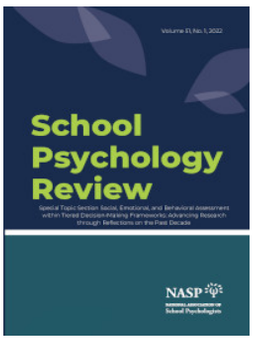

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School Bullying and Gender Minority Youth: Victimization Experiences and Perceived Prevalence

Tyler E. Smith, Loren A. Bauerband, David Aguayo, Chynna S. McCall, Francis L. Huang, Wendy M. Reinke, and Keith C. Herman

University of Missouri

ABSTRACT

Gender minority youth experience bullying victimization at concerningly high rates. The current study sought to unmask potentially unique bullying victimization experiences and perceived prevalence of bullying for Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning students. Results revealed that all three gender minority groups were significantly more likely to report being bullied in comparison to cis male students. Transgender and fluid gender students also reported significantly higher prevalence rates of teasing and bullying within their schools. No significant differences between gender minority subgroups were found for either perceived prevalence or bullying victimization experiences. However, Transgender students reported consistently higher rates of victimization in comparison to fluid gender and gender questioning students. Limitations, future directions, and practice implications for school-based personnel are discussed.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Gender minority youth are frequently bullied by school peers. The current study adds to research in this area by exploring the unique bullying experiences and perceived prevalence of bullying from Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning students. School personnel can play a critical role in addressing school bullying through prevention and intervention efforts aimed at supporting the needs of gender minority youth.

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Gender minority youth (i.e., Transgender, nonbinary) are frequently subjected to gender-related hostility and bullying victimization (Goldblum et al., 2012), which can lead to a host of negative psychological effects (e.g., increased suicide attempts; Singh & Kosciw, 2017). Unfortunately, much of what we know is based on research that has broadly consolidated the experiences of all gender minority youth as a single group or even combined gender minority experiences with other minoritized populations based on sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual). However, evidence suggests the experiences of gender minorities are different based on gender identity (e.g. Price-Feeney et al., 2020). Grouping individuals with different experiences can lead to a lack of understanding, less visibility of unique experiences, and ineffective inclusion practices by school personnel (Shatila et al., 2021).

School psychologists play a critical role in supporting gender minority youth. In particular, school psychologists can prioritize continued learning, advocate for the rights of gender minority youth and work with other school personnel to create safe and secure learning environments (Shatila et al., 2021). Consistent with recent calls for scholarship to advance research and practice with minoritized youth (Jimerson et al., 2021), more research is necessary to further inform school psychology practices that can address the needs of Transgender and nonbinary youth (i.e., gender fluid, gender questioning).

Thus, the current study aimed to create greater visibility and increase understanding regarding the potentially unique bullying victimization experiences and perceived prevalence of bullying for different gender minority populations. Throughout this manuscript the term *gender minority* is used to encompass Transgender and nonbinary (i.e., fluid gender and gender questioning) individuals. That said, this term is used for the sake of organization and in reference to categorizations within past research studies. Extending beyond these past categorizations, the current study distinguishes among broad gender minority groupings by presenting unique results for *Transgender* (i.e., students currently identifying as a different gender than birth; Lessard et al., 2021), *gender fluid* (i.e., students identifying as neither male nor female; Diamond, 2020),

CONTACT Tyler Smith smithtyle@missouri.edu Missouri Prevention Science Institute and Department of Educational, School, & Counseling Psychology, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, USA.
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and *gender questioning* students (i.e., students identifying that they are unsure of their gender identity; Bower-Brown et al., 2021). Further, the current study also further distinguishes Transgender students currently identifying as female from Transgender students currently identifying as male in supplemental analyses. Study findings offer a unique contribution to research in this area and aim to advance school psychology research and practice for minoritized and underrepresented populations.

THE DYNAMIC AND MULTISYSTEMIC NATURE OF SCHOOL BULLYING

School bullying can include a range of behaviors and forms primarily based on peer interactions (Mehta et al., 2013). In particular, school bullying can be defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another student on purpose, and can include physical, verbal, or social behavior (Huang & Cornell, 2015). This definition encapsulates the individual-level experiences of students and can include a range of behaviors (e.g., being teased, harassed, threatened, or injured) that comprise student bullying victimization experiences. Anonymously assessing student self-reports of bullying victimization provides key insight into students' direct experiences and is the most frequently utilized approach due to efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Furlong et al., 2010; Huang & Cornell, 2015; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Further, this approach is understandable given that many teachers and other school-based personnel may be unaware that students are being bullied (Jia et al., 2018). It is also important to yield consideration to student and family factors when assessing the bullying experiences of students. Particular student (i.e., racial minority and disability status) and family (i.e., lower socioeconomic status) factors have been associated with increased rates of bullying victimization (Price-Feeney et al., 2018; Tippett & Wolke, 2014).

