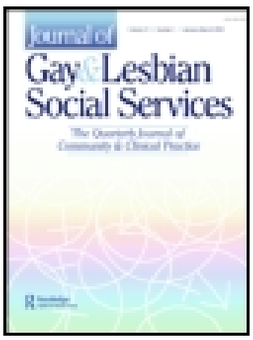

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Prevalence and predictors of homophobic behavior among high school students in Switzerland

Patrick Weber and Daniel Gredig

University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work, Olten, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This study assessed homophobic verbal behavior among high school students in Switzerland and tested a multifactorial explanatory model. Data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling. Of the 897 students, 85.4% reported having made homophobic statements in the previous 12 months. Behavior was predicted by negative attitudes ($\beta = 0.20$), acceptance of traditional gender roles ($\beta = 0.06$), religiosity ($\beta = -0.07$), contact with gay people ($\beta = 0.10$), expectations of parents ($\beta = -0.14$) and friends ($\beta = -0.19$), gender ($\beta = -0.22$), and immigration background ($\beta = 0.09$). The social cognitive variables were determined by gender, age, immigration background, school type, and discussion of homosexuality in class (GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.0169, CMIN/df = 1.199, adj. R^2 = 0.384). Findings provide leverage points for interventions.

KEYWORDS

adolescents; explanatory model; homophobic behavior; homophobic verbal behavior; high school students; multifactorial introduction

Among adolescents, gay-related name-calling using expressions such as "fag," "gay," or "queer" appear to be commonplace and anti-gay slurs seem to be an integral part of youth slang. Indeed, research has confirmed that homophobic verbal behavior, such as anti-gay slander, gay-related name-calling, and derisive or disparaging remarks about gay men and adolescents, is widespread and forms part of the experiences of many adolescents made in the context of peer groups in various aspects of their lifeworld, as well as in school. Concurring with previous findings (Bochenek & Brown, 2001), a recent nationwide survey about school climate in the United States of America found that 71.3% of the participating sexual minority high school students reported hearing other students making derogatory remarks, such as fag, often or frequently, and 84.9% reported that students used the word gay in a negative way often or frequently (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). These findings are supported by numerous other studies as well. For instance, in a sample of high school students in a town in California, 62% reported hearing homophobic expressions, such as "That's so gay," and 57% reported hearing

CONTACT Patrick Weber Patrick.weber@fhnw.ch University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland, School of Social Work, Riggenbachstrasse 16, 4600 Olten, Switzerland.

epithets such as fag on a daily basis. In the same group, 21.4% male and 17.7% female students reported that they used the expression "That's so gay" daily while 21.7% male and 16.4% female students reported their daily use of the epithet fag (Athanases & Comar, 2008). In an early study involving a sample of high school students in New York City, 94% of the respondents reported that they had heard the expression "That's so gay" and 65% epithets such as "faggot" as a put-down. Twenty-six percent reported that they had frequently used the expression "That's so gay" and 17% had used "faggot" as a put-down (Peters, 2003). In line with studies conducted in the United States, 84% of gay, lesbian, or transgender adults who participated in a retrospective study on bullying victimization in the United Kingdom reported having experienced name-calling and 71% having been ridiculed in school (Rivers, 2001). In a sample of Italian high school students, 53% of the respondents reported having "always" or "often" witnessed the use of homophobic verbal insults in the previous year (Prati, Pietrantoni, & D'Augelli, 2011). In a study on gay-related name-calling among ninth-grade students in Norway, 23% of the male students and 9% of the female students reported having been name-called by other students monthly or more often; 26% of the boys and 13% of the girls reported being name-called once a week or more often by someone who did not like them (Slaatten, Anderssen, & Hetland, 2015). In a recent survey on the experiences of sexual minority youths in Germany, consisting of 5,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people, 82% reported having experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lives, 44% in the context of education or work. Of the latter, 54.8% reported homophobic slurs, insults, and ridiculing (Krell & Oldemeier, 2015). This picture is completed by the insights provided by the EU LGBT survey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [EU-FRA], 2014), which included 93,079 persons living in the European Union (28) who identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Recalling their experiences in school, 38% of all participants and 44% of the gay participants reported that they had "always" or "often" experienced negative comments during their schooling before the age of 18 while 68% of the participants indicated that they had "always" or "often" witnessed negative comments or conduct because a schoolmate was perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT; EU-FRA, 2014, p. 37). Thus, across Western countries, findings support the assumption that homophobic verbal abuse is one of the most common forms of victimization occurring in schools (Birkett & Espelage, 2015) and that secondary schools are "the least tolerant environments" (Hafford-Letchfield, Cocker, Ryan, & Melonowska, 2016, p. 2341). Literature also confirms that boys are more likely to be exposed to these expressions of homophobic behavior than girls (see, for example, Prati et al., 2011). However, homophobic name-calling is not only directed at (supposedly), gay, lesbian, or bisexual people. Words such as fag or gay are also directed at people (supposedly) identified as heterosexual and may be intended either to be a joke or to cut someone down (Athanases & Comar, 2008). Thus, as recent studies show, adolescents' understanding of such slurs must not be directly related to homophobic

beliefs and may even be used without explicit homophobic intent (Burn, 2000; Hunt et al., 2016). Scholars have suggested that homophobic name-calling has various subjective meanings conducive to identity construction and peer status. It is assumed to serve boys to demonstrate conformity with prevailing heteronormative gender norms (see, for example, Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003) and avoid misunderstandings about their own masculinity (Kimmel, 1994). In line with this view, one of the primary reasons prompting homophobic name-calling seems to be gender nonconformity (Poteat & Russell, 2013). Homophobic verbal behavior may also be used to mark the delineation of the in-group and out-group and reinforce group membership (see, for example, Burn, 2000), to maintain position in constantly shifting social hierarchies (Athanases & Comar, 2008), or to display bold rebellion by breaking social norms and showing disrespect for authority (Thurlow, 2001). Nevertheless, this language draws on prejudice based on sexual orientation, makes negative references to gay men, and has the potential to disparage, disempower, and exclude people. Using the word gay for objects or situations that are not deemed valuable, enjoyable, normal, masculine, or "cool" also seems to be an integral part of certain youth slang and culture (Burn, 2000; Phoenix et al., 2003). Used intentionally to hurt and put someone down or thoughtlessly as "banter" and "fun" among friends (Athanases & Comar, 2008), such language is derogatory, conveys a notion that sexual orientation matters, and confirms a view that sexual minorities are "not okay" (Chonody, Rutledge, & Smith, 2012), although this may not be perceived as such by these adolescents (Slaatten et al., 2015). This language forms an integral part of other forms of homophobic behavior and is an expression of heterosexist views in society and cultural stigma. Using the homonegative language, in turn, continually stimulates, affirms, stabilizes, and, so, perpetuates heterosexism.

