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# TRANSGENDER REALITIES: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSGENDER VISIBILITY, RACE, AND VICTIMIZATION

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TRANSGENDER REALITIES: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSGENDER VISIBILITY, RACE, AND VICTIMIZATION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

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# ABSTRACT

For years, gender scholars and activists have agreed that transgender individuals in the United States face overwhelming systemic oppression as well as high rates of violence and victimization. However, few studies have evaluated the level at which the perceived gender non-conformity of one's transgender identity is a marker of stigma visibility on its own which may contribute to more frequent victimization. This is imperative to investigate as experiencing frequent victimization can lead to a host of negative health and life outcomes for trans and non-binary individuals. Thus, it is important to understand the intricacies of transgender victimization to further find and promote mitigating resources. In this study, I examine the possible effects of transphobic victimization through the minority stress model and the weathering hypothesis which are frameworks that illustrate the long-term social costs of inhabiting intersecting and visibly stigmatized identities. Specifically, I use data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (N=26,388) to examine how trans visibility is related to verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault respondents face. I also investigate how gender, race, and transition status (surgical and physical) intersect to complicate this relationship. Findings shows that visibly trans respondents are more likely to experience verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault, regardless of interactions with gender, race, and transition status. In addition, those who have had any surgeries still suffer from high predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment in a similar pattern to those who have not had any surgical transitions. The only exception lies with trans women who have experienced sexual assault in the past year. These analyses provide important insight to the social costs that still exist for individuals who are perceived as straying away from the binary gender system.



**Keywords:** transgender; visibility; verbal harassment; physical abuse; sexual assault

# Transgender Realities: The Relationship Between Transgender Visibility, Race, and Victimization

## INTRODUCTION

For years, gender scholars and activists have agreed that transgender individuals in the United States face overwhelming systemic oppression, as well as high rates of violence and victimization (Halberstam 1998; Duggan 2003; Stryker 2008). For example, past and current literature suggests trans individuals of color, and especially Black trans women, are at high risk for murder, suicide, mental and physical health issues, and other negative experiences (Crosby, Salazar, & Hill 2016; Grant et al. 2011; Herbst et al. 2008; Sevelius et al. 2019). While past research has investigated how various intersections of trans individuals' identities may be related to the victimization they face, few studies have evaluated the level at which the perceived gender non-conformity of one's transgender identity is a marker of stigma visibility on its own which may contribute to more frequent victimization (for an exception, see Miller & Grollman 2015). This is imperative to investigate as experiencing frequent victimization can lead to a host of negative health and life outcomes for trans and non-binary individuals (Bradford et al. 2013; Rachlin et al. 2008; Miller & Grollman 2015). Thus, it is important to understand the intricacies of transgender victimization to further find and promote mitigating resources.

Current scholarly work on the intricacies of trans people's gender non-conformity discusses the possible penalties for individuals refusing to "do gender" through the binary cisgender system of man/woman (West & Zimmerman 1987; Westbrook & Schilt 2014; Miller & Grollman 2015; West & Zimmerman 2009; Schilt 2010; Nicholas 2019). Those who are perceived as not participating in the binarized gender system are susceptible to transphobia—prejudice and hostility towards trans people—which takes place through the social process of

gender attribution (Schilt 2010; West & Zimmerman 1987). Through the gender attribution process, transphobic victimization may be heightened depending on how visibly gender non-conforming an individual is perceived as (Miller & Grollman 2015), which contributes to their stigma visibility status. The current study focuses on the intricacies of this process for trans and non-binary individuals. Expanding further on this, I examine the possible effects of transphobic victimization through the minority stress model and the weathering hypothesis which are frameworks that illustrate the long-term social costs of inhabiting intersecting and visibly stigmatized identities (Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006; Hood et al. 2019; Meyer 1995; Meyer 2003). Altogether, these studies support and inform my current research questions.

Using the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey data (USTS), I examine whether "visibly trans" (or perceived gender non-conforming) transgender and non-binary individuals face more or less victimization than "non-visibly trans" (or perceived gender conforming) transgender and non-binary individuals. In other words, does increased trans visibility relate to increased victimization in the forms of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and/or sexual assault? Further, how do gender, race, and transition status intersect to complicate this relationship? Using these guiding questions and relevant frameworks, my analyses highlight and expand what we know about the effect of visible transness on different types of victimization experienced and how visible transness intersects with gender, race, and transition status.

