



Individual and Contextual Factors Associated with School Staff Responses to Homophobic Bullying

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Published online: 12 November 2018

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Abstract

This cross-sectional research investigates the individual (i.e., sexual prejudice, contact with lesbian and gay [LG] people, and perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets) and contextual (i.e., homophobic bullying observed by school staff and perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying) factors as predictors of school staff intervention against vs. legitimization of homophobic bullying. Data were collected in secondary schools in the North of Italy via a paper-and-pencil survey. Participants were school staff members ($N = 273$) from 24 Italian secondary schools. The results have indicated that the higher the sexual prejudice and the lower the contact with LG individuals, the higher the legitimization of homophobic bullying. Also, perceiving colleagues as legitimizing or intervening in cases of homophobic bullying predicted similar reactions on the part of school staff participants. The findings are discussed with respect to the current literature regarding homophobic bullying, and applied interventions for school staff training programs to tackle homophobic bullying at school are put forward.

Keywords School climate · School staff · Bullying · Homophobia · Contact hypothesis · Secondary school

Students who identify as or who are considered to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (i.e., LGBT) are more frequently the target of discrimination in general, and in particular of bullying within the school context, compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Greytak, Kosciw, Villenas, & Giga, 2016; Rivers & D'Augelli, 2001; Robinson, Espelage, & Rivers, 2013; UNESCO, 2012, 2016; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Studies carried out in numerous countries have shown that homophobic bullying, as well as harassment and name-calling, is a widespread phenomenon in school settings, for instance in Great Britain (Guasp, 2012), Ireland (Higgins et al., 2016), Italy (Ioverno, Baiocco, Nardelli, Orfano, & Lingiardi, 2016), European Union (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014), the USA (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016), Canada (Taylor et al., 2011), and Australia (Hillier et al., 2010).

Surveys conducted in Canada (Smith, 2000; Taylor et al., 2011), Great Britain (Guasp, 2012), Israel (Pizmony-Levy, Kama, Shilo, & Lavee, 2008), and the USA (Kosciw et al., 2016) have revealed that LGBT students frequently declare that school staff tend not to intervene in cases of homophobic verbal or physical assault. Inaction on the part of school staff can be understood as implicit approval of the bullying acts (Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2008). Additionally, at least in certain cases, school staff justifies the students perpetrating the bullying behavior, thus blatantly legitimizing the bullying, which is part of a general response of disengagement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Camodeca, Baiocco, & Posa, 2018). For instance, in Italy, which is the context of the current research, 25.8% of secondary school students reported teachers having justified the students perpetrating the bullying behavior in the case of homophobic episodes (Prati, Coppola, & Saccà, 2010).

In a recent study (Kosciw et al., 2016) among US LGBT students, more than half who have been the victim of homophobic bullying never reported these incidents to school staff, as they cast doubts on the effectiveness of school staff intervention, expressed concerns about staff members' reactions, and fear that reporting these homophobic episodes would have made the situation worse. Furthermore, Kosciw et al. (2016) found that students in schools where staff intervene

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less often in cases of homophobic remarks felt less safe in their school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression.

Conversely, school staff can also improve the climate at school when they actively address homophobic bullying and support the victims. Indeed, school staff intervention in cases of homophobic bullying enhances the feelings of acceptance on the part of LGBT students (Ploderl, Faistauer, & Fartacek, 2010) and creates a supportive and safe school environment (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012). Moreover, LGBT students with supportive school staff, compared to those whose school staff is less supportive, are less likely to miss school because they feel embedded in a safer and more comfortable environment (Kosciw et al., 2016).

In sum, evidence suggests that school staff reactions can vary significantly, including, but not limited to, underestimation of the seriousness of bullying, engaging in homophobic jokes and name-calling, a lack of awareness regarding homophobic bullying episodes, direct intervention to address the bullying, and collective actions to counteract the phenomenon in question. Despite the extensive variety of school staff reactions, however, many responses can fall into two categories of interest here, namely those reactions that covertly and overtly tend to legitimize homophobic bullying episodes, hereafter referred to as legitimizing reactions, and supportive interventions in cases of these episodes. Legitimizing reactions refer to different responses to homophobic bullying, spanning from subtler (e.g., ignoring, not intervening) to more blatant (e.g., discounting the offensiveness of homophobic acts and the student perpetrating the bullying behavior) reactions, which likely contribute to legitimizing the bullying episodes. Supportive interventions in cases of homophobic bullying refer to all the individual attempts to purposively support the victim and counteract the bullying episodes. Significantly, these distinct types of reactions shape different outcomes at school, the former reactions being associated with unsafe feeling and absenteeism among students and high levels of victimization, and the latter reactions associated with supportive school climate and a reduced rate of drop-outs (Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan, Pereira, & Lichty, 2009; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2016). The aim of this work is to analyze the distinct individual and contextual correlates associated with these two different types of school staff reactions.

A recent review (Vega, Crawford, & Van Pelt, 2012) suggests that the manner in which school staff manage sexual orientation-based discriminations is due to both individual factors, such as school staff's personal attitudes and beliefs, and to contextual factors, such as their perception of colleagues' beliefs and reactions towards these forms of discrimination. Several qualitative studies have examined school staff reactions to bullying or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender expression (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009;

Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Gerouki, 2010; McGarry, 2008; McIntyre, 2009; Meyer, 2008; O'Higgins-Norman, 2009; Sykes, 2004). Only a few recent quantitative studies have explicitly examined either individual factors (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014; Nappa, Palladino, Menesini, & Baiocco, 2017) or the interplay of individual and contextual factors (Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2015; McCabe, Rubinson, Dragowski, & Elizalde-Utnick, 2013), as predictors of school staff reactions to homophobic bullying or incidents of harassment. The aim of this study is to complement these empirical works by analyzing within the same research design the different or overlapping contributions of individual and contextual factors in predicting two distinct school staff reactions to homophobic bullying, namely their legitimization of the homophobic bullying episodes or their supportive intervention in case of these episodes.

