

Navigating Digital Marginalization: Cyberbullying Experiences of Transgender and Non-binary Emerging Adults in Online Spaces

Yuanxi Li, University of Washington | yuanxili@uw.edu

Background

- Cyberbullying remains common in emerging adulthood, a life stage marked by identity exploration, transition, and intensive social media use (Arnett 2000; Lee et al. 2015).
- Transgender and non-binary (TNB) young adults face especially high exposure to online harassment, yet most prior research focuses on adolescents or broader LGBTQ populations rather than TNB emerging adults specifically (Abreu and Kenny 2017; James et al. 2024).
- Existing studies rarely distinguish between **public online spaces** and **private online spaces**, even though these settings may shape how harassment unfolds (Festl 2016).
- Standard cyberbullying measures also often miss TNB-specific harms such as **misgendering, deadnaming, and outing** (Anderson 2025).
- Guided by **Minority Stress Theory**, this study conceptualizes cyberbullying as a **distal stressor** for TNB young adults (Meyer 2003).

RQ: How do platform context, cyberbullying type, and social ties shape cyberbullying risk among TNB emerging adults?

Data & Methods

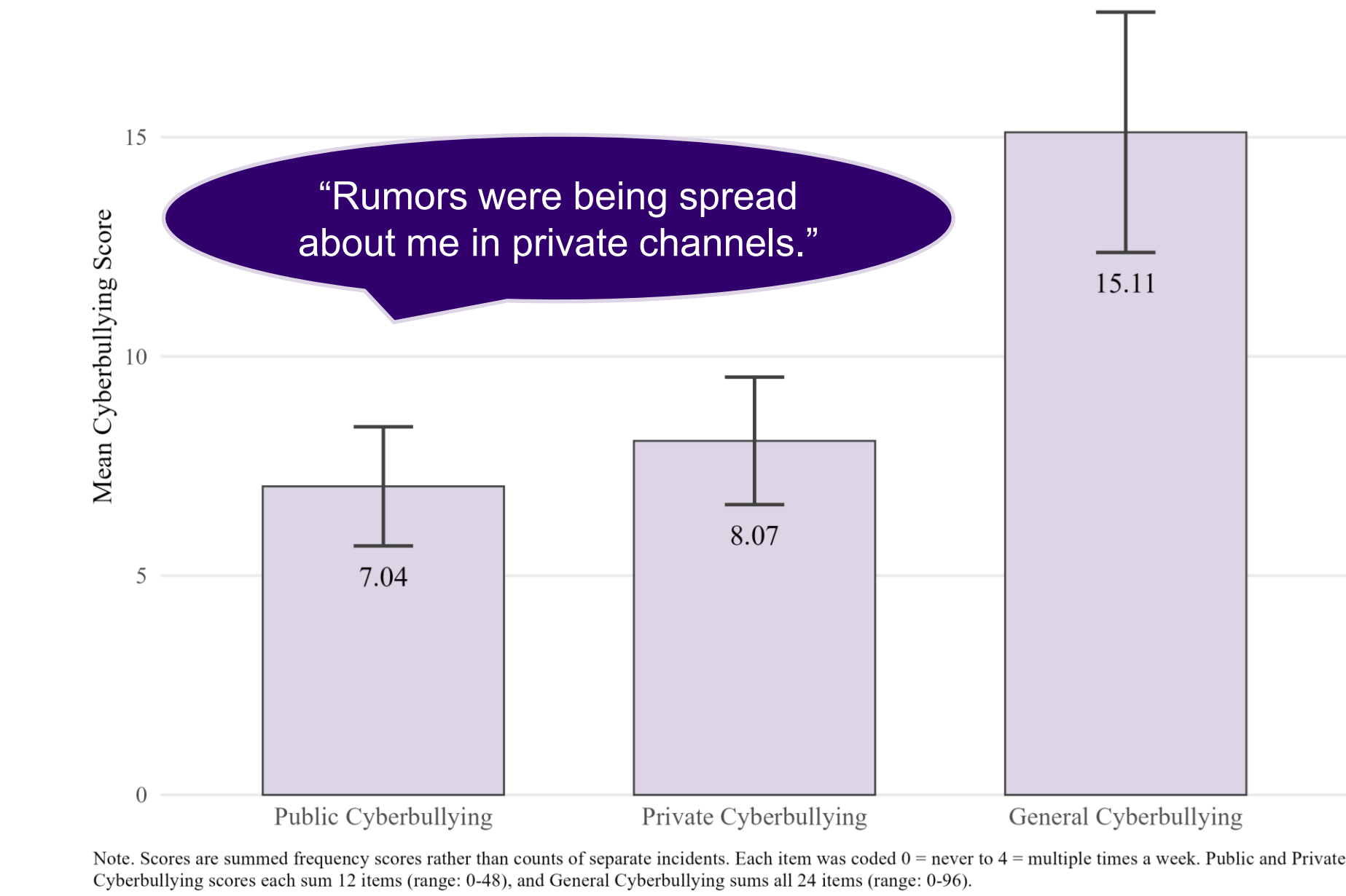
- Design: Cross-sectional **mixed-methods** online survey
- Sample: **N = 183** TNB respondents, ages 18–25
- Recruitment: Reddit, Discord, Instagram, campus LGBTQ+ groups, snowball sampling
- Qualitative data: **84 open-ended responses** from 46 participants
- Outcome: Modified **Cyberbullying Victimization Scale** (Lee et al. 2015)
 - 24 items: 12 public + 12 private
 - 3 domains: verbal/written, visual/sexual, social exclusion
- Predictors: platform use, outness, demographics, geographic region

