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Bullied Youth: The Impact of Bullying Through Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Name Calling

Caroline B. R. Evans and Mimi V. Chapman
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Bullying is a common experience for many school-aged youth, but the majority of bullying research and intervention does not address the content of bullying behavior, particularly teasing. Understanding the various forms of bullying as well as the language used in bullying is important given that bullying can have persistent consequences, particularly for victims who are bullied through biased-based bullying, such as being called gay, lesbian, or queer. This study examines bullying experiences in a racially and ethnically diverse sample of 3,379 rural elementary-, middle-, and high-school youth. We use latent class analysis to establish clusters of bullying behaviors, including forms of biased-based bullying. The resulting classes are examined to ascertain if and how bullying by biased-based labeling is clustered with other forms of bullying behavior. This analysis identifies 3 classes of youth: youth who experience no bullying victimization, youth who experience social and emotional bullying, and youth who experience all forms of social and physical bullying, including being bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer. Youth in Classes 2 and 3 labeled their experiences as bullying. Results indicate that youth bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer are at a high risk of experiencing all forms of bullying behavior, highlighting the importance of increased support for this vulnerable group.

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The public conversation on school bullying has changed from regarding bullying as a routine "part of growing up" that is survived, almost as a rite of passage, to the recognition of bullying as a serious social and public health problem. Bullying behavior is defined by three features: intent to harm the victim, a social or physical power imbalance between the bully and the victim, and repetition (Olweus, 1993). In addition, bullying can be classified into four behavioral categories: physical force, such as hitting or kicking; verbal teasing and name calling in oral or written form; relational behaviors, such as spreading rumors or posting embarrassing images—either electronically or physically—to damage the victim's reputation and relationships; and property damage, including stealing (Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, & Lumpkin, 2014). For victims, repeated exposure to these forms of bullying has been associated with increased rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal ideation, and decreased self-esteem (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpelä, Marttunen, Rimpleä, & Rantanen, 1999; Olweus, 1993).

National bullying prevalence rates vary depending on the forms of bullying that are assessed (i.e., rates of physical, verbal, relational, or property damage bullying) as well as whether the survey used provides respondents with a definition of bullying. Based on studies dating from 2001, current bullying victimization estimates for youth in middle and high school range from 10% to 28% (Nansel et al., 2001; Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Although bullying victimization is common in both rural and urban areas, rates are particularly high in rural areas with estimates ranging from 33% to 82% (Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, & Blackburn, 2004; Price, Chin, Higa-McMillan, Kim, & Frueh, 2013; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002). Overall, bullying estimates indicate that a substantial percentage of U.S. youth have experienced some form of bullying victimization.

Youth are often bullied for looking or acting differently than their peers, and victims are targeted for physical characteristics such as weight, size, color, or ethnicity as well as hairstyle and clothing choices (Geiger & Fischer, 2006). *Bias-based bullying* refers to bullying motivated by prejudice toward the victim's real or perceived group membership (Mishna, 2012; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013). Examples of targeted groups include racial, ethnic, and religious groups (Eslea & Mukhtar, 2000; Graham, 2006; Stein, Dukes, & Warren, 2007) as well as gender (Timmerman, 2003), disability status (Farmer et al., 2012; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994), and sexual orientation (Elze, 2003; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). Indeed, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (LGB) are at a particularly high risk for peer victimization and bullying experiences (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001). However, few studies have assessed the specific use of LGB name calling as a form of bullying behavior.

Furthermore, children and adolescents sometimes think about bullying in ways that differ from the definitions used by research-

Caroline B. R. Evans and Mimi V. Chapman, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Caroline B. R. Evans, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Tate-Turner-Kuralt Building, 325 Pittsboro Street, Campus Box 3550, Chapil Hill, NC 27599-3550. E-mail: careyrobertson@gmail.com

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ers. Youth definitions of bullying do not necessarily include the elements of intent, repetition, or power imbalance (Guerin & Hennessy, 2002; Monks & Smith, 2006). Thus, some youth might not label their ongoing victimization experiences as bullying whereas others might label an isolated aggressive act as bullying. To better understand youth's perceptions and experiences of bullying, this study sought to address two questions that have not been fully answered in the literature: How does LGB name calling fit into the repertoire of bullying behavior?; and What behaviors do youth identify as "bullying" behaviors?