Beyond individual experiences of victims, school bullying is a complex, schoolwide problem that also impacts student bystanders and aggressors (Mehta et al., 2013). From a social–ecological perspective, bullying extends beyond a dyadic experience between a bully and victim, and is considered a group phenomenon in which multiple contextual factors promote, maintain, or hinder bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2010). Thus, conceptualizations of bullying must consider its dynamic nature while also taking into account multiple contextual factors at varying systemic levels (Espelage et al., 2014). In particular, it is important to yield consideration to student and family factors when assessing the bullying experiences of students. Particular student (i.e., student age, racial minority status, disability status) and family (i.e., lower socioeconomic status) factors have been associated with increased rates of bullying victimization (Merrill & Hanson, 2016; Price-Feeney et al., 2018; Tippett & Wolke, 2014). Beyond direct victimization experiences, research has indicated that bullying has an indirect negative affect on student bystanders (Pepler & Craig, 1995; Swearer et al., 2010). Previous estimates reveal that nearly two-thirds of students (i.e., 63%) have witnessed bullying at school, which has been associated with increased anxiety and hostility (Rivers et al., 2009). Bullying is also more likely to occur in classrooms in which bullying is characterized as a peer norm (Pepler et al., 2010) and be supported in schools where climates are perceived as negative (Gendron et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013). Students are also less likely to report bullying experiences if they perceive their school climate as negative (Unnever & Cornell, 2004).

Given the complexity and multisystemic nature of bullying, some researchers have argued that it is important to distinguish the experience of being a bully victim from the observation of others being bullied (Mehta et al., 2013). This has led to some researchers measuring multiple aspects of school bullying, as student reports of bullying experiences alone may not tell the whole story. For instance, Cornell and colleagues (2013) highlighted the importance of measuring both student-reported bullying experiences in addition to measuring the prevalence of bullying that occurred within students' schools. In particular, 9th grade student observations of prevalence of teasing and bullying, but not student reports of bullying victimization experiences, were significantly predictive of high school dropout four years later (Cornell et al., 2013). In the current study, we chose to follow a similar approach in hopes of gaining a comprehensive understanding of bullying within a school setting. As previously noted, it is imperative to conceptualize bullying from a social–ecological perspective, in that bullying behaviors are based on social exchanges between individuals, peer groups, and the broader school environment (Swearer & Espelage, 2010). Bullying occurs in social situations whereby peers also play either an implicit or explicit role (Salmivalli et al., 1998). Bullying incidents rarely occur without an audience, as Sutton and Smith (1999) found that 85% of bullying incidents occurred with a peer present. The behaviors of the observing peers, through their complacence, support, or resistance to the bullying behavior, are all integral to its prevalence (Muijs, 2017). Consideration of social and group norms within schools further highlights bullying as a social–ecological phenomenon. In particular, social and groups norms dictate the resilience of bully victims and the observing peers' reactions to instances of bullying (Flaspohler et al., 2009). The assessment of both students' direct experiences with bullying and perceived

prevalence of bullying within the broader school climate is essential to advancing our understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of school bullying.

THE IMPACTS OF SCHOOL BULLYING

School bullying victimization remains a pervasive issue for children in the United States, as recent estimates indicate that one out of every five students have experienced bullying at school (NCES, 2019) and approximately 16% experience bullying online or through text messaging (Kann et al., 2016). Previous estimates in large-scale studies have also suggested that 20% to 30% of students are bully victims and/or bully other students (Forero et al., 1999; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Smith et al., 1999). Although some data indicate that bullying victimization is not a harmful experience for all students (Wang et al., 2020), a large body of evidence suggests bullying events serve as a potent risk factor for short- and long-term negative consequences (Arseneault et al., 2010). High prevalence rates are especially concerning given that school bullying can be detrimental to students' social and emotional well-being (e.g., anxiety, depression; Copeland et al., 2013; Hill et al., 2017), academic outcomes (e.g., grades; Lacey & Cornell, 2013), and physical health (e.g., headaches, tiredness; Fekkes et al., 2006). Meta-analyses and large-scale reviews have also revealed that bullying victimization is associated with lower academic achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010) increased suicidal ideation (Holt et al., 2015), more suicide attempts (Moore et al., 2017), lower emotional adjustment, poor relationships with peers, and increased health problems (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009). Additionally, Tharp-Taylor and colleagues (2009) found that adolescents who reported either physical or verbal bullying were more likely to report alcohol and drug use. Evidence also suggests bullying victimization during adolescence has negative effects that can continue into adulthood, such as reduced functioning caused by mental health problems (e.g., depression; Sigurdson et al., 2015). Another study found that bullying victimization by peers served as a stronger risk factor for adult depression, anxiety, and suicidality than child maltreatment (Lereya et al., 2015).

Bullying victimization may be especially concerning in high school, when identity development and social/emotional growth may be largely shaped by peer relationships. Large-scale surveys have revealed high rates of bullying and negative associations with high school student mental health. Surveying over 20,000 high school students, Schneider and colleagues (2012) found that 47% indicated being impacted by cyberbullying and in-school bullying and reported high rates of depressive symptoms; 15% of those who experienced cyber and school bullying reported suicide attempts compared to 2% of those who did not experience bullying victimization. Another study including nearly 1,500 high school students found that bullying victimization was a significant predictor of student depression (Bauman et al., 2013). As bullying continues to be negatively associated with high school students' social–emotional wellbeing during a critical period of development, further investigation is warranted.

