank. Therefore, this item should be interpreted with some caution.

The analyses presented here include baseline data from a large-scale randomized clinical trial of a social-emotional learning program that is described in more detail elsewhere (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2013). Schools were recruited through the school district offices and had to be willing to be assigned to either an intervention or control condition. To be eligible, the schools could not be implementing any large-scale bully prevention curriculum or initiative, and control schools agreed to not implement a bully prevention program until after the three-year trial.

Twenty-four schools from Illinois and twelve schools from Kansas participated in the project. In the Illinois schools, 732 teachers and other staff completed the survey. A total of 715 teachers and other staff from Kansas schools participated. One school in Illinois provided only two teacher and staff surveys; all other schools, across both states, had at least ten teachers participate in the survey (Range = 2 – 101; M = 39.69; SD = 24.24). Schools were eligible for the school-level stipend if 80% of their teachers and staff completed the survey; all but three schools reached this goal. The sample consisted of 66% teachers, 10% support staff, 9% paraprofessionals, 4% administrators, 3% counselors or psychologists, 2% custodian staff, and
1% cafeteria staff. The staff identified mainly as White (75%), 10% as Black, and 8% as Hispanic. 78% of the sample identified as female, and the average age of the teachers and staff was 42.5 years old.

Data Collection

A waiver of active parental consent and an active consent protocol were both approved by the institutional review board at the University of Illinois, and districts could employ either method. Parents of all 6th grade students enrolled in all participating schools were sent letters or consent forms. An 86% participation rate was achieved in schools using a waiver of active consent and 63% participation rate was achieved for schools using an active consent procedure. Students were asked to consent to participate in the study through an assent procedure included on the coversheet of the survey. The data collection team included six trained research assistants, the primary researcher, and a faculty member collected the data. At least two of these individuals administered surveys to classes ranging in size from 10 to 25 students. The research assistants first informed students about the general nature of the investigation. Students were then given survey packets and the survey was read aloud to them. It took students approximately 40 minutes to complete the survey. Teachers and staff at each school were sent an email with a link to the online School Environment Survey.

Teacher/Staff School Environment Survey

Data were collected from school staff, teachers, and administrators using the School Environment Survey (Espelage et al., 2013). This instrument was adapted from the Colorado Trust’s Bullying Prevention Initiative (Csuti, 2008). Demographic information related to staff members’ gender, race or ethnicity, age, position in the school, and length of employment at the school is included in the survey. Espelage and colleagues (2013) conducted a factor analysis of
this instrument and eight factors emerged. Five of these factors were used in the present study. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .79 - .94.

**Student Intervention**

Five items emerged in this first factor. Teachers and staff are asked, “How likely is it that STUDENTS at your school could be counted on to help out in the following situations?” Examples include (1) A student is making fun of and teasing another student who is obviously weaker; (2) A student is spreading rumors or lies about another student behind their back. Response options include “Very unlikely,” “Unlikely,” “Likely,” and “Very Likely.” A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .84 was calculated for this sample of teachers and staff.

**Staff Intervention**

Five items emerged in this second factor. Teachers and staff are asked, “How likely is it that STAFF at your school could be counted on to help out in the following situations?” And the same five items from the student intervention (above) are presented. Response options include “Very unlikely,” “Unlikely,” “Likely,” and “Very Likely.” A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .91 was calculated for this sample of teachers and staff.

**School Commitment to Bully Prevention**

Eight items emerged in this third scale. Teachers and staff are asked “How much is your school doing in each of the following areas?”: Examples include (1) Demonstrating administrator commitment and leadership to address bullies, bullied, and bystanders; (2) Developing policies and programs to prevent bullying; (3) Implementing policies and programs to prevent bullying; (4) Supporting an active stakeholder group to address bullying and guiding implementation of bullying prevention activities. Response options include “Not at all,” “A little bit,” “A fair
amount,” and “A lot.” A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .94 was calculated for this sample of teachers and staff.

Positive Teacher-Staff-Student Interactions

Seven items emerged in the fourth factor. Teachers and staff are asked how much they agree with statements such as: (1) Teachers and staff in this school are willing to help students out; (2) Teachers and staff in this school can be trusted. Response options include “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.” A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .88 was calculated for this sample of teachers and staff.

Gender Equity or Intolerance of Sexual Harassment

Five items emerged in this fifth scale. Teachers and staff are asked how much they agree with the following statements: (1) Sexual harassment isn’t a serious problem in school; (2) Boys and girls are treated equally in school; (3) Boys understand that it is not okay to make sexual comments to girls at school; (4) Boys and girls show respect for each other at school; (5) Sexual harassment is not tolerated at school. Response options include “Strongly disagree,” “Disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.” Respondents were also allowed to respond “I don’t know” and these data were converted to missing values. A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .79 was calculated for this sample of teachers and staff.