Verbal bullying is usually assessed by asking youth if they have been teased, made fun of, or called names, but bullying assessments rarely include items that probe into the content of verbal bullying (e.g., "I was bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer"). This study contributes to the literature by examining specific bullying experiences in a racially and ethnically diverse sample of 3,379 rural elementary-, middle-, and high-school youth. Using latent class analysis, we established clusters of bullying behaviors, including being verbally bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer. The resulting classes were examined to ascertain if and how bullying by homophobic labeling clusters with other forms of bullying behavior. This study did not assess sexual orientation, and thus, does not attempt to explain the bullying experiences of LGB youth. Rather, the aim of this study was to investigate whether youth who are bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer have a different cluster of bullying experiences when compared with youth who have not been bullied through homophobic name calling.

LGB Youth Involvement in Bullying

Despite the high prevalence of bullying in U.S. schools, researchers have rarely focused on the causes of bullying (Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012). The victimization literature indicates that LGB youth are at an increased risk of suffering from negative school experiences—including violence—suggesting that bullying is a common experience for LGB youth. As compared with youth attracted to the opposite sex, those who reported bisexual or same-sex attraction were also more likely to have experienced forms of bullying, including having their property stolen or damaged, having been threatened with physical injury, injured with a weapon, involved in a physical fight at school, involved in a fight that required medical treatment, and having been the victim of a violent attack (Robin et al., 2002; Russell et al., 2001). The elevated risk of victimization for youth who identify as LGB has been documented in studies with sample sizes between 2,000 and 8,000 (Berlan et al., 2010; Young & Sweeting, 2004). For example, as compared with heterosexual youth, both males and females who identified as being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or mostly heterosexual, were more likely to report they had been bullied (Berlan et al., 2010).

The aforementioned studies indicate that youth who identify as LGB are at an increased risk for bullying. However, research also suggests that verbal bullying based on a victim's perceived sexual orientation (e.g., calling a victim gay, lesbian, or queer) has particularly harmful effects for high school students. Among a sample of 251 males in Grades 9 through 11, those who reported they were bullied by use of *gay* as a verbal epithet reported worse psychological outcomes, including increased rates of depression and anxiety, and more negative perceptions of school than males who were bullied by being called other names or by other means (Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). Participants' actual sexual orientation was not included in the analysis because youth who do not identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual may nonetheless be bullied via homophobic name calling.

Classes of Bullied Youth

Previous research has sought to classify bullying behaviors using clustering techniques such as *k*-means clustering and latent class analysis (LCA). LCA provides the most robust means for analyzing clusters (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007) and has moved the field from identification of simple groupings such as victims, bullies, bully/victims, and noninvolved youth (Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2001; O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Sawyer, 2009), to a more nuanced understanding of the subgroups of youth involved in bullying (Goldweber, Waasdorp, & Bradshaw, 2013). These subgroups include distinct groups of bullies (Luk, Wang, & Simons-Morton, 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012) and victims (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, & O'Brennan, 2013; Nylund, Bellmore, Nishina, & Graham, 2007; Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010). For example, victims might be categorized as low-level victims (i.e., low probability of experiencing any victimization), verbal/relational victims, verbal/physical victims, or high-level victims (i.e., high probability of experiencing all forms of victimization; Bradshaw et al., 2013).

Although new research has illuminated subgroups of youth involved in the bullying dynamic, the specific form of bullying behaviors remain largely unknown. For example, verbal bullying has been assessed by asking if the victim was teased, called names, or made fun of, but the nature of that verbal harassment has not been described. To address this gap, Goldweber et al. (2013) included questions about perceived reasons for victimization (i.e., race, appearance, gender, family income, and religion); however, Goldweber and colleagues neglected to ask victims about bullying based on sexual orientation. Given the negative consequences of being bullied by being called gay (Swearer et al., 2008), this is a striking gap in the bullying literature. Further, the aforementioned studies did not assess whether youth labeled their experiences as bullying. Although many of the assessment tools used in these studies provided respondents with a definition of bullying and asked if youth had been bullied in various ways (e.g., being hit, excluded), these assessments did not include a general question asking if youth had been bullied at school. The absence of this general assessment of bullying means that youth who have been hit, kicked, or had rumors spread about them might or might not label those experiences as bullying, thus possibly decreasing the salience of programs targeting bullying behavior.