In its effect, homophobic verbal behavior "pollutes the social-psychological environment" (Thurlow, 2001, p. 26) in which sexual minority youths live. Research has documented well the negative impact of homophobic behavior on sexual orientation and the well-being of sexual minority youths and adolescents who still feel uncertain about their sexual orientation. Studies have evidenced correlations among homophobic name-calling, bullying, and the victimization of gay adolescents and increased levels of depression, suicidal behavior, feeling unsafe in school, and continued mental health problems into adulthood (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Haas et al., 2010). Adolescents seem to be particularly vulnerable to homophobic behavior as they are still exploring their own sexual identity, feeling uncertain about their sexual orientation, or are only at the beginning of their coming-out process.

Regarding Switzerland, there is evidence that the suicide attempt rate among gay and bisexual male adolescents is 5.1 times higher than among heterosexual male adolescents (Wang et al., 2014). Social and interpersonal problems are among the most common reasons for a suicide attempt (Wang, Plöderl, Häusermann, & Weiss, 2015). To our knowledge, however, homophobic victimization and, in this context even more importantly, homophobic verbal behavior, have not been the subject of systematic inquiry. Thus, an assessment of homophobic verbal behavior is needed.

The growing literature on the impact of homophobic behavior on adolescents' well-being demonstrates a need for action in diverse dimensions of adolescents' life-world, especially in the school environment, but also in other contexts. Teachers, educators, social workers, and, last but not least, parents should become aware of the ramifications of homophobic behavior and address it. For this, context-adequate and culturally meaningful interventions are needed. For the adaptation of effective interventions as well as for the design and development of new and context-specific interventions, it is necessary to draw on a well-founded understanding of the mechanisms underlying homophobic behavior (Gredig, 2011). In the language of intervention research, which is specific to the United States, a sound problem theory is needed (Fraser, Richman, Galinsky, & Day, 2009). Therefore, the focus needs to be on those who engage in homophobic behavior and the factors influencing their actions as perpetrators.

Research has identified several factors determining homophobic verbal behavior among adolescents. Among them are gender (male) and a homophobic school climate (Prati et al., 2011), (non-gay-biased) bullying (Poteat, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013), and anti-gay prejudice (Burn, 2000; Poteat et al., 2013). The vast literature on sexual prejudice has established a series of factors associated with negative attitudes toward gay people. Recent studies confirmed factors such as perpetrators' gender (Gormley & Lopez, 2010; Herek, 1994), age (Simon, 2008), education (Steffens & Wagner, 2004), urbanity (Steffens & Wagner, 2004), migration background (Simon, 2008; Teney & Subramanian, 2010), traditional gender-role beliefs (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2015; Whitley, 2001), and religiosity (Roggemans, Sruyt, Droogenbroeck, & Keppens, 2015), as well as the perception of group-level institutional discrimination (Teney & Subramanian, 2010) and contact with persons who identify as sexual minorities (Herek, 1994; Smith, Axelton, & Saucier, 2009). Other important factors seem to be social influences from significant others and socialization instances involving—specifically for youths—peers, parents (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Poteat et al., 2013), and teachers (Klocke, 2012).

In this context, Poteat and colleagues (2013) underline the importance of comprehensive models explaining homophobic behavior. Explanatory models that are more complex allow for a more inclusive perspective on the interplay of a greater number of variables on different levels and better control of the contribution a single variable makes. In a study on homophobic behavior among adolescents living in Berlin, Klocke (2012) recently developed and tested a comprehensive explanatory model of homophobic verbal behavior. In addition to a number of variables well-established in research and mentioned earlier, the study also considers knowledge about homosexuality and sexual diversity, respondents' social dominance orientation, and—specific for the school context—the discussion of lesbian and gay related issues in class. To our knowledge, this is one of the rare comprehensive models of homophobic behavior and the only one that has ever been tested in the German-speaking world. Thus, in the current study, we drew on Klocke's work (Klocke, 2012).

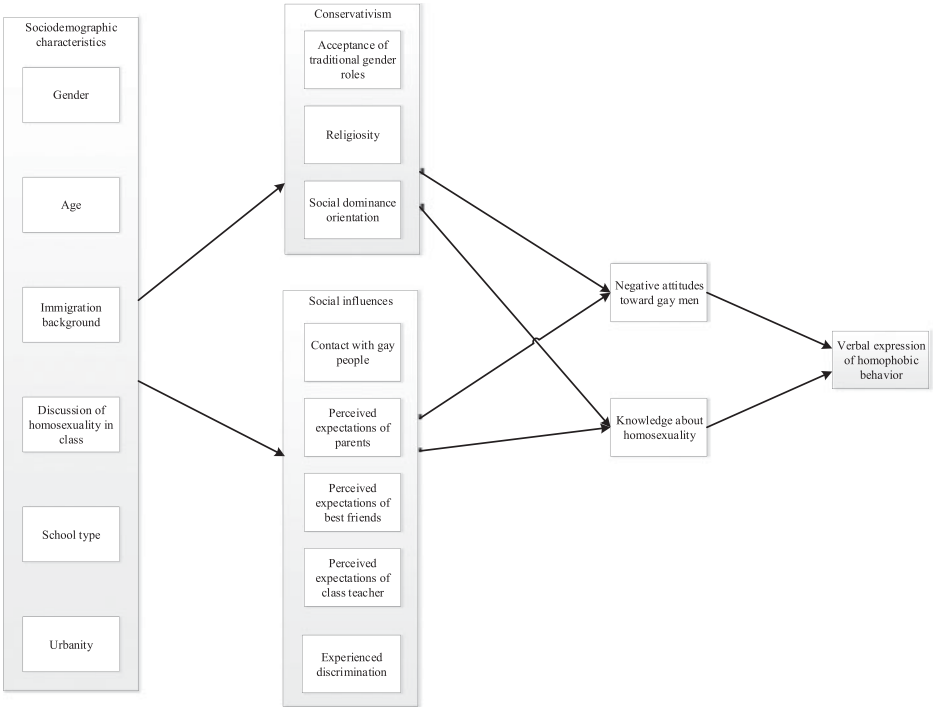

Figure 1. Theoretical model explaining the frequency of homophobic verbal behavior in high school students

A comprehensive, multifactorial model of attitudes toward gay men and homophobic verbal behavior

We built on Klocke's concept (Klocke, 2012), complemented this set of variables by including additional variables corroborated in previous research, and developed a multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior. It posits that this behavior is determined by negative attitudes toward gay men and knowledge about homosexuality. These variables are assumed to be predicted by conservativism (including acceptance of traditional gender roles, religiosity, and social dominance orientation) and social influences (including contact with gay people, expectations of significant others, and experiences of discrimination). Finally, these variables are expected to be predicted by sociodemographic aspects, specifically gender, age, immigration background, urbanity, school type, and the discussion of gay issues in class. Figure 1 visualizes these propositions.