SCHOOL BULLYING AND SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY YOUTH

To this point, we have discussed the concept of bullying and research on negative bullying experiences in terms of the general student populations. Unfortunately, rates of bullying victimization are even higher for sexual and gender minority youth, including youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, transgender, or fluid gender. For instance, recent estimates have revealed that 34% of gender minority youth report being bullied at school and 28% report experiencing bullying online or through text messaging (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). When compared to straight cisgender peers, sexual minority youth are also significantly more likely to experience physical bullying at school (i.e., 33% vs. 17%) and cyberbullying (i.e., 27% vs. 13%; Kann et al., 2016). Survey data from GLSEN's National School Climate Survey additionally indicated that sexual minority youth are more likely to report feeling unsafe at school and are at higher risk for experiencing harassment and physical assault (Kosciw et al., 2016). Another large national survey found that over 90% of gender minority youth reported hearing derogatory statements from peers, with more than 50% of these individuals hearing derogatory statements from teachers or other school personnel (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Despite the well-documented higher prevalence of bullying victimization among gender minority youth in the US, one limitation of existing research is the lack of examination of bullying experiences within gender minority subgroups. That is, bullying victimization research with gender minority youth has primarily combined the experiences of several minoritized groups based on sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian, gay, transgender) or sexual identity (e.g., fluid gender, questioning) into a single group (e.g., noncisgender, gender nonconforming). This is problematic as masking the experiences of gender minority subgroups may lead to discrediting unique concerns and strengths of Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning students. By comparison, researchers have long recognized that collapsing racial and ethnic minority groups into a single category overlooks the unique experiences of specific groups and can distort or lead to incorrect interpretations of results (Allen et al., 2008). Examining

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the unique experiences of gender minority subgroups may reveal that nonbinary individuals may have different bullying experiences and outcomes compared to others. Nonbinary youth are already less likely to be living as their current gender, less likely to be receiving gender affirmative healthcare, and report higher levels of stress (Todd et al., 2019). Although sample sizes may be smaller, when nonbinary and gender binary youth are researched as distinct groups, attempts should be made to understand how bullying may be different. Efforts aimed at highlighting distinct experiences can advance school psychology research and practice and ultimately better serve and support the needs of Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning students.

STUDY PURPOSE

Exploring the bullying victimization experiences of gender minority groups is essential to informing school psychology practice in regards to the prevention, assessment, and intervention of school bullying. Bullying is a complex and multidimensional issue that continues to negatively impact school students in the U.S. This is particularly true for gender minority students. However, previous research in this area that has typically collapsed sexual and gender minority youth into a single group may have failed to explore potentially unique experiences that can be influential to informing school-based research and practice. Further, much of what we know is based on student self-reports of bullying experiences. Recognizing the importance of student direct experiences, we additionally wanted to explore student reports of prevalence of teasing and bullying at the school level. Thus, the purpose of this research brief was two-fold. First, we wanted to build on previous research comparing bullying victimization (based on both direct student experiences and perceived prevalence within their school) of gender minority students to cisgender students. However, the current study specifically sought to unmask unique experiences of gender minority groups by analyzing each minority group separately (i.e., Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning) in comparison to cisgender students. Second, we wanted to determine if gender minority groups differed from one another in reported bullying experiences and perceived prevalence of teasing and bullying, given that, to our knowledge, previous research has yet to examine if differences among gender minority students exist. The following research questions were explored to address our study aims:

1. How do student reports of (a) bullying victimization and perceptions of (b) prevalence of teasing and bullying differ based on student gender?
2. Do student reports of (a) bullying victimization and perceptions of (b) prevalence of teasing and bullying differ among gender minority groups (i.e., Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning)?

METHOD

Participants and Setting

Data for the current study were drawn from an ongoing grant-funded randomized controlled trial (RCT) funded by the Institute of Education Sciences. This focused on the implementation and assessment of the Safe and Civil School Leadership (SCSL) professional development program (Sprick et al., 1992, 2002). In particular, SCSL focuses on developing specific leadership skills through school administration training to promote safe and positive school climates. Participating schools were from public school districts across the state of Missouri and were randomly assigned to the SCSL intervention group or a waitlist control group. Data were collected at two points each year by way of online surveys with school personnel monitoring completion during both the fall and spring semesters to assess baseline data and SCSL effectiveness. The current study only used student baseline survey results to account for potential intervention effects.

A total of 4,311 high school students from eight schools completed surveys about bullying, victimization experiences, school climate, in addition to demographic information (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status). As a means of accounting for data quality, we used a multistep process to screen and eliminate participants who indicated they did not complete the survey truthfully via two validity questions ($n = 329$, 7.63% of total sample) and for those who completed the survey in 5 minutes or less ($n = 7$, <1% of total sample). In total, 3,975 high school students completed surveys that were utilized within the current study. See Table 1 below for detailed demographic information of study participants.