## BACKGROUND

### *A Brief History of Trans Victimization*

When discussing trans victimization, it is imperative to understand the history of transphobia/trans victimization and its effects on society today. Although the term "transgender" has only recently become a mainstream identity term, researchers have shown that some

individuals have resisted gender norms from the start (Stryker 2008; Feinberg 1996). For example, historic records have shown individuals undergoing transitional surgeries as early as 1930 (Heidenreich 2001; Stryker 2008). At the same time, researchers have also reported a long history of transphobia and trans victimization (Nothing 2013; Stryker 2008; Crookston 2018). Perhaps one of the most well-known historical instances of the costly effects of trans victimization can be seen through accounts of the Stonewall Riots in 1969 where mostly trans women of color were arrested for their perceived "non-normative" gender visibility by police and hetero-cis-normative patrons[1] (Nothing 2013; Stryker 2008; Worthen 2016; Crookston 2018). After this historic instance of trans and queer victimization from hetero-cis-normative outsiders, trans and gender non-conforming people were exiled from gay and lesbian liberation movements and marches and were banned from gay bars which contributed to a growing homonormativity[2] within the queer community as well (Halberstam 1998; Duggan 2003; Stryker 2008).

It is evident that years of historic transgender victimization and erasure have influenced anti-trans legislation and societal norms we see today. For example, the U.S. is seeing a heightened amount of anti-trans legislation, including anti-trans bathroom bills, the "Save Adolescents from Experimentation" or SAFE Act, trans youth sports bans, threats of military transgender exclusion, and more (*freedomforallamericans* 2023). This is causing transgender and non-binary individuals to face immense difficulties in their access to gender-segregated public

[1] While less commonly known, the police-led attack on trans women during Compton's Cafeteria Riot in 1966 symbolized the start of rising violence against trans and queer folks of color (Stryker 2008).
[2] First referred to by Halberstam (1998), then coined by Duggan (2003), later implemented in trans studies by Stryker (2008), "homonormativity" refers to a kind of politics that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2003:179). When used by Stryker, it is specifically used to describe the cis-normative and anti-trans sentiment that largely existed within gay and lesbian liberation movements. I use both of these implementations simultaneously.

restrooms, school locker rooms and sports teams, and inclusive legal documents (Schilt & Lagos 2017; Hill et al. 2018; Cavanagh 2010; Cavanagh & Sykes 2006; Lucal 1999; Mathers 2016; Westbrook & Schilt 2014).

The effects of transphobic victimization are severe for trans and non-binary individuals but especially for trans people of color. For example, Black trans women experience some of the highest rates of violence, murder, and incarceration in the U.S. (Grant et al. 2011; Namaste 2005; Vidal-Ortiz 2008, 2009; Foristiere 2020; Westbrook 2016). In addition, the unemployment rate for trans people of color is four times greater than the national average (Grant et al. 2011; Schilt & Lagos 2017). In healthcare settings, non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals are at higher risk for mistreatment compared to trans men and trans women and we know these risks are much higher for Black gender non-conforming individuals (Grant et al. 2011; Nordmarken & Kelly 2014; Miller & Grollman 2015). Specifically related to my current research questions, past research on transgender issues has kept track of verbal harassment and abuse, physical violence, and sexual violence (Schilt & Lagos 2017; Serano 2007; Stotzer 2009). Witten (2003) reported that of their sample, 48% had experienced verbal harassment that was believed to be directly related to/referring to their trans visibility. In addition, several reports have found that trans women experience high levels of sexual assault—as high as 69% (Stotzer 2009;Kenagy 2005; Clements-Nolle et al. 2006; Garofalo et al. 2006). Xavier et al. (2007) found that 40% of their transgender sample reported experiencing physical violence, with the mean age of first physical assault being 16 years old (Xavier et al. 2007).

Intersectionality has proven to be an informative framework throughout sociology but especially in understanding trans victimization (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016; Abelson 2014; Collier 2016; Dozier 2005; Schilt 2010; Vidal-Ortiz 2002; Lombardi 2009; Westbrook 2016).

Past and recent research has examined how intersecting marginalized identities can foster compounded disadvantage and discriminatory experiences for trans and non-binary individuals on multiple levels, which has allowed trans scholars to better understand the intricacies of trans victimization (Abelson 2014; Collier 2016; Dozier 2005; Schilt 2010; Vidal-Ortiz 2002; Lombardi 2009; Westbrook 2016; Miller & Grollman 2015; Rood at el. 2016; Singh 2013; Ussher et al. 2021). This deeper understanding of trans experiences through intersectionality allows us to investigate multiple identities trans people have; however, little is known about how the perceived presentation of an individual's trans identity specifically relates to the victimization they may face (for exception, see Miller & Grollman 2015). In other words, the level at which an individual can be recognized as transgender or perceived as going against the gender binary should be investigated when looking at trans people's experiences with victimization.