Aims and study objectives

Against this background, the present study placed heterosexually identified high school students living in Switzerland center stage and focused on their homophobic verbal behavior. The purpose was to contribute to a robust knowledge base that

permits a well-founded discussion about the need for specific interventions. Specifically, the current study aimed to assess homophobic verbal behavior among high school students.

Another purpose of the study was to provide leverage points for the choice or the development of adequate interventions and prevention offers addressing homophobic verbal behavior. For the design and tailoring of such interventions and prevention offers, it is necessary to understand the dynamics underlying these attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the present study also aimed to provide insights into the complexity of determinants underlying this behavior in high school students living in Switzerland. Specifically, the current study aimed to establish the predictors of the reported homophobic verbal behavior by testing the multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior presented earlier.

Hypotheses

Deriving from this multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior, we hypothesized that

- homophobic verbal behavior is predicted by knowledge about homosexuality and negative attitudes toward gay men,
- knowledge and negative attitudes are predicted by conservatism and social influences, and
- these variables, in turn, are determined by gender, age, immigration background, urbanity, as well as the discussion of gay issues in class and the school type.

Methods

Sample recruitment

Participants were recruited from public high schools located in the canton of Aargau, a major canton in the German-speaking area of Switzerland. "High school" refers to the seventh to ninth years of compulsory education, which 95% of the students complete free of charge at a state school in the municipality in which they live (EDK Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren, 2017). These years constitute the lower secondary level (Level 2 of the International Standard Classification of Education; UNESCO, 1997) of the Swiss education system. At this level, students are taught in performance-based program types. In the canton of Aargau, there are three performance-based types, known as Realschule (basic), Sekundarschule (intermediary), and Bezirksschule (advanced) (hereafter abbreviated as RS, SS, and BS), which are run in separate classes. Upon request, the cantonal ministry of education provided us with the contact details of the 88 public high schools in the canton of Aargau. In June 2016, we contacted the principals of the schools and asked them to authorize a survey of their students enrolled in the eighth- and ninth-year classes of all types of high schools of which they were in charge. Twenty-two principals of

high schools from all districts of the canton gave their consent (25%), while 43 (49%) principals declined and 23 (26%) did not respond. Reasons given for declining were a lack of time, a lack of interest, or the fact that schools receive too many requests to participate in surveys. The 22 principals allowed 58 classes to be surveyed (eighth and ninth years; RS, SS, and BS). They allotted one lesson (45 minutes) to the survey and the 58 teachers specified the date and the time of the survey of their class. Consequently, the data collection involved 58 appointments and took place from August 2016 to October 2016. In this way, we reached a total of 973 students.

Data collection

For the data collection, we used an anonymous, standardized self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered during class. In each class, the first author was present and guided the class through the lesson reserved for the survey. He took the questionnaire to the classes, introduced the study topic, declared the aim of the study, gave instructions, and asked the students to participate in the study and administer the questionnaire. The questionnaire also included information about the study, instructions, the affirmation that participation was voluntary, and a confirmation of anonymity, also with regard to the teachers. The participants were asked to declare their informed consent and agree to the inclusion of their data in the analysis. In accordance with national legislation, this survey did not have to be submitted to an additional formal external ethical review.

The administration of the questionnaire took 20 to 30 minutes. The completed questionnaires were returned directly to the first author. After completion, the first author gave the students an opportunity to ask questions about issues broached in the questionnaire. In all classes, the first author discussed the items referring to knowledge about gay men in order to prevent leaving students with misconceptions.

Measures

The dependent variable: Homophobic verbal behavior included name-calling and using epithets such as fag or queer, calling situations or objects gay, ridiculing gay people, or ridiculing boys for gender-nonconforming behavior during the previous 12 months, regardless of whether it was directed to sexual minority youths or heterosexual peers. We measured these behaviors using five items. Three items were adopted and one item adapted from the scale developed and tested by Poteat and colleagues (2013). One item stemmed from a scale developed and tested by Klocke (2012). The question was introduced: 'Some kids use phrases like "that's so gay" or "no homo" or call each other names like "fag", "queer", or call each other "so gay", etc. In the last 12 months, how often have you been in the following situations?' The items were (a) "I called someone I didn't like one of these words"; (b) "I used phrases like 'that's so gay' or 'no homo' in a conversation"; (c) "I made a joke about gays"; (d) "'I poked fun at somebody who is gay"; and (e) "I poked fun at a boy who behaved like a girl." The five-point Likert response scale ranged from

0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, to 4 = very often. The construct was calculated by using the mean of the responses to the five items. Higher average scale scores represent more engagement in homophobic verbal behavior. The scale showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$).

The independent variables in the model: Attitudes toward gay men and adolescents were operationalized in terms of affective and cognitive attitudes (Ernulf & Innala, 1987). To measure the affective attitudes toward gay men, we used a scale developed by Klocke (2012) that had proved to be adequate in a German-speaking context and showed good psychometric characteristics. The question began with the introduction: "How would you feel in a situation like …" and continued with four items (for example, "being in a group of gay boys"). The five-point-Likert response scale ranged from 0 = very uncomfortable to 4 = very comfortable. The internal consistency of this subscale was very good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). To capture the cognitive attitudes toward gay men, we also used four items (for example, "Gay relationships are as okay as relationships between men and women") (Klocke, 2012). The five-point-Likert response scale ranged from 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The internal consistency of this subscale was very good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). The construct score was calculated using the mean of the eight items. Higher scale scores represented more negative attitudes. In order to permit a more intuitive understanding, we labeled the variable "negative attitudes toward gay men."

To capture knowledge about homosexuality, we used a formative index including nine items (examples of these were "Being gay is a choice" and "Most gays want to be women"). We selected the items from a larger scale developed by Klocke (2012) provided they were adequate to the study context.

The three response options were false, true, and do not know. The value for accurate answers was +1 and for inaccurate answers –1. "Do not know" had the value 0. The score was computed by adding up the responses. Higher scale scores represent more comprehensive and correct knowledge about homosexuality.