Current Study

This exploratory study aimed (a) to augment the existing bullying research by using LCA to examine the relationship between particular victimization patterns and being bullied by being called gay, lesbian, and queer, and (b) to assess if certain subgroups of victims are more likely to label their experiences as bullying. In contrast to most assessment instruments, the questionnaire used in

this study included an item that asked whether youth had been bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer. Youth in this sample were not asked whether they self-identified as LGB or a sexual minority. Rather, the variable used represents either a potentially powerful bullying technique used by bullies or a proxy of how young people may be perceived. To the authors' knowledge, no other bullying studies using LCA have included a question addressing LGB name calling as a form of bullying. In addition, the survey included a general question asking participants if they had been bullied at school.

Method

Data from this analysis came from a survey administered to a sample of elementary-, middle-, and high-school students in a rural school district in the Southeastern United States. The survey was designed by a committee of school administrators. The intended purpose of the survey was to gather baseline data before the schools implemented a bullying prevention program (i.e., Second Step; Normand, Doces, & Kamb, 2008). Therefore, the data have several limitations, including the exclusion of demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, receipt of free/reduced lunch) and no specified timeframe for endorsed bullying experiences. However, the data come from a rural school district that is racially and ethnically diverse and represents an in vivo measure used by practitioners working with bullied youth. This analysis was part of a larger community-engaged research and intervention effort. The current study was used to refine the school district's bullying interventions and accompanying data collection.

Measures

The survey was first administered in the spring of 2004. Because of changes in the school district's data storage and retrieval systems, only the raw data from 2011 were available for analysis. The 36-item survey consisted of three demographic questions (i.e., school, grade, and race/ethnicity), and 33 questions about bullying perpetration (e.g., frequency, type, and reasons) and bullying victimization (e.g., frequency, type, location, reasons, adult responses, and student responses). The survey was administered biannually to all students in Grades 3 through 10 in 17 schools representing all levels (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). Parental consent was not required because the survey was part of the school system's regular data collection efforts. No identifying information was attached to surveys and students could decline to participate. Approval for secondary analysis of the data was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the authors' university.

The survey used 13 items to measure bullying victimization. The first item asked participants "Have you ever been bullied at school?" Response options were *never, sometimes (1 or 2 times a month), regularly (1 or 2 times a week),* and *every day.* For the purposes of the current analysis, this question was dichotomized as *never been bullied* (coded as 0) and *bullied* (combined responses for *sometimes, regularly, or always bullied*; coded as 1). This variable is shown in Table 1 as *victimized in any way*, and indicates whether youth labeled their victimization experiences as bullying. The second survey item asked students to describe which bullying behaviors they experienced by providing dichotomous yes/no response options to 12 items: "I have been teased and called names," "I have been hit, kicked, or punched," " I have been threatened with a weapon," "Others leave me out of groups," "Others have taken by belongings," "Others do not choose to sit by me or talk to me," "Others try and hurt me on the way to and from school," "Others phone me at home and say they will hurt me," "Others phone me at home and say they will hurt my family," "I have been called gay, lesbian, or queer," "I have been bullied through e-mail or MySpace/Facebook," and "I have been bullied through a cell phone/texting."