Results

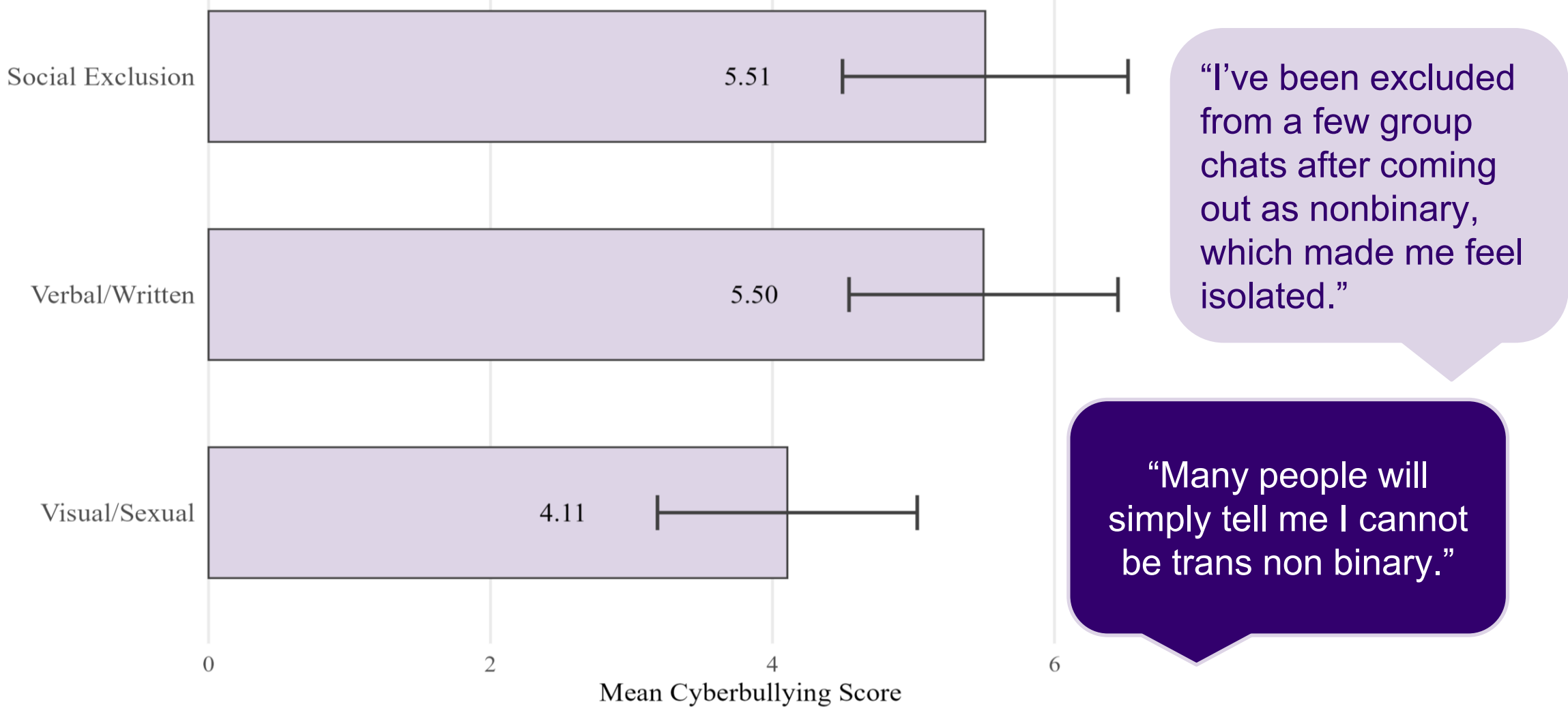
Demographic Info	Category	n (%)
Race	White	103 (56.3)
	People of Color	44 (24.0)
Gender Identity	Nonbinary	60 (32.8)
	Transgender Man	44 (24.0)
	Trans Man + Nonbinary	11 (6.0)
	Transgender Woman	28 (15.3)
	Trans Woman + Nonbinary	6 (3.3)
Sexual Orientation	Bi/Pan/Queer	88 (48.1)
	Gay/Lesbian	34 (18.6)
	Asexual	17 (9.3)

Note: Table shows selected major categories. Remaining respondents identified with preferred not to answer. Percentages are based on full survey respondents (N = 183).