The construct conservativism included the variables "acceptance of traditional gender roles" (ATGR), "religiosity," and "social dominance orientation" (SDO). To measure ATGR we used an instrument developed by Klocke and Lamberty (2016). It referred to nine stereotypes about what is (traditionally) conceived to be "female" or "male" behavior. The first question focused on women: "What do you think of a woman who does the following?" It was followed by nine items displaying the nine stereotypes (for example, "At home, she takes over the cleaning of the apartment" or "she interrupts her career for a year to care for her child"). The response scale was a five-point Likert scale ranging from –2 = very bad to +2 = very good. The second question focused on men and asked, "What do you think of a man who does the following?" It was followed by the same items and response options. The ATGR score was computed in two steps: First, for each behavior, the evaluation of women is subtracted from the evaluation of men, resulting in difference scores indicating how much a participant prefers men to show this behavior compared with women. For the female role behaviors, the signs are reversed, and finally, all difference scores are

averaged: traditional (positive score), egalitarian (zero score) and anti-traditional (negative score) gender role attitudes. Second, we calculated the mean of the nine scores. Higher scale scores represent higher levels of ATGR. The internal consistency of this subscale was good (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$).

To measure religiosity we used a single item. The question was, "How religious do you think you are?" The response scale was a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = not religious at all to 4 = very much religious.

The social dominance orientation (SDO) was measured using a short form of the SDO scale (Cohrs & Asbrock, 2009) tested by Klocke (2012). It included six items (examples of items were "It's probably fine that some groups have a higher position in society than others" and "Some groups have fewer opportunities than others; this is okay"). The five-point Likert response scale ranged from 0 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The construct was calculated by using the mean of the responses to the six items. Higher scale scores represented higher levels of dominance orientation. The scale showed an acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$).

The construct "social influence" included the variables "contact with gay people," "perceived expectations of significant others," and "own experiences of discrimination."

In order to capture whether respondents had conscious contact with gay adolescents or men we used a single item. The question was, "Do you personally know any boys or men whom you know for certain to be gay? If so, how many?" The instructions explained that "knowing personally" meant that they had had a conversation with them. As a response, the participants were asked to complete the sentence "I know … gays personally" by indicating the respective number. A higher number represented more contact with gay people.

To assess students' perceptions of the expectations of three groups of significant others—their parents, their best friends, and their class teacher—we used the measure developed and tested by Klocke (2012) comprising four items. Referring to each group of significant others, the question was, "What do you think your (parents'/best friends'/class teacher's) opinion of you would be if …." This question was continued by four items as examples of behavior (for example, "you did not want to have anything to do with a boy because he was gay"). The five-point Likert response scale ranged from –2 = very bad to +2 = very good. For each group of significant others a mean score was computed ranging from –2 to +2. Higher scale scores indicated a perception of more gay-friendly expectations in that specific group. Internal consistency was good with Cronbach's' $\alpha = 0.78$ for parents, $\alpha = 0.84$ for best friends, and $\alpha = 0.81$ for class teachers.

In order to assess participants' own experiences of discrimination, we used a scale developed by Klocke (2012) that included six items. Participants were asked to report if they had had the experience in the previous 12 months that, for example, "people have avoided them" due to their origin, skin color, or religion. The five-point Likert response scale ranged from 0 = never to 4 = very often. The construct was calculated by using the mean of the responses to the 5 items. Higher scale scores

represent higher levels of experienced discrimination. The internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$).

Furthermore, a question captured whether gay issues had been the object of discussion in class. We used a single item question to measure this experience. The question was, "Has a teacher ever discussed issues of homosexuality in class?" Response items were 0 = no and 1 = yes.

Finally, the questionnaire captured sociodemographic information such as gender (male/female), age, place of residence, and sexual orientation (self-identification as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, questioning, other). The information on the domicile was used to identify the population size of the domicile and served as an indicator of urbanity. We also asked for respondents' immigration background (country of origin of both parents). For further analysis considering the diverse immigration backgrounds, we grouped the countries according to geographical criteria and transformed the areas into dummy variables. For structural equation modeling, we computed the two geographic areas that had evidenced an association with homophobic verbal behavior in the bivariate and multivariate analyses (South-Eastern Europe and Middle East and Central Asia) into one (dummy) variable (with the expressions 0 and 1). The performance-based school type in which the respondents were enrolled was added by the first author when entering the data.

The questionnaire was in German. Scales that were not available in German were translated into German, and the outcome was verified using a back-translation procedure.

A pre-test involving nine adolescents was used to verify the comprehensibility and usability of the questionnaire. As a result of the intense feedback discussion, we slightly adjusted the wording of the questionnaire. The internal consistency of all scales proved to be acceptable.

Data entry and analytic strategy

Data were imported manually into IBM SPSS 22. First, we tested the scales for internal consistency and performed descriptive analyses of the variables included in the model. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, analyses for skewedness and kurtosis, showed that none of the variables implied was distributed normally.

Second, we determined the correlations of these variables using bivariate and multivariate analyses. For the multivariate analyses, variables that were measured on a nominal level were also transformed into dummy variables with the values 0 and 1. These refer to gender, the three school types (RS, SS, BS: SS forming the reference category), and the immigration background. The variable labels displayed in the respective tables and graphs relate to the value 1 (for example, the value of the variable "gender" was 0 for male and 1 for female. In consequence, in the results the variable is labeled "gender:female").

Third, the hypothesized causal paths were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Structural equation modeling was performed using Amos 24. As structural equation modeling requires complete data sets and given that 15 variables were entered into the model, missing data could have entailed the exclusion of a number of participants and a potential bias. In order to avoid exclusions, multiple imputation was performed as suggested by Lüdtke, Robitzsch, Trautwein, and Köller (2007; see also Schafer & Graham, 2002). Analysis was performed using the generalized least square estimates method, which allows for the inclusion of variables without normal distribution. Thereby, we included only those variables in the equation that had proved a significant association with at least one other variable in the model in bivariate and multivariate analyses (standard regressions). For this reason, knowledge, own experiences of discrimination, and urbanity were not considered. All the remaining variables were entered into the equation at once and paths were considered according to the results of the prior multivariate analyses (standard regressions).

For the assessment of model fit, we used several indices. Given that each index has its flaws, we considered various tests and observed if the different indices will point to the same conclusion. We used the goodness of fit index (GFI) and the adjusted goodness of fix index (AGFI) that adjusts for model complexity (i.e., number of parameters). Both indices are considered satisfactory when >0.90. We also calculated the normed chi-square, which is the CMIN-degree of freedom-ratio (CMIN/*df*). Given the sample size, this ratio should result in a value smaller than 2 (Ullman, 2001). We also considered the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Its value should be <0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1998). Finally, we also wanted to express in an accessible way the extent to which the model was able to explain the variance in homophobic verbal behavior. For this purpose, we calculated the adjusted coefficient of determination (adj. R^2) to explain variance in the dependent variable.

Results

Sample description

The sample consisted of 957 high school students, which resulted in a response rate of 98.4%. Among them, 897 (93.7%) respondents identified themselves as heterosexual and 60 (6.3%) identified themselves as non-heterosexual. Of these, six self-identified as gay (0.6%), 17 as bisexual (1.8%), 32 (3.3%) were uncertain about their sexual orientation, and five (0.5%) self-identified as "other." Out of these 60 students, 20 self-identified as male and 39 as female. One student did not indicate gender.

As the current study aimed to establish predictors of homophobic behavior in heterosexual students, the analysis focused on students who had self-identified as heterosexual. Thus, the sample used in the further analysis consisted of 897 high school students. Their sociodemographic characteristics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants who self-identified as heterosexual ($N = 897$).

Variable	Descriptor	*N*	%
Gender			
	Female	459	51.2
	Male	438	48.8
Year			
	8th year	334	37.2
	9th year	563	62.8
Type of high school			
	RS (Realschule)	144	16.1
	SS (Sekundarschule)	345	38.5
	BS (Bezirksschule)	408	45.5
Age			
	12 years	3	0.3
	13 years	143	15.9
	14 years	347	38.7
	15 years	311	34.7
	16 years	87	9.7
	17 years	6	0.7
	Mean age (*SD*)	14.4	(0.90)
Immigration background			
	None (both parents Swiss)	446	49.7
	Western and Northern Europe	92	10.3
	Southern Europe	65	7.2
	South-Eastern Europe	133	14.8
	Eastern and North-Eastern Europe	10	1.1
	Central and South America	30	3.3
	North America	7	0.8
	Middle East and Central Asia	51	5.7
	Asia	38	4.2
	Africa	25	2.8
Population size of place of residence/urbanity			
	≥50,000 residents	0	0
	20,000–49,999 residents	95	10.6
	10,000–19,999 residents	47	5.2
	5,000–9,999 residents	246	27.4
	2,000–4,999 residents	336	37.5
	1,000–1,999 residents	96	10.7
	<1,000 residents	77	8.6

Controlling for school type and gender, the sample matches the population of high school students in the canton of Aargau. The proportion of students with a migration background in the sample matches the proportion of people with an immigration background in the canton of Aargau and in Switzerland (Bundesamt für Statistik [BFS], 2017).

Homophobic verbal behavior

Out of the 897 participants, 47.7% reported that they had called someone they did not like a fag, a queer, or gay during the previous 12 months; 65.1% reported that they had used phrases like "that's so gay" or "no homo," 33.1% had made jokes about gays, and 18.3% reported that they had poked fun at somebody who was gay. Furthermore, 56.9% reported that they had poked fun at a boy who appeared to them to behave like a girl. In turn, 34.9% of the respondents reported that they had

never used phrases like "that's so gay" or "no homo" in the previous 12 months, and 52.3% declared they had never called someone they did not like a fag, queer, or gay.

An overview of the various forms of expressions of homophobic verbal behavior makes clear that 85.4% of the participants reported having engaged in homophobic verbal behavior in the previous 12 months. The use of homophobic language was associated with gender ($r_s = -0.45, \leq 0.001$). Among male students, 95.2% reported the use of homophobic language. Homophobic verbal behavior was significantly less frequent among female students. Nevertheless, 76% of the female students reported having used anti-gay language in the previous 12 months. Further analysis revealed that the frequency of the use of homophobic language was associated with specific immigration backgrounds. Having a South-Eastern European ($r_s = 0.10, = 0.002$) or a Middle Eastern or Central Asian ($r_s = 0.11, = 0.001$) immigration background was associated with higher levels of homophobic verbal behavior, while not having an immigration background ($r_s = -0.12, \leq 0.001$) was associated with less frequent use of homophobic language. Finally, the frequency of use of homophobic language was also associated with the school types in which the students were enrolled. Being enrolled in RS was associated with a more frequent use of homophobic language ($r_s = 0.14, \leq 0.001$), while being enrolled in BS was associated with a less frequent use of homophobic epithets ($r_s = -0.16, \leq 0.001$). There were no significant associations of the frequency of the use of homophobic language with age, grade, or the population size of students' domicile. Table 2 displays the reports on the various expressions of homophobic verbal behavior in detail.

Negative attitudes, knowledge about homosexuality, conservativism, social influence, and discussions about homosexuality in class

The respondents' scores on the variables referring to their attitudes toward gay men, their knowledge about homosexuality, and on the variables in the constructs conservativism and social influence are summarized in Table 3.

Of the 897 participants, 48.3% reported that they did not personally know somebody who was gay; 22.5% declared they knew one gay person personally, while 23.4% reported knowing two or three gay people personally. A minority of 5.7% reported knowing four to seven gay adolescents or men personally.

In total, 34.4% of the respondents in the eighth year and 54.1% of those in the ninth year declared that they had discussed homosexuality in class. Among students attending BS, the formally highest level of high school, 60.1% of those in the eighth year and 60.8% of those in the ninth year reported that the subject of homosexuality had never been broached in class. Among students attending SS, 79.3% of those in the eighth year and 54.1% of those in the ninth year reported that the subject of homosexuality had never been broached in class. Of the students attending RS, the formally lowest level of high school, 55% of those in the eighth year and 48.8% of those in the ninth year reported that they had never discussed the issue in class.

Table 2. High School Students' Reports of Homophobic Verbal Behavior by Gender ($N = 897$).

Item (N)	Gender Male (M) Female (F) Total	Response in %						
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	*M*	*SD*
I called someone I didn't like one of these words ("fag," "queer") ($N = 897$)	M	33.3%	33.1%	19.2%	9.4%	5.0%	1.20	1.15
	F	70.4%	20.3%	7.2%	1.7%	0.4%	0.42	0.74
	T	**52.3%**	**26.5%**	**13.0%**	**5.5%**	**2.7%**	**0.80**	**1.04**
I used phrases like "that's so gay" or "no homo" in a conversation. ($N = 896$)	M	18.0%	27.2%	31.5%	14.4%	8.9%	1.69	1.18
	F	51.1%	27.1%	17.7%	3.7%	0.4%	0.75	0.90
	T	**34.9%**	**27.1%**	**24.5%**	**8.9%**	**4.6%**	**1.21**	**1.15**
I made a joke about gays. ($N = 894$)	M	50.0%	25.9%	15.6%	6.7%	1.8%	0.84	1.03
	F	83.0%	14.2%	2.0%	0.7%	0.2%	0.21	0.52
	T	**66.9%**	**19.9%**	**8.6%**	**3.6%**	**1.0%**	**0.52**	**0.87**
I poked fun at somebody who is gay. ($N = 894$)	M	76.8%	14.7%	5.0%	2.1%	1.4%	0.36	0.79
	F	86.2%	9.4%	3.1%	1.1%	0.2%	0.20	0.56
	T	**81.7%**	**12.0%**	**4.0%**	**1.6%**	**0.8%**	**0.28**	**0.69**
I poked fun at a boy who behaved like a girl. ($N = 894$)	M	37.0%	36.6%	17.7%	5.1%	3.7%	1.02	1.04
	F	48.8%	33.3%	14.6%	2.4%	0.9%	0.73	0.86
	T	**43.1%**	**34.9%**	**16.1%**	**3.7%**	**2.2%**	**0.87**	**0.96**

Table 3. Overview of the Response Scores.

Variable	*N*	Scale	Min./Max.	Range	Mean	*SD*	Median
Homophobic verbal behavior	896	0–4	0.00/4.00	4.00	0.73	0.68	0.60
Negative attitudes toward gay men	897	0–4	0.00/4.00	4.00	1.46	0.91	1.38
Knowledge about homosexuality	896	−1–1	−0.78/1.00	1.78	0.15	0.30	0.11
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	894	−2–2	−3.11/3.56	6.67	0.76	0.70	0.75
Religiosity	893	0–4	0.00/4.00	4.00	1.42	1.03	1.00
Social dominance orientation	896	0–4	0.00/3.50	3.50	1.07	0.71	1.00
Expectations of parents	894	−2–2	−2.00/2.00	4.00	0.74	0.77	0.75
Expectations of best friends	896	−2–2	−2.00/2.00	4.00	0.43	0.83	0.50
Expectations of class teachers	895	−2–2	−1.50/2.00	3.50	1.18	0.67	1.25
Experienced discrimination	896	0–4	0.00/3.00	3.00	0.31	0.48	1.67

Interestingly, the specific reports of students attending the same class did not always match.

Testing the multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior

Analysis showed that respondents' level of homophobic behavior was predicted directly by negative attitudes toward gay men ($\beta = 0.20$). Furthermore, it turned out that homophobic behavior was also directly predicted by variables conveying conservatism and social influence. Specifically, the frequency of homophobic verbal behavior was predicted by the acceptance of traditional gender roles ($\beta = 0.06$) and religiosity ($\beta = -0.07$) as well as by contact with gay people ($\beta = 0.10$), expectations of parents ($\beta = -0.14$), and expectations of best friends ($\beta = -0.19$). Finally, the frequency of homophobic verbal behavior was predicted directly by sociodemographic variables, specifically by gender ($\beta = -0.22$) and having a South-Eastern European, Middle Eastern, or Central Asian immigration background ($\beta = 0.09$).

Negative attitudes toward gay men were predicted by the acceptance of traditional gender roles ($\beta = 0.19$), religiosity ($\beta = 0.16$), and social dominance orientation ($\beta = 0.18$), as well as by having contact with gay people ($\beta = -0.10$), perceived expectations of parents ($\beta = -0.24$), best friends ($\beta = -0.23$) and class teachers ($\beta = -0.09$), and gender ($\beta = -0.12$).

This evidences that acceptance of traditional gender roles, religiosity, as well as contact with gay people, perceived expectations of parents and best friends, and gender had both a direct effect on the frequency of homophobic verbal behavior and an indirect effect mediated by negative attitudes toward gay men. These predictors, in turn, were determined by gender, age, immigration background (South-Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Central Asia), the performance-based school types RS and BS, and the discussion of gay issues in class. Contrary to our expectation, analysis also evidenced that the knowledge about homosexuality was not a significant predictor of the frequency of homophobic behavior.

The multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior showed a good fit (GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.979; SRMR = 0.0169, CMIN/df = 1.199). The tested model explained 38.4% of the variance in homophobic verbal behavior and 65.15%

of the variance in negative attitudes toward gay men. The standardized regression weights implied and the respective p-values are shown in Table 4. Figure 2 provides a visualization of the significant paths described here.

Discussion

Among the high school students participating in this survey, the prevalence of homophobic verbal behavior was high; 85.4% of the respondents (i.e., 95.2% of the male and 76% of the female students) reported having engaged in homophobic verbal behavior in the previous 12 months. A minority of 14.6% of the participants (4.8% male and 24% female) reported having never used homophobic language in the preceding year. Furthermore, analysis showed that students with a South-Eastern European, a Middle Eastern, or a Central Asian immigration background reported having used homophobic language more frequently than groups with other backgrounds. Finally, students in RS reported having used homophobic language more often than students in other school types.

The prevalence of homophobic verbal behavior compares with the levels assessed in recent studies of high school students in the United States (Athanases & Comar, 2008; Peters, 2003). Thus, our findings further corroborate the view that the use of homophobic language is commonplace and mirrors the assessment by Athanases and Comar that "students' reports depict a school culture saturated with use" of homophobic language (Athanases & Comar, 2008, p. 18).

When we set out to design our study we did not assume that the use of homophobic language was a phenomenon strictly specific to "male cultures" and prevalent in male friendship groups only (Burn, 2000, p. 2). Thus, the study included male and female high school students. Data support this initial tacit assumption. In our sample, not only did male students engage in homophobic verbal behavior but female students did too—although on a significantly lower level. This gender difference parallels the well-corroborated findings of previous research (see, for example, Prati et al., 2011).

The data of this sample broadly founded support for the multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior. It is worth noting, however, that some hypotheses were not confirmed. Contrary to our assumption, knowledge about homosexuality was not a significant predictor of homophobic verbal behavior, whereas gender turned out to be a direct predictor of homophobic verbal behavior—in fact, the strongest predictor. Another variable unexpectedly directly predicting homophobic behavior was the aforementioned specific South-Eastern European, Middle Eastern, or Central Asian immigration background. Negative attitudes toward gay men, however, were confirmed to be a direct and strong predictor of homophobic verbal behavior. In addition, analysis supported the assumption that negative attitudes toward gay men mediated the influence of the acceptance of traditional gender roles, religiosity, social dominance orientation, contact with gay people, and the perceived expectations of parents, best friends, and class teachers. However, apart from social

Table 4. Results of Structural Equation Modeling ($N = 897$).

Regressions Variables			Standardized Regression Weights	p
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	Gender	− 0.305	≥0.001
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	Age	− 0.160	≥0.001
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	Migration background	0.146	≥0.001
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	Discussion of homosexuality in class	− 0.075	0.009
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	School type BS	− 0.078	0.021
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<—	School type RS	0.071	0.034
Religiosity	<—	Gender	0.109	≥0.001
Religiosity	<—	Migration background	0.297	≥0.001
Social dominance orientation	<—	Gender	− 0.234	≥0.001
Social dominance orientation	<—	School type BS	− 0.083	0.018
Social dominance orientation	<—	School type RS	0.107	0.002
Contact with gay people	<—	Age	0.126	≥0.001
Contact with gay people	<—	Migration background	− 0.125	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of parents	<—	Gender	0.179	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of parents	<—	Migration background	− 0.248	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of parents	<—	School type BS	0.188	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of parents	<—	School type RS	− 0.103	0.001
Perceived expectations of best friends	<—	School type RS	− 0.169	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of best friends	<—	School type BS	0.181	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of best friends	<—	Migration background	− 0.080	0.004
Perceived expectations of best friends	<—	Age	0.092	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of best friends	<—	Gender	0.417	≥0.001
Perceived expectations of class teacher	<—	Gender	0.095	0.003
Perceived expectations of class teacher	<—	School type BS	0.112	0.001
Perceived expectations of class teacher	<—	School type RS	− 0.187	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	0.187	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Religiosity	0.157	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Social dominance orientation	0.179	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Contact with gay people	− 0.105	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Perceived expectations of parents	− 0.239	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Perceived expectations of best friends	− 0.234	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Perceived expectations of class teacher	− 0.094	≥0.001
Negative attitudes toward gay men	<—	Gender	− 0.125	≥0.001

(*Continued on next page*)

Table 4. (Continued)

Regressions Variables			Standardized Regression Weights	p
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Negative attitudes toward gay men	0.204	≥0.001
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	0.065	0.046
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Religiosity	− 0.070	0.020
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Contact with gay people	0.100	≥0.001
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Perceived expectations of parents	− 0.139	≥0.001
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Perceived expectations of best friends	− 0.187	≥0.001
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Perceived expectations of class teacher	0.061	0.059
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Gender	− 0.218	≥0.001
Homophobic verbal behavior	<—	Migration background	0.090	0.002
Correlations Variables			*Coefficient*	
Gender	<–>	Age	− 0.061	
Gender	<–>	Migration background	0.034	
Migration background	<–>	Discussion of homosexuality in class	0.126	
Age	<–>	Discussion of homosexuality in class	0.084	
Gender	<–>	Discussion of homosexuality in class	− 0.049	
Age	<–>	Migration background	0.097	
Age	<–>	School type BS	− 0.102	
Migration background	<–>	School type BS	− 0.304	
School type BS	<–>	School type RS	− 0.402	
Discussion of homosexuality in class	<–>	School type RS	0.067	
Migration background	<–>	School type RS	0.236	
Age	<–>	School type RS	0.113	
Gender	<–>	School type RS	− 0.026	

Religiosity	<–>	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	0.192
Religiosity	<–>	Social dominance orientation	0.087
Social dominance orientation	<–>	Contact with gay people	− 0.089
Perceived expectations of parents	<–>	Contact with gay people	0.149
Perceived expectations of parents	<–>	Perceived expectations of best friends	0.489
Perceived expectations of best friends	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	0.365
Social dominance orientation	<–>	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	0.305
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<–>	Contact with gay people	− 0.132
Perceived expectations of parents	<–>	Acceptance of traditional gender roles	− 0.276
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<–>	Perceived expectations of best friends	− 0.289
Acceptance of traditional gender roles	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	− 0.173
Religiosity	<–>	Contact with gay people	− 0.059
Religiosity	<–>	Perceived expectations of parents	− 0.217
Religiosity	<–>	Perceived expectations of best friends	− 0.132
Religiosity	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	− 0.083
Social dominance orientation	<–>	Perceived expectations of parents	− 0.357
Social dominance orientation	<–>	Perceived expectations of best friends	− 0.310
Social dominance orientation	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	− 0.216
Contact with gay people	<–>	Perceived expectations of best friends	0.084
Contact with gay people	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	0.108
Perceived expectations of parents	<–>	Perceived expectations of class teacher	0.473

Notes. $N = 897$; Method: Generalized least square estimates, GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.0169, CMIN/df = 1.199, adj. $R^2 = 0.384$.

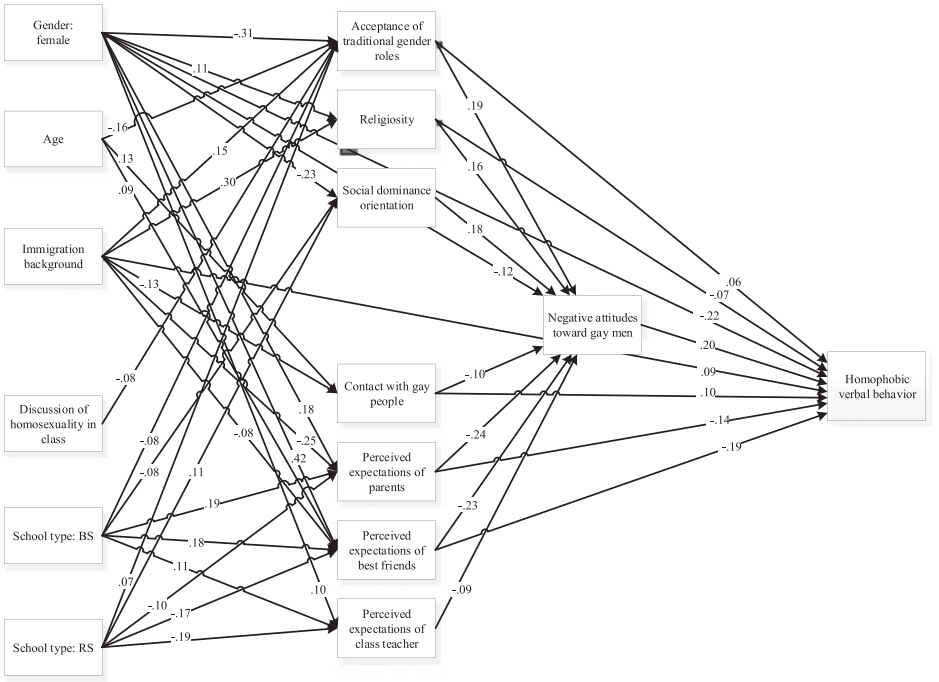

Figure 2. Visualization of the findings from the test of the explanatory model of the frequency of homophobic verbal behavior ($N = 897$)
Note: $N = 897$; Method: Generalized least square estimates, GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.0169, CMIN/df = 1.199, adj. $R^2 = 0.384$.

dominance orientation and perceived expectations of class teachers, all these variables turned out to also predict homophobic behavior directly, which the model had not assumed.