In the current study, three items were dropped because they did not cluster well with the other items: hurt on the way to school, had items stolen, and threatened with a weapon. Remaining items were grouped to create variables for *social bullying* and *cyber/electronic bullying*. The social bullying variable comprised three items: teased/called names, others do not sit with or talk to me, and others leave me out of groups (labeled *Social* in Table 1). The *cyber/electronic bullying* variable comprised four items: bullied on the Internet, bullied on cell phone, threatened on the phone, and family threatened on the phone (labeled *Electronic* in Table 1). If a participant reported experiencing one or more forms of social bullying, he or she was identified as having experienced social bullying. Similarly, if a participant reported experiencing one or more forms of cyber/electronic bullying, he or she was identified as having experienced electronic bullying. The item "I have been

Table 1. *Victimization Rates for Overall Sample and by Grade*

Form of victimization	Overall *n* (%)	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade
Victimized in any way	1,367 (40.88)	241 (44.22)	245 (45.37)	198 (42.13)	197 (40.20)	191 (39.79)	132 (37.18)	72 (35.12)	85 (31.37)
Physical	437 (12.93)	91 (16.70)	75 (13.89)	67 (14.26)	54 (11.02)	61 (12.71)	48 (13.52)	17 (8.29)	24 (8.86)
LGB	503 (14.89)	74 (13.58)	68 (12.59)	93 (19.79)	82 (16.73)	71 (14.79)	46 (12.96)	30 (14.63)	34 (12.55)
Social									
Teased	1,342 (39.18)	219 (40.18)	223 (41.30)	204 (43.40)	198 (40.40)	186 (38.75)	125 (35.21)	72 (35.12)	91 (33.58)
Ignored	476 (14.09)	86 (15.78)	70 (12.96)	64 (13.62)	70 (14.29)	72 (15.00)	52 (14.65)	31 (15.12)	29 (10.70)
Left out	771 (22.82)	137 (25.14)	142 (26.30)	112 (23.83)	118 (24.08)	102 (21.25)	74 (20.85)	38 (18.54)	44 (16.24)
Electronic									
Internet	174 (5.15)	22 (4.04)	18 (3.33)	15 (3.19)	23 (4.69)	31 (6.46)	29 (8.17)	18 (8.78)	16 (5.9)
Cell phone	177 (5.24)	23 (4.22)	18 (3.33)	15 (3.19)	22 (4.49)	28 (5.83)	37 (10.42)	11 (3.37)	21 (7.75)
Threatened on phone	72 (2.13)	25 (4.59)	4 (0.74)	3 (0.63)	7 (1.43)	11 (2.29)	13 (3.66)	5 (2.44)	4 (1.66)
Family threatened on phone	55 (1.63)	18 (3.30)	5 (0.93)	0 (0)	6 (1.22)	10 (2.08)	8 (2.25)	5 (2.44)	3 (1.11)

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hit, kicked, or punched" was labeled as *Physical* and the item "I have been called gay, lesbian, or queer" was labeled as *LGB*.

Participants

The sample (N = 3,379) consisted of students in Grades 3 through 10 enrolled in the 16 elementary, middle, and high schools in one rural school district. The district included a 17th school that was not included in our sample because it was an alternative school serving a small, specialized population. The final sample included 46% (n = 1,555) elementary-school students (Grades 3 through 5), 39% (n = 1,325) middle-school students (Grades 6 through 8), and 14% (n = 476) high-school students (Grades 9 and 10). In the study area, traditional elementary-school programs serve kindergarten through Grade 5; middle-school programs serve Grades 6, 7, and 8; and high schools serve Grades 9 through 12. In addition to these traditional programs, the participating school district included schools that serve Kindergarten through Grade 8 students. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (52%, n = 1,724), and about one fifth of the sample was Hispanic/Latino, with the remainder of the sample made up of participants who self-identified as African American, American Indian, or mixed race/other. Demographic variables, school type, and grade are shown in Table 2.