As for the individual variables, we corroborate previous findings that attest to a relationship between sexual prejudice on the part of school staff and their reactions to homophobic bullying (Collier et al., 2015; Nappa et al., 2017) and extend this investigation to factors that have received little attention, such as school staff contact with LG individuals (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014) and the perceived offensiveness of homophobic verbal assaults. As for the contextual variable, the frequency of homophobic bullying observed by school staff and their perception of colleagues' reactions to homophobic bullying comprise the contextual variables, as it has been shown that they play a significant role in shaping the manner in which school staff manage homophobic bullying (Collier et al., 2015; McCabe et al., 2013; Novick & Isaacs, 2010). Pursuing this goal would allow us to clarify the specific contribution of the individual and contextual factors as unique predictors of staff reactions to homophobic bullying in terms of legitimization of or intervention to counteract homophobic bullying episodes.

It is worth noting that the only two studies that have addressed the interplay between the individual together with contextual factors and school staff reactions to homophobic bullying were carried out in the Netherlands and the USA (Collier et al., 2015; McCabe et al., 2013), while no research on this issue has yet been carried out in the Italian context. A recent Eurobarometer survey in the European Union has shown that the Italian context is characterized by high levels of negative attitudes towards LG individuals (European Commission, 2015; see also, Baiocco, Nardelli, Pezzuti, & Lingiardi, 2013; Lingiardi, Falanga, & D'Augelli, 2005), and a national survey has shown the widespread use of homophobic epithets, even in the adult population (ISTAT, 2012). Moreover, only 58% of those interviewed claimed to personally know LG individuals (ISTAT, 2012). The prevalence of a negative and stigmatizing view of LG individuals, the high usage of homophobic epithets, and the low level of contact with LG individuals make the Italian cultural context a useful

setting in which to test whether school staff's homophobia, contact with LG individuals, and the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets (i.e., individual factors) might contribute to shape staff reactions towards homophobic bullying. Also, no policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation exists in Italian schools (Nappa et al., 2017; Prati, Pietrantoni, & D'Augelli, 2011). Differently from other European countries (e.g., Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, the UK, France), Italian schools are neither provided with a national guideline nor supported by specific training to deal with homophobic bullying (Dankmeijer, 2017). Moreover, in-school support groups (e.g., Gay-Straight Alliance) are not present in the Italian school context. The lack of any institutional condemnation of discrimination based on sexual orientation, as well as any institutional support to address homophobic bullying, makes the analyses of school contextual factors especially important in understanding staff reactions towards homophobic bullying, particularly in the Italian context.

Individual Factors Related to School Personal Reaction in Homophobic Bullying Incidents

Sexual Prejudice Experimental research in social psychology has demonstrated that sexual prejudice is a strong determinant in preventing social observers from intervening in cases of homophobic discrimination. In a relevant study, Kreis, Turner, Goodnight, Brennan, and Swartout (2016) assessed, among other constructs, participants' sexual prejudice and then exposed participants to current verbal harassment and physical intimidation perpetuated by an aggressor confederate towards an ostensibly gay male target. The time participants took to intervene in the staged scenario was assessed. Results revealed that the higher the sexual prejudice, the longer the time participants took to intervene. The fact that sexual prejudice likely interferes with intervention in cases of homophobic discrimination has also been demonstrated outside the laboratory, and specifically in the case of homophobic bullying at school. Precursory evidence has shown the co-occurrence of homophobic attitudes among teachers and their tendency to refrain from addressing LGBT issues in school (Bailey & Phariss, 1996; Ollis, 2010; Sears, 1992). The relationship between teachers' sexual prejudice and the manner in which they manage homophobic bullying episodes has also been analyzed by Collier et al. (2015). In this research, which was conducted with secondary school teachers in the Netherlands (Collier et al., 2015), the authors assessed participants' attitudes towards homosexuality, presented them with homophobic bullying scenarios and measured participants' behavioral intention to intervene in the described incidents. Bivariate correlations indicated that higher levels of negative attitudes towards homosexuality were associated with lower intentions to

intervene. Recently, and in the Italian school context, Nappa et al. (2017) found that higher levels of teachers' homophobia (i.e., attitudes towards lesbians and gay men related to three dimensions such as deviance, personal discomfort, and institutional homophobia; Lingiardi et al., 2015) were associated with higher feeling of powerlessness and a lower feeling of positive activation, such as understanding the needs and thoughts of the victim.

On the basis of this empirical evidence, assessing school staff's sexual prejudice could be highly informative regarding the manner in which they deal with homophobic bullying in the school context. Specifically, the above-mentioned evidence demonstrates that sexual prejudice may reduce the likelihood of teacher intervention in situations of homophobic discrimination in general, and also in hypothetical homophobic bullying scenarios, as well as distancing school staff from understanding the needs and thoughts of the victim. Hence, we hypothesized that higher levels of sexual prejudice on the part of school staff could be associated with higher levels of homophobic bullying legitimization. (*Hypothesis 1*).

Contact with LG People Inter-group contact is a crucial variable in improving inter-group relations, such as weakening prejudice, enhancing cooperation, and pro-social behaviors (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Poteat & Vecho, 2016; Sakalli & Ugurlu, 2003; Shamloo, Carnaghi, & Fantoni, 2018a; Shamloo, Carnaghi, Piccoli, Grassi, & Bianchi, 2018b; Smith, Axelton, & Saucier, 2009). Notwithstanding the importance of contact as a key factor in shaping bystander intervention in bullying episodes, to our knowledge, there is only one qualitative study (McGarry, 2008) and one quantitative research (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014) that have analyzed the association between teachers' contact with LGBT individuals and the way in which they deal with homophobic bullying episodes. In the qualitative study carried out on a sample of secondary teachers in an American school, McGarry (2008) reported that higher levels of contact with LGBT individuals was an important factor in promoting teacher intervention in cases of homophobic bullying. Similarly, in a quantitative study based on an American national sample of secondary school teachers, Greytak and Kosciw (2014) showed that the lower the contact with both an LGBT student and an LGBT person other than a student or a co-worker, the lower the teachers' intervention in anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.

Building on this premise, and given the few empirical studies on this issue, we intend to gather additional quantitative evidence on the association between staff levels of contact with LG individuals and the manner in which they deal with homophobic bullying. In line with results from Greytak and Kosciw (2014), we hypothesized that lower levels of contact with LG individuals among school staff would be a significant

predictor of higher levels of homophobic bullying legitimization (*Hypothesis 2*).