*Visibly Trans and Non-Visibly Trans: Social Costs of Non-Conformity & Stigma Visibility*

Although the majority of transgender individuals experience victimization in the form of verbal harassment and/or abuse, little is known about whether one's ability to conform to binary gender norms (whether purposeful or not) mitigates these experiences in any way. Current studies on gender non-conformity discuss the possible penalties for individuals who are perceived as refusing to "do gender" through the binary cisgender system (West & Zimmerman 1987; Westbrook & Schilt 2014; Miller & Grollman 2015; West & Zimmerman 2009; Schilt 2010; Nicholas 2019). According to these studies, everyone goes through gender attribution processes which are comprised of physical and social interactions wherein your gender is determined by others (Schilt 2010; West & Zimmerman 1987). Those who are determined to be most resistant to gender norms are more susceptible to transphobia (Miller & Grollman 2015;

Schilt 2010; Westbrook & Schilt 2014) and are more likely to experience *stigma visibility* (Miller & Grollman 2015; Kando 1972; Goffman 1963; Dozier 2005; Connell 2010; Levitt & Ippolito 2014).

*Stigma visibility* is a term used by Miller and Grollman to explain the idea that "there are sometimes visible, conspicuous, and known markers on the body that reveal a person's stigmatized status to others" (2015:813).[3] Stigma visibility can be a damaging and dangerous effect of the gender attribution process for trans and non-binary individuals who are unable to or do not want to conform to a binarized gender system. This includes individuals who identify as binarily trans (such as trans men and trans women) and individuals who identify as non-binary or genderfluid, for example.[4] Because of this, it is important to investigate differences in stigma visibility by examining individuals' levels of trans visibility. By doing so, researchers and advocates can be informed of the importance in seeing and understanding current social treatment of gender differences.

*Consequences of Transgender Victimization: Minority Stress and Social Weathering*

Examining gender visibility differences is also needed because of the negative life and health outcomes that can result for trans and non-binary folks—especially those that encompass multiple marginalized identities—due to frequent experiences of victimization (Halberstam 1998; Duggan 2003; Stryker 2008; Miller & Grollman 2015; Bradford et al. 2013; Rachlin et al. 2008). The *minority stress model* and *social weathering hypothesis* provide frameworks for the implications of transphobic victimization (Meyer 1995; Rood et al. 2016; Serpas & Garcia

[3] "Stigma visibility" adds to Goffman's (1963) theories of discredited and discreditable stigmas.
[4] It is important to note that some non-binary individuals may present and/or be perceived as binary contrary to the idea that all non-binary folks express an androgynous or genderless physical identities. Therefore, their responses are of-interest for this research question and might provide greater insight to the experiences of trans folks who specifically reject being binarized.

2021). Connecting experiences of anti-trans social interactions with poor health and life outcomes, the minority stress model suggests that individuals who face disproportionate levels of victimization are more likely to engage in damaging behaviors, such as self-harm, drug use, and suicide (Meyer 1995; Cochran & Mays 2000). Similarly, the social weathering hypothesis conceptualizes the relationship between chronic stress and negative health outcomes, specifically for Black women (Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006). This framework has recently been expanded for Black LGBTQ individuals which uses the allostatic load measure to conceptualize the cumulative impact of intersecting marginalization (Serpas & Garcia 2021). The weathering hypothesis and minority stress model both investigate how marginalized intersected identities and external stressors lead to poorer long-term mental and physical health. Examining the possibilities of both frameworks guides the current study on the ever-present and long-term effects of experiencing victimization —especially for trans people of color. Disaggregating between who is at risk for increased levels of victimization will provide a better understanding of trans experiences and will help us to find mechanisms that will ultimately fight back against the dangers and ongoing threat of hetero-cis-normativity.

**Current Study**

This study examines how transgender visibility is related to experiencing increased levels of victimization, specifically with other marginalized intersecting identities including gender, race, and transitional status. By examining multiple binary logistic regression models with several interactions, this study provides a multi-dimensional approach to interrogate and disaggregate the effects of daily victimization faced by trans and non-binary individuals daily.

My first research question explores the effects of different types of abuse on key predictor variables. To investigate this, I will look at the un-interacted binary logistic regression

model for individual relationships between my key predictor variables (visible transness, gender, race, transition status) and victimization experiences (verbal harassment, physical abuse, sexual assault) faced in the last year. Based on past research about trans victimization (Bradford et al. 2013; Connell 2010; Griffin et al. 2019), I predict visibly trans people, trans women, non-white trans folks, and those with no surgical transition history will experience higher levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault.