Given the limited participant demographic data collected by the survey, school district demographic data was included to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the school district. The county in the current study spans 709 square miles and is home to almost 67,000 residents, 20% of whom are younger than 18 years. Youth between the ages of 5 years and 21years are served by one of the 17 county schools. The schools in the district are diverse in terms of size, student socioeconomic status (SES), racial and ethnic makeup, academic achievement, and teacher characteristics. This diversity reflects the diversity in the county, especially regarding race and ethnicity and SES levels. The size of participating schools ranged from 236 students to 941 students (M = 479; SD = 145.90). The schools served families with a wide range of SES levels, with the number of students eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch ranging from between 24.5% and 92.4% (M = 47.6%, SD = 22.22) across the 17 schools in the current study. The racial and ethnic makeup of schools varied widely across the district: eight schools were 70% or more Caucasian whereas the remaining nine schools were racially and ethnically diverse with a mix of Caucasian, African American, Latino, Native American, and mixed race youth. On average, 81.0% of youth were at or above grade level for math (range 64.3% to 88.1%) and 72.4% were at or above grade level for reading (range 51.6% to 84.1%). In terms of teacher characteristics, on average, 35.5% (range 19% to 46%) of teacher in the district had an advanced degree. The rate of teacher turnover (i.e., teachers who did not return to classroom teaching in the following year) averaged 12.6% across the district (range 6% to 20%).

Table 2. *Demographic Information*

Demographic variable	*n* (%)
Race/ethnicity	
African American	422 (12.49)
American Indian	81 (2.40)
Caucasian	1,724 (51.02)
Hispanic/Latino	757 (22.40)
Mixed/other	361 (10.68)
School type	
Elementary (Grades K–5)	1,085 (32.11)
Elementary (Grades K–8)	810 (23.97)
Middle (Grades 6–8)	989 (29.27)
High (Grades 9–12)	478 (14.15)
School Grade	
Grade 3	545 (16.12)
Grade 4	540 (15.98)
Grade 5	470 (13.91)
Grade 6	490 (14.50)
Grade 7	480 (14.21)
Grade 8	355 (10.51)
Grade 9	205 (6.07)
Grade 10	271 (8.02)

Procedure

Per the school district's policy, the survey was adopted as part of normal school proceedings and formal parent consent was not obtained; a letter explaining the survey was sent home to parents. Prior to taking the survey, youth were advised that it was voluntary and that they could opt out if they chose. No data were collected on the number of youth who opted out, but according to school officials, students rarely, if ever, refused to complete the survey. The survey was administered at the end of the school year between May and June. In an effort to minimize the possibility of students completing the survey more than once, the survey was administered to an entire school at the same time. Participants filled out the surveys online, in their classrooms, and it took youth about 30 min to complete the survey. No identifying information was collected so all answers were anonymous.

Analysis

The analysis used the final sample of 3,379 students. Descriptive statistics were obtained using STATA 12.0, and LCA was conducted using MPlus 7.0. Missing data were addressed using the full information maximum likelihood estimation. LCA analysis was chosen because this method identifies meaningful subgroups of participants based on similar responses to the variables of interest, enabling the researchers to examine unobserved differences in a population (Muthén, 2004; Nylund, Asparouhov et al., 2007). In accordance with Nylund's (2007) guidelines, we first specified a two-class LCA model, then a three-class model, a four-class model, and so on until the model no longer converged. In line with previous LCA research (Bettencourt, Farrell, Liu, & Sullivan, 2013) we determined the optimal number of classes by using model fit statistics (i.e., Bayesian Information Criterion [BIC], Akaike Information Criterion [AIC], entropy, Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test), class size, and interpretability. BIC is the best predictor of class size, with smaller values indicating a better fit to the data (Nylund, Asparouhov et al., 2007). AIC is often used in conjunction with the BIC, with smaller values indicating a better fit. Entropy ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a better model fit (Bettencourt et al., 2012). The p value for the Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood

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ratio test indicates whether the model fit is significantly improved when an additional class is added. The See Table 3 for fit statistics for each class.