Perceived Seriousness of Homophobic Epithets As far as the manner in which school staff deals with the use of homophobic language in the school environment is concerned, a survey conducted in the UK (Guasp, 2014) revealed that secondary school teachers considered homophobic epithets harmless banter and too common to intervene in every situation. These findings suggest that the seriousness and the extent of the usage of homophobic epithets are often denied or minimized (Gerouki, 2010; Zack, Mannheim, & Alfano, 2010). More importantly for our purpose, the perceived seriousness of homophobic bullying events has been found to influence the way school staff manages these events. Indeed, research has suggested that forms of bullying that are processed as not serious, including cyber and homophobic bullying, end up being considered less worthy of attention and consequently of intervention (Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011; see also, Greytak & Kosciw, 2014; Perez, Schanding Jr, & Dao, 2013; Yoon, 2004).

The present study intends to explore the potential relationship between the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets by school staff and the manner in which homophobic bullying episodes are dealt with. Based on the reported research which indicates that dismissing the seriousness of homophobic bullying is associated with decreased levels of intervention (Craig et al., 2011; see also Greytak & Kosciw, 2014), we hypothesized that the lower the perceived seriousness and offensiveness of homophobic epithets, the higher the probability that the school staff would legitimize homophobic bullying episodes (*Hypothesis 3*).

Contextual Factors Related to School Personnel Reactions to Homophobic Bullying Episodes

Homophobic Bullying Observed by School Staff Research addressing the role of homophobic bullying observed by school staff in influencing the manner in which this bullying is managed has produced mixed findings. In a qualitative study conducted in the Irish secondary school context, O'Higgins-Norman (2009) found that when teachers stated that name-calling occurred with great frequency, they also claimed that they could not address bullying all the time. In a similar vein, results coming from a survey in the UK (Guasp, 2014) showed that teachers who admitted to refraining from intervening in cases of homophobic remarks justified their behavior by claiming that homophobic slurs were too common to intervene in every situation. This pattern of results suggests a potential negative relation between the homophobic bullying observed by school staff and their intention to actively

intervene in homophobic bullying episodes. In a quantitative research regarding bullying in general (i.e., not specific to homophobic bullying), Novick and Isaacs (2010) assessed how frequently teachers observed or were informed about bullying episodes and their intervention in bullying incidents (i.e., coaching students on how to dealing with bullying episodes and support for bullying prevention and social skills). Otherwise, results indicated that the higher the levels of observed bullying episodes, the higher the teachers' interventions.

Given the few studies addressing the relationship between the homophobic bullying observed by staff and the manner in which they manage homophobic bullying, additional evidence is needed to evaluate this relationship. In the current study, we intend to contribute to the debate on this issue by testing whether the levels of observed homophobic bullying may or may not be associated with either staff intervention in case of homophobic bullying or legitimization of bullying episodes (*Hypothesis 4*).

Perceived Colleagues' Reactions to Homophobic Bullying

Social norms strongly orient individuals' behaviors. The manner in which one observes others responding to a given event may contribute to shape an individual's response to that event (Carnaghi & Yzerbyt, 2006; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Descriptive norms refer to norms pointing to the perception of what most people do in a given situation (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991). The study by Collier et al. (2015) is, to our knowledge, the first to address (among other variables) the impact of descriptive norms on teachers' intentions to intervene in homophobic bullying scenarios. Specifically, Collier et al. (2015) assessed teachers' intentions to intervene, their perceptions of what colleagues would do in a similar situation, and their perception of whether salient referents (e.g., the school principal) expect them to intervene (i.e., injunctive norm). Bivariate correlations showed a significant association between both norms and intentions to intervene. In other words, the more favorable the descriptive and injunctive norms were with regard to intervening, the stronger the reported intention to intervene.

The current study tests whether school staff perception of colleagues' responses to homophobic bullying, namely the descriptive norm, would be associated with similar responses to such events by participants. We reasoned that especially within the school context without institutional norms regarding how to deal with homophobic bullying episodes, such as in the Italian context, perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying might be a source of information regarding how one is expected to respond to such events (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Hence, and in line with results from Collier et al. (2015), we hypothesized that perceived legitimization of homophobic bullying by other school staff members would be

positively correlated with self-assessed legitimization of homophobic bullying. In a similar vein, we hypothesized that perceived intervention by other school staff members would be positively correlated with self-assessed intervention in homophobic bullying (*Hypothesis 5*).

Overview of the Study

The current study aims to analyze the unique predictors of school staff reactions to homophobic bullying in terms of supporting the LG students victimized by peers or legitimizing homophobic bullying. For the first time, this research analyzes the specific contribution of both individual factors (i.e., sexual prejudice, contact with LG individuals, the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets) and contextual factors (i.e., the homophobic bullying observed by school staff and the perceived responses of colleagues to homophobic bullying) in predicting staff reactions to homophobic bullying in the Italian context (see Fig. 1).

Method

Participants

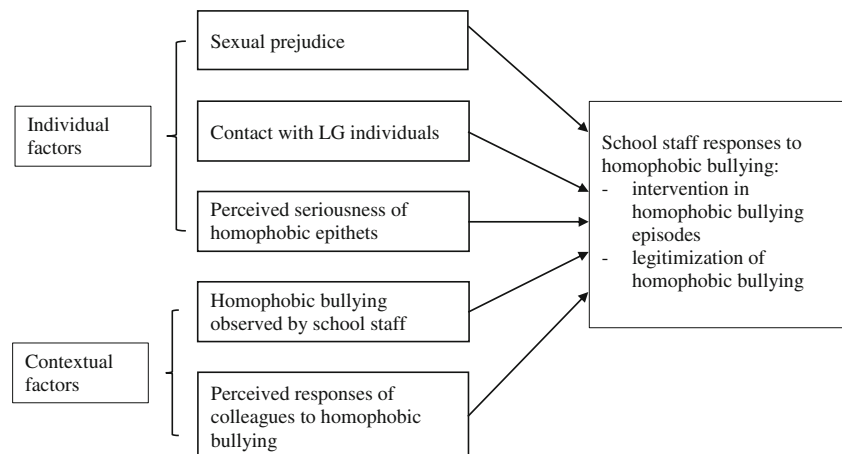
Two hundred seventy-three school staff members ($n = 179$ women, $n = 84$ men, $n = 10$ participants did not indicate their gender) from 24 secondary schools in north Italy voluntarily took part in the research. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 63 ($M = 49.25$, $SD = 8.44$). The research was presented to all the secondary schools of the region in which the study was carried out ($N = 75$ schools). School participation in the research was contingent upon the agreement of the school principal as well as the faculty. Twenty-four schools (i.e., 36.9% of the region schools) agreed to take part in the research, and 16.1% of the school staff voluntarily agreed to fill in the