My second question focuses on "visibly trans" respondents and their relationships with different types of victimization. Here, I will use binary interactions to better understand the relationship between visible transness and an additional marginalized identity on each category of victimization experienced in the last year. Within the "visibly trans" group, I expect trans women and non-binary individuals, non-white participants, and those with no surgical transition history to experience elevated levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault.

Finally, I use multiple triple interactions to further complicate the relationship between visible transness and two additional marginalized identities on different levels of victimization experienced in the last year in order to better understand individuals' experiences with multiple intersecting marginalized identities. I expect those who encompass multiple marginalized identities will experience the highest levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault.

## METHODS

### *Data and Sample*

To investigate my research question, I use the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS; N=26,388), which is the largest survey of trans people in the United States to date (James et al. 2016). The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) recruited trans and non-binary

people aged 18 and older to participate in the study through snowball sampling. The USTS was live from January to December 2015 in both English and Spanish and it collected responses from trans and non-binary individuals in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and US military bases home and abroad. The survey addresses a multitude of topics facing trans and gender non-conforming folks, including housing, health, victimization, and more. A listwise deletion approach was used for all missing data. The final analytical sample includes 26,388 people which is inclusive of trans women (n=8,704), trans men (n=7,870), and non-binary individuals (n=9,814).

*Dependent Variables: Verbal Harassment, Physical Abuse,* and *Sexual Assault.* Section 17 and 18 of the USTS ask questions about victimization and harassment faced in the last year. The first dependent variable for this study comes from the survey question, "in the past year, did anyone verbally harass you for any reason?" which I will recode into a binary variable (0=No, 1=Yes). The second dependent variable of interest comes from the question, "in the past year, did anyone physically attack you (such as grab you, throw something at you, punch you, use a weapon) for any reason?" which I will recode into a binary variable (0=No, 1=Yes). The final dependent variable of interest comes from the question, "in the past year, have you experienced unwanted sexual contact (such as oral, genital, or anal contact or penetration, forced fondling, rape)?" which I will recode into a binary variable (0=No, 1=Yes). Presented in Table 1, 56% of the overall sample reported experiencing verbal harassment, 13% reported experiencing a physical attack, and 21% reported experiencing sexual assault in the past year.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

*Key Independent Variables: Trans Visibility, Gender, Race, and Transition Status*. The USTS asks participants to respond to the statement, "people can tell I am trans even if I don't tell

them," with categorical answer choices, "always," "most of the time," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." These answer choices were recoded into a new binary variable called *Trans Visibility*, with categories *visibly trans* (survey answers: "always," "most of the time," and "sometimes" coded as 1), and *not visibly trans* (survey answers: "rarely" and "never" coded as 0).[5] Past research suggests "gender non-conforming trans individuals" experience higher levels of victimization than "gender conforming trans individuals," suggesting that those who are *visibly trans* (to utilize the language of the current study) tend to experience higher levels of victimization (Miller and Grollman 2015). To examine the effects of perceived gender non-conformity on victimization experienced in the past year, *trans visibility* is the main outcome of interest with *not visibly trans* as the reference category. Overall, 44% of the overall sample reported being "visibly trans" (Table 1).

*Race* and *gender* are key independent variables which will be used in this study to examine how intersections of various marginalized identities influence the victimization faced by visibly trans individuals. Because past research indicates that trans women of color experience victimization on multiple fronts due to their intersecting marginalized identities (Westbrook 2016; Forestiere 2020), I expect race and gender to be important indicators for the victimization faced by trans and non-binary individuals. The USTS asks participants to identify their gender identity based on a list of six options: Cross-dresser, Woman, Man, Trans Woman, Trans Man, and Non-binary/Genderqueer. Because this survey only included trans individuals, I was able to group "woman" and "trans woman" into the *trans women* category and "man" and "trans man" into the *trans men* category. Participants who selected "cross-dresser" were excluded from this

[5] I added "sometimes" to the *visibly trans* category, because even if individuals are only "read" as transgender some of the time, I believe this still indicates visible transness and is therefore important to investigate for this research.

study.[6] When asked about race, the USTS provides an expansive range to choose from, but due to small cell size, I recoded the race variable to be a binary variable (0=White, 1=Non-White). Presented in Table 1, an overwhelming majority of the sample is white (82%) which is discussed further in the limitations section.