In previous work with these data, we conducted a series of analyses to assess the relationship between each racial or ethnic group and the forms of bullying. However, the results from those analyses indicated no relationship existed; therefore, we deemed it unnecessary to include each race or ethnic group as a covariate in the current study. However, we included a dichotomous race variable to determine if group membership differed for Caucasian versus non-Caucasian youth. We also included a covariate for grade to assess whether prediction of class membership differed for those with elementary- or middle-school student status versus those with high-school student status. We grouped elementary- and middle-school youth together based on the similar rates of bullying experienced by students in these grade divisions (See Table 1). Following the convention in LCA analysis, the covariates were included in the analysis so that their influence on the class structure could be assessed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Nearly a third of the sample (31%, $n = 1{,}034$) reported never having witnessed bullying, whereas 36% ($n = 1{,}186$) of the sample reported witnessing bullying one or two times per month, 19% ($n = 632$) reported witnessing bullying one or two times per week, and 15% ($n = 486$) reported frequently witnessing bullying (i.e., *all the time*). More than half of the sample reported never having been bullied (59%, $n = 1{,}977$) whereas 41% ($n = 1{,}367$) reported being bullied (i.e., *once or twice per month*, *once or twice per week*, or *every day*). The most frequent form of bullying was teasing, which was reported by 39% ($n = 1{,}324$) of the sample. The next most frequent forms of bullying included exclusion (i.e., being left out; 23%, $n = 771$), being called gay, lesbian, or queer (15%, $n = 503$), and being hit or kicked (13%, $n = 437$). Table 1 provides rates for each form of victimization for the total sample and by grade. Rates of each form of bullying were stable across grades, but decreased slightly in Grades 9 and 10. This relative stability across grade levels indicates youth of every age are at risk of being bullied in a variety of ways.

Latent Class Solution

To determine the best class solution, we compared fit statistics and considered the interpretability of two-, three-, four-, five-, and six-class solutions. Table 3 provides comparative fits statistics for each model. Based on interpretability and fit statistics, a three-class model was selected as the best fit with the data. Although the two-class solution had the highest entropy (.90), it also had the highest AIC and BIC and was not easily interpretable. According to the two-class solution, students either had a low probability of being bullied or had a high probability of being socially bullied. This solution did not provide sufficient differentiation in the victimized class. Although the three-class solution had slightly lower entropy (.87), this model had lower BIC and AIC values and a significant Lo-Mendell-Rubin value, indicating a significant improvement in fit as compared with the two-class solution. According to the three-class solution, the subgroups consisted of a Nonvictims group, a Social Victims group, and an All Victims group. Nonvictims consisted of students with a very low probability of being bullied ($n = 1{,}903$; predicted probabilities ranged from 0 to .001). Social Victims consisted of students with a high probability of being socially bullied ($n = 1{,}239$; predicted probability of .86), and a high probability of reporting they were bullied (.87), but a low probability of reporting either physical bullying (.21), electronic bullying (.11), or bullying by LGB name calling (.21). The third class labeled All Victims had a high probability of experiencing all forms of bullying as well as high probability of being bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer. Class 3 was the only class that reported being bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer ($n = 237$; predicted probabilities ranged from 1 to .66; See Table 4 for three-class predicted probabilities and see Figure 1 for a visual depiction of results). The remaining class solutions (i.e., four-, five-, and six-class solutions) dropped in entropy, had nonsignificant Lo-Mendell-Rubin values, and had increasing BIC values.

Table 3. *Fit Statistics*

	Entropy	AIC	BIC	Lo-Mendell-Rubin
2 Class	0.90	20393.80	20485.68	3456.39, $p < .001$
3 Class	0.87	20247.07	20387.95	160.26, $p < .001$
4 Class	0.73	20210.52	20400.40	51.75, $p = .27$
5 Class	0.70	20184.71	20423.60	41.17, $p = .06$
6 Class	0.83	20172.98	20460.87	27.31, $p = .10$

Note. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

The sample grouping included a variable indicating whether the respondent had experienced bullying. Members of the Social Victims group and the All Victims group who endorsed experiencing victimization had almost equal probabilities of reporting they had been bullied (87% Social Victims group; 90% All Victims group), indicating the majority within each group identified their experiences as bullying. Examining the race and grade covariates revealed that the All Victims group was 84% elementary- and middle-school students and 60% Caucasian; the Social Victims group was 90% elementary- and middle-school students, and 53% Caucasian; and the Nonvictims group was 83% elementary- and middle-school students and 50% Caucasian.