questionnaire. At the regional level, school staff was comprised of 62.4% women. Our sample reflected the gender make-up of the population, 65.6% of the research sample being women. Also, at the regional level, the mean age was 52.5 years old, which is close to the mean age of the research sample. As the number of school staff is not officially listed per institution, we are not able to ascertain whether participation proportionally varied from school to school. Moreover, 77.3% of participants were teachers, 6.6% of participants were janitors, 5.5% of participants belonged to the office staff, 1.5% of participants were technicians, and $n = 1$ participant reported being a psychologist. Finally, 8.8% of respondents did not report their position.

Procedure

School staff was officially informed by the school board that the local university was conducting a study on homophobic bullying in collaboration with the local regional government. In accordance with ethical standards, the aim of the research, the research procedures, and information about participating in the research were provided by the school board to the school staff. The current questionnaire was reviewed and discussed by our lab and the school boards and approved by the school boards. Participants were invited to take part in the study and fill out a questionnaire left in the staff room. Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire individually and then put it in a box provided by the researcher. Participants were requested to fill out the questionnaire only one time and, to enhance participants' compliance, the reason behind this request was explained by stating that the reliability of the research output strongly depended on that. Participants were informed that their responses were anonymous, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure anonymity and encourage completion of the questionnaire, sexual orientation of the participants was not requested in their background information. Participants were informed that they

Fig. 1 Theoretical relationships analyzed in the present study



could contact the researcher for any question or clarification. No incentive was provided to participants to complete the survey. Data collection lasted for 2 months.

Measures

Measures were presented in the following order: sexual prejudice, contact with LG individuals, homophobic bullying observed by school staff, perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying, personal reactions to homophobic bullying, perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets, demographic measures.

Sexual Prejudice Sexual prejudice is a multidimensional phenomenon that maps onto different aspects of the representation of sexual orientation (Herek, 2004; Herek & McLemore, 2013). Due to this complexity, the current operationalization of this construct relies on multiple assessments (for a similar procedure, see Prati et al., 2011). Specifically, the complexity of sexual prejudice was addressed by multiple assessments including a robust measure of attitudes towards LG individuals, sexual stigma assessment, gender-inversion beliefs towards LG individuals assessment, and acceptability of same-sex sexual behaviors in public contexts. Indeed, participants were presented with the short form of the Attitude towards Gays and Lesbians (i.e., ATGL, Herek, 2000; see Herek &

Capitanio, 1996; e.g., “Sex between two men [women] is just plain wrong”). Participants rated their answers on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 4 (= *strongly agree*). We averaged participants’ ratings on the ATGL to form a single index. Higher values on this index indicated negative attitudes towards LG individuals. Means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha are reported in Table 1.

Also, participants rated three items pertaining to assess sexual stigma (i.e., “Homosexuality is immoral”; “Homosexuality is an illness”, “Homosexuality is a threat to family”). Participants reported the level of endorsement of each item by means of a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 4 (= *strongly agree*). Similarly, we averaged participants’ ratings on sexual stigma; higher values on this scale indicate the higher endorsement of a stigmatizing view towards homosexuality (see Table 1).

Third, acceptability of same-sex sexual behaviors was measured by means of the affective scale already used in the Italian national survey on this issue (ISTAT, 2012). Specifically, participants read three short descriptions concerning two individuals kissing each other. In the first description, the two individuals were a man and a woman; in the second description, they were two men, while in the third description, they were two women. For each description, participants indicated whether that behavior was acceptable or not (binary response, 0 = no, 1 = yes). We summed

Table 1 Mean scores, standard deviations and Cronbach’s alpha for measures used in the study

Scale	Subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Sexual Prejudice	ATGL ^a	1.61	0.68	.86
	Sexual stigma ^a	1.38	0.62	.76
	Gender non-conformity of LG individuals ^b	0.40	0.74	
	Acceptability of same-sex sexual behaviors ^c	1.21	0.60	
Perceived offensiveness of homophobic epithets ^d	Offensiveness of homophobic labels addressing LG	3.66a	0.62	.91
	Offensiveness of category labels referring to LG	2.01b	1.21	.97
Perceived offensiveness of slurs ^d	Offensiveness of hard slurs	3.67a	0.58	
	Offensiveness of light slurs	2.83c	0.80	
Homophobic bullying observed by school staff ^e		1.22	0.33	.84
Personal reactions to homophobic bullying ^f	Personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying	2.72a	0.80	.78
	Personal legitimization of homophobic bullying	1.79b	0.78	.82
Perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying ^g	Perceived colleague intervention in the case of homophobic bullying	2.73a	0.75	.74
	Perceived colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying	2.15b	0.75	.90

Means with different letters in the same scale differ significantly at $p < .001$

^a From 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 4 (= *strongly agree*)

^b From -3 (= *homosexuals are more gender conforming than heterosexuals*) to +3 (= *heterosexuals are more gender conforming than homosexuals*)

^c From 0 to 2, higher values indicate a lower acceptance of these behaviors

^d From 1 (= *not all*) to 4 (= *very much*)

^e From 1 (= *never*) to 4 (= *always*)

^f From 1 (= *never*) to 5 (= *always*)

^g From 1 (= *never*) to 5 (= *always*)

participants' responses on items related to the acceptability of same-sex sexual behaviors thus creating an index ranging from 0 to 2. To make the entire sets of measures coherent, we reversed this index so that higher values indicated a lower acceptance of these behaviors (see Table 1).