*Surgical transition status* is the final independent variables of interest. *Surgical transition status* is a binary measure of whether someone has undergone any surgical transitions—breast augmentation/top surgery or reconstruction, hysterectomy (or any removal of the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and/or cervix), clitoral release/metoidioplasty/centurion procedure, phalloplasty (creation of a penis), orchidectomy (removal of testes), vaginoplasty/labiaplasty, trachea shave (Adam's apple or thyroid cartilage reduction), facial feminization surgery, and/or voice surgery—or not (0=At least one surgical transition, 1=No surgical transitions). As seen in Table 1, only 32% of the sample reported having at least one surgical transition. In addition,

*Control Variables: Physical Transition (non-surgical) Age, Region of Residence.* For this study, I controlled for factors that could influence the likeliness of victimization, including *physical transition (non-surgical), age* as a continuous variable, as well as an *age-squared* term (*age* is shown categorically in Table 1 for data visualization purposes), and *region of residence.* I included a variable encompassing any non-surgical transitional treatments participants might have had to enhance their gender presentation: *physical transition (non-surgical)*—whether someone has undergone any non-surgical medical enhancements including voice therapy, silicone injections, hair removal/electrolysis, hormone treatment/HRT, and/or puberty blocking hormones (usually used by youth ages 9-16)—or not (0=At least one physical transition, 1=No physical transitions). Presented in Table 1, 66% of the sample reported having at least one

[6] While theoretically interesting to explore, due to the low cell size (about 1%) and nature of the research question, respondents who selected "cross-dresser" as their main gender identity were excluded.

physical transition. Further, *t*-tests show that every participant who responded "yes" to having a surgical transition also answered "yes" to having a physical transition. In addition, previous studies have shown that aging works in tandem with transphobia, racism, and other intersecting marginalized statuses, suggesting that a trans person's increase in age influences the victimization they may face (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. 2014; Grant et al. 2011; Siverskog 2014). As seen in Table 1, a majority of the overall sample (43%) is between the ages of 18 and 24. Only 3% are 65 years or older (Table 1). Finally, recent research shows that trans people living in the southern United States experience unique and heightened marginalization (Griffin et al. 2019; Scott et al. 2021). Table 1 shows us that a majority of the overall sample lives in the western U.S. (31%).

**Analytical Strategy**

To investigate my research question, I use a series of binary logistic regressions with multiple interactions that are modeled by the following equation:

$$\log\left(\frac{\Pr\,(discrim)}{1-(\Pr(discrim))}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1\,(vis) + \beta_2(gend) + \beta_3(nonw) + \beta_4(nosurg) + \beta_5\,(int) + \beta_6(cont)$$

where $\log\left(\frac{\Pr\,(discrim)}{1-(\Pr(discrim))}\right)$ is the predicted logged odds of the three types of victimization experienced in the last year. *Vis* is an indicator of trans visibility paired with the $\beta_1$ coefficient, which captures the differences in experiencing victimization for those who are visibly trans. The *gend* vector includes indicators for trans men, trans women, and non-binary individuals with the accompanying effect of experienced victimization which is represented in the $\beta_2$ coefficient. The *nonw* indicator and $\beta_3$ coefficient capture the effect of victimization on non-white respondents. *Nosurg,* along with the $\beta_4$ coefficient, capture the effect of victimization on respondents with no surgical transitions. Several of my models include interactions—both binary interactions and triple interactions—to disaggregate the effect of experienced victimization on transgender

visibility by race, gender, and surgical transition status. These effects are represented by the *int* vector with the differences between interactions captured in the $\beta_5$ coefficient. All models include control variables, which are represented by the *cont* vector and $\beta_6$ coefficient. $\epsilon$ accounts for residual model error.

**Results**

*Binary Logistic Regressions—Verbal Harassment*

Table 2 presents logistic regressions of verbal harassment in the last year by trans visibility, gender, race, and transition status. Presented in the uninteracted Model 1, those who are labeled "visibly trans" have 0.71 significantly higher logged odds of being verbally harassed in the past year than those who are "not visibly trans." Using predicted probabilities, trans individuals who were visibly trans had a 64.7% chance of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year, while trans individuals who were not visibly trans had a 48.6% chance of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year. This shows that trans people who report being visibly trans are predicted to experience verbal harassment 16% more often than trans people who are not visibly trans. Also shown in Model 1, trans women have 0.27 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing verbal harassment than trans men, and non-binary individuals have 0.46 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing verbal harassment than trans men. In predicted probabilities, trans women have a 56% chance of experiencing verbal harassment, and non-binary individuals have a 60.4% chance of experiencing verbal harassment. The main effect of the "non-white" race variable is not statistically significant. This could be due to the low response rate of non-white respondents. In addition, because over half of the overall sample experienced verbal harassment, it is even more difficult to disaggregate racial effects. This is discussed further in the limitations section. Finally, Model 1 shows that individuals who have