Measures

Student Reports of Bullying Victimization

Five items from the *School Climate Bullying Survey* (Cornell, 2015) were utilized to assess student experiences with bullying victimization. Students responded anonymously to five items: "I have been bullied at school this year"; I have been physically bullied or threatened with physical bullying"; "I have been verbally bullied at school this year"; "I have been socially bullied at school this year"; "I have been cyberbullied at school this year." Each item was answered on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., "Never"; "Once or twice"; "About once per week"; "More than once

Table 1. Descriptions of Student Sample ($n = 3,975$)

Student Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender		
Cis male	1,806	45.4
Cis female	2,016	50.7
Transgender	44	1.1
Fluid gender	64	1.6
Questioning	45	1.1
Race/ethnicity		
White	2,387	60.1
Black	713	17.9
Asian	60	1.5
Native American/Pacific Islander	42	1.1
American Indian or Alaska Native	73	1.8
Multiracial	700	17.6
Grade level		
9th grade	1,157	29.1
10th grade	1,078	27.1
11th grade	907	22.8
12th grade	833	21.0
FRL		
Yes	1,325	33.3
No	2,650	66.7
Special education status		
Yes	497	12.5
No/Do not know	3,478	87.5

Note. Total numbers and percentages based on reported sample.

per week"). See Cornell (2015) for an overview of studies reporting research using the SCBS including internal and external validation (e.g., Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009).

Student Reports of Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying

As a method of asking students general questions about teasing and bullying they had observed at school, we used the Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying (PTB) scale (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). Students responded anonymously to five items on the PTB scale: "Students in this school are teased about their clothing or physical appearance"; "Bullying is a problem at this school"; "Students in this school are teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity"; "There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics in this school"; and "Students in this school are teased or put down about their sexual orientation." Each item was answered on a 4-point Likert scale (i.e., "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree"). Four factor analytic studies have indicated strong support (i.e., Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009; Klein et al., 2012; Konold et al., 2014; Konold & Cornell, 2015). Previous studies using the PTB have also found it to be predictive of school discipline (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009), high school dropout (Cornell et al., 2013), and student engagement (Mehta et al., 2013).

Student Gender Variables

Students at participating schools reported demographic data regarding their gender that were utilized to categorize gender variables relevant for the current study. In particular, students reported their sex at birth (i.e., "What gender were you at birth, even if you are not that gender today?"), as well as their current gender identity (i.e., "What is your current gender identity, even if it is different than the gender you were born as?") at the time of the survey. Students that identified at the time of the survey differently than their reported birth gender were categorized as *Transgender*. Students that reported "I don't identify as either male or female" at the time of the survey were categorized as *fluid gender*, and students that reported "I'm not sure yet" were categorized as *gender questioning*. Regarding the *Transgender* variable, we further distinguished between students currently identifying as female from Transgender students currently identifying as male in supplemental analyses.

Relevant Covariates

We also accounted for relevant covariates when making statistical comparisons of bullying victimization and bullying prevalence based on student gender. As previously noted, research has indicated that students also experience greater bullying victimization based on lower socioeconomic status (Tippett & Wolke, 2014), race, disability status (Price-Feeney et al., 2018), and age (i.e., younger students experience more bullying; Merrill & Hanson, 2016). *Student race* was reported based on students identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White, or 2 or more races. Student participation in free/reduced lunch (FRL) was utilized as proxy for *socioeconomic status*. *Student disability status* was based on if a student reported they had an individualized education plan (IEP). *Student age* was based on student grade level (i.e., ninth through twelfth grade). Further, each of our eight schools was dummy coded and included in analyses to account for school variability.

Data Analysis Plan

All data were summarized and analyzed using R. For research question 1a (i.e., exploring differences in student-reported prevalence of teasing and bullying based on student gender), we conducted a fixed effects regression model that included student gender as our predictor (i.e., male [reference group], female, Transgender, fluid gender, gender questioning), our relevant covariates (i.e., SPED status, race [Black, other, with White as a reference group], disability status, FRL, age, and school as a dummy code), and the mean PTB score as our outcome. Outcome measures for the regressions were standardized ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). Due to the standardization, the regression coefficients for dummy coded variables can be interpreted as

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a standardized mean difference which can be read as an effect size (e.g., Cohen's *d* difference compared to the reference group). For research question 1 b (i.e., exploring differences in student-reported bullying victimization based on student gender), we ran a logistic regression model which again included student gender as our predictor, all relevant covariates from our first model, and bullying victimization as our outcome. In particular, presence of bullying victimization was determined based on students reporting any level of bullying on any of the five items from the SCBS (i.e., a value of 1 was coded for each item of the SCBS in which students indicated "Once or twice"; "About once per week"; "More than once per week"; a value of 0 was coded for "Never"). This approach is consistent with past studies assessing student-reported bullying experiences (e.g., Huang & Cornell, 2016). To evaluate if differences existed among gender minority groups for student-reported prevalence of teasing and bullying (i.e., research question 2a) and bullying victimization (i.e., research question 2b), we conducted a Pearson Chi-square test with Rao and Scott (1981) design adjustments. The Rao and Scott (1981) design adjustments were applied to account for complex survey design that is not assumed to abide by the same chi-square distribution under the null hypothesis. The same test was utilized for each of the five SCBS items and for the PTB scale score. In addition, interactions between gender and all other variables were tested and none were statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive details of the student variables used within the current study. In total, our final sample included 3,975 high school students from eight schools (i.e., three treatment and five control). On average, the student response rate across schools was 78% (SD = 9.03). Approximately half of participating students were cis male (i.e., 50.7%), followed by cis female (i.e., 45.4%), fluid gender (1.6%), Transgender (1.1%), and gender questioning (1.1%). Regarding Transgender students, 16 (i.e., 0.04% of the total sample) identified as female at the time of the survey and 28 (0.07%) identified as male. In total, gender minority students comprised 3.7% of our study sample, which is slightly higher than a comparable recent study of 81,000 Midwestern high school students that found that 2.7% of students self-reported as Transgender or gender nonconforming (Rider et al., 2018). Most students were White (i.e., 60.1%), followed by Black (17.9%), multiracial (17.6%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.8%), Asian (1.5%), and Native American/Pacific Islander (1.1%). The number of students per grade level did not vary widely, although the sample is comprised of slightly more 9th grade students (i.e., 29.1%) in comparison to other grades (i.e., 27.1%, 22.8%, and 21.0%). Further, most students (i.e., 66.7%) did not receive FRL or special education services (i.e., 87.5%). Overall, participants were found to be representative of their schools based on student demographics. For instance, for one school, the student population was 81% White, 6% Black, and 13% other, whereas our sample was 78% White, 7% Black, and 15% other. Similar trends were observed for most schools, with the exception of one school's sample that was slightly under representative of its Black student population (i.e., our sample was 35% Black; the total school population was 47% Black).