Student Measures

Students completed a questionnaire about involvement in homophobic name-calling, sexual harassment, and other forms of peer aggression. Self-reports of sex, grade, and race were also elicited to determine demographic characteristics.

Homophobic Name-calling Perpetration & Victimization
The ten-item Homophobic Content Agent Target Scale (Poteat & Espelage, 2007) assesses two separate outcome measures: homophobic teasing perpetration and victimization. Students were asked how often they directed homophobic epithets at other students (perpetration) or were targets of this language (victimization) during the previous 30 days. For the perpetration scale, 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 these words to…” and then were asked how often they said these words to: “a friend,” “someone you did not like,” “someone you did not know well,” “someone you thought was gay,” and “someone you did not think was gay.” Then they were asked how many times each individual called them these names. Response options were “Never,” “1 or 2 times,” “3 or 4 times,” “5 or 6 times,” or “7 or more times.” Construct validity of this scale has been published previously (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .80 for perpetration and .81 for victimization.

**Sexual Harassment/Violence Perpetration & Victimization**

A modified version of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Sexual Harassment Survey was used to assess two separate outcome measures: sexual harassment perpetration and victimization (Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012). Each scale (perpetration, victimization) included 10 items measuring unwanted verbal sexual violence and groping (e.g., sexual comments, sexual rumor spreading, and pulling at clothing in sexual way) and forced sexual contact (e.g., forced kissing). Response options were “Never,” “1 to 3 times,” “4 to 9 times,” “10 or more times.” Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .80 for perpetration and .81 for victimization.

**Analysis**

*Hierarchical Linear Modeling*
Multilevel modeling was employed in this study because of the hierarchical nature of schools and the importance of having an aggregate variable for the school environment at the level 2 predicting student reports. The multilevel or hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) approach is a departure from the traditional ordinary least squares regression (OLS) in that OLS assumes that participants within a school are independent of each other in regards to the outcome variables. Because of the inherent relationship between students within a school environment, this assumption of independence is not tenable (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Snijders & Bosker, 2012). In other words, the assumptions of uncorrelated errors and homoscedasticity that are held to be true in OLS are not plausible in the multilevel case, as error variance is likely to shift based on the group that students belong to. Additionally, multilevel modeling increases the precision of the model building process by accounting for more components more exactly, because of the procedure’s ability to model random intercepts and slopes.

The model building process was conducted using SPSS 22.0, and began with the estimation of an unconditional or null model with no predictors in order to ascertain an estimation of the intraclass correlation coefficient (Heck, Thomas, & Tabata, 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 2012). The next step was to fit the model with level-1, i.e. individual- or student-level predictors. The coefficients resulting from this analysis can be interpreted similarly to traditional regression coefficients when the outcome variables are standardized, as was done in this case (Heck, et al., 2010). Statistically significant random intercepts were found, indicating the utility of accounting for variation between schools in the model. The level-1 model is as follows:

\[ Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} \times \text{Male} + \beta_{2j} \times \text{White} + \beta_{3j} \times \text{African American} + \beta_{4j} \times \text{Hispanic} + \beta_{5j} \times \text{Asian} + r_{ij} \]
where $Y_{ij}$ represents each of the four outcomes (homophobic name calling perpetration, homophobic name calling victimization, sexual harassment perpetration, and sexual harassment victimization). $\beta_{0j}$ is the random intercept, $\beta_{1j}$ represents gender differences at the individual level, and $\beta_{2j}, \beta_{3j}, \beta_{4j}$, and $\beta_{5j}$ represent the difference between bi-racial students and each other racial group. The gender variable was coded such that female served as the reference group for gender, and the racial variable was dummy coded so that the bi-racial students were the reference group for race. These categorical and dichotomous variables remained un-centered, as recommended by various authors (Heck et al., 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 2012).

The level-2 or school-level variables were then included in the model as part of the model-building process. In this case, the teacher/staff reported variables concerning school environment were aggregated to the school level. The resultant level-2 model consists of the same variables for each outcome, and can be represented as:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} * \text{Student Intervention} + \gamma_{02} * \text{Staff Intervention} + \gamma_{03} * \text{School Commitment to Bully Prevention} + \gamma_{04} * \text{Positive Teacher/Staff/Student Interactions} + \gamma_{05} * \text{Gender Equity/Intolerance of Sexual Harassment} + u_{0j}$$

where $\beta_{0j}$ represents each school’s intercept, and is modeled in detail through the aforementioned level-1 model. $\gamma_{00}$ represents the grand mean of the outcomes over all of the schools, and remaining variables each model the relationship between the school-level school environment variable and the school’s intercept. In order to evaluate the model and its variables, traditional statistical significance testing was conducted; additionally, as mentioned, standardized regression coefficients were calculated in order to allow for more viable coefficient comparison across models (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).
Results

Frequencies

In the schools sampled here, 33.7% of students reported calling fellow students homophobic epithets, while 31.3% of students reported being the victim of homophobic name-calling. Additionally, 7.6% of the participants reported being perpetrators of at least one incident of sexual harassment, and 14.8% reported being victims of at least one type of sexual harassment.