Discussion

The majority of youth in the study sample (56%) were classified as Nonvictims with a low probability of reporting any form of victimization. The second-largest group was referred to as the Social Victims group (37%) because these youth had a high probability of reporting social victimization (i.e., teased or called names, ignored, left out) and a low probability of reporting all other forms of victimization. However, the Social Victims group had a relatively high probability (87%) of reporting they had been bullied, which was a clear indication that these students identified their experiences as bullying. The All Victims group (7%, who reported experiencing social, physical, electronic bullying victimization, and victimization by being called lesbian, gay, or queer) had a high probability of reporting all forms of victimization, a

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Table 4. *Victimization Experiences by Class*

	N	Physical	LGB	Electronic	Social	Victimized
All Victims group	237	66%	100%	50%	99%	90%
Social Victims group	1239	21%	21%	11%	86%	87%
Nonvictims group	1903	.01%	.01%	.01%	.07%	0%

Note. Percentages refer to probability of endorsing victimization type.

100% probability of reporting that they were bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer, and a 90% probability of labeling their experiences as bullying.

Findings suggest a relationship between being called gay, lesbian, and queer and the most extensive experiences of various forms of bullying. However, our findings do not indicate the All Victims group suffers from more frequent bullying, but rather suggest that this group experiences a wide array of bullying behaviors. Two possibilities are present to explain this finding. First, it could be that the All Victims group is comprised of youth who are particularly susceptible to bullying and are therefore bullied in every way assessed by this survey (i.e., verbally [being called gay, lesbian, or queer], socially, physically, and electronically). In this case, the actual or perceived sexual orientation of the victim does not affect the bullying, with homophobic name calling simply being one technique in the bullies' arsenal of bullying tactics. The second possible explanation is that youth in the All Victims group openly identify as LGB or are perceived by others to be LGB, and therefore, these youth are bullied by being called gay, lesbian, or queer because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. If this second explanation is the case, the current findings suggest that LGB youth or youth perceived to be LGB are at the greatest risk of suffering from the most diverse forms of bullying victimization. However, because sexual orientation was not assessed in the current study, it is not possible to ascertain which explanation is accurate.

It is interesting that youth in the Social Victims group and the All Victims group had nearly equal probabilities of reporting that they were bullied (87% and 90%, respectively). This finding indicates that most youth who have experienced the behaviors assessed in this study define those behaviors as bullying. In terms of grade, the majority of youth in each group were in elementary or middle school. This finding is in line with previous research showing that victimization rates are highest in middle school and decrease in high school (Ionatti, 2012; Nansel et al., 2001).

In regard to race, the All Victims group was 60% Caucasian whereas the Nonvictims group and the Social Victims groups were about 50% Caucasian and 50% non-Caucasian. Past research has provided mixed results on whether certain race or ethnic groups are at an elevated risk for bullying. Some studies have found that as compared with other races and ethnicities, Caucasians reported slightly higher rates of bullying victimization (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011), whereas other studies have found no differences between racial and ethnic groups (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). Current findings highlight the need for additional research to establish whether LGB bullying specifically is associated with race or ethnicity.

Current findings suggest that bullying was a common experience among this sample that cut across the racial and ethnic makeup and SES of diverse participants and schools. Students in the current sample came from many racial and ethnic groups and SES backgrounds. However, bullying was reported in all schools, highlighting the universality of bullying. Further, given that the school district has been implementing bullying interventions since 2005, it is notable that nearly 6 years later when these data were collected in 2011, almost half of the students surveyed still reported experiencing bullying. Indeed, many bullying interventions do not decrease rates of bullying and victimization. A recent systematic review of 27 studies of antibullying interventions found that only 18 (67%) reported significant program effects (Evans, Fraser, & Cotter, 2014).

Bullying programs aimed at youth and the adults who are intended to protect youth from bullying rarely, if ever, address LGB status or LGB terms used as bullying epithets (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Although many bullying interventions have been tested, few of the available interventions include lesson content on overcoming or resolving the biases and prejudices that lead bullies to target particular groups (Bonds & Stoker, 2000; Flerx et al., 2009; McDonald & Stoker, 2008; Snyder, Riese, Limber, & Mullin, 2012). Moreover, this oversight among bullying interventions might lead adults to tolerate or ignore biased-bullying behavior that is in line with their own prejudices. Bullying programs are developed with the aim of addressing all forms of bullying rather than targeting biases toward particular populations that might be at greatest risk of experiencing bullying. Indeed, the majority of U.S. schools do not include LGB-related classroom curricula (Kim, Sheridan, & Holcomb, 2008). In sum, the current research points to the need for creating comprehensive interventions with a focus on promoting acceptance of LGB youth and discouraging homophobic name calling. Current findings suggest that learning more about the role of LGB issues in the bullying context and genuinely addressing those issues through interventions is critically important to developing a better understanding of bullying and increasing capacity for intervening with bullying behavior.