not had any surgical transitions have 0.15 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing verbal harassment than individuals with at least one surgical transition. In predicted probabilities, trans individuals who have not had any surgeries have a 56.9% chance of experiencing verbal harassment. Figure 1 investigates the surgical transition variable further by illustrating the relationship between trans visibility and surgical transition and shows that individuals who have had no surgical transitions are significantly more likely to be visibly trans than those who have had at least one surgery. While this figure helps us better visualize the relationship between the visibility of transness and surgical transition status, it is evident that even respondents with at least one surgical transition experience high predicted probabilities of visible transness. Control variables behave consistently in all models.

[INSERT TABLE 2]

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Model 2 includes an interaction of visibility and gender, while Model 3 interacts visibility and race, and Model 4 interacts visibility and surgical transition status (Table 2). Because cross-group comparisons of logistic coefficients are unreliable due to differences in residual variation, Wald tests of probability are used to formally test the significance of all interactions (Long & Mustillo 2018). According to these probability tests, all interactions are significant and are explored further in the figures.

Figure 2 contains two graphs representing Models 2 and 3: one that shows the effects of race and visibility on verbal harassment and one that shows the effects of gender and visibility on verbal harassment. The first cell interacts visibility and race and shows that visibly trans non-white respondents had significantly higher predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment compared to visibly trans white respondents. This significant difference was

confirmed through a linear combination test. We can see that even though the non-white race variable was not statistically significant in the first model, it became significant when interacted with visible transness. Thus, there is no statistically significant difference in the verbal harassment faced by white and non-white respondents who are not visibly trans.

[INSERT FIGURE 2]

From the second cell of Figure 2, we see that trans women and non-binary individuals experience the highest predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment regardless of visibility. To break it down by gender, non-binary individuals who are not visibly trans have a 54.3% chance of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year, while non-binary individuals who are visibly trans have a 67.7% chance of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year. This shows there is a 13.4% difference in chances of experiencing verbal harassment between visibly trans and non-visibly trans non-binary individuals. Trans women who are not visibly trans have a 47.3% chance of verbal harassment in the past year, and trans women who are visibly trans have a 66.3% chance of verbal harassment in the past year, showing a 19% difference in chances of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year. Trans men who are not visibly trans have a 42.8% chance of being verbally harassed in the past year and trans men who are visibly trans have a 58.8% chance of being verbally harassed in the past year showing a 16% difference in chances of experiencing verbal harassment in the past year. This Figure shows that the largest difference in probabilities within gender (19%) is between trans women who are visibly trans and non-visibly trans. Across genders, the largest difference in the probability of experiencing verbal harassment (24.9%) is between visibly trans non-binary individuals and trans men who are non-visibly trans. Across both cells in Figure 2, we can see that visibly trans

respondents had significantly higher (in some cases, drastically higher) predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment regardless of race or gender.

*Binary Logistic Regressions—Physical Abuse*

Table 3 presents logistic regressions of physical abuse experienced in the last year by trans visibility, gender, race, and transition status. Presented in the uninteracted Model 5, respondents who are labeled "visibly trans" have 0.49 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing physical abuse in the past year than those who are "not visibly trans." Using predicted probabilities, trans individuals who were visibly trans had a 16.3% chance of experiencing physical abuse in the past year while trans individuals who were not visibly trans had a 10.8% chance of experiencing physical abuse in the past year. This shows that trans people who report being visibly trans are predicted to experience physical abuse 5.5% more often than trans people who are not visibly trans. Also shown in Model 5, trans women have 0.23 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing physical abuse than trans men. In predicted probabilities, trans women have a 14.7% chance of experiencing physical abuse. However, there is no statistically significant effect of trans visibility on physical abuse for non-binary individuals. Interestingly (and contradictory of the verbal harassment uninteracted Model 1), non-white respondents have .25 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing physical abuse. In predicted probabilities, non-white respondents have a 15.6% chance of experiencing physical abuse. Finally, Model 5 shows that individuals who have not had any surgical transitions have 0.12 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing physical abuse and respondents with no physical transitions have .10 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing physical abuse. In predicted probabilities, trans individuals who have not had any surgeries have a 13.5% chance of

experiencing physical abuse and trans individuals who have not had any physical transitions have a 13.9% chance of experiencing physical abuse.