Perceived Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying Based on Gender

With the exception of gender questioning students, results revealed a significant relationship between each gender group included in our analyses and student-reported prevalence of teasing and bullying. In particular, cis female ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < 0.01$), Transgender ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), and fluid gender ($b = 0.57$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$) all reported higher prevalence rates of teasing and bullying at their schools in comparison to cis male students (see Table 2). No significant relationship was found for gender questioning students ($b = 0.53$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = 0.05$). We conducted subsequent regression analyses with Transgender students further distinguished between students identifying as female and students identifying as male at time of the survey. Results revealed that Transgender students currently identifying as male reported significantly higher perceived prevalence of teasing and bullying, whereas Transgender students identifying as female at the time of the survey did not (see online supplemental Appendix—Table A1).

Table 2. Perceived Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying by Gender ($n = 3,975$)

	b	SE	t	df	*p*
Gender variable					
Cis female	0.19**	0.03	5.67	4.90	0.00
Transgender	0.68**	0.15	4.50	5.54	0.00
Fluid gender	0.57**	0.11	5.11	3.82	0.00
Questioning	0.53	0.20	2.66	4.36	0.05
Covariate					
SPED	−0.02	0.01	−1.96	4.96	0.10
RaceBlack	0.08	0.03	2.18	3.80	0.09
RaceOther	0.21	0.03	5.75	4.59	0.00
FRL	−0.01	0.05	−0.11	5.30	0.91
Grade	0.04	0.01	3.35	4.87	0.02

Results represent the final estimation of fixed effects with robust standard errors

Note. b = coefficient estimate, SE = standard error.
**$p < 0.01$. *$p < 0.05$.

Bullying Victimization Experiences Based on Gender

All gender groups included in our analyses were significantly more likely to report experiencing bullying victimization in comparison to cis male students. That is, cis female (*Odds ratio* [*OR*] = 1.37, CIs = 1.22, 1.53, $p < 0.01$), Transgender (*OR* = 3.15, CIs = 2.18, 4.55, $p < 0.01$), fluid gender (*OR* = 2.33, CIs = 1.43, 3.81, $p < 0.01$), and gender questioning (*OR* = 2.18, CIs = 1.16, 4.09, $p < 0.05$) students were all significantly more likely to report being bullied in comparison to cis male students (see Table 3). To further support findings, we conducted additional analyses of bullying victimization using a higher bullying threshold (i.e., occurring on a weekly basis) recommended by Solberg and Olweus (2003). Results did not differ substantively from the lower bullying threshold with the exception of gender questioning students who were no longer found to be significantly more likely to report bullying victimization in comparison to cis male students (see online supplemental Appendix—Table A2). Finally, results also revealed that both Transgender students identifying as female and Transgender students identifying as male at the time of the survey were significantly more likely to report being bullied in comparison to cis male students (see online supplemental Appendix—Table A3).

Rates of Teasing and Bullying and Bullying Victimization Experiences Among Gender Minority Groups

Based on the Pearson Chi-square test with Rao and Scott (1981) design adjustments, no significant differences were found among the three gender minority groups (i.e., Transgender, fluid gender, gender questioning) in terms of student-reported prevalence of teasing and bullying ($\chi^2 = 0.80$). Additionally, Chi-square results for each PTB item are provided in Table 4. No significant differences were found among the three gender minority groups when comparing results for each PTB item (e.g., students teased about their clothing or physical appearance). Rates of perceived prevalence per each item also do not appear to represent any common trends in responses for any particular gender minority group. For instance, a higher percentage of gender questioning students were likely to agree/strongly agree that students are teased about sexual topics in their school; however, more Transgender students were likely to agree/strongly agree that students in their school get teased or put down due to their sexual orientation.