Fourth, since sexual prejudice is an overarching construct that includes, among others, evaluative, emotional responses and beliefs, and given that the above-mentioned items are more related to the evaluative, emotional-based component of attitudes towards LG individuals, we decided to enter a gender role non-conformity measure to tap the beliefs about LG individuals. Although gender ideology is a distinct construct from sexual prejudice (Herek, 2004), other authors (e.g., Kimmel, 1997) have argued that contemporary sexual prejudice is entrenched with beliefs that, for instance, gay men are insufficiently masculine. Also, empirical works show that endorsing beliefs about the gender inversion of gay and lesbian individuals is a strong correlate of sexual prejudice (Barron, Struckman-Johnson, Quevillon, & Banka, 2008; Baunach, Burgess, & Muse, 2010; Keiller, 2010; Kilianski, 2003; Meaney & Rye, 2010; Parrott, Adams, & Zeichner, 2002). Given the significance of the beliefs about gender role non-conformity, we assessed beliefs about the gender-role non-conformity of LG individuals by asking participants the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: "In general gay men [lesbians] are effeminate males [masculine females]"; "In general heterosexual men [heterosexual women] are effeminate males [masculine females]." Participants reported their level of endorsement with the above-

mentioned beliefs by means of a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 4 (= *strongly agree*). To compute the extent to which participants believed that LG individuals were gender non-conforming, participants' ratings of the heterosexual-referred items were subtracted from their ratings of the homosexual-referred items, separately for men and women as targets. The different scores were then averaged thus forming an index of beliefs in the gender non-conformity of LG individuals. Higher values indicated a stronger belief about LG individuals' gender non-conformity, while values equal to zero indicated that homosexuals and heterosexuals were thought to be similar in terms of gender conformity (see Table 1).

Participants' averaged scores on the ATGL, the sexual stigma, gender non-conformity, and acceptability were significantly and positively correlated (see Table 2). Participants' averaged scores on these variables were *z*-transformed. Reliability analyses were then computed and demonstrated a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$). To fulfill our requirement of gaining a complex measure of sexual prejudice and to avoid multicollinearity, participants' scores on these variables were averaged, thus forming a single measure of sexual prejudice (for a similar procedure, see Saroglou, Lamkaddem, Van Pachterbeke, & Buxant, 2009). Higher values on this measure indicated higher levels of sexual prejudice.

Contact with LG Individuals In line with the procedures outlined by Greytak and Kosciw (2014), participants were

Table 2 Summary of intercorrelations among ATGL, sexual stigma, gender non-conformity, acceptability of same-sex behaviors, HBO, category labels, homophobic labels, hard slurs, soft slurs, colleague

Measure	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.
1. ATGL													
2. Sexual Stigma	0.73**												
3. Gender non-conformity	0.15*	0.16*											
4. Acceptability of same-sex behaviors	0.51**	0.58**	0.22**										
5. HBO	-0.01	0.09	0.01	0.02									
6. Category labels	0.21**	0.26**	0.05	0.22**	0.13*								
7. Homophobic labels	-0.18**	-0.21**	-0.06	-0.10	-0.16**	0.11							
8. Hard slurs	-0.05	-0.07	0.02	0.01	-0.09	-0.03	0.43**						
9. Soft slurs	0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.11	0.08	0.34**	0.35**					
10. Colleague intervention	-0.07	0.11	-0.01	0.05	0.17*	0.19**	0.06	0.05	0.10				
11. Colleague legitimization	-0.02	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	0.23**	0.07	-0.09	-0.06	-0.06	0.11			
12. Personal intervention	-0.17*	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	0.05	0.10	0.15*	0.18**	0.21**	0.74**	0.07		
13. Personal legitimization	0.07	0.11	-0.02	0.08	0.14*	0.06	-0.21**	-0.14*	-0.10	0.18*	0.52**	0.06	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

intervention in case of and colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying, personal intervention in case of, and personal legitimization of homophobic bullying

asked to indicate whether they personally knew at least one LG individual by means of a binary response format (no = 0 vs. yes = 1). They further indicated whether the LG individual/s was/were a family member, somebody at school, somebody at work, a friend, a neighbor, or an acquaintance. The measure allowed for multiple responses. An index of contact with LG individuals was calculated by summing the selected options. This index ranges from 0 to 6, namely from a lack of contact with LG individuals to a high level of contact with LG individuals.

Perceived Seriousness of Homophobic Epithets We included a measure of the offensiveness of homophobic insults (see Carnaghi & Maass, 2006, 2008; Hunt et al., 2016), thus analyzing whether the extent to which homophobic labels addressing gay males and lesbians might contribute to shaping staff's own reactions. Specifically, participants were presented with homophobic labels addressing gay males (i.e., *finocchio* [poof], *frocio* [faggot], *checca*, *culattone* [fairy]) and lesbians (i.e., *lesbicona* [dyke], *pervertita* [perverted]), category labels referring to gay males and lesbians (i.e., *gay*, *omosessuale* [homosexual], *lesbica*, [lesbian]), two light slurs unrelated to sexual orientation (i.e., *scemo* [silly], *stupido* [stupid]), and two hard slurs not associated with sexual orientation (i.e., *coglione* [asshole], *stronzo* [bastard]). Participants rated the extent to which they perceived each term as insulting by means of a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *not all*) to 4 (= *very much*). Since homophobic labels addressing gay males and lesbians were significantly and positively correlated, $r(266) = .84, p < .001$, participants' ratings on these two measures were averaged together. Moreover, since category labels referring to gay males and lesbians were significantly and positively correlated, $r(264) = .95, p < .001$, participants' ratings on these two measures were also averaged together. Higher values indicated that terms were perceived as insulting (see Table 1).

Homophobic Bullying Observed by the School Staff As for the homophobic bullying observed (i.e., HBO) by the school staff, participants rated a modified version of the observation of homophobic aggressive behavior scale (Prati, 2012). This scale was comprised of eight items, four related to gay male-directed homophobic bullying and four related to lesbian-directed homophobic bullying (i.e., to hear offensive labels such as *finocchio* [poof], *frocio* [faggot], *checca*, *culattone* [fairy], *lesbicona* [dyke], *pervertita* [perverted]); to read offensive labels such as the above-mentioned on a wall, in a restroom, on a door, in an e-mail, in an SMS, and on a social network; to notice a student who was socially excluded or marginalized because he/she appeared to be or was homosexual; to notice a student who was teased, insulted, or the target of aggression because he/she appeared to be or was homosexual). Participants reported the extent to which they witnessed

these events in the last school year on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *never*) to 4 (= *always*). Participants' ratings on the HBO were averaged to form a single index. Higher scores indicated a stronger observed prevalence of homophobic bullying (see Table 1).