► **Finding 1: Private cyberbullying was more frequent than public cyberbullying.**



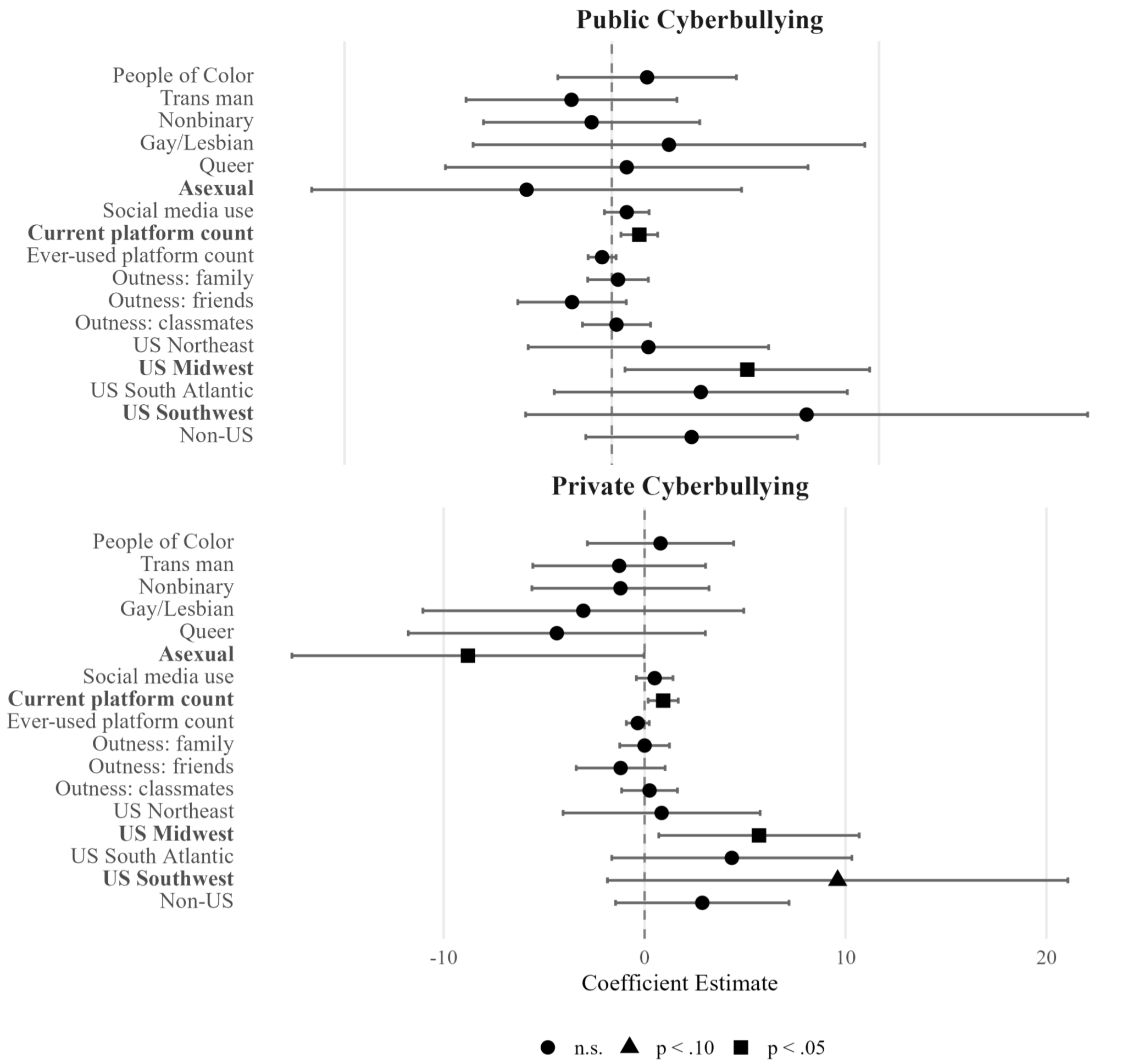
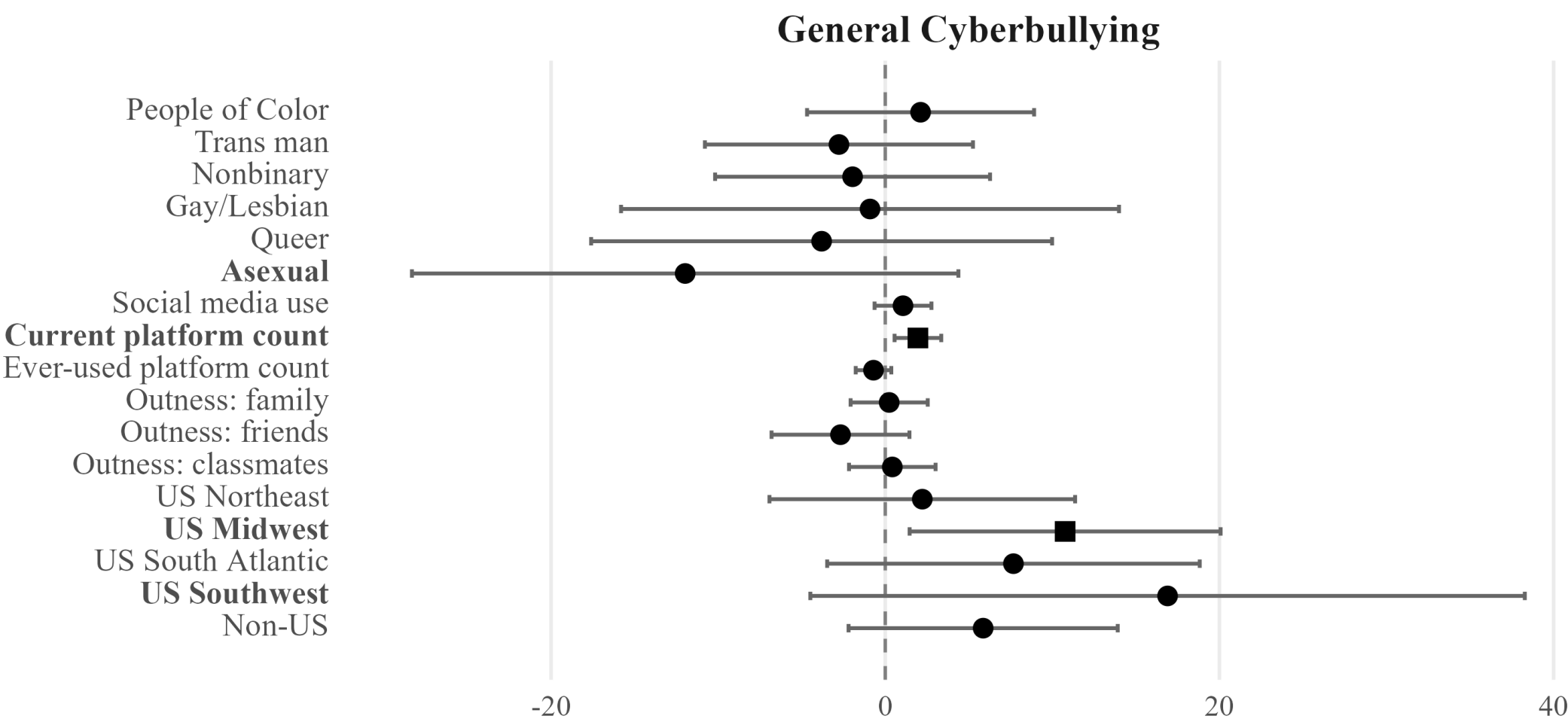
► **Finding 2: Cyberbullying was most often verbal and relational.**



► **Finding 3: More platforms meant higher exposure to risk.**

► **Finding 4: Outness to friends was protective in general and public spaces.**

Table 1. Predictors of Cyberbullying in General/Public/Private Space
OLS coefficient estimates with 95% confidence intervals



► **Finding 5: Beyond cyberbullying, participants described general transphobia and their protective strategies.**

“When I first got horrible messages, I deleted every post and picture that could hint at me being trans off my socials. Only the trusted people know.”

“While I haven’t ever been the specific target of transphobia online, the broader impacts of seeing transphobia on almost every platform are definitely challenging.”

Discussion

- Measurement:** Standard cyberbullying scales should be adapted to capture TNB-specific harms, including misgendering, deadnaming, outing, doxxing, and identity invalidation.
- Platform design:** Safety interventions should address private and semi-private spaces, not only public posts and comments.
- Prevention:** Strengthening affirming peer networks may help reduce visible online harassment, but private harassment requires additional platform-level protections.
- Theory:** Cyberbullying should be understood not only as discrete incidents, but as a digital minority stress process that shapes visibility, self-censorship, and participation.

Scan for poster, bibliography, and appendix.

