Using Mixed Methods to Explore Forms of Harassment for K-12 BIPOC Trans Students

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Using Mixed Methods to Explore Forms of Harassment for K-12 BIPOC Trans Students

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Abstract: Trans students of color face verbal and physical harassment all too often in educational settings. Using the 2015 United States Trans Survey, this mixed methods study explored the relationship between race and gender identity with regard to experiences with verbal and physical harassment in the K-12 setting. The quantitative phase investigated the extent to which race and gender identity predicted verbal and physical harassment, while the qualitative phase explored the types of harassment experiences for trans students of color. Quantitative findings highlight a higher incidence of verbal and physical harassment for Alaska Native/American Indian trans individuals and trans women, and lower physical harassment for Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. The exploration of the alignment in quantitative and qualitative findings shows which race and age wrote more about their experiences, which highlighted some enduring effects of verbal and physical harassment.

Keywords: 2015 U.S. Trans Survey, verbal harassment, physical harassment, trans students of color, mixed methods

Introduction

The number of anti-trans education bills has more than doubled since 2022 and multiplied over 30-fold since 2018 in state legislatures (Choi, 2023), causing a period of anxiety and unrest for parents of trans youth and their children (Larson, 2021; Price & Herron, 2023; Puckett, 2023). Many of these bills are introduced under the guise of safety for children (Astor, 2023). State legislators are not prioritizing the safety of trans youth, leading to the Human Rights Campaign declaring a state of emergency for LGBTQ+ folks in 2023 (Darling-Hammond & Evans-Santiago, 2024). According to the Trans Legislation Tracker (2024), 620 (with 266 carrying over from 2023) anti-trans bills have been introduced across the United States in 2024. The increase in legislative efforts against trans individuals makes it imperative to understand the interpretation of federal policies. The interpretation of Title IX amongst presidential administrations has continued to evolve. Obama's administration broadened the definition to include binaries outside of male and female, but in Trump's administration, sex was defined biologically. Moving forward, the Biden administration released an executive order to ensure a discrimination-free environment on the basis of sex in schools, inclusive of sex and gender (Mayo et al., 2022). Despite the current orders, trans youth do not feel safe in schools (Kosciw et al., 2022). These bills will affect students in their educational settings; thus, there is a need for mixed methods research that studies the K-12 experiences of large groups of trans individuals more holistically, especially for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) trans individuals, who are more vulnerable to intersecting systems of oppression (Conron & Wilson, 2019).

Trans students should feel safe and a sense of belonging in the K-12 educational setting, but these students face verbal and physical harassment all too often. Trans high school students report higher levels of transphobia and victimization compared to trans-post-secondary students (Taylor et al., 2022). Only 8.2% of LGBTQ+ students reported that their own school or district had policies to support them (Kosciw et al., 2022). However, research has pointed to the invisibility of queer and trans people of color in education research as it comes from a primarily white perspective (e.g., Brockenbrough, 2015, 2016b; Cruz, 2013; Keenan & Suárez, 2022; McCready, 2004). This study was conducted for school personnel who can make administrative policy changes at the school level (e.g., school administration); it seeks to increase awareness through an intersectional lens, QuantCrit, and queer theory about the verbal and physical harassment that students who are transgender face at school from peers and adults. Administrators who can enact school-level policies could benefit from a better understanding of the types of harassment that trans students face during their time in K-12 schools. Transgender students do not have time to wait due to the victimization and harassment they are facing in schools (Kosciw et al., 2022).

To that end, the present study aims to retrospectively explore the experiences of trans students in the K-12 setting by investigating the relationship between verbal harassment, physical harassment, and race/ethnicity. Due to the lack of large-scale education surveys that collect gender identity from trans youth (Suárez, 2024), the education research community is often left using retrospective data to examine K-12 outcomes. We use the restricted-access dataset of the largest sample of trans adults collected to date, the 2015 U.S. Trans

Survey with over 27,000 trans individuals, to carry out our analysis. The results could lend themselves to creating more district or school-wide policies for minoritized students, especially trans students.

Positionality of the Researchers

We are a group of researchers with very different types of experiences with systems of oppression in K-12 education. Two are self-identified white, cisgender women, and the other is a trans man of color. All three researchers have worked in the K-12 system as public school elementary and secondary educators. As such, we have a unique understanding of how the system can (and does) discipline and treat some students very differently than others based on race, gender (identity), and class privilege. The first author is a White, cisgender, heterosexual woman. She is a current high school educator and researcher who has had the privilege of working with minoritized populations which have deepened her understanding of the unique challenges that queer and trans youth face in school. Through practice and inquiry, she seeks ways to make schools space for students, especially marginalized students, to thrive. The second author was one of the participants in the study in 2015 when one of the recruitment events took place at an LGBTQ+ conference he attended. At the time, he was a practitioner and not a researcher and has had first-hand experience with taking the survey and being an active member of various advocate groups at the time the data was collected. The third author, a cisgender White woman, has worked as a teacher in elementary schools and as a teacher educator and researcher focused on training teachers to meet the needs of all their students. We are committed to deconstructing and disaggregating these experiences using QuantCrit and qualitative methods in this study to understand the experiences of trans students of color in K-12 spaces and use the results to improve those experiences.

Literature Review

In order to better understand the experiences of trans individuals of color in K-12 educational environments, we engage with the literature addressing the relationship between race and harassment of people who are trans in the K-12 setting, which identifies various issues. The five major themes found in the literature include the LGBTQ+ experience in education, heteronormativity, the exclusion and banning of LGBTQ+ curriculum, adult interactions, and the intersections of race and sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBTQ+ Experience in K-12 Education

LGBTQ+ students in public education face multifaceted challenges and barriers because the schools they attend do not serve them (Darling-Hammond, 2019) and have become "spaces of immense violence" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019, p. 376). The first theme explores the complex issues LGBTQ+ students face in public education; this theme emerges with prominence and severity. The findings from Hatchel et al. (2019) state that suicide and peer victimization are major health concerns among LGBTQ+ youth. Not only are suicide and victimization an issue facing queer and trans youth, but they also report lower levels of sense of belonging than their white peers (Mello et al., 2012; Montoro et al., 2021). In GLSEN's 2021 report from the National School and Climate Survey (NSCS), 83.1% of LGBTQ+ students were harassed or assaulted based on their gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2022). For gender non-conforming students, Meyer reported violence in the high school setting (2022). The victimization of queer youth is not limited to peer interactions; counselors and principals are not continually supportive of students (Wozolek et al., 2017). Trans folks are marginalized by the very institution governing their day-to-day lives: public education (Keenan, 2022). Because schools cater to a gender binary (Keenan & Hot Mess, 2020), the literature confirms that we will continue to see the victimization of queer and trans youth.