Personal Reactions to Homophobic Bullying We relied on Prati et al.'s (2010) scale, which was derived from the work of Bacchini, Amodeo, Vitelli, Abbruzzese, and Ciardi (1999) and has already been used in the Italian context. Participants were presented with a description of a case of verbal homophobic bullying (i.e., when someone is called by offensive labels such as the above-mentioned) and then with a case of behavioral homophobic bullying (i.e., when someone is excluded and/or attacked). Participants were asked to report how they had managed such cases. To attain this aim, they read five items assessing personal *legitimization of homophobic bullying* (i.e., "I do nothing as it [the bullying episode] is a boyish prank"; "I pretend not to see it"; "I justify the bully"; "I'm not present [when this occurs]"; "I do not realize it"). Also, they read three items assessing *supportive personal intervention* (i.e., "I intervene to defend the victim, but the insults then increase"; "I intervene to defend the victim, but nothing changes"; "I intervene to defend the victim, and the insults then decrease and stop"). It is worth noticing that personal *legitimization of homophobic bullying* items point to behaviors that either blatantly support homophobic bullying or collude with it so as to legitimize the occurrence of homophobic bullying, while the supportive personal intervention items allowed us to assess the frequency of personal intervention regardless of their effectiveness, thus controlling for the different outcomes of these interventions.

Participants rated these items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *never*) to 5 (= *always*). Participants' ratings on items assessing *personal legitimization of homophobic bullying* were averaged. Higher values indicated higher legitimization of homophobic bullying (see Table 1). The same computation was applied to participants' ratings on items assessing *personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying*. Higher values indicated higher intervention in the case of homophobic bullying (see Table 1).

Perceived Colleague Reactions to Homophobic Bullying Participants were presented with both the verbal and behavioral bullying episodes as above. Participants had to report how their colleagues usually manage such cases. To do so, participants were provided with the same items already used to assess personal reactions to homophobic bullying but this time framed so as to refer to their colleagues' reactions. Participants rated their colleagues' reactions on the items on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (= *never*) to 5 (= *always*).

Participants' ratings on items assessing *perceived colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying* were averaged.

Higher values indicated higher legitimization of homophobic bullying by school staff (see Table 1). The same computation was applied to participants' ratings on items assessing *perceived colleague intervention in the case of homophobic bullying*. Higher values indicated higher intervention in the case of homophobic bullying by school staff.

Demographic Measures Participants reported their gender, age, their role within school staff, the type of secondary school in which they were employed, the geographic location of the school (province), and the class they taught.

Statistical Analyses

A regression analysis was conducted with the sexual prejudice index, contact with LG individuals, homophobic bullying observed by school staff, colleague intervention in the case of homophobic bullying, colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying, and the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets as predictor variables and personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying and personal legitimization of homophobic bullying as criterion variables. Demographic variables (i.e., age, gender) were also included in the regression analyses as predictors.

Given that the personal *legitimization of homophobic bullying* and *personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying* captures two distinct, and not necessarily complimentary personal reactions to homophobic bullying, and since the two personal reactions to homophobic bullying were not significantly correlated (see Table 2), the above-mentioned regression model was carried out separately on these two types of personal reactions to homophobic bullying.

Continuous variables were *z*-standardized, and participant gender was coded as binary variable (0 = woman, 1 = man). These models allowed us to verify the unique predictors of each type of school staff reactions (i.e., personal legitimization of homophobic bullying and personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying) as criterion variables, thus also controlling for age and gender.

As shown by the correlation analyses (see Table 2) and the tolerance analyses (see Tables 3 and 4), no multicollinearity was detected among predictors. Below, we discuss significant predicted effects, while the full models are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Results

Descriptive Analyses

As regards the *Contact with LG individuals* measure, 12% of the sample affirmed that they did not personally know at least one LG individual. Among those who personally knew at least

one LG individual, 7% of the sample reported that the LG individual(s) in question was/were a family member, 16.5% of the sample affirmed that the LG individual(s) was/were somebody at school, 19.8% of participants declared that they personally knew at least one LG individual at work. Of our sample, 43.2% reported that the LG individual(s) was/were a friend/s, 5.9% reported that he/she was/were a neighbor, and 51.3% affirmed that the LG individual(s) was/were an acquaintance.

Participants' ratings on *Perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets* were analyzed by means of a four (labels: homophobic vs. category vs. hard slurs vs. light slurs) repeated measure ANOVA. The omnibus effect was significant $F(1, 262) = 87.16, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .25$. Pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni's correction) showed that participants perceived homophobic labels and hard slurs as similarly offensive ($p = 1$), and more offensive than both category labels and light slurs ($p < .001$). Also, light slurs were perceived as being more offensive than category labels ($p < .001$). However, category labels were not perceived as neutral labels, as revealed by a one-sample *t* test on a test value equal to 1, which stands for not at all offensive, $t(264) = 13.51, p < .001$.

With regard to *Personal reactions to homophobic bullying*, a paired sample *t* test showed that participants reported more intervention in the case of homophobic bullying than legitimization of homophobic bullying, $t(202) = 13.02, p < .001$. Moreover, a paired sample *t* test showed that participants reported more intervention on the part of their colleagues in the case of homophobic bullying than legitimization of homophobic bullying, $t(193) = 8.09, p < .001$.

Regression Analyses

Incomplete questionnaires were not entered into the main analyses. Regarding personal legitimization of homophobic bullying, the overall model was significant, $Adj. R^2 = .33, F(11, 166) = 8.94, p < .001$. The sexual prejudice index was positively associated with personal legitimization of homophobic bullying, $B = 0.11, SE = 0.05, t = 2.30, p = .02, sr^2 = .14$, indicating that the higher the level of participants' sexual prejudice, the higher the tendency to legitimize homophobic bullying (supporting *Hypothesis 1*). Contact with LG individuals significantly and negatively predicted the legitimization of homophobic bullying, $B = -0.09, SE = 0.04, t = 2.27, p = .03, sr^2 = -0.14$. This pattern of results indicated that the lower the contact with LG individuals, the higher the tendency to legitimize homophobic bullying (supporting *Hypothesis 2*). Finally, the extent to which participants perceived colleagues legitimizing homophobic bullying was positively associated with the extent to which participants legitimize homophobic bullying, $B = 0.33, SE = 0.05, t = 7.18, p < .001, sr^2 = 0.44$ (supporting *Hypothesis 5*).