[INSERT TABLE 3]

Model 6 includes an interaction of visibility and gender, Model 7 presents an interaction of visibility and race, and Model 8 shows an interaction of visibility and surgical transition status (Table 3). Because cross-group comparisons of logistic coefficients are unreliable due to differences in residual variation, Wald tests of probability are used to formally test the significance of the interactions in Model 6, Model 7, and Model 8 (Long & Mustillo 2018). According to these probability tests, the interactions in Model 6 and Model 8 are significant and are explored further in figures.

Figure 3 contains two graphs representing Models 6 and 7: one that shows the effects of gender and visibility on physical abuse and one that shows the effects of race and visibility on physical abuse. In the first cell of Figure 3, it is evident that trans women who are visibly trans experience the highest significant percentages of physical abuse in the past year at 18.7%. There is no statistically significant difference between the physical abuse experienced by trans men who are visibly trans and visibly trans non-binary individuals. Similarly, there are no statistically significant differences between the physical abuse experienced by individuals labeled "not visibly trans." The second cell of Figure 3 represents the interaction between visibility and race. Non-white visibly trans respondents experience significantly higher percentages of physical abuse at 20.3%, compared to non-white individuals who are not visibly trans, as well as both visible and non-visible white respondents. This figure shows (and Wald tests confirm) there is no statistically significant difference between the physical abuse experienced by white and non-white trans individuals who are labeled "not visibly trans."

[INSERT FIGURE 3]

*Binary Logistic Regressions—Sexual Assault*

Table 4 presents logistic regressions of sexual assault experienced in the last year by trans visibility, gender, race, and transitions status. Presented in the uninteracted Model 9, respondents who are labeled "visibly trans" have 0.21 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing sexual assault in the past year than those who are "not visibly trans." Using predicted probabilities, trans individuals who were visibly trans had a 16.2% chance of experiencing sexual assault in the past year while trans individuals who were not visibly trans had a 10.7% chance of experiencing sexual assault in the past year. This shows that trans people who report being visibly trans are predicted to experience sexual assault 5.5% more often than trans people who are not visibly trans. Also shown in Model 9, trans women have 1.053 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing sexual assault than trans men. In predicted probabilities, trans women have a 35.3% chance of experiencing sexual assault. Non-binary respondents have .330 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing sexual assault which is a 18.0% higher chance in predicted probabilities. Moving to the *race* effect, non-white respondents have .20 significantly higher logged odds of experiencing sexual assault. In predicted probabilities, non-white trans individuals have a 16.0% chance of experiencing sexual assault. Finally, Model 9 shows that there are no statistically significant effects for individuals with no surgical transitions or individuals with no physical transitions as related to sexual assault.

[INSERT TABLE 4]

To explore these relationships further, Model 10 includes an interaction of visibility and gender, Model 11 includes an interaction of visibility and race, and Model 12 includes an interaction of visibility and surgical transition status. Although only one of the interactions is

shown to be statistically significant (Model 11), cross-group comparisons of logistic coefficients are unreliable due to differences in residual variation. Therefore, Wald tests of probability are used to formally test the significance of the interactions in Model 10 and Model 12 (Long & Mustillo 2018). According to these probability tests, the interactions are significant and are explored further in the figures.

Figure 4 contains two graphs that represent Model 10 and Model 11. The first cell of Figure 4 shows the interaction between visibility and gender on the percentage of sexual assault faced in the past year. At 35.7%, trans women who are visibly trans are significantly more likely to experience sexual assault in the last year. Trans women who are non-visibly trans also report significantly high percentages of sexual assault in the past year at 29.4%. While there is no significant difference between non-visibly trans and visibly trans non-binary individuals, trans men who are visibly trans have significantly higher probabilities of experiencing sexual assault than trans men who are labeled "not visibly trans." The second cell in Figure 4 represents the interaction of visibility and race, and similarly to Figure 3, non-white visibly trans respondents have the highest significant percentage of experiencing sexual assault in the last year. There is no statistically significant difference between non-white respondents who are labeled "not visibly trans" and white respondents who are both visibly trans and non-visibly trans.

[INSERT FIGURE 4]

*Triple Interactions*

Model 13, Model 14, and Model 15 present multiple triple interactions between trans visibility, gender, surgical transition status, and race, evaluating the effects of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault (Table 5). Because triple interactions are difficult to interpret

via tables, Figures 5A and 5B, Figure 6, and Figure 7 show visual representations of the significant triple interactions presented in Model 13, Model 14, and Model 15.