Heteronormativity and White Supremacy Enforce Social Norms in Schools

A major finding in the literature is the pervasiveness of heteronormativity and Whiteness within the school system. Humans created a social hierarchy in which to enact oppression and discrimination based on the color of someone's skin color, even though D.N.A. from any two humans is 99.9% identical (Crow, 2002, p. 82). More than social class and gender, race is the "master" category that continues to transform the United States (Omi & Winant, 2014). This "master" category shapes perception and action and, in turn, perpetuates gender oppression (Omi & Winant, 2014).

The social hierarchy creates a "gold standard of sexual orientation or expression" defined by Whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity, erasing trans identities (Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020, p. 157). When you are outside the gold standard, your identity becomes Othered. This Othering has been done by dominant groups creating boundaries to maintain status and power (Saperstein et al., 2013). LGBTQ+ students, including queer students of color, are Othered by peers or adults, resulting in harmful actions (Kumashiro, 2000). Peers or adults who Other LGBTQ+ students, as well as queer students of color, result in harmful actions When society normalizes certain identities, it marginalizes all of the others. In a Eurocentric society, heterosexual and White values and traditions are seen as the norm; anything else is different or less than.

Intersection of Race and SOGI

There are a variety of factors and identities that need to be taken into consideration when doing research for queer and trans students: racism, social class, housing, and food in/security (Paechter, 2021). As the exploration of literature on queer and trans youth is imperative to the study, it also

becomes necessary to explore the intersections of their racial identities. Schools are a microcosm of society at large, and racial and gender discrimination is ever-present. Far too often, white trans folks have been the spokesperson for the transgender experience (Keenan & Suárez, 2022). This perspective is valid, but it does not account for the larger racial makeup of the entirety of the queer and trans community. As Meyer (2022) has noted, "We need pedagogies that listen to transgender experience in all its forms" (p. 319). Du Bois (1903/2008), a leading race scholar and sociologist, emphasized that the problem of the twentieth century was the color line. Where race is a social construct (Itzigohn et al., 2020; Omi et al., 2014), this line separates and segregates people of color from their white counterparts; the ability of a BIPOC person becomes a mirror of the white ability or commonly known as having a double conscious and looking at one's self through the eyes of another (Du Bois, 1903/2008; Morris 2015). The historical comparison between races magnifies the color line and validates race as "the first social construction of modernity, an imagined but violently real social construction (Itzigohn et al., 2020, p. 69)." It is imperative to examine both race and gender identity.

With regard to BIPOC queer and trans youth experiences, research shows that traditional schools do this population a disservice (Kosciw et al., 2022; Truong et al., 2020a,b; Zongrone et al., 2020a,b). As a result, BIPOC youth have had to find a sense of belonging outside of school, often in informal spaces (Brockenbrough, 2016; Cruz, 2011, 2013; McCready, 2019; Reid, 2022). These researchers, through a FUBU ("for us, by us") perspective (Darling-Hammond, 2019), highlight the resistance and agency of BIPOC queer and trans youth. However, some research has addressed minor pockets of safety in schools, which tend to appear with supportive adults (Wozolek, 2021), and others have written about ways to develop curriculum to foster trans youth (especially trans youth of color) thriving in schools (Darling-Hammond & Evans-Santiago, 2024). Little attention has been paid to the intersection of race and trans identity for youth in K-12 settings through a quantitative lens.

Exclusion and Banning of LGBTQ+ Curriculum in K-12 Schools

An important theme in the literature is the exclusion and banning of LGBTQ+ curriculum in schools, which consequently silences LGBTQ+ voices and identities. This theme illustrates the complex intersection of policy, cultural traditions and values of education, and LGBTQ+ rights. It maintains ignorance and prejudice. Bans of all types, including banning inclusive curricula in schools, are only one of the challenges facing teachers and students today. The Trump administration in 2019 stated that schools should remove LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula and materials (Kosciw et al., 2022). Curriculum is foundational to the transfer of knowledge between teacher and learner. The null curriculum, or the excluded curriculum, omits texts, perspectives, or voices from the classroom, forming microaggressions (Bonilla-Silva,

2006). This exclusionary tradition contributes to a hostile environment.

In addition to the curriculum, state legislatures attack spaces (e.g., Gay Straight Alliances, Gender Sexuality Alliances, Queer Straight Alliances) where queer students find solidarity and safety, labeling them as noncurricular; this illustrates the heteronormative voice and knowledge that have become superior in K-12 schools (Camicia, 2016). With a lack of queer and trans representation in the curriculum, clubs directed toward gender and sexual orientation could be the only queer space a student has access to. Only 34.8% of LGBTQ+ students had a G.S.A. (i.e., Gay-Straight Alliance, Gender and Sexuality Alliance) or a similar club at their school (Kosciw et al., 2022). G.S.A.s provide a space in contrast to the "hostile school climate" (Adelman et al., 2022, p. 194) even if a club that meets periodically does not make up for the lack of queer and trans student identities missing from the larger curriculum and culture of the school. And yet, increased attention on queer and trans folks has led to more harm and ever-evolving barriers (Keenan & Suárez, 2022).

The Impact of Adult Interactions with Queer Youth in Schools

The fourth central theme explores adult interactions. Trans youth often have to suppress parts of themselves to accommodate others' comfort (Reid, 2022). This suppression can be difficult for trans youth, as they do not always have the support of loved ones, putting them in a sense of "survival mode" (Gutzwa, 2022). Administrators, teachers, and other adult personnel at the school play a critical role in shaping the school climate and the perception and experience of LGBTQ+ students. Teachers, administrators, and educational leaders are responsible for fostering support and validating trans students (Keenan & Suárez, 2022). Adults in schools maintain marginalization and discrimination through negative encounters. For example, a study on the school-to-coffin pipeline described how counselors and unsupportive principals repeatedly dismissed students (Wozolek et al., 2017). Educational spaces, meant to be nurturing, "have become spaces of immense violence" (Loutzenheiser & Erevelles, 2019, p. 376). Large-scale quantitative findings related to the harassment of their trans students could benefit administrators; the literature illuminates patterns.

Adults play a critical role in creating and fostering safe and affirming environments where students can gain a sense of belonging. Keenan (2020) explored the learned "gendered script" of schooling and what can happen if students stray from it (p. 446). This departure could include students dropping out, changing schools, moving to online education, or graduating early. An educator's unwillingness to learn about gender diversity can "make schools uncomfortable places for transgender students" (Payne et al., 2022, p. 54). GLSEN reported that 58.4% of staff never intervened when peers made negative gender expression remarks in schools, leaving students to fend for themselves (Kosciw et al., 2022). This

statistic suggests that even having adults present in a school environment does not ensure that there will be staff intervention for biased language. Similarly, 61.5% of students experienced harassment and assault from school staff but never reported the incidents (Kosciw et al., 2022). These findings highlight the need for more training and accountability for all school staff.