Table 5 presents Chi-square results for each item of the five items for the SCBS. Similar to results for prevalence of teasing and bullying, estimates did not reveal statistically significant differences in student-reported bullying victimization experiences among the three gender minority groups for any of the five SCBS items (i.e., all *p*-values > 0.05; bullied at school [$\chi^2 = 1.10$], physically bullied or threatened [$\chi^2 = 0.69$], verbally bullied [$\chi^2 = 3.29$], cyberbullied [$\chi^2 = 2.02$], and socially bullied [$\chi^2 = 0.66$]). Although statistically significant differences were not found, it is noteworthy that Transgender youth reported consistently higher percentages of bullying experiences compared to other gender minority youth. This is consistent across various forms of bullying victimization from peers including being physically bullied, verbally bullied, cyberbullied, and socially bullied. For instance, approximately 41% of Transgender students reported being bullied at school this year, compared to approximately 33% of fluid gender students and 31% of gender questioning students.

Table 3. Bullying Victimization Experiences by Gender (*n* = 3,975)

	OR	CIs	z	*p*
Gender variable				
Cis female	1.37**	1.22, 1.53	5.46	0.00
Transgender	3.15**	2.18, 4.55	6.10	0.00
Fluid gender	2.33**	1.43, 3.81	3.39	0.00
Questioning	2.18*	1.16, 4.09	2.41	0.02
Covariate				
SPED	0.98	0.91, 1.05	−0.67	0.50
RaceBlack	0.55	0.46, 0.66	−6.40	0.00
RaceOther	0.94	0.75, 1.18	−0.53	0.59
FRL	1.17	0.93, 1.48	1.38	0.17
Grade	1.03	0.96, 1.11	0.82	0.41

Results represent the final estimation of fixed effects with robust standard errors

Note. OR = odds ratio, CIs = 97.5% confidence intervals.
**$p < 0.01$. *$p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

The present study was one of the first to examine school-based bullying and teasing victimization experiences of gender minority subgroups. Our approach extends beyond past research in this area that has primarily consolidated experiences of all gender minority youth (and often other minoritized populations) into a single group. It is our hope that study results will help to improve understanding and create more visibility of experiences for gender minority subgroups. Further, given both the host of negative effects associated with school bullying and the systemic and dynamic nature of school bullying, this study examined both student-reported bullying experiences and perceived prevalence of bullying within schools. Analyses also controlled for school-level variation and other variables (i.e., student age, disability status, race, socioeconomic status) found to be previously related to student bullying.

Results revealed that Transgender and fluid gender students reported significantly higher prevalence rates

Table 4. Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying Item Response by Student Gender

		Cisgender				Gender Minority						
		Male ($n = 1,806$)		Female ($n = 2,016$)		Transgender ($n = 44$)		Fluid Gender ($n = 64$)		Questioning ($n = 45$)		Gender Minority Comparison
Item	Response Option	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	χ^2
Students in this school are teased about their clothing or physical appearance.	Strongly disagree	194	10.74	174	8.63	1	2.27	4	6.25	2	4.44	3.39^{ns}
	Disagree	733	40.59	737	36.56	10	22.73	21	32.81	16	35.56	
	Agree	683	37.82	790	39.19	21	47.73	24	37.50	16	35.56	
	Strongly agree	196	10.85	315	15.83	12	27.27	15	23.44	11	24.44	
Students in this school are teased or put down because of their race or ethnicity.	Strongly disagree	448	24.81	423	20.98	8	18.18	10	15.63	5	11.11	2.05^{ns}
	Disagree	912	50.50	1029	51.04	19	43.18	34	53.13	24	53.33	
	Agree	331	18.33	410	20.34	11	25.00	14	21.88	10	22.22	
	Strongly agree	115	6.37	154	7.64	6	13.64	6	9.38	6	13.33	
There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.	Strongly disagree	241	13.34	192	9.52	3	6.82	5	7.81	3	6.67	5.98^{ns}
	Disagree	771	42.69	780	38.69	12	27.27	17	26.56	7	15.56	
	Agree	574	31.78	692	34.33	17	38.64	23	35.94	26	57.78	
	Strongly agree	220	12.18	352	17.46	12	27.27	19	29.69	9	20.00	
Bullying is a problem at this school.	Strongly disagree	355	19.66	280	13.89	5	11.36	9	14.06	4	8.89	12.52^{ns}
	Disagree	941	52.10	1002	49.70	13	29.55	29	45.31	20	44.44	
	Agree	378	20.93	514	25.50	19	43.18	9	14.05	13	28.89	
	Strongly agree	132	7.31	220	10.91	7	15.91	17	26.56	8	17.78	
Students in this school get teased or put down about their sexual orientation.	Strongly disagree	334	18.49	302	14.98	3	6.82	9	14.06	3	6.67	9.94^{ns}
	Disagree	864	47.84	875	43.40	11	25.00	18	28.13	16	35.56	
	Agree	417	23.09	547	27.13	11	25.00	13	20.31	17	37.78	
	Strongly agree	191	10.58	292	14.48	19	43.18	24	37.50	9	20.00	

Note. χ^2 = Pearson Chi-square test with Rao and Scott (1981) design adjustments estimate; ns = nonsignificant (i.e., all *p*-values > 0.05).