Table 3 Complete model of the regression analyses on personal legitimization of homophobic bullying

	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	VIF
Intercept	−0.12	0.05	−2.32*	—	
Participants' gender	0.006	0.09	0.06	0.004	1.12
Participants' age	0.04	0.04	0.86	0.05	1.20
Colleague intervention in case of homophobic bullying	0.06	0.05	1.36	0.08	1.13
Colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying	0.33	0.05	7.18**	0.44	1.14
Sexual prejudice index	0.11	0.05	2.30*	0.14	1.23
HBO	0.02	0.05	0.48	0.03	1.15
Category labels	0.02	0.04	0.53	0.03	1.22
Homophobic labels	−0.07	0.05	−1.50	−0.09	1.36
Contact with LG individuals	−0.09	0.04	−2.27*	−0.14	1.12
Hard slurs	−0.05	0.05	−1.04	−0.06	1.37
Soft slurs	−0.05	0.05	−1.08	−0.07	1.31

p* < .05; *p* < .001

As for personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying, the overall model was significant, *Adj. R*² = .49, *F*(11, 164) = 16.16, *p* < .001. The only statistically significant result concerned the association between colleagues' intervention and participants' own intervention. Specifically, colleague intervention in the case of homophobic bullying was positively associated with personal intervention regarding the same behavior, *B* = 0.66, *SE* = .06, *t* = 11.91, *p* < .001, *sr*² = 0.64, showing that the higher the extent to which participants perceived their colleagues would intervene in the case of homophobic bullying, the higher their personal intervention (supporting *Hypothesis 5*).

Since the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets and the observed homophobic bullying were significantly associated neither with staff legitimization of nor with intervention in bullying episodes, *Hypotheses 3* and *4* were not supported.

Discussion

The majority of research related to intervention by school staff in bullying incidents has explored student perceptions, leaving staff attitudes towards and reactions to these episodes partially unexplored (Bauman, Rigby, & Hoppa, 2008; Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000; Craig et al., 2011; Espelage, Polanin, & Low, 2014; Sairanen & Pfeffer, 2011). Significantly, the underrepresentation of studies addressing the way school staff appraise and react to bullying is even more pronounced when homophobic bullying is taken into account (e.g., Collier et al., 2015; Greytak & Kosciw, 2014; Guasp, 2014; McCabe et al., 2013; Nappa et al., 2017; Norman, 2004; Russell, Day, Ioverno, & Toomey, 2016). This work helps fulfill this lacuna by analyzing the specific contribution of individual factors (i.e. sexual prejudice, contact with LG individuals, perceived seriousness of

Table 4 Complete model of the regression analyses on personal intervention in the case of homophobic bullying

	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	VIF
Intercept	−0.030	0.06	−0.49		
Participants' gender	0.007	0.11	0.06	0.003	1.11
Participants' age	0.004	0.05	0.08	0.004	1.22
Colleague intervention in case of homophobic bullying	0.66	0.06	11.91**	0.64	1.13
Colleague legitimization of homophobic bullying	0.03	0.05	0.55	0.03	1.15
Sexual prejudice index	−0.08	0.05	−1.50	−0.08	1.22
HBO	0.01	0.05	0.23	0.01	1.15
Category labels	0.03	0.05	0.60	0.03	1.22
Homophobic labels	−0.003	0.06	−0.06	−0.003	1.36
Contact with LG individuals	−0.08	0.05	−1.62	−0.08	1.12
Hard slurs	0.09	0.05	1.68	0.09	1.40
Soft slurs	0.08	0.06	1.38	0.07	1.37

p* < .05; *p* < .001

homophobic epithets), and of contextual factors (i.e., homophobic bullying observed by staff, perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying), in motivating staff members to intervene in the case of homophobic bullying or legitimizing this bullying.

School staff reported that they were more likely to intervene rather than legitimize bullying episodes. Importantly, regression analyses showed that distinct individual and contextual factors predicted whether participants intervene when facing homophobic bullying episodes or legitimize these episodes. As far as individual factors are concerned, our results indicated that they play a crucial role in shaping participants' personal legitimization of homophobic bullying only but not participants' intervention in cases of homophobic bullying. Specifically, and in line with our hypotheses 1 and 2, participants' personal legitimization of homophobic bullying was predicted by sexual prejudice and contact with LG individuals. The results of the associations between sexual prejudice and the legitimization of homophobic bullying episodes confirmed previous findings showing the correlation between these two constructs (Collier et al., 2015; Nappa et al., 2017) and further boosted the experimental findings on this issue by showing the crucial role of sexual prejudice in refraining from intervening in situations of sexual discrimination (Kreis et al., 2016). As for findings concerning contact with LG individuals, our results corroborate the only finding reported in the literature thus far regarding the relation between contact with LG individuals and the way school staff manages bullying episodes (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014). As previous research on this issue has been conducted in the US context, our data provide the first evidence on the importance of establishing contact with LG individuals as a way in which to weaken staff legitimization of homophobic bullying in the Italian context as well. Moreover, our study contributes to the literature on the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) by demonstrating that low contact plays a key role in preventing bystanders from intervening when processing group discrimination. In summary, endorsing sexual prejudice and having low contact with LG individuals independently promoted the personal legitimization of homophobic bullying.

As for the contextual variables, perceived colleague reactions to homophobic bullying were the only contextual factors that accounted for personal reactions to homophobic bullying. Indeed, both perceiving others as legitimizing homophobic bullying episodes and perceiving colleague intervention in the case of homophobic bullying predicted similar reactions on the part of participants (*Hypothesis 5*). These findings are in line with previous evidence (Collier et al., 2015; McCabe et al., 2013) showing the impact of descriptive norms on personal reactions when dealing with homophobic episodes.