Research Questions

Using the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), we address the following research questions:

1.) To what extent, if any, does race/ethnicity of trans participants retrospectively predict K-12 types of harassment (i.e., verbal, physical)?
2.) What negative experiences and perceptions of discrimination did BIPOC trans individuals retrospectively encounter while in K-12 schooling?
3.) Do responses to negative experiences and perceptions of discrimination while in K-12 schooling help to explain between-group differences for BIPOC respondents?

Theoretical Frameworks

Queer and Trans Theory

This study is guided by queer and trans theory as frameworks to view and better understand the harassment and experiences that transgender people face while in the K-12 setting. Queer and trans theory are the major theoretical framework that "critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender (Abes et al., 2007, p.620)." Queer and trans theories are often attributed to Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Foucault (1976/1990) focuses heavily on sexuality, while Butler (1999) discusses gender, yet both are instrumental in breaking the binary. In 1990, Teresa de Lauretis coined the term *queer theory* at a research conference; this shifted the field of gender studies (Halperin, 2003). Trans theory, as a body of literature, is still emerging, but it is known to borrow from theoretical bases such as feminism, queer theory, and social justice (Nagoshi, 2010). In the introduction to *Transgender Studies Quarterly (T.S.Q.),* Stryker and Currah (2014) write about the emergence of trans studies as early as the 1980s with respect to medico-legal issues of transsexualism, which eventually evolved into trans studies as we know of today, which theorizes trans beyond the body and questions gender normative ways of being and knowing. That said, Black queer feminists and other queer women of color were writing about the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and class long before queer and trans theories emerged as academic theories (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Queer women of color wrote in *The Combahee River Collective Statement, and This Bridge Called My Back* about their disappointment with progressive white women and men's activism that did not

advocate for anti-racist and liberatory politics inclusive of the experiences these women had.

Heterosexuality has become the norm in society, placing it as the standard on which to base normality. A goal of queer and trans theory is to break from the oppression of those in the LGBTQ+ community and to break gender binaries by decentering hetero- and cisnormativity. When we decenter cisgender people, Whiteness becomes decentered because systems of power and privilege are being dismantled and challenged. In this study, we do this by focusing solely on the experiences of trans individuals in the 2015 USTS, without a need to compare to cisgender individuals, as a way to decenter Whiteness. We argue that trans lives are worthy of being studied on their own without having to compare to cisgender people. We examine the nuanced and complex experiences of trans people. Integrating both qualitative trans narratives with quantitative data with a queer and trans lens provide perspectives that embrace the fluid and diverse understanding of identities.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) pioneered the term intersectionality to illustrate how multiple systems of oppression intersect and interact to create different types of discrimination, oppression, or privilege for minoritized individuals, primarily Black women. For example, a white, gay, cisgender man is part of a systemically oppressed and discriminated against group (i.e., gay) but is also white and cisgender, which affords them privilege compared to Black trans women, who are triply marginalized (Black, transgender, and women). Identities create different aspects of discrimination or privilege and shape perception, experience, and opportunity. Queer of Color Critique is a contemporary conversation that builds on intersectionality in which queer youth of color must position themselves within the different contexts they find themselves (Brokenbrough, 2015). This study will explore trans people's perception and experience with harassment at the intersection of their self-identified race and gender identity. The data was analyzed through an intersectional lens to illuminate how identities connect to systems of oppression. We analyzed the data by examining each respondent's race/ethnicity and age. Instead of looking at all participants as a universal trans experience in school, we consider the differences between Latino/a/Hispanic trans individuals, Black trans individuals, etc. As researchers, we recognize that a person's various identities shape their experience. By grounding this study in intersectionality, we seek to contribute to the growing body of research by exploring these identities in the context of K-12 education.

QuantCrit

In addition to an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1989), we use QuantCrit (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022; Gillborn et al., 2018), a critical race theory of statistics, to retrospectively explore the

experiences of trans adults in K-12. We understand and assert that multiple systems of oppression are at play for trans people of color and that those systems are not designed for them to thrive. QuantCrit (Gillborn et al., 2018) emphasizes a set of five principles to understand when analyzing quantitative data at the intersection of race and statistics: "1) centrality of racism; 2) numbers are not neutral; 3) categories are neither 'natural' nor given: for 'race' read 'racism'; 4) voice and insight: data cannot 'speak for itself'; and 5) using numbers for social justice" (p. 169). In this vein, QuantCrit combines what we know about critical race theory and uses critical quantitative methods to analyze how racialized systems impact people of color in education. We note here that we use race as a demographic measure to analyze racist systems, and in alignment with QuantCrit, we do not attribute one's outcomes to one's race or the color of their skin. Rather, we recognize that one's educational experience is often felt differently due to race and/or skin color.

Using queer and trans theory, intersectionality, and QuantCrit as theoretical frameworks allow for a comprehensive analysis of the queer and trans BIPOC experience in K-12 schooling.
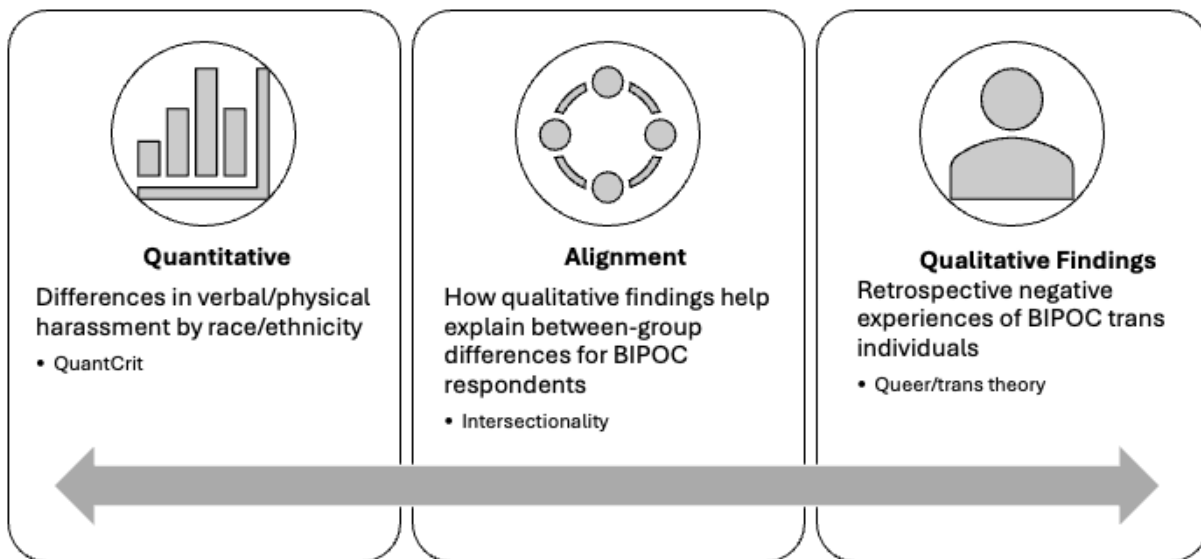
Combining these theoretical frameworks provides fluidity and diversity of identities while ensuring that the methodology is critical and used for social justice.

Methodology

By integrating qualitative data with quantitative analysis, we seek to uncover nuances and a better understanding of the BIPOC trans experience in K-12 settings that may not be entirely found in the quantitative results or explain some of the findings. The present study uses a convergent (i.e., parallel) mixed methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Guetterman et al., 2018; Keenan & Suárez, 2022) to retrospectively investigate the K-12 experiences of trans individuals in the USTS restricted-access dataset. Researchers were given access to the dataset after receiving I.R.B. approval. Secondary quantitative and qualitative data used in this study were collected simultaneously, though we used the results from the survey to guide us in narrowing down the choice of cases from the qualitative open-ended responses to triangulate the findings. Figure 1 shows how the theories align with the mixed methods design and the research questions.

Figure 1

Process Display of Alignment between Theories, Research Questions, and Study Design

Quantitative	Alignment	Qualitative Findings
Differences in verbal/physical harassment by race/ethnicity	How qualitative findings help explain between-group differences for BIPOC respondents	Retrospective negative experiences of BIPOC trans individuals
• QuantCrit	• Intersectionality	• Queer/trans theory

The 2015 United States Transgender Survey

With 27,715 respondents from across the United States, territories, and U.S. military bases, the 2015 USTS is the largest survey about the experiences and perceptions of trans people to date that is a collaboration between researchers and trans advocates from the National Center for Trans Equality (NCTE). The online survey in English and Spanish consists of 32 sections pertaining to questions about experiences in K-12 and post-secondary education, families, housing, employment, and overall health, among other topics. While the USTS consisted of survey questions that were quantitative in nature, some open-ended items were collected simultaneously (e.g., write-in options and elaboration options). Purposive recruitment of trans individuals ages 18 and older took place over the course of about a month (August 19-September 21, 2015) through trans national and local community organizations and online, among other places that serve the trans community (James et al., 2019).

Quantitative Analysis

Variables of Interest

The focal independent variable in this study is that of gender identity. This variable was originally asked in the questionnaire as two separate questions: *Q2.1: What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate? with a binary option of female or male; and Q2.2: Which of these terms do you identify with? (Mark all that apply)* with 26 options (e.g., butch, bulldagger, intersex, stud, fa'afafine, trans man, transsexual, two-spirit, travesti). This question was then recoded by the data collection research team (NCTE) in the codebook as a 5-level gender variable (crossdresser, trans woman, trans man, AFAB GQ/NB, AMAB GQ/NB)[1]. For the purposes of this study, we recoded the 5-level variable as a 3-level variable (trans man, trans woman, and nonbinary/genderqueer/other) for ease of interpretation. In addition, past research has suggested that there is a cis-like (i.e., "passing") privilege effect for trans men, compared to trans women and nonbinary/genderqueer individuals (e.g., Schilt, 2006, 2010; Suárez et al., 2022).

The second independent variable is racial/ethnic identity[2]. The item (Q2.9) asked: "Although the choices listed below may not represent your full identity or use the language you prefer, for this survey please select the choice that most accurately describes your racial/ethnic identity. (Please choose only one answer.)". This predictor was operationalized with seven categories (Alaska Native/American Indian, Asian/Asian American/ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Biracial/multiracial, Black/African American, Latino/a/Hispanic, Middle Eastern/North African, white/European American).

The dependent variables used for this study come from question *Q26.4: Did any of these happen to you while in K-12? (If any of these things were done to you in K-12 by classmates, teachers, or school staff, please answer "yes.")*. Responses in the survey were all dichotomous (i.e., no/yes), with eight statements. Of those eight statements, we use the following two in this study: I was verbally harassed because people thought I was trans; I was physically attacked because people thought I was trans. Since they were originally dichotomized variables, we kept them as such. Descriptive statistics for the variables of interest can be found in Table 1. Note that most of the sample (almost 82%) is white and genderqueer/nonbinary (about 36%). The average current age at the time of the survey collection was about 31 years of age (*M*=31.2, *SD*=13.5), and the median was 26 years of age.

Analytic Strategy

In order to identify to what extent race/ethnicity and gender identity predicted verbal and physical harassment, we used logistic regressions. A logistic regression is the most appropriate statistical method to use with dichotomous dependent variables. With regard to race/ethnicity, white trans individuals are used as the reference category as they are the largest group, and for gender identity, we used trans men as the reference group as research has shown a cis-like "passing" privilege for trans men (Schilt, 2006, 2010). We also used the *margins* command to explore the predictive marginal effects of the interaction between race/ethnicity and gender identity with their respective graphs (Williams, 2012). Exploring the marginal effects aligns closely with a QuantCrit analysis, as it allows for the investigation of interactions for each individual subgroup (e.g., Black trans women, Latinx trans men) and has been used in QuantCrit analyses (e.g., López et al., 2018; Suárez et al., 2021). Marginal effects coefficients are interpreted as the probability of that group (e.g., Latinx trans women) reporting the specific type of harassment compared to all the other groups (e.g., Black trans women, white trans women). Stata Version 17.0 (StataCorp, 2021) was used for statistical analyses. The EDRACEAGE weight was used as recommended by the user manual.

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[1] In the codebook, AFAB represents *assigned female at birth* while AMAB represents *assigned male at birth*. The codebook also used GQ and NB to represent genderqueer and nonbinary, respectively.

[2] Here, we note that there are differences between the terms *race* and *ethnicity*. Race has been created as a 'biological' trait that has been used historically to systematically discriminate against individuals, especially enslaved individuals and those deemed less worthy. Eriksen (2010) notes that the concept of 'race' is a dubious category, as there has been so much intermixing between humans, rendering genetics just as mixed, as well as the fact that "there is often greater variation within a 'racial' group than there is systematic variation between groups" (p.46). Ethnicity, on the other hand, is much more defined based on "cultural characteristics as language, history, religion, and customs" (National Research Council, 2004, p. 9). In this study, though we understand the differences between the two, we use the term *race/ethnicity*, as that is what was originally used in the USTS survey and codebook.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Sample of U.S. Trans Adults, 2015 U.S. Trans Survey

Variables of Interest	*n*	%
Race/Ethnicity		
Alaska Native/American Indian	319	1.15
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	786	2.84
Biracial/Multiracial	1551	5.6
Black/African American	796	2.87
Latinx/Hispanic	1473	5.31
White	22658	81.75
Middle Eastern/North African	132	0.48
Gender identity		
Trans woman	9238	34.27
Trans man	7950	29.49
Genderqueer or non-conforming, and/or unsure	9769	36.24
Did any of these happen to you while in K-12? (If any of these things were done to you in K-12 by classmates, teachers, or school staff, please answer "yes.")		
I was verbally harassed because people thought I was trans.	5745	54.45
I was physically attacked because people thought I was trans.	2413	22.96

Qualitative Analysis

This part of the study focuses solely on responses within the BIPOC community, which excluded white responses. Through an intersectional lens, the results allowed us to examine thespecific challenges and perspectives of BIPOC students and those within the trans community. We describe the qualitative strategy in the following paragraphs.

One open-ended question that was chosen for analysis: *Q32.2 Please tell us anything else that you would like to tell us about your experience of acceptance or discrimination so we can better understand your experiences.* This question was chosen because it allowed the responder to include any information about acceptance or discrimination that may or may not have been represented within the survey. Although the question was not directly related to K-12 educational settings, the responses provided sufficient depth from the respondents' K-12 experiences and allowed analyzing between-group commonalities and differences. Details of methods are found in the qualitative analysis.

Originally, 1,112 responses were pulled from the dataset from participants who were BIPOC (about a fifth of the larger BIPOC sample) and had *any* response to the question used in the analysis. All qualitative responses (for those who answered the open-ended question) were pulled for all BIPOC and

biracial/multiracial individuals in the dataset. After filtering through the 1,112 responses, only 84 responses spoke to the individual's K-12 schooling experience. The responses were initially grouped into negative, positive, or neutral experiences. There were a total of 67 responses coded as negative experiences and analyzed further for this study; the majority of the responses came from Biracial (*n*=25) and Latinx/Hispanic (*n*=18) trans folks. Notably, Asian (*n*=12), Black (*n*=7), Alaskan Native (*n*=3), and Middle Eastern (*n*=2) responses were also present. Out of the 109 responses originally pulled, 25 responses were excluded because they did not reflect a K-12 experience for a student (e.g., trans teacher experiences, responses that referenced higher education, unclear about what type of schooling they were referencing, health education, Title IX).

Braun and Clark's (2006) six steps were employed in the coding process as well as two coding cycles: holistic coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). In the first step, the lead researcher re-read 84 responses multiple times to allow familiarity. This repeated reading allowed for an overall sense of the data and initial recognition of common patterns. In the second step, after familiarizing with the data, holistic coding (Saldaña, 2016) using initial codes was assigned as the second step. This coding process chunked data into either positive, negative, or neutral experiences. These broad categories allowed the separation of individual's perceptions of their experience. For example, a response reporting a supportive G.S.A. experience was coded as positive, while incidents of physical harassment were coded as negative. Only negative experiences were analyzed further to highlight specific challenges within the field of education. In the third step, the data was further broken down into smaller themes; those themes were sexual harassment, physical harassment, mental health, bullying, educational impacts, interactions with administrators/adults, mental health, outings, misgendering, isolation, and bathrooms. This step highlighted specific phrases and segments that corresponded with each smaller theme.

In the fourth step, using inter-rater reliability, multiple researchers compared themes to ensure consistency and reduce bias. Here, specific attention was paid to the intersection of race and gender identity in order to identify nuances that could explain verbal and/or physical harassment. For example, because all of the pulled responses were from trans people of color, responses were analyzed to understand how both race and gender identity influenced their experience. In the fifth step, themes and sub-themes were refined to create clear distinctions between them. This step comprised of choosing the official themes and discussing the findings. This process included merging similar themes and eliminating those not heavily present in the responses. For example, being misgendered and being outed collapsed with the verbal harassment category. Three themes emerged as being the most prevalent: administration and adult interactions, verbal harassment, and educational impacts. In the sixth and final

step, the thematic analysis was written. Each theme was described in detail with supporting quotes.

Results

Quantitative Results

Results from the logistic regressions showed that race and gender identity both predicted verbal and physical harassment (Table 2). Specifically, Alaska Native/American Indian trans people were 2.254 times as likely to have reported verbal harassment in comparison to white trans individuals, and trans women were over 1.5 times as likely to have reported verbal harassment in K-12 schooling in comparison to trans men. Additionally, Alaska Native/American Indian trans people were over 2.5 times as likely to have reported physical harassment in comparison to white trans individuals, and Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were about half as likely. Trans women were over 3.7 times as likely to be physically harassed compared to trans men.

Results of the marginal effects analysis in Table 3 show the predicted probabilities of the intersection of race and gender identity for each individual subgroup for verbal and physical harassment. All marginal effects are significant at the $p < .001$ level. For a more nuanced visual, we provide Figure 2, which shows the marginal effects graph for verbal harassment, and Figure 3, which shows the marginal effects graph for physical harassment. As seen in Figure 2, trans women of all races/ethnicities in general report a greater likelihood of having been verbally harassed in K-12, though Alaska Native/American Indian trans women have the largest predicted probability (80.2% predicted probability compared to the lowest of 47% for Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander nonbinary/genderqueer individuals as seen on Table 3). Trans men of all races/ethnicities are in the Middle, at around 50% predicted probability (see Table 3 for specific probabilities). Of that group, biracial/multiracial trans men report the lowest predicted probability of verbal harassment (49.9%, as seen in Table 3). Nonbinary/genderqueer individuals of all races/ethnicities, in general, report the lowest incidence of verbal harassment, with biracial/multiracial nonbinary/genderqueer people less likely to have been verbally harassed in K-12 (ranging from 49.6% for Asian/NH/PI to 55.2% for Black/African American nonbinary/genderqueer individuals).

As seen in Figure 3 and Table 3, trans women of all races/ethnicities in general report a greater likelihood of having been physically harassed in K-12, though Alaska Native/American Indian trans women have the largest

Table 2

Logistic Regression Results Expressed as Odds Ratios Predicting Verbal and Physical Harassment in K-12, 2015 U.S. Trans Survey

Variables of Interest	Verbal (S.E.)	Physical (S.E.)
Race/Ethnicity [ref=white]		
Alaska Native/American Indian	2.254*	2.528**
	(0.731)	(0.865)
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.963	0.535*
	(0.193)	(0.144)
Bi/Multiracial	0.866	1.310
	(0.201)	(0.271)
Black/African American	1.202	1.622
	(0.280)	(0.442)
Latinx	1.005	1.428
	(0.185)	(0.297)
Middle Eastern/North African	1.225	1.874
	(0.718)	(1.153)
Gender Identity [ref=trans man]		
Trans woman	1.563***	3.718***
	(0.206)	(0.543)
Nonbinary/Genderqueer	0.892	0.965
	(0.100)	(0.140)
Observations	10,402	10,364
Degrees of freedom	(8, 10394)	(8, 10356)
F-value	3.88**	16.08***
Pseudo R^2	.014	.085

Note. $* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001$

predicted probability (69.5% predicted probability) and Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander trans women at their lowest of that group (32.5% predicted probability). Trans men of all races/ethnicities and nonbinary/genderqueer individuals have nearly identical predicted probabilities (at around 25% predicted probability), with Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders reporting the lowest incidence of physical harassment compared to all the other groups, as low as 11.1% for nonbinary/genderqueer individuals.

Table 3

Logistic Estimates of Probability of Verbal and Physical Harassment by Race/Ethnicity & Gender Identity

|	Verbal Harassment Marginal Effect (S.E.)	Physical Harassment Marginal Effect (S.E.)
Alaska Native/American Indian # Trans woman	0.802 (0.052)	0.695 (0.073)
Alaska Native/American Indian # Trans man	0.721 (0.067)	0.379 (0.083)
Alaska Native/American Indian # NB/GQ	0.698 (0.069)	0.371 (0.082)
Asian/NH/PI # Trans woman	0.633 (0.048)	0.325 (0.059)
Asian/NH/PI # Trans man	0.525 (0.051)	0.115 (0.029)
Asian/NH/PI # NB/GQ	0.496 (0.052)	0.111 (0.027)
Bi/Multiracial # Trans woman	0.609 (0.057)	0.541 (0.053)
Bi/Multiracial # Trans man	0.499 (0.058)	0.241 (0.040)
Bi/Multiracial # NB/GQ	0.470 (0.061)	0.234 (0.039)
Black/African American # Trans woman	0.683 (0.053)	0.593 (0.068)
Black/African American # Trans man	0.580 (0.056)	0.282 (0.056)
Black/African American # NB/GQ	0.552 (0.057)	0.275 (0.053)
Latinx # Trans woman	0.643 (0.046)	0.562 (0.055)
Latinx # Trans man	0.536 (0.048)	0.257 (0.037)
Latinx # NB/GQ	0.507 (0.043)	0.250 (0.039)
White # Trans woman	0.642 (0.020)	0.474 (0.021)
White # Trans man	0.535 (0.021)	0.195 (0.017)
White # NB/GQ	0.506 (0.020)	0.189 (0.017)
Middle Eastern/North African # Trans woman	0.687 (0.127)	0.628 (0.144)
Middle Eastern/North African # Trans man	0.585 (0.143)	0.312 (0.133)
Middle Eastern/North African # NB/GQ	0.556 (0.145)	0.304 (0.131)
Number of observations	10402	10364

Note. All marginal effects are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level; probabilities for groups based on linear combinations of marginal effects from a saturated logistic model.

Qualitative Findings

Verbal Harassment

An analysis of qualitative data yielded several key findings related to verbal and physical harassment experienced by BIPOC trans students in K-12 schools. Verbal harassment emerged as a striking and pervasive form of mistreatment (24 responses) faced by BIPOC trans students. This finding is important between the qualitative and quantitative data, where there is no statistically significant evidence of verbal harassment as a major factor, considering that the questions

Figure 2

Predicted Probabilities for Verbal Harassment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2015 U.S. Trans Survey
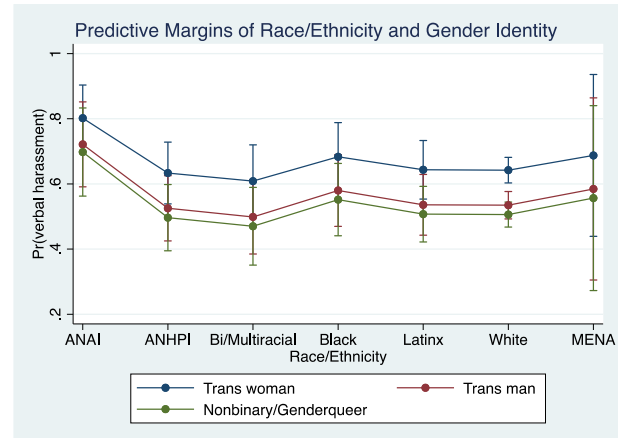
Note. ANAI=Alaska Native/American Indian; ANHPI=Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; MENA=Middle Eastern/North African.

Figure 3

Predicted Probabilities for Physical Harassment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2015 U.S. Trans Survey
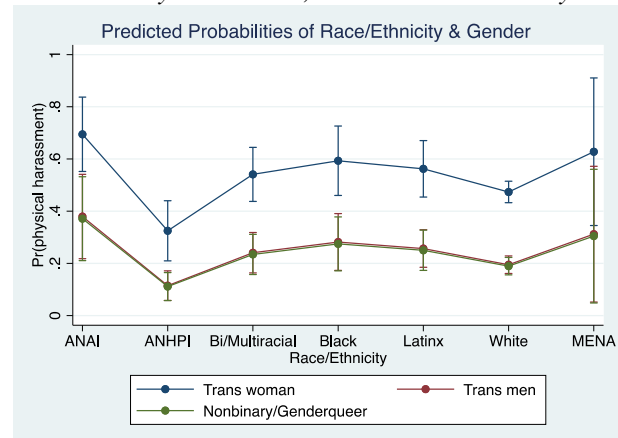
Note. ANAI=Alaska Native/American Indian; ANHPI=Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; MENA=Middle Eastern/North African.

participants were responding to were constructed differently. Participants recounted incidents of intentional misgendering, being outed, and microaggressions specific to sexual orientation and gender identity. One 18-year-old Asian responder recounted, "I was told by a math teacher that everyone assisting in my transition should be put in jail. I was told that I had a disorder, that I was too young to make the decision to transition and severely verbally harassed." Not only were trans individuals verbally harassed by adults, but also by peers. One 47-year-old Black participant mentioned that there was a group of Black students who bullied them from 10th to 11th grade. The harassment doesn't begin in high school; a 31-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic responder stated that when they

were in elementary school, they were teased for being "different" and "tom-boy." When trans folks felt comfortable transitioning and coming out to their peers, they were also verbally harassed. A 39-year-old Asian individual had a girlfriend out them to other peers and teachers. While an 18-year-old Biracial trans individual went through verbal harassment after they came out, they were harassed on social media, and individuals purposefully referred to them by the wrong name and pronoun. The remarks aimed to ridicule, shame, harass, and threaten these individuals. This recurrent theme across the responses illustrates the widespread issues of verbal harassment within the BIPOC trans demographic.

Negative Interactions with Administration and Adult School Personnel

Negative experiences with administration and adult school personnel emerged as a second notable theme. Most experiences came from teachers, staff, police officers, or administrators. The responses revealed a common trend – when BIPOC transgender students reported incidents of harassment or bullying, their experiences were dismissed (Wozolek et al., 2017). For example, an 18-year-old Latinx participant said, "At school, I was beaten up, and when I told the administration, they did nothing about it." In a similar situation, another 18-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic responder said that after they were spat on, they were told to ignore it. One 44-year-old Biracial responder had bones broken and noted that the "schools did nothing." The survey responders felt unsupported and marginalized by the adults who were supposed to keep them safe. An 18-year-old Alaskan Native said that they could not use the restroom of their identified gender because the school principal told them it made other students uncomfortable. In a similar instance, one 18-year-old Biracial responder couldn't use the men's restroom because of their safety; they felt dismissed by teachers. This theme exhibits the systemic challenges that BIPOC transgender students face; bathrooms become another example of unequitable access (Darling-Hammond & Evans-Santiago, 2024). Schools should be a place of support and protection, and where students were brave enough to seek interventions, punishment for offenders, or validation, they were unsupported. A 20-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic individual was stabbed in the head, which ended up in a physical altercation. Afterward, the dean of the school said they would do nothing. Police and counselor interaction was prevalent in the findings. A 21-year-old biracial participant recounted being raped in middle school, and the principal and police worked together to cover it up—counselor interactions related to sending students to mental health institutions or being ignorant of trans issues. The police interactions spoke to experiencing unwanted physical and verbal harassment as well as dismissing incidents of bullying.

Educational Impacts

A hostile school climate where verbal harassment and negative interactions with adults are prevalent was evident in the data. These students often faced educational impacts due to a lack of support and acknowledgment from school personnel. These barriers were physical and mental. The harassment profoundly affected the students; they described feeling suicidal, isolated, and fearful. An 18-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic individual considered suicide at the end of their senior year of high school. Because of their well-being, some students dropped out of high school, did not attend graduation, or changed schools. Another 25-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic participant lived through constant bullying, which made them drop out of high school and endure two attempts on their life. In a similar situation, one 19-year-old biracial trans participant dropped out of school entirely because of the bullying. An unsafe school environment was created as a result of the verbal and physical harassment and bullying these students felt (Reale-Smith & Suárez, 2024), which hindered their well-being and academic success. One 20-year-old Latino/a/Hispanic individual was run out of their first high school due to bullying. Another 18-year-old Black participant said that they had to transfer schools to transition. All too often, transferring schools did not make the situation better; a 39-year-old Asian individual changed schools in 6th grade, but "that really didn't solve much."

Age, Racial & Gendered Patterns in Verbal Harassment

When examining physical and verbal harassment responses more in-depth based on race, it became evident that there were consistent patterns. Among those who reported verbal harassment, the highest number of responses came from biracial individuals, followed by Latino/a/Hispanic individuals. The biracial and Latino/a/Hispanic responders who wrote about their negative schooling experiences were between the ages of 18-25, except for one individual who was 31 years of age – with the majority being 18 years old. The gender identity of these responders of verbal harassment was almost entirely nonbinary/genderqueer or trans men. Within biracial responders, one notable pattern is the lack of gender-affirming language from both peers and adults. Multiple individuals reported that people at the school did not use their preferred pronouns. Another common form of verbal harassment for biracial individuals is adults telling them they could not use a bathroom that matched their gender identity. One responder was told they could not audition for a male part in the musical production because "you're a girl." Within Latino/a/Hispanic individuals, the pattern most prevalent with verbal harassment came from dismissive adults. Nurses, administrators, and teachers did next to nothing when individuals reported incidents of harassment. One responder said", "along the way, I experienced a lot of discrimination by my school."

Even though physical harassment was not a prominent theme in the qualitative analysis, some nuanced findings came from the respondents' answers. Physical harassment had similar findings to verbal harassment, with the highest number of responses from Latino/a/Hispanic individuals followed by Asian, Black, and Biracial. The participants who reported physical harassment had a wider range of ages. The participants were between 18 and 51, with the majority being 20 or younger. Most of the responders who reported physical harassment identified as nonbinary/genderqueer. The range of physical harassment went from being spat on to being punched to being stabbed with a pencil. The examples of physical harassment came from peers and, again, had some type of institutional failure. The schools failed to support these students or take appropriate action. Most responders perceived an unsupportive school environment.

Mixed Methods Findings

In exploring the third research question for alignment between the quantitative and qualitative findings, we find some contrasting results. With regards to the quantitative results, biracial/multiracial individuals reported the lowest incidence of verbal harassment, and Alaskan Native/American Indians had the highest. In contrast, the qualitative results indicated that biracial and Latino/a/Hispanic individuals reported the highest incidents of verbal harassment, with no reported incidents by Middle Eastern/North African individuals.

With regards to the quantitative results, Asian/Pacific Islanders have the lowest incidence of physical harassment, and Alaskan Native/American Indians have the highest. This finding was not seen in the qualitative results, as more Latino/a/Hispanic reported more physical harassment and no reported incidents of physical harassment from Middle Eastern/North African individuals. These qualitative and quantitative results do not align by race/ethnicity, highlighting a significant discrepancy. Due to this disparity, potential implications need to be researched further.

Discussion

The present study sought to examine whether there were differences between race/ethnicity and forms of K-12 harassment through a mixed-methods analysis. Quantitative findings show that race and gender identity significantly predicted verbal and physical harassment. Specifically, Alaska Native/American Indian trans individuals were over twice as likely to be verbally and physically harassed, Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders who identify as trans were about half as likely to be physically harassed compared to white trans people, and trans women were between 1.5 and 3.7 times as likely to be verbally and physically harassed, respectively, compared to trans men. These findings are consistent with

literature that show that trans people of color are disproportionately physically assaulted and verbally harassed in schools (Truong et al., 2020a, 2020b; Zongrone et al., 2020a, 2020b), especially Black trans women (Rosentel et al., 2021). The results of the intersectional analysis by race and gender show how trans women of color are some of the most vulnerable in the trans community, especially Alaska Native/American Indian trans women, as they were more likely to be verbally and physically harassed. The disproportionate harassment toward Alaska Native/American Indian trans people could be due to the impacts of colonial societal discourses on race and gender identity (Balestrery, 2012), as research also shows a greater likelihood of sexual abuse and deteriorating effects on mental health (Schuler et al., 2023). The gender disparity with trans women more likely to be harassed also aligns with research on sexism (e.g., Meyer, 2022; Schilt, 2006).

Qualitative data derived from the open-ended question show that BIPOC trans students are verbally harassed in schools, especially by adults, and those experiences of harassment had mental, physical, and educational impacts. The qualitative data shows a larger, richer explanation of the verbal and physical harassment experienced by trans youth in K-12 schooling when analyzed through each race. This interpretation aligns with QuantCrit's fourth tenet: Data cannot speak for itself (Gillborn et al., 2018), which is why we sought to include the voice of the community, even if through very short responses in the survey.

Queer and trans theoretical frameworks guided our analyses and lens through which to explore the K-12 experiences of trans people of color. In particular, the prevalence of verbal harassment in younger folks but physical harassment in older trans folks of color in the qualitative analysis pushed us to think about trans theory beyond the body. This observation led us to theorize that the enduring impact of verbal harassment exceeds that of physical harassment on trans individuals' psychological well-being over time. With that being said, we are not implying that verbal harassment has a longer-term impact than physical harassment; only when we retrospectively explored the experiences both quantitatively and qualitatively responders were more likely to write about verbal harassment in the open-ended question than report to it in a yes or no question. In particular, we note the ages of the participants who wrote about their schooling experience. The majority of individuals who mentioned any physical or verbal harassment during their K-12 schooling experience were under the age of 25 years old. However, when it came to physical harassment, we noted a wider age span from 18-51 years old. Physical harassment may have been more prevalent and "allowable" in schools in the past, but now there is more verbal harassment and cyber bullying (Wang et al., 2009). Employing a mixed-methods approach gives a more comprehensive perspective on the harassment (verbal and physical) of trans youth in school, recognizing that a quantitative analysis alone is not enough.

More research needs to be done in the current K-12 setting with students who are trans, as we were limited to retrospectively analyzing the experiences of trans adults. Due to the challenges highlighted regarding negative adult interactions for queer and trans youth in schools, it is imperative that action needs to take place. The incidents highlight the urgent need for more inclusive, trans-informed policies, which is a complex but necessary task for schools (Gill & McQuillan, 2022). By exploring BIPOC transgender voices and validating their experiences, this study aimed to shed light on their experiences through a QuantCrit lens. The effects impact the well-being and safety of these students.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study and in alignment with the fifth tenet of QuantCrit (i.e., using numbers for social justice), we have three recommendations for schools and districts. There is no denying that transgender students are physically, verbally, and emotionally attacked in schools (Kosciw et al., 2022; Willingham-Jaggers, 2022). Schools should be where students feel safe to be themselves, where the curriculum is inclusive, and where bathrooms, locker rooms, hallways, or common areas do not cause anxiety. First, we recommend professional development and training on gender identity at the school and district levels at a bare minimum. Notably, there was a significant number of negative verbal harassment interactions from teachers, substitutes, administration, and school officers. Professional development and training can be controlled at the school or district level. With more awareness of the physical and verbal harassment that students, especially trans students, face within the entire school system, professional development can empower teachers to create safe learning environments (Payne et al., 2018). Training should be ongoing for current school personnel and also addressed for pre-service teachers, even using service-based learning (Coulter et al., 2020). Trans students should not face harassment from adult members of their school community, and training could reduce the detrimental effects on their well-being.

The second recommendation is to create safe(r) spaces in schools. When school staff have an increased awareness of issues related to queer and trans youth, there should be safe spaces designated for transgender students to seek support. This space could be in the form of a club (e.g., Gender Sexuality Alliance), common spaces within a counseling or administrative office, or a classroom where students can seek support from harassment and discrimination. We need these spaces to create disruptions within the current system and to support students' mental health. We need to give opportunities, within the safe spaces, to use chosen names for the sake of more robust mental health (Russell et al., 2018). Lastly, with the ever-present school-to-coffin pipeline, queer and trans students are experiencing queer/trans battle fatigue (Wozolek et al., 2017). This daily exhaustion, paired with racial battle fatigue for BIPOC trans students, contributes to youth suicide (Wozolek et al., 2017). As has been noted, queer and trans BIPOC students find themselves avoiding spaces where they do not find authentic relationships (Cisneros & Bracho, 2020). Those authentic, necessary relationships can be created in safe spaces of inclusion and acceptance. Schools are failing to address institutional harm, and educators and school personnel can start to create spaces to do the identity work. Adelman and colleagues (2022) suggest three dimensions of identity work within safe spaces: empowerment, deployment, and goal. Empowerment creates a sense of belonging amongst people who may not have common experiences; this can be found within classrooms or clubs working toward gender acceptance.

The third recommendation is to break down systems of power by addressing the inequities that have become foundational to our educational system and curriculum. Education was founded on a White-Eurocentric, middle/upper-class ideology. This ideology can be seen through the curriculum selection for what knowledge and perspectives seem *worthy* to teach in public schools and what voices are unintentionally or intentionally being left out. Schools reinforce cisheteronormativity (Meyer, 2022). White and straight is the "gold standard of sexual orientation or expression (Kokozos et al., 2020, p. 157)," and students who do not fit into the gold standard cannot just hope for inclusion at their school – the categorization and oppression will perpetuate until something foundationally shifts. Schools can "contribute to the material change in the conditions of trans life by identifying and dismantling the root causes of transgender oppression and contributing to the development of alternate social formations (Keenan, 2022, p.311)." When educators and staff normalize queer and trans discourse, they disrupt those power dynamics. Addressing and breaking down inequities faced by minoritized students is a vital next step.

Conclusion

The present study focused on the relationship between verbal and physical harassment in the K-12 setting at the intersection of race and gender identity. The statistical analysis reported an association between race and verbal and physical harassment, which highlighted a higher incidence of verbal and physical harassment for Alaska Native/American Indian trans individuals and trans women, and lower physical harassment for Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. The common themes amongst the qualitative responses were verbal harassment from peers, harassment from staff, teachers, and administration, and educational impacts, which indicated greater nuance by age and race. The exploration of the alignment in quantitative and qualitative findings shows which race and ages wrote more about their experiences, which highlighted some enduring effects of verbal and physical harassment. These findings highlight the impact of harassment of BIPOC transgender individuals in their K-12 experience, offering insights into the need for intersectional justice for trans thriving.

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