Figure 5A illustrate the only statistically significant triple interaction ($p<0.001$) of Model 13, which presents the relationship between verbal harassment and visibility, gender, and surgical transition in predicted probabilities (Table 5). From Figure 5A, we can see that visibly trans non-binary individuals with no surgical transitions have the highest predicted probability of experiencing verbal harassment at 68.3%. However, this is not significantly different from trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions, visibly trans non-binary individuals with at least one surgical transition, or trans women who are visibly trans with at least one surgical transition. By comparison, trans men who are non-visibly trans with at least one surgery have the lowest predicted probability of experiencing verbal harassment at 37.1%. Interestingly, trans men who are non-visibly trans are the only respondents who reported experiencing lower predicted probabilities of verbal harassment when they had at least one surgery (by almost 10%).

[INSERT FIGURES 5A and 5B HERE]

In addition, there are significant differences in the predicted probabilities of verbal harassment between visibly trans and non-visibly trans individuals. Across all genders, whether a respondent has had any surgical transitions or not, visibly trans respondents have a higher chance of experiencing verbal harassment. This could imply that, looking back at Figure 1, surgery can mitigate the effects of visible transness; however, having at least one surgical transition does not protect trans individuals from the effects of verbal harassment, as those who have had any surgeries still suffer from high predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment in a similar pattern to those who have not had any surgical transitions (Figure 5A).

When looking at Figure 5B, we can see differences in the predicted probabilities of trans visibility by surgical transition. This shows that the difference between trans men who are visibly trans and non-visibly trans with no surgical transitions experience 9.1% significantly lower chances of experiencing verbal harassment than the difference between trans men who are visibly trans and non-visibly trans with at least one surgical transition. Further, the difference between trans women who are visibly trans and trans women who are non-visibly trans with no surgical transitions is significantly higher than the difference between trans men who are visibly trans and trans men who are non-visibly trans with no surgical transitions as well as the difference between visibly trans and non-visibly trans non-binary individuals with no surgical transitions. While I originally predicted transitional surgeries to lower trans visibility, and in turn, lower the verbal harassment they face, these figures complicate the role of surgery in mitigating perceived gender non-conformity.

Figure 6 illustrates the only statistically significant triple interaction ($p<0.05$) of Model 14, which is the relationship between physical abuse and visibility, gender, and surgical transition status presented in predicted probabilities (Table 5). Trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions experience the highest levels of physical abuse at 20.4%. Visibly trans non-binary individuals with at least one surgical transition also experience high levels of physical abuse at 17.3%; however, it is not significantly different from non-visibly trans non-binary individuals with at least one surgical transition. Besides non-binary individuals with at least one surgical transition, respondents labeled “visibly trans” experience significantly higher levels of physical abuse, regardless of gender or surgical transition status. This highlights the effect of trans visibility.

[INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE]

Figure 7 illustrates the only statistically significant triple interaction ($p<0.01$) of Model 15, which presents the relationship between sexual assault in the past year with visibility, gender, and surgical transition in predicted probabilities (Table 5). While trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions have the highest predicted probabilities of experiencing sexual assault in the past year at 36%, trans women who are visibly trans with at least one surgical transition and trans women who are not visibly trans with at least one surgical transition experience similar levels of sexual assault that are not significantly different from each other. This may suggest that trans women are particularly vulnerable to instances of sexual assault, as trans men and non-binary individuals (visible or not; surgically transitioned or not) are significantly less likely to experience sexual assault in the past year.

[INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE]

*Summary of Findings*

In sum, visibly trans respondents are statistically significantly more likely to experience verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault, regardless of interactions with gender, race, and transition status. In terms of verbal harassment, trans women and non-binary individuals have high chances of experiencing this form of victimization at 56% and 60.4%, respectively. Respondents with no surgical transitions are also statistically significantly more likely to experience verbal harassment. When looking at binary interactions, it is evident that non-white respondents who are labeled "visibly trans" have statistically significantly higher chances of experiencing verbal harassment. From the triple interactions, visibly trans non-binary individuals with no surgical transitions are shown to have the highest chances of experiencing verbal harassment at 68.3%. Trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions, visibly trans non-binary individuals with at least one surgical transition, and trans women who

are visibly trans with at least one surgical transition also experience elevated levels of verbal harassment.

When examining the effects of physical abuse, the uninteracted model clearly shows that trans women and non-white respondents have statistically significantly higher chances of experiencing physical abuse at 14.7% and 15.6% respectively. Respