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Running head: STAY AWAY OR STAY TOGETHER?

Stay Away or Stay Together? Social Contagion, Common Identity and Bystanders'

Interventions in Homophobic Bullying Episodes

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## Abstract

Two studies explored the link between social contagion concerns and assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions in homophobic bullying episodes. Study 1 ( $N= 216$ ) examined if adolescents' social contagion concerns (i.e., fear of being misclassified as gay/lesbian) relate to decreased behavioral intentions to help victims of bullying, by increasing negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. Study 2 ( $N= 230$ ) further explored if inclusive identity representations (i.e., one-group or dual-identity) were related to less concerns of social contagion, thereby increasing adolescents' assertive behavioral intentions. Results (partially) confirmed both expected mediations: social contagion concerns were associated with less assertive behavioral intentions, via increased negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Study 1); one-group representations, but not dual-identity, were associated with more assertive behavioral intentions, via decreased social contagion concerns (Study 2). These findings extended previous studies illustrating the underlying mechanisms through which social contagion concerns and common identity affect assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions.

## Stay Away or Stay Together? Social Contagion, Common Identity and Bystanders'

## Interventions in Homophobic Bullying Episodes

Homophobic bullying is a specific type of bias-based bullying that, as general bullying, happens when a student is frequently and over time exposed to negative actions by one or more aggressors. However, this specific type of bias-based bullying includes verbal or physical violence related to the actual or perceived sexual orientation of the victims (e.g., Day, Snapp, & Russell, 2016; Koehler, 2016). Research consistently shows that victims of homophobic bullying experience several negative psychological, academic and health consequences (e.g., Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, & Koenig, 2012).

Bias-based bullying, and bullying in general, is considered as a group phenomenon (e.g., Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004), with several studies highlighting that peers are present in most of the episodes (i.e., bystanders) and that they can successfully stop bullying, though their intervention on behalf of the victims is rare (Frey, Pearson, & Cohen, 2014; Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Therefore, recent studies have focused on factors that can increase assertive interventions by bystander peers' in bias-based bullying episodes. Recent research shows, for instance, that intergroup contact is associated with more assertive bystander behavioral intentions (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; António, Guerra & Moleiro, 2017). However, some researchers argue that bystanders, specifically in contexts of homophobic behaviors, may be exposed to higher social risks compared to those in general bullying (Poteat & Vecho, 2015).

Building on this idea, we propose that there may exist specific predictors, and underlying mechanisms, that inhibit or facilitate peers' interventions in homophobic bullying episodes. In two studies, we examine a) if adolescents' social contagion concerns (i.e., the

fear of being misidentified as gay or lesbian) are related to less assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions (Study 1) and b) if inclusive identity representations (i.e., one-group and dual-identity) can reduce concerns of social contagion, and thereby increase bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions (Study 2). The current research extends previous studies in several ways: a) examining, for the first time, the role of social contagion concerns on a very prevalent form of bullying - homophobic bullying; b) examining a potential underlying mechanism for this effect (i.e., attitudes towards sexual minorities), and c) exploring for the first time the potential of inclusive identities to reduce social contagion concerns.

### **Determinants of Bystanders' Assertive Intentions: The Role of Social Contagion**

Research focusing on bystanders' behaviors shows that there are several personal (e.g., gender, race) and social factors (e.g., empathy) that are commonly associated with defending behavior and active bystanders in general bullying (e.g., Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). However, little is known about bystanders who intervene in homophobic bullying episodes. Two recent studies showed that having lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) friends, as well as, having more supportive attitudes towards LGBT individuals, were associated with more defending actions in episodes of homophobic harassment (Dessel, Goodman, Woodford, 2016; Poteat & Vecho, 2015). However, other research shows that the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian, by association, may prevent some heterosexual individuals to engage in behaviors as allies with sexual minorities (Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010).

In line with these findings, recent research explored the concept of social contagion – that is, the concern over being misidentified as a sexual minority – and its consequences for responses to intergroup contact with sexual minorities (Buck, Plant, Ratcliff, Zielaskowski, & Boerner, 2013; Cascio & Plant, 2016). Studies conducted with college students revealed

that social contagion concerns were related to denigration of lesbians and gay men (Plant, Zielaskowski, & Buck, 2014), and also to avoidance of contact (Buck et al., 2013). Specifically, this research illustrated that, apart from traditional sexual prejudice (i.e., negative attitudes towards homosexuality), social contagion concerns were a unique predictor of anxiety and negative intergroup contact with lesbians and gay men (Buck et al., 2013). Overall, social contagion concerns have been shown to have a negative impact on intergroup relations towards gay men and lesbians. Based on these findings, we propose that being misidentified as gay or lesbian (i.e., social contagion concerns) can be a key factor that determines adolescents' assertive bystander behavioral intentions in homophobic bullying episodes. Having concerns about being misclassified as a sexual minority should decrease the willingness to intervene on behalf of victims of homophobic bullying. Importantly, social contagion concerns are related to negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbians (Cascio & Plant, 2016), thus we expect that adolescents' higher social contagion concerns will be related to less assertive behavioral intentions, through negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

### **Social Contagion Concerns and Negative Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men**

Although there have been some legal advances concerning sexual minorities' rights (e.g., access to same-sex marriage), there are still many prejudiced attitudes towards LGBT people (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Importantly, research shows that attitudes are a key predictor of bystanders' intervention. For instance, having anti-bullying attitudes was associated with more defending behaviors of bullying victims (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004), and positive intergroup attitudes were related to bystanders' assertive interventions in inter-racial bullying (Abbott & Cameron, 2014). Previous research focusing specifically on homophobic attitudes also showed that, among college students, having positive attitudes towards lesbian and gay individuals was related to higher intentions to intervene in episodes

of LGBT discrimination (Dessel et al., 2016). Thus, based on these findings, we expect that the more adolescents are concerned about being misidentified as gay or lesbian, the more negative their attitudes should be towards LGBT individuals, which then should be related to less assertive behavioral intentions (Study 1).

### **Gender Differences and Homophobic Attitudes**

When considering social contagion concerns among adolescents, it is important to consider research showing that homophobic attitudes and behaviors are usually associated with masculinity norms and beliefs (e.g., Poteat & Vecho, 2015). Those masculinity norms involve not being homosexual and acting according to gender-role norms (e.g., not being feminine, express negative attitudes toward gender-role violators; Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009). By adhering and behaving in accordance with these norms, young males prove their heterosexuality and masculinity, and prevent themselves of being victims of homophobia (Pascoe, 2007; Poteat & Russell, 2013). Contrary to what happens concerning females and femininity, masculinity and heterosexist norms are early instilled in young males' education and are more important to men's identity than femininity to women's (Falomir-Pichastor & Mugny, 2009; Poteat & Vecho, 2015).

Previous studies suggest that boys, more than girls, use homophobic name-calling to assert their dominance over others (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Epstein, 2001). Indeed, research conducted with adolescents consistently illustrates that male adolescents have more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Costa & Davies, 2012; Hooghe, Claes, Harell, Quintelier, & Dejaeghere, 2010). Male adolescents also usually engage in homophobic behaviors to prove their stereotypical masculinity or to avoid gender nonconforming behaviors for fear of being called "gay" (Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003; Plummer, 2001). Thus, in the next two studies we will examine the relation between gender and adolescents' social contagion concerns.

**How to Reduce Social Contagion Concerns: The Role of Common Inclusive Identities**

Social contagion concerns have been consistently associated with negative attitudes and behaviors towards gay men and lesbians. Thus, besides examining if these concerns would inhibit adolescents' assertive bystander intentions, we extend previous research by exploring, for the first time, if inclusive group identities are related to less contagion concerns (Study 2). Recategorizing ingroup and outgroup members into a common identity, by creating either a common superordinate category (i.e., one-group), or more complex dual-identity representations (two subgroups in the same team), reduces intergroup bias and increases positive outgroup attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner & Saguy, 2009; Dovidio, Gaertner, Ufkes, Saguy, & Pearson, 2016). Importantly, highlighting group commonalities is also an effective strategy to promote prosocial behaviors, specifically intergroup helping (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Abad-Merino, 2017). One study conducted with Manchester United football team supporters, revealed that when commonalities were highlighted (i.e., wearing a shirt of Manchester United), participants were more likely to help a confederate who fell and hurt his ankle (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005). Another study conducted with undergraduate students showed that students are more likely to help another student hanging posters when a common identity is salient (Dovidio, Gaertner, Validzic, Matoka, & Johnson, 1997). More recently, Thomas, Saguy, Dovidio and Gaertner (2014, cited in Dovidio et al., 2017) obtained similar results in a study conducted with college students at a college athletic event, with black confederates being more helped when sharing a common identity with white participants (i.e., participants' college or USA national identity).

Based on these findings we propose that the endorsement of inclusive identities should be related to increased intentions of helping the victims of homophobic bullying.



Specifically, we propose that inclusive identities should be related to assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions, through reduced social contagion concerns. Previous research already showed that common identities have the potential to reduce threat perceptions (Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald, & Lamoreaux, 2010), and contagion concerns can be seen as a form of perceived threat to the self. However, because one-group representations do not involve the salience of the original subgroups, we expect that its negative relation with social contagion concerns will be stronger relative to the dual-identity one. Endorsement of a common identity that does not make salient the different sexual orientations of participants, should be more effective in reducing the fear of being misidentified as gay or lesbian, which will then be related to more intentions of helping the victim.

We conducted two survey studies with male and female adolescents to examine if social contagion concerns were related to adolescents' behavioral intentions of helping the victims of homophobic bullying, and if endorsement of inclusive identities could foster intergroup helping by reducing these concerns.

### **Study 1**

This study examined if, and how, adolescents' social contagion concerns are associated with less assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions. We expected that adolescents' higher social contagion concerns will be related to less assertive bystanders, via increased negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, particularly among male adolescents (H1).

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

Two hundred and sixteen students from 4 public schools from Lisbon Metropolitan Area (119 females), aged between 11 and 19 ( $M=14.3$ ,  $SD= 1.74$ ), participated in this study. Approximately 66% of the students were in middle school (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> years); and 34% were high school (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> years). Two hundred participants identified as heterosexual, 5 as bisexual, 2 as homosexual and the remaining did not answer or had doubts as to their sexual orientation. Because this study focused on homosexual/bisexual as the relevant outgroup target, we did not include participants who self-identified as homosexual, bisexual and the ones who did not respond to the question or declared having doubts about their sexual orientation. Thus, the final sample involved 200 heterosexual students (110 females).

All students who participated in the study had to provide previous parental consent and before participating they were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants completed a paper and pencil questionnaire<sup>1</sup> during class time in the presence of a teacher and the researcher.

## Measures

**Social contagion concerns.** We adapted Buck et al., (2013) measure of social contagion concerns. Participants indicated, on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree), to what extent they agreed or disagreed with 10 statements related to contagion concerns involving ingroup and outgroup members (e.g., *“If I was hanging out with a homosexual person, I would worry that other people would think I was a homosexual, too.”*; *“If I had to interact with a homosexual person of my same gender, I would worry that he or she would flirt with me”*;  $\alpha= .83$ ). Following Buck et al., (2013) procedure, we created a composite score of social contagion, where higher values indicate higher social contagion concerns.

**Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.** We used the modern heterosexism dimension of an adapted version of the Multidimensional Scale of Attitudes towards

Lesbians and Gay Men (Gato, Fontaine, & Leme, 2014). Participants were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with 7 statements (e.g., “*Being raised in a homosexual home is quite different from being raised in a heterosexual home*”; “*Gay men and lesbians should stop imposing their lifestyle on others*”) on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree;  $\alpha = .66$ ). Higher scores indicate more prejudiced attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

**Assertive behavioral intentions.** Based on a previously used measure of bystanders’ behavioral intentions (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Palmer & Cameron, 2010; Palmer, Rutland, & Cameron 2015), participants read a vignette of a name-calling homophobic bullying episode: “*Imagine that it is the end of the school day, you are walking down the corridor and you hear a student (Student A) shout a rude word against another student (Student B) because he/she is gay/lesbian or because Student A thinks Student B is gay/lesbian. What would you do?*”. After reading the vignette, participants indicated their intention to engage in 4 assertive behavioral intentions, on a 5-point scale (1= never do; 5= always do; “*I would tell a teacher or member of staff.*”;  $\alpha = .76$ ). Higher scores indicate the endorsement of more assertive behavioral intentions<sup>2</sup>.

## Results and Discussion

The descriptive findings, means and zero order correlations, are reported in Table 1. We tested the conditional indirect effect of social contagion concerns on assertive bystanders’ behavioral intentions, through attitudes towards lesbians and gay men with PROCESS bootstrapping macro (Model 7; Hayes, 2013) for SPSS with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected standardized bootstrap CI. Social contagion was the predictor, gender was the dichotomous moderator, attitudes towards lesbians and gay men were the mediator, and assertive behavioral intentions were the outcome<sup>3</sup>. The index of moderated mediation

(0.03, 95% CI [-0.00, 0.10]) and the interaction of gender with social contagion concerns were not significant ( $b = -0.17, p = .12$ ), thus not supporting the expected moderated mediation. We then explored an alternative simple mediation model (i.e., Model 4) to examine the indirect effect of social contagion on assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions, through attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

Results revealed that social contagion concerns were positively related to attitudes towards lesbians and gay men ( $b = 0.51, p < .001$ ), that is, the more adolescents had concerns over being misidentified as gay or lesbian, the more they reported negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Table 2). Additionally, as hypothesized, negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men were negatively associated with assertive behavioral intentions ( $b = -0.17, p = .03$ ). Partially supporting our hypothesis, the negative indirect effect of social contagion on assertive bystanders' intentions through negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men was significant,  $b = -0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.16, -0.01]. Specifically, social contagion concerns were indirectly and negatively related to assertive behavioral intentions towards victims of homophobic bullying through increased prejudiced attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

Overall, the results are in line with previous research conducted with adults, showing that adolescents' social contagion concerns are related to prejudiced attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (e.g., Buck et al., 2013). Higher concerns about being misidentified as gay or lesbian were associated with less bystanders' intentions of helping the victims, through the endorsement of negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. However, contrary to the hypothesis, this effect was not stronger for male adolescents. Thus, regardless of adolescents' gender, the more concerns they had about being misidentified as gay or lesbian, the less assertive behavioral intentions they revealed. These results are further discussed in the General Discussion.

## Study 2

The main goal of Study 2 was to explore, for the first time, a strategy that may reduce contagion concerns among adolescents and thereby increase their bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions. Specifically, this study explored if adolescents' endorsement of more inclusive identity representations (i.e., one-group and dual-identity) are related to less social contagion concerns, and thereby increase bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions. Similar to Study 1, and based on previous research illustrating gender differences in homophobic behaviors (e.g., Birkett & Espelage, 2015), we expect that the negative relation between social contagion concerns and adolescents' assertive behavioral intentions will be stronger among male than female participants. Thus, we expect the positive indirect effect of one-group representations on assertive behavioral intentions to be particularly stronger among male participants (H1).

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were 230 students (54.3% female), aged between 11 and 19 ( $M = 14.3$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ), from 4 public schools from Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Ninety percent of the sample identified as heterosexual. Approximately 69% of the students were in middle school (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> years) and 31% were in high school (10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> years). As in study 1, we did not include participants who self-identified as homosexual, bisexual and the ones who did not answered or had doubts concerning their sexual orientation ( $N = 23$ ). This led to a final sample of 207 heterosexual students (54.1% female). The procedure was the same used in Study 1. All students who participated in the study had to provide previous parental

consent and before participating they were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous.

## Measures

Social contagion concerns and assertive behavioral intentions were assessed with the same measures used in Study 1. To assess common and dual-identity representations, we adapted items from previous research (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). Participants indicated, on a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree), to what extent they felt like one-group (*“At school, when I think of heterosexual and homosexual students, I see them as one group of students”*; *“Regardless of our different sexual orientations, at school it usually feels as we are all members of a single group”*), and two subgroups within a larger group of students (*“At school, when I think of heterosexual and homosexual students, I see them as two subgroups of students”*; *“At school, heterosexual and homosexual students seem like sub-groups within a larger group.”*)<sup>4</sup>. Given the low reliability scores of the two items assessing each representation, we used only the single-item measure traditionally used by Gaertner and colleagues (e.g., Gaertner et al., 1989; 1999)<sup>5</sup>.

## Results and Discussion

The descriptive findings, means and zero order correlations, are presented in Table 3. Overall, one-group representations were negatively related to social contagion concerns, and positively related to assertive behavioral intentions. However, contrary to the expected, dual-identity was positively related to social contagion concerns. As expected, social contagion concerns were negatively associated with assertive behavioral intentions.

We used PROCESS bootstrapping macro to test our moderated mediation model (Model 14; Hayes, 2013). For this model, one-group representations were entered as the

predictor and dual-identity entered as a covariate<sup>67</sup>, social contagion as the mediator, bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions as the outcome, and gender as the dichotomous moderator. We estimated all alternative models (i.e., using dual-identity as the main predictor and one-group as the covariate).

### **One-Group Representations: Moderated Mediation**

Results revealed that one-group representations were negatively related to social contagion concerns ( $b = -0.19, p = .01$ ), that is, the more adolescents felt heterosexual and homosexual students as one-group, the less adolescents had concerns over being misidentified as gay or lesbian (Table 4). The direct relation of one-group with assertive behavioral intentions ( $b = 0.14, p = .03$ ) was reliable, suggesting that the more adolescents endorsed the representation, the more they were willing to help. The direct relation of social contagion with assertive behavioral intentions ( $b = -0.08, p = .19$ ) was not reliable, but as predicted, there was a significant interaction between social contagion concerns and gender on bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions,  $b = -0.31, p = .01$ . We plotted the significant interaction (Figure 1) and calculated the simple slopes using the procedures recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). The results confirmed the hypothesis, as social contagion concerns were negatively related to assertive behavioral intentions only for male participants ( $t = -4.81; p < .05$ ), but not for female participants ( $t = -0.95; p > .05$ ). The difference between slopes was significant ( $t = -2.77; p < .05$ ), suggesting that the relationship between social contagion and bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions is affected by participants' gender. We then tested the conditional indirect effect using PROCESS index of moderated mediation. Evidence of the expected moderated mediation was found in the significant index of moderated mediation (0.06, 95% CI [0.01, 0.16]). Moderation of the indirect effect of one-group on assertive behavioral intentions was explored by estimating

the conditional indirect effect of one-group representations on bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions through social contagion concerns at the two levels of gender. The indirect effect of one-group representations on bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions, through social contagion concerns was positive only for male participants,  $b = 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.00, 0.13]. Among female participants, the indirect effect was negative but not significant,  $b = -0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.06, 0.01].

### **Dual-Identity Representations: Moderated Mediation**

Dual-identity was also significantly related to social contagion ( $b = 0.16$ ,  $p = .04$ ), however, contrary to the expected, the relation was positive, suggesting that the more participants felt like two groups within a larger group, the higher their contagion concerns (see Table 4). The direct relation of dual-identity with assertive behavioral intentions ( $b = 0.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was reliable, suggesting that the more adolescents endorsed the representation, the more they were willing to help. As mentioned above, the direct relation of social contagion with assertive behavioral intentions ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $p = .19$ ) was not reliable, but as predicted, there was a significant interaction between social contagion concerns and gender on assertive behavioral intentions,  $b = -0.31$ ,  $p = .01$  (Figure 1). Plotting and simple slopes analyses were the same as reported above since the interaction was in the same path (i.e., social contagion and gender).

Evidence of the moderated mediation was found in the significant index of moderated mediation ( $-0.05$ , 95% CI [-0.14, -0.00]), however not supporting the expected moderated mediation. Moderation of the indirect effect of dual-identity on assertive behavioral intentions was explored by estimating the conditional indirect effect of dual-identity representations on bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions through social contagion concerns at the two levels of gender. Contrary to the results found for one-group



representation, the indirect effect of dual-identity representations on bystanders' assertive behavioral intentions, through social contagion concerns was negative and only significant for male participants,  $b = -0.04$ , 95% CI  $[-0.11, -0.00]$ . Among female participants, the indirect effect was positive but not significant,  $b = 0.01$ , 95% CI  $[-0.01, 0.06]$ .

In sum, these results supported our hypothesis that, for male adolescents, the more they felt heterosexual and homosexual students as one-group, the less social contagion concerns they felt, which then related to increased behavioral intentions to help victims of homophobic bullying. These findings are also consistent with previous work, showing that creating a more inclusive common identity is associated with increased intergroup helping (e.g., Levine et al., 2005). However, and contrary to what was found for one-group representation, the relation of dual-identity and bystanders' behavioral intentions, through social contagion concerns was negative. In fact, the endorsement of a dual-identity representation was related to higher social contagion concerns, which then related to less intentions of helping the victims of homophobic bullying.

### **General discussion**

Two studies examined a) if social contagion concerns about being misidentified as gay or lesbian were related to adolescents' behavioral intentions of helping the victims of homophobic bullying, and b) if endorsement of inclusive identities could reduce these concerns and consequently foster intergroup helping. Taken together, the results of the two studies provide evidence for the negative consequences of social contagion concerns, and for the potential of inclusive identity representations to foster assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions.

Consistent with previous research on the negative effects of social contagion concerns among adults, our findings further illustrated that these concerns are also associated

with less assertive behavioral intentions by peer bystanders in homophobic bullying episodes. Specifically, Study 1 extended previous work by exploring the impact of social contagion on a very prevalent form of bullying: homophobic bullying, and also by examining a potential underlying mechanism that accounted for this effect (i.e., attitudes towards sexual minorities). Consistent with previous studies, heterosexual adolescents with higher social contagion concerns had more negative attitudes towards lesbian and gay people (e.g., Cascio & Plant, 2016; Plant et al., 2014). Previous research has found that more supportive attitudes towards lesbian and gay individuals are associated with higher intentions to intervene in discrimination against LGBT people (Dessel et al., 2016). Importantly, extending previous research, our results revealed that adolescents' homophobic attitudes hindered assertive behavioral intentions on behalf of a bullying victim. However, contrary to our expectation, these negative effects of social contagion were not stronger for male participants. Regardless of participants' gender, the more concerns they had about being misidentified as gay or lesbian, the less assertive behavioral intentions they reported. This finding should be interpreted with caution, as we did not replicate it in Study 2, where there were significant differences between male and female adolescents.

Supportive of our hypotheses, Study 2 provided some first evidence for the potential of inclusive identities to reduce social contagion concerns, and through that, increasing adolescents' intentions of acting on behalf of the victims of homophobic bullying. These findings are consistent with previous research showing the positive effects of recategorization on helping behaviors (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2017, Levine et al., 2005). Our results showed that only a more inclusive common identity that did not make salient the subgroup differences (i.e., students of the same school) was related to increased intentions of helping the victims, via reduced social contagion concerns. Dual-identity representations were positively associated with helping intentions, however, this relation was not explained

by reduced social contagion concerns. In fact, the indirect effect of dual-identity on assertive behavioral intentions was negative, precisely via increased concerns of being misidentified as gay or lesbian. This result may suggest that making salient both common identity and subgroup differences may not be effective in reducing social contagion concerns and, conversely, still induce social contagion concerns, which did not happen when creating a unique common identity (i.e., one-group representations). Therefore, other underlying mechanisms may account for the positive relation of dual-identity and assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions. Future studies could test this finding experimentally, as well as, explore other potential mediators (e.g., empathy or willingness for contact).

Indeed, dual-identity, relative to one-group representations, is more effective in triggering solidarity-based collective action among majority groups (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013). In this study, White Americans showed more willingness to protest in favor of racial minorities when both common and subgroup identities were salient. Thus, future studies could compare the relative efficacy of both common identity representations, exploring if different underlying mechanisms account for their effects on assertive behavioral intentions.

Importantly and differently than what was found in Study 1, the indirect effect of one-group representation on helping intentions was only significant for male adolescents. This is consistent with prior research showing that homophobic behaviors are usually associated with masculinity norms and boys usually report less helping behaviors in homophobic episodes than girls (e.g., Poteat & Vecho, 2015). However, in Study 1, gender did not moderate the relation between social contagion concerns and negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. One potential difference that may account for this result has to do with the moderator role of gender. In Study 1, gender did not moderate the relation between social contagion concerns and attitudes, suggesting that male and female participants showed similar negative attitudes as a consequence of contagion concerns. In

Study 2, however, gender moderated the relation between contagion concerns and assertive behavioral intentions, suggesting that the impact of contagion on helping behavioral intentions differs between male and female participants. Future studies could further explore the differential impact of gender on attitudes and behaviors towards lesbian and gay adolescents, given the large differences between male and female attitudes toward sexual minorities, with male adolescents usually having more negative attitudes toward this group and girls endorsing more defending behaviors in bullying episodes (e.g., Evans & Smokovski, 2015).

### **Limitations and future research directions**

The current studies had some limitations, particularly given its correlational nature, which did not allow us to test causal pathways between the variables. To overcome this limitation, future studies could test these findings experimentally. For example, manipulating social contagion concerns to test its impact on attitudes and bystanders' behavioral intentions. Future research could also manipulate identity representations and address new potential mediators that could explain the differential indirect effects of one-group and dual-identity on assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions. Importantly, we also recognize the potential limitations of the vignette presented in this study, given that it was referring to a name-calling homophobic bullying episode. Thus, future studies could present a vignette with a physical homophobic bullying episode to further extend these findings.