School-level Associations between Teacher/Staff Perceptions and Student Self-Report

The teacher/staff factors were each aggregated to the school level and we estimated the intercorrelations between these variables as well as the outcome variables (Table 2). Both student and staff intervention were not significantly associated with less homophobic name-calling or sexual harassment, which did not support our hypotheses. As hypothesized, school commitment to bully prevention was significantly correlated with less homophobic name-calling perpetration ($r = - .49$), sexual harassment perpetration ($r = - .54$), and sexual harassment victimization ($r = - .39$). However, school commitment was not associated with less homophobic name-calling victimization, which did not support our hypothesis. As hypothesized, positive interactions between teachers, staff, and students were significantly correlated with less homophobic name-calling perpetration ($r = - .52$) and victimization ($r = - .36$), and sexual harassment perpetration ($r = - .40$), but were not significantly associated with less sexual harassment victimization. Support was also found for our hypotheses that gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment at the school level would be significantly associated with less homophobic name-calling perpetration ($r = - .64$), homophobic name-calling victimization ($r = - .53$), and sexual harassment perpetration ($r
However, sexual harassment victimization was not significantly correlated with gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment, which did not support our hypothesis.

**Hierarchical Linear Modeling**

The intraclass correlations (ICCs) were calculated through the creation of an unconditional or null model. The null model excludes all predictors, allowing for an estimation of the amount of variation occurring between schools. The ICCs for each of the four outcomes were as follows: 1.69% for homophobic name-calling perpetration, 0.96% for homophobic name-calling victimization, 0.18% for sexual violence perpetration, and 1.33% for sexual violence victimization. Although these percentages were relatively low, because they are above zero, they indicate that there is some difference between outcomes according to which school a student attends. Additionally, the nested nature of these data indicates that the data are multilevel in structure and should be analyzed as such (Snijders & Bosker, 2012), regardless of the extent to which outcomes vary between schools. Therefore, level-1 and level-2 variables were included in the model and the intercept was allowed to vary randomly from school to school (Table 3). However, random slopes were not necessary, as the variation between schools was not significant enough to warrant this approach.

**Homophobic Name-Calling Perpetration**

Teacher perceptions of gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment at the school level were significantly related to lower levels of student self-reported homophobic name-calling perpetration (B = -.40, SE = .11, p < .01). Male students at the individual level were significantly associated with higher reported levels of homophobic name-calling perpetration (B = .18, SE = .03, p < .01). Race at the individual level was significantly correlated with homophobic name-calling perpetration when the race variable was coded with biracial students as the reference.
group. Specifically, White students in this model were less likely to report homophobic name-calling perpetration (B = -.13, SE = .06, p < .05), as were Hispanic students (B = -.13, SE = .06, p < .05), and Asian students (B = -.23, SE = .12, p < .05). Conversely, Black students were more likely to report homophobic name-calling perpetration as compared with their biracial peers (B = .17, SE = .06, p < .01).

**Homophobic Name-Calling Victimization**

Again, schools that had a high level of gender equity or intolerance for sexual harassment also tended to have lower homophobic name-calling victimization (B = -.36, SE = .12, p < .01). Male students were correlated with increased reporting of homophobic name-calling victimization (B = .18, SE = .03, p < .01).

**Sexual Harassment Perpetration**

School-level analyses revealed that lower levels of sexual harassment perpetration were significantly related to higher school commitment to bully prevention (B = -.17, SE = .06, p < .01) and greater teacher/staff perceptions of their school’s gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment (B = -.22, SE = .11, p < .05).

**Sexual Harassment Victimization**

The results of the sexual harassment victimization model indicated disparate findings in relation to the other three models. None of the school environment variables were significantly associated with sexual harassment victimization.