Interestingly, religiosity was a predictor of homophobic behavior. Unexpectedly, it was inversely proportional to behavior ($\beta = -0.07$) while—expectedly—directly proportional to negative attitudes toward gay men. Given this direction in these associations, we speculate that strong ties with religious groups and denominations fuel negative attitudes toward gay people while providing a sense of preserving appearances and showing decency. However, such an interpretation has to be made with caution. As we measured religiosity using one item only, the finding could reflect a measurement issue. Intriguingly, the reported contact with gay adolescents or men appeared to be inversely proportional to negative attitudes toward gay men while directly proportional to homophobic verbal behavior. The second result is unexpected. Given the aforementioned observations regarding the functions of anti-gay name-calling and attitudes in adolescents, this result might be understood as an expression of the dynamics in the peer group that may fuel the use of homophobic slurs for self-positioning and to define insiders. Homophobic language may also form a thoughtless aspect of youth slang, not intended to put others down and occurring independently of anti-gay bias. This dynamic can be considered specific to adolescents and therefore in contrast to findings that support the idea that contact promotes more positive attitudes and less biased behavior regarding gay people.

Notably, the finding could also be due to a measurement issue. It is possible that the respondents were not always able to know for certain if those they had a conversation with were gay, which makes this result to some extent arbitrary.

Finally, analysis revealed that urbanity in terms of population size was not significantly associated with any of the variables included in a causal path and that individual experiences of discrimination were not associated with behavior or attitudes. Therefore, these variables were not included in structural equation modeling. Nonetheless, we speculate that these variables would contribute to a causal path when investigating other samples with more variability in these aspects. No participant lived in a municipality with more than 21,000 inhabitants (capital of the canton). However, this is quite typical for the population living outside the major six cities (with 100,000–400,000 inhabitants) of Switzerland (Schweizerischer Städteverband SSV & Bundesamt für Statistik BFS, 2017).

The multifactorial model was able to explain 38.4% of the variance in homophobic behavior. It yields considerable explanatory power. Nevertheless, the same result can be interpreted as an incentive to further develop the model and integrate other variables that could explain the variance in the target behavior more completely. Possible variables are, for example, (nonverbal) bullying (as suggested by Poteat et al., 2013), situational factors (e.g., to whom this language is directed; Slaatten et al., 2015), the subjective meaning of the homophobic language used (e.g., the understanding that anti-gay slander was "just a joke" versus "injurious speech"; Athanases & Comar, 2008), perceived social acceptability (Hunt et al., 2016) or, more specifically, school climate (Prati et al., 2011). The multifactorial model also explained 65% of the variance in attitudes toward gay men. This reflects a strong explanatory power of the model in this respect and confirms the value of utilizing complex models.

The current study is the first to investigate homophobic behavior in adolescents living in Switzerland. Its findings are based on data from a sample of high school students that can be considered as representative as it matches the eighth- and ninth-year students of the respective canton in terms of gender and school type. Homophobic verbal behavior was captured using a scale that includes five different expressions of gay-negative verbal behavior. Although it is more comprehensive than other studies, it shares the limitations of many in as far as the behavior was self-reported. Thus, the report might be subject to social desirability bias and recall bias. Furthermore, we measured religiosity using one item only. For further research, we suggest using more elaborate measures, which permit to capture respondents' religious denomination, and the frequency of attendance at religious services or their religious identity. Due to the presumably restricted accessibility of the participants (readiness of school principals to agree to a second survey and provide more class time), the study had a cross-sectional design. This limits the causal interpretation of the findings. Given the fact that the principals have the authority to decide about the participation of the students in their schools, we had also to accept that we were gathering an availability sample. An implementation of a more stringent sampling strategy (such as a stratified probability sample) was not feasible. Furthermore, as the participants

were from schools in one particular canton, the generalizability of the current findings to the general high school population in Switzerland might be limited.

Nevertheless, we think that this inquiry provides insight into the homophobic verbal behavior of high school students in a major Swiss canton. Its findings are conducive to an appraisal of the prevalence of homophobic language used among adolescents and the verbal abuse to which sexual minority youths and all those who are questioning are exposed. From our perspective, the present assessment evidences high levels of homophobic verbal behavior and, thus, demonstrates the need for specific interventions. By testing a multifactorial model of homophobic verbal behavior, the study is able to contribute to an understanding of the dynamics underlying this behavior. Thus, it suggests leverage points for the choice as well as the development of adequate interventions and prevention offers to address homophobic verbal behavior in this age group. Further research is certainly needed in order to build a robust knowledge base for prevention and intervention. Nonetheless, we think the present findings should be reason enough to start the discussion about homophobic verbal behavior—in adolescents and in the wider society. We are of the opinion that not only teachers, but also educators, social workers, and parents should become aware of the intensity of the use of homophobic language among adolescents. Social workers are in a good position to take action to intervene and prevent further homophobic verbal (and nonverbal) behavior, although well-informed observers of the scene think social work has still not fully embraced LGBT issues and still has to develop new and different ways of dealing with the respective challenges in research, education, and practice (see, for example, Cocker & Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Nothdurfter & Nagy, 2016). When engaged in school social work, professionals can intervene in the context of schools. They can advocate and promote anti-bullying policies and interventions (see, for example, Hall, 2017; Khoury, 2014). A recent comparative study identified a number of good practices in this context. The piloted interventions based on alliances led by young people and families in partnership with schools may serve as inspiring examples for further-reaching action (Ararteko, 2015). However, social workers' contact with adolescents is not restricted to this context as they engage in a working relationship with youths in many other fields too, which offer them a—maybe even more suitable—setting to address homophobic (verbal) behavior, such as, for example, in open youth work or youth centers, shelters, youth associations, or in the health care system. In any context, social workers may interrupt slang, broach the use of homophobic verbal language, and show the consequences of this language use for sexual minorities (see, for example, Steinkemper, 2015). Social workers can address sexual minority issues and arrange for contact with openly gay (lesbian and bisexual) people. This enumeration is not final. Social work professionals in any field can support and empower sexual minorities, provide security, and promote respect in order to prevent negative interactions among adolescents (see, for example, Hong, Espelage, & Kral, 2011). Together with findings from extant research, the insights provided by this study may give initial directions for choosing and implementing specific interventions—now.

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