Finally, the moderating role of gender was not consistent across the two studies and future research could examine its role in homophobic bullying, given the wide differences between male and female behaviors, attitudes and beliefs related to sexual minorities.

Despite these limitations, our findings contribute to the existing knowledge on assertive behavioral intentions by peer bystanders in several ways: highlighting the negative

role of social contagion concerns on helping victims of homophobic bullying; and importantly, illustrating, for the first time, the potential of inclusive identities to decrease these concerns, enhance assertive behavioral intentions among bystanders, and building a positive and supportive school environment for all students.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The study was part of a broader project, which included other measures that were not directly relevant for this study.

<sup>2</sup> We included 6 additional bystanders' behaviors with other possible responses including ignoring, watching and joining in (e.g., "*I would ignore the comment and walk away*"; "*I would watch*"). However, those were not analyzed because this research focused on assertive behaviors only.

<sup>3</sup> Age was included as a covariate in this study, and following the recommendations of Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn (2011) we also tested the model without the covariate and the results were the same.

<sup>4</sup> For exploratory reasons, given that this was the first study that examined the relation of different group representations with social contagion concerns and assertive bystanders' behavioral intentions, we included two items measuring separate group representations.

<sup>5</sup> Importantly, we replicated the analyses using the two-item measure and the results were the same.

<sup>6</sup> Age was included as a covariate in this study. Following the recommendations of Simmons, et al. (2011), we tested the model without the covariate and results were different, only for the moderated mediation of dual-identity that became non-significant. Given that age was strongly and significantly related to social contagion concerns, we included age in both moderated mediation models.

<sup>7</sup> PROCESS estimates models with multiple predictors by entering the additional predictors as covariates. To estimate the direct and indirect effects of all k X variables we ran PROCESS k times, each time putting one Xi in the model and the remaining X variables

as covariates. Mathematically, all resulting paths, direct and indirect effect, are the same as if they were estimated simultaneously (Hayes, 2013).

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Variables (Study 1)*

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Social Contagion	3.25	1.43	-		
2. Attitudes	3.09	1.19	.57**	-	
3. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	.30**	.25**	-
4. Assertive behavioral intentions	3.34	1.06	-.17*	-.21**	-.27**

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .<sup>a</sup> 1= Female; 2= Male

Table 2

*Social Contagion's Indirect Effect on Assertive Behavioral Intentions (Study 1)**Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

	M (Attitudes)			Y (Assertive Bystanders)		
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p
Constant	1.67	.66	.80	3.81**	.69	.00
(X) Social Contagion	.51**	.05	.00	-.02	.07	.77
(cov) Age	.09*	.04	.03	.01	.04	.84
M (Attitudes)	-	-	-	-.17*	.08	.03
(W) Gender	.17	.15	.25	-	-	-
X x W	-.17	.11	.12	-	-	-
	$R^2 = 0.354$			$R^2 = 0.044$		
	$F(4, 183) = 25.118, p < .001$			$F(3, 184) = 2.836, p = .039$		

The values are unstandardized regression coefficient

Table 3

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between the Variables (Study 2)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. One-group	4.13	1.33	-			
2. Dual identity	1.90	1.32	-.17*	-		
3. Social Contagion	3.22	1.46	-.27**	.17*	-	
4. Gender <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-.25**	.12	.25**	-
5. Assertive behavioral intentions	3.21	1.12	.24**	.19*	-.14	-.27**

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .<sup>a</sup> 1= Female; 2= Male



Table 4

*One-Group and Dual-Identity Representations' Indirect Effects on Assertive Behavioral Intentions (Study 2)*

	M (Social contagion)			Y (Assertive Bystanders)		
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p
Constant	4.87**	.88	.00	2.59**	.75	.00
(X) One-group	-.19*	.07	.01	.14*	.06	.03
(cov) Dual-identity	.16*	.08	.04	.22**	.06	.00
(cov) Age	-.30**	.06	.00	-.02	.05	.69
M (social contagion)	-	-	-	-.08	.06	.19
(V) Gender	-	-	-	-.50**	.16	.00
M x V	-	-	-	-.31*	.11	.01
	$R^2 = 0.206$			$R^2 = 0.198$		
	$F(3, 169) = 14.618, p < .001$			$F(6, 166) = 6.848, p < .001$		

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

The values are unstandardized regression coefficient

Figures Captions

*Figure 1.* Interaction of social contagion concerns and gender