Table 5. School Climate Bullying Survey Item Responses by Student Gender

		Cisgender				Gender Minority						
		Male ($n = 1,806$)		Female ($n = 2,016$)		Transgender ($n = 44$)		Fluid Gender ($n = 64$)		Questioning ($n = 45$)		Gender Minority Comparison
Item	Frequency	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	χ^2
Bullied at school this year	Never	1,490	82.50	1,569	77.83	26	59.09	43	67.19	31	68.89	1.10^{ns}
	Once or more	316	17.50	447	22.17	18	40.91	21	32.81	14	31.11	
Physically bullied or threatened at school this year	Never	1,638	90.70	1,916	95.04	33	75.00	50	78.13	37	82.22	0.69^{ns}
	Once or more	168	9.30	100	4.96	11	25.00	14	21.87	8	17.78	
Verbally bullied at school this year	Never	1,394	77.19	1,427	70.78	19	43.18	35	54.69	28	62.22	3.29^{ns}
	Once or more	412	22.81	589	29.22	25	56.82	29	45.31	17	37.78	
Socially bullied at school this year	Never	1,541	85.33	1,574	78.08	27	61.36	40	62.50	31	68.89	0.66^{ns}
	Once or more	265	14.67	442	21.92	17	38.64	24	37.50	14	31.11	
Cyberbullied at school this year	Never	1,619	89.65	1,707	84.67	31	70.45	46	71.88	37	82.22	2.02^{ns}
	Once or more	187	10.35	309	15.33	13	29.55	18	28.12	8	17.78	

Note. χ^2 = Pearson Chi-square test with Rao and Scott (1981) design adjustments estimate; ns = nonsignificant (i.e., all *p*-values > 0.05).

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of teasing and bullying within their school in comparison to cis gender male students. Additionally, Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning youth reported experiencing bullying victimization at significantly higher rates than cis gender male students. These findings are consistent with past related research that has collapsed the experiences of gender minority students. However, findings showcasing these disparities for each gender minority group separately are a unique and important contribution of the current study. For instance, gender questioning students have often been overlooked and dropped from related studies altogether (Kosciw et al., 2016; Rimes et al., 2019). Further, the reporting of perceptions of perceived prevalence of bullying for each gender minority group is an important addition to the literature, given that most related studies have focused solely on student reports of direct bullying experiences. Notably, cis female students also perceived a significantly higher prevalence of teasing and bullying, and reported experiencing more bullying victimization. This is additionally a key finding given that mixed results have been found in past studies comparing bullying experiences of cis male and cis female students. That is, some studies indicate males report higher rates of victimization (e.g., De Bruyn et al., 2010), whereas other have found the opposite (e.g., Veenstra et al., 2005).

On the other hand, we did not find evidence of disparate rates of bullying experiences reported by gender minority subgroups. It is important to note, however, that like most research with these student subgroups, our study was underpowered to detect statistically significant differences among these groups due to small sample sizes. Thus, we cannot fully rule out the possibility that prevalence differences may exist when observed on a larger scale. For instance, Transgender youth reported consistently and visibly higher rates of victimization experiences compared to other gender minority subgroups. This is an interesting finding, and may be due to the expression of Transgender youth being more visible to peers, in comparison to expressions of fluid gender and gender questioning youth that may be more covert. That said, youth may be bullied for a variety of reasons, and we cannot say with certainly that bullying experiences are based on student gender identity. Further, as previously noted, these trends were not statistically significant in this relatively small group of students ($n = 44$), and were based on single items, which raises potential concerns with reliability. The fact that we did not find significant differences among gender minority also does not preclude the importance of future studies continuing to explore potential unique experiences among these groups. Further work is needed to determine if these trends and differences are observed in other, larger samples of students.

Practice Implications

Findings support the need for ongoing practices and interventions to reduce the prevalence of bullying and victimization experienced by so many students in U.S. schools. For instance, 23–57% of youth across the various cis gender and gender minority subgroups reported experiencing verbal bullying in the past year. Given the well-documented links between bullying experiences and student academic, social, behavioral, and somatic health (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Sigurdson et al., 2015; Tharp-Taylor et al., 2009), reducing or eliminating these high rates of school victimization experiences is a critical step in promoting positive youth development.

Universal and targeted school-based programs may be critical to addressing bullying and improving school climate (Hong et al., 2018; Huang & Cornell, 2019). Large-scale meta-analyses have found that the majority of school-based programs focused on bullying prevention are successful at decreasing bullying rates and increasing positive student interactions (e.g., Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). One meta-analysis even found that school-based bullying programs were more effective at improving bystander intervention behaviors for high school students in comparison to younger students (Polanin et al., 2012). Further, specific antibullying programs, such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, have demonstrated moderate effectiveness for student bullying outcomes (Limber et al., 2018). Multitiered approaches to addressing student behavior such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) can also facilitate bullying prevention and improve school climate (Bradshaw, 2013).