**Discussion**

This study adds to the existing literature on gendered harassment and school climate with its use of multi-item, comprehensive measures of school environment from the teacher and staff perspective, as well as the use of multilevel modeling. The students sampled here reported
experiencing gendered harassment, which is consistent with previous findings (AAUW, 1993, 2001, 2011). The percentages of both perpetration and victimization indicate that students are certainly experiencing homophobic and sexual harassment; it is probable that students are also bystanders in at least some of these events. Therefore, the process of learning through observation and imitation could well be active in many of these schools.

Results of this study indicate that teacher perceptions of school environment and student reports of gendered harassment are correlated among a middle school age sample. Specifically, in schools where teachers perceived greater administrative support for bullying prevention, students reported less homophobic name-calling perpetration and sexual harassment perpetration and victimization. Additionally, fewer instances of student-reported homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization and sexual harassment perpetration were all associated with increased positivity in interactions between teachers, staff, and students, as well as higher levels of gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment as reported by staff and teachers. These findings are consistent with previous research regarding the correlates between school climate and bullying (Espelage et al., in press; Glew et al., 2005; Goldweber et al., 2013; Harel-Fisch et al., 2011).

When the school environment variables were considered in the multilevel, multivariate model, gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment was a significant multilevel predictor of lower student reports of homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization and of decreased sexual harassment perpetration. The gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment scale included teacher/staff perceptions of the prevalence of sexual harassment in their school, how equally boys and girls are treated, and how much both boys and girls know that sexual harassment is not acceptable or tolerated at school. These results indicate that in schools where
teachers believe there is less tolerance for sexual harassment, there are lower levels of gendered harassment. This finding is not surprising, but it is worthwhile to highlight the impact that school environment can have on decreasing sexual harassment and homophobic name-calling. The recent “Dear Colleague” letters on harassment and bullying published by The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education noted the legal obligations of schools to protect their students from gendered harassment under Title IX (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2010). This protection extends to the prevention of gendered harassment; thus, given the results presented here, schools would be wise to make their policies regarding gendered harassment clear to their students, and to encourage equality between their students regardless of gender. Additionally, staff and teachers must be aware of their legal obligation to prevent gendered harassment and intervene when it occurs.

Teacher and staff perceptions of higher commitment to bullying prevention were also significantly associated with lower levels of student self-reported sexual harassment perpetration. This scale included adult perceptions of school-wide commitment to address bullying, including developing policies and preventative programming, implementation of those programs, and ongoing supervision and training for staff to help prevent bullying. This finding is consistent with a meta-analysis of bully prevention programs (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), which found a number of specific aspects of programming as significantly associated with reduction in bullying perpetration. These aspects included disciplinary methods, playground supervision, classroom management and rules, teacher training, and implementing a whole school anti-bullying policy (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Given the associations between sexual harassment perpetration and bullying among early adolescents, it makes sense that bully prevention efforts would also help to lower rates of sexual harassment in schools (Esepelage et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2013). Thus, in
order to prevent sexual harassment perpetration, it is important for schools to create and implement a comprehensive prevention approach. This programming should include the voices of active stakeholders, including teachers, staff, administrators, and parents, in promoting positive youth development. Additionally, implementation of this prevention programming should be continuous and include ongoing teacher/staff training and supervision.

However, results indicated that positive teacher-student relationships were not associated with decreased gendered harassment. This finding is in keeping with a recent study of the correlates of the same teacher-student relationship scale and bullying at the individual level; the authors found that student reports of aggression were not associated with positive teacher-student relationships when school commitment to bully prevention was accounted for (Espelage et al., in press). These findings contradict earlier studies, which did find an association between decreased peer aggression and teacher-student relationships (Glew et al., 2005; Goldweber et al., 2013). However, these earlier studies did not use both multilevel modeling and the broader scale of school commitment to bullying prevention. Given the results here, it seems that in order to decrease gendered harassment, it is more important for schools to focus on implementing bully prevention programming and to create an intolerance for sexual harassment rather than just focusing on staff and students relationships in general. However, more research needs to be done in this area, as it is possible that positive relationships are a necessary but not sufficient aspect of prevention.

Surprisingly, the model for sexual harassment victimization included no significant correlates at the individual or school level. However, when bivariate correlations were considered, school commitment to bullying prevention was significantly associated with less sexual harassment victimization. These findings warrant further investigation, as it is unclear
which aspects of school environment are connected with decreased victimization. Other studies have found that teachers find it especially difficult to intervene in instances of gendered harassment (Meyer, 2008), and it is likely that this difficulty could explain an aspect of these results. Less understandable is the lack of correlation between decreased sexual harassment victimization at the individual level and increased gender equity or intolerance of sexual harassment at the school level. It is possible that because sexual harassment victimization is often underreported, this study was not able to fully capture the relationship between school environment and this behavior (AAUW, 2011).