Contrary to *Hypothesis 3*, the perceived seriousness of homophobic epithets was unrelated to the likelihood that school staff would legitimize homophobic bullying episodes as well

as intervening in such episodes. Although null results are difficult to interpret, it might be plausible that as these epithets are processed as hard slurs, their homophobic content might be disregarded, thus losing their connection with homophobic bullying (for a similar explanation, see Hunt et al., 2016). Future studies can address this issue by more directly assessing the perceived bullying nature of homophobic labels and hard slurs, thus clarifying the relative contribution of the perceived offensiveness and bullying characteristics of these insults in predicting school staff reactions to homophobic bullying.

Finally, the homophobic bullying observed by school staff was not a significant predictor of either school staff legitimization of homophobic bullying or intervention in such episodes (*Hypothesis 4*). We speculated that at least two factors could have contributed to the lack of association between the variables in question. First, and differently from the study carried out by Novick and Isaacs (2010), we only assessed the frequency of observed bullying episodes by school staff, while we failed to consider the extent to which school staff were informed about bullying episodes. Second, and in contrast to Novick and Isaacs' (2010) research, we limited our investigation on school staff reactions to a restricted number of participants' types of intervention in cases of homophobic bullying, while Novick and Isaacs' (2010) detailed distinct and different types of interventions in bullying incidents, such as coaching students on the manner in which they could deal with bullying episodes. Hence, limitations regarding the nature of measures both in the predictor and the outcome variable could have overshadowed the association between the homophobic bullying observed by school staff and their reactions when dealing with homophobic bullying episodes.

The findings of the current research have relevant applied implications. First, training programs for school staff should aim to reduce sexual prejudice thus likely decreasing the legitimization of homophobic bullying episodes (Athanasos & Larrabee, 2003; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Szalacha, 2004). For instance, training programs should promote the opportunities for preservice and in-service teachers to deconstruct prejudicial attitudes and biased beliefs regarding LG individuals. Also, national and local school administration should promote training programs that support LG youth and adult visibility to enhance school staff familiarity and contact with LG people in the school community (i.e., students, school staff members, parents).

The interventions mentioned above are especially needed in those contexts in which sexual prejudice is strongly entrenched and the contact with LG individuals is still elusive, such as in the Italian school context.

Second, an enumerated antibullying policy should be promoted in the national and school setting. If Italian state law were to provide policies to protect listed categories of students, including but not limited to LG individuals, this

would likely promote school staff intervention in cases of LGBT youth victimization (Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010). Indeed, the presence at the school level of antibullying enumerated policy is positively associated with school staff engagement in supportive actions towards LGBT students (e.g., immediately addressing homophobic language; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Complimentarily, LGBTQ students in schools with inclusive policies report higher rates of school staff interventions in homophobic remarks than students in schools with no policy or only a generic one (Kosciw et al., 2016). These policies are specifically needed in Italy where the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) has not provided national policies to prevent and counteract bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression specifically (Nappa et al., 2017).

Third, to counteract school staff legitimization of homophobic bullying and enhance the probability of counteracting homophobic bullying episodes, guidelines for school staff members in handling homophobic bullying and harassment episodes would be relevant to deconstruct the school staff's perceived normativity of legitimizing homophobic bullying as well as informing school staff regarding the best practices of intervention against homophobic bullying and harassment.

Together, these tools are urgently needed given the detrimental consequences that homophobic bullying and harassment have on the victim's well-being (e.g., depression, psychological distress, and low self-esteem; Bianchi, Piccoli, Zotti, Fasoli, & Carnaghi, 2017; Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Collier, van Beusekom, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008; Wyss, 2004), and scholastic success (e.g., school absenteeism, discipline problems, and a low level of school belonging; Kosciw et al., 2016; Rivers, 2000; Poteat & Espelage, 2007).

Some methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the outcome measure concerning school staff intervention presented less variability in terms of types of interventions than the outcome measure concerning the legitimization of homophobic bullying. Future studies could rely on intervention-related measures that assessed different active strategies to counteract homophobic bullying. Second, given that the primary interest of the current study was to address an arbitrary classification of school staff reactions to homophobic bullying (i.e., school staff intervention vs. legitimization of homophobic bullying), we forced participants' responses in a simplified format. Hence, broader classifications of school staff reactions to such a phenomenon is encouraged for subsequent studies thus mapping staff reactions in a more ecological fashion. Third, we relied on self-reported measures, which are extremely sensitive to social desirability and self-

presentational concerns. Future research should complement this measurement procedure with observations and reports from additional sources (e.g., students). Fourth, this study adopted a passive survey collection method, which could have interfered with a more appropriate random sampling. Fifth, although our sample at least in part matched the demographic characteristics of the target population, we warn against generalizing our findings to the school staff of the region under examination, given a self-selection bias likely occurred in our sample.

Although this empirical effort is, to our knowledge, among the few studies which addresses the psychological predictors of the manner in which school staff manage homophobic bullying in the Italian context specifically (Nappa et al., 2017), additional work should be carried out in other countries to corroborate and enhance the external validity of our findings. Moreover, given the importance of contact with LG individuals in shaping staff reactions towards homophobic bullying, future studies should assess this variable by taking into account not only the quantity of contact, as in the current research, but also the quality of contact (Viki, Culmer, Eller, & Abrams, 2006), which has been found to be predictive of behavioral intention in the inter-group context. Also, and parallel to the quality of contact measure, it would be significant to assess the level of distant/close contact with LG individuals, by relying on an appropriate scale (Tausch, Hewstone, Schmid, Hughes, & Cairns, 2011), as it has been demonstrated that intimate contact is associated with more positive attitudes towards LG individuals (Heinze & Horn, 2009) and likely influence school staff appraisal of homophobic bullying episodes.

Acknowledgments This research was supported by Finanziamento per Ricerca di Ateneo (FRA 2016 University of Trieste) to the first and second author.

We would like to thank Loredana Panariti, Ketty Segatti, and Maria Graziella Pellegrini—Regione Autonoma Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Direzione centrale lavoro, formazione, istruzione, pari opportunità, politiche giovanili, ricerca e università. Area istruzione, formazione e ricerca—for the support to this research.

We would like also to thank Karry Close for her careful review of our work.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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