Here we found further evidence that gender minority youth bear an even greater burden of bullying experiences compared to their cisgender peers. Thus, in addition to addressing bullying behavior in general, there is a particularly urgent need to reduce bullying behavior that targets gender minority youth. Existing evidence-supported bully prevention programs likely do not provide sufficient focus on this high-risk group of students. As a collective, educators and education systems are underprepared to support gender minority youth (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Victimization experiences of gender minority youth may be exacerbated by systems and adults who do not know how to intervene in bullying or how to support the identity and experiences of these youth (Simons & Russell, 2021). Specific, tailored training and coaching for teachers and administrators to support gender minority youth is needed as part of any bully prevention curriculum that will positively impact youth development. Additionally, specific content related to gender minority youth experiences is needed for any effective bully prevention program that

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targets peers or bystander interventions. As the unique experiences of gender minority students are more clearly understood, it is critical for bullying interventions to adapt and tailor content. Finally, schools can make adjustments to school-based curricula and ensure gender minority students have access to supportive resources (Reisner et al., 2015). For instance, research has demonstrated that the presence of LGBTQ-related resources (e.g., LGBTQ-inclusive education, supportive school personnel, and access to student groups such as gay-straight alliances) is associated with decreased student bullying for Transgender students (Greytak et al., 2013).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although findings of the current study are important, there are also several limitations that must be considered. First, results from the current study are based solely on student-reported data. As previously discussed, bullying is a dynamic and systemic phenomenon that does not occur in isolation. Teachers and families both play a critical role in supporting child development and student social–emotional outcomes, as highlighted across a breadth of empirical research (e.g., Reinke et al., 2019; Sheridan et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019, 2020, 2021). Thus, future studies should include the assessment of teacher and parents' perceptions of school climate in regards to prevalence of teasing and bullying. Teachers and parents may offer unique insights and perspectives beyond student reports alone.

There are also limitations to consider in terms of our surveying approach. For instance, asking youth about their gender on anonymous self-report surveys can be problematic, as youth may intentionally provide mischievous responses (Cimpian & Timmer, 2020) or may mark responses in error (Cornell & Mehta, 2011). Given the small population of gender minority youth included in the current sample, only a small number of mischievous or inaccurate item responses for our variables of interest may have influenced our data. Future studies should expand efforts to evaluate self-report data in the presence of potentially mischievous responders. Robinson-Cimpian (2014), for example, recommended a four-step sensitivity-analysis procedure for identifying and screening youth that systematically provide unusually high numbers on low-frequency items (e.g., reporting they are deaf *and* blind *and* parenting multiple children). Further, the current study did not involve directly asking students about their gender minority status using particular gender minority labels (e.g., "Transgender" or "fluid gender"). Thus, it is possible that we may have missed some responses of gender minority students, as students may not have recognized what was being asked of them. Future studies could consider using more direct questioning with specific definitions detailing what responses mean and/or using specific gender minority labels.

Relatedly, although our categorizations of gender minority groups are based on current and emerging research (e.g., Diamond, 2020; Lessard et al., 2020), it is important to recognize that our categorizations of gender minority youth are inferential and may not accurately capture the groupings used in the current study (i.e., Transgender, fluid gender, and gender questioning). For instance, it is possible that youth responding "I'm not sure yet" to the item about current gender identity may have confused or conflated their response with questioning sexual orientation. We attempted to account for this by also including an item about sexual orientation (not included here given the focus of the current study on gender minority youth), but it is also important to recognize youth may have been confused. Future research should continue to expand efforts to verify gender minority status and confirm that youth are not conflating gender identity and sexual orientation. For example, other sources of data beyond survey items could be used to confirm gender minority groupings, such as questioning parents or counselors for confirmation (Cornell & Mehta, 2011). Additionally, follow-up interviews with students could be used directly to confirm their gender identity and ensure they understood the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. However, parent, counselor, and student interviews were not possible within the context of the current study that used anonymous surveying. Future studies using nonanonymous approaches may consider using specific efforts and resources aimed at confirming gender minority status through follow-up interviews. That said, caution should be considered with any approach utilized. For instance, following up with parents could put youth at risk of exposure of their sexual or gender minority status and may lead to physical or verbal harm (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006).

Further, results - limited to youth across schools from a single Midwestern state, and therefore may not generalize to other regions of the country. Larger and more nationally representative samples will allow future researchers to draw more conclusions with greater confidence. Results of the current study are also limited to a single data collection timepoint, and thus should only be considered a brief glimpse into student experiences and perceptions of bullying. It is likely that student experiences and perceptions of bullying may change throughout the school year. Future studies should include data collected at multiple time points to assess potential predictive relationships over time and explore possible trends in bullying victimization. Relatedly,

we are unable to examine the stability of gender minority status over time. It is possible that some youth may question their gender as part of a situational crisis and/or shift from one gender to another over time. Future studies will need to collect gender identity measurements at multiple time points to better specify its dynamic nature in relation to bully victimization risk and consider whether perceptions do change with identity shifts.

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ORCID

Tyler E. Smith http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1611-9666
Loren A. Bauerband http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3790-5175
Chynna S. McCall http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6675-8143
Francis L. Huang http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5900-7763
Wendy M. Reinke http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7235-624X
Keith C. Herman http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2246-5792

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

Tyler E. Smith is a senior research associate with the Missouri Prevention Science Institute and the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri.

Loren A. Bauerband is an assistant professor in the Department of Health Sciences at the University of Missouri.

David Aguayo is a senior research associate with the Missouri Prevention Science Institute and the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri.

Chynna S. McCall is a senior research associate with the Missouri Prevention Science Institute and the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri.

Francis L. Huang is an associate professor in the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri.

Wendy M. Reinke is an associate vice chancellor for research and professor in the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri. Wendy is also the codirector of the Missouri Prevention Science Institute.

Keith C. Herman is a Curator's distinguished professor in the Department of Educational, School, and Counseling Psychology at the University of Missouri and codirector of the Missouri Prevention Science Institute.