In terms of individual-level correlates with gendered harassment, males reported higher levels of both homophobic name-calling perpetration and victimization. This finding is in keeping with previous research, which suggests that for males homophobic name-calling can be an aspect of bantering between friends and peer groups (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Although this name-calling may be normative and considered harmless by participants, researchers have found that for males, being the target of homophobic name-calling significantly predicted increased levels of anxiety, depression, personal distress, and lower sense of school belonging (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). These negative mental health consequences indicate that it is necessary for schools to commit to prevention of homophobic epithets in bantering situations as well as in more obviously victimizing situations where a weaker or less powerful student is subjected to homophobic epithets. Additionally, it could be useful for schools to specifically focus on males in their prevention efforts regarding homophobic name-calling, as this group is more apt to be involved in these behaviors.

A limitation of this study is that the data are cross-sectional; however, the inclusion of multi-informant, multi-item scales and multilevel modeling are important strengths. These
findings indicate that researchers and school administrators alike should regard improvements in school environment as an avenue to reducing gendered harassment. Too often, prevention efforts narrowly target student’s conceptual understanding of bullying rather than the broader school climate. Given the psychological and social repercussions of these behaviors, it is important to identify preventative factors that can reduce the occurrence of gendered harassment in schools; one such protective factor is school climate (Espelage et al., 2000; Goldweber et al., 2013; Tortura et al., 2009). Given our findings, it is important that schools work to increase gender equity and intolerance of sexual harassment. This could be done by directly addressing issues of gender inequity in the classroom as well as other locations throughout the school. Although it can be difficult for teachers to intervene when they witness instances of sexual harassment and homophobia, it is important that staff be clear that gendered harassment is not tolerated or acceptable behavior on school grounds (Meyer, 2008). School leaders need to make a commitment to prevention of bullying and gendered harassment by including stakeholders in planning and implementation efforts. All staff and teachers throughout the school need to demonstrate their investment in engendering gender equity, enforcing rules regarding sexual harassment, and implementing bullying prevention strategies.
REFERENCES


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http://dx.doi.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1040


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2010.539164
**Tables**

Table 1  
*Participant and School Characteristics*

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<tr>
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<th>Illinois</th>
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<td>1,604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>52.9</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>59.08</td>
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<td>Median $N$ per school</td>
<td>27.50</td>
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Table 2
*School-Level Correlation Matrix (N = 36)*

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Homophobic Name-Calling Perpetration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2 Homophobic Name-Calling Victimization</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Sexual Harassment Perpetration</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Sexual Harassment Victimization</td>
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<td>.65**</td>
<td>.32</td>
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<td>.13</td>
<td>-.15</td>
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<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td></td>
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<td>7 School Commitment to Bully Prevention</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.54**</td>
<td>-.39*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.57**</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Positive Teacher/Staff/Student Interactions</td>
<td>-.52**</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td>-.40*</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Gender Equity or Intolerance of Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>-.64**</td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
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* p < .05.  ** p < .01
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Homophobic Name-Calling Victimization (B (SE))</th>
<th>Sexual Harassment Perpetration (B (SE))</th>
<th>Sexual Harassment Victimization (B (SE))</th>
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<td>1.87 (.79)*</td>
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<td>1.79 (.85)*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>.18 (.03)**</td>
<td>.18 (.03)**</td>
<td>.06 (.03)</td>
<td>-0.04 (.03)</td>
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<td>.04 (.06)</td>
<td>.04 (.06)</td>
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<td>.03 (.06)</td>
<td>.10 (.06)</td>
<td>.01 (.06)</td>
</tr>
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<td>-.06 (.06)</td>
<td>.07 (.06)</td>
<td>-.08 (.06)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-.23 (.12)*</td>
<td>-.06 (.12)</td>
<td>.09 (.12)</td>
<td>.02 (.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School-level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Intervention Staff</td>
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<td>-.23 (.17)</td>
<td>.07 (.16)</td>
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<td>School Commitment to Bully</td>
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<td>.09 (.16)</td>
<td>.10 (.15)</td>
<td>-.06 (.17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention Positive Teacher/</td>
<td>-.11 (.06)</td>
<td>-.06 (.07)</td>
<td>-.17 (.06)**</td>
<td>-.11 (.08)</td>
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<td>Staff/Student Interactions</td>
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<td>-.13 (.14)</td>
<td>.09 (.12)</td>
<td>-.17 (.16)</td>
</tr>
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<td>-.36 (.12)**</td>
<td>-.22 (.11)*</td>
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<td>of Sexual Harassment</td>
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*Note.* School-level N = 36 (df = 28); student-level N = 3616; Biracial is the reference group for race variables.

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