In addition to bullying programs that address LGB issues, bullying assessments should more thoroughly assess LGB bullying. The lack of existing measures that assess general bullying behaviors (i.e., physical, verbal, social/relational, property damage, cyber/electronic) and anti-LGB bullying, highlights a clear need for researchers to develop comprehensive bullying measures. Without

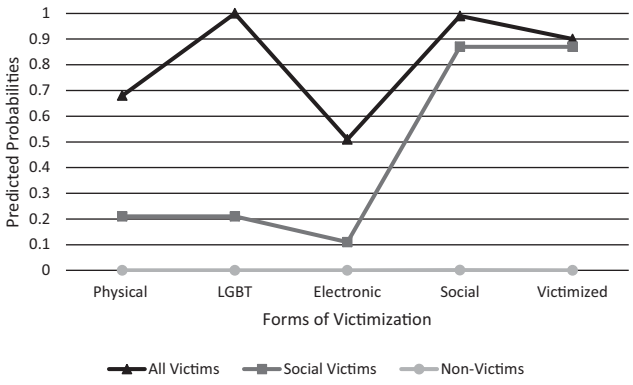

Figure 1. Latent class profiles of victimization experiences.

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comprehensive, holistic measures, it is impossible to fully understand LGB name calling as a bullying behavior and its impact on youth.

Taken together, the current findings underscore the fact that youth who might be perceived as LGB are bullied in multiple ways. It is incumbent upon researchers and practitioners who are examining and concerned with bullying to provide much-needed supports to vulnerable LGB youth through developing effective interventions and in-depth assessment tools that address anti-LGB bullying.

Limitations

The findings presented must be considered in the light of certain study limitations. The data used in the current study excluded covariates that might provide further information. Because of the data limitations, we were unable to link the class structure to respondent characteristics such as gender and SES. Further, other measures of well-being and school success were not included, making it impossible for us to link our class structure to important functional domains such as school performance and perceptions of school safety. School context effects were not able to be addressed in the current analysis. Although not uncommon in the literature, the victimization items were dichotomized on the school district's survey (Bradshaw et al., 2013). Therefore, we know only that the particular bullying behaviors were experienced, but we do not know how often those forms of bullying were experienced or the duration of the bullying. Finally, the current findings must be considered in light of the rural environment. Historically, rural areas have been less tolerant of individuals who are openly or perceived to be nonheterosexual (Herek, 2002), especially in the rural South where religiosity is associated with less tolerance for sexual minorities (Wills & Crawford, 1999). Thus, youth who were actually or perceived to be LGB in the current sample might have been at an increased risk of LGB-biased-based bullying because of their geographic location. Therefore, results must be generalized with caution given the sample's rural makeup and the cross-sectional nature of the data.

Conclusion

These findings highlight how LGB name calling can be used as a weapon in the bullying arsenal and used in conjunction with other forms of bullying—social, physical, and electronic. Given the limitations of the study data, we were unable to connect the experiences of bullying to victims' school functioning or other indicators of youth well-being. However, this work should prompt bullying researchers to collect and analyze data that will examine those connections. Further, it is time to bring LGB status to the forefront of the bullying conversation in public institutions such as schools, health care facilities, and social service agencies that interact with young people. The lack of bullying measures and interventions focused on bias toward LGB populations might represent a serious gap that hinders the development of effective antibullying interventions. Such information will provide a foundation from which targeted interventions can be developed to decrease the biases and prejudices that fuel bullying behavior.

Keywords: bullying; victimization; homophotic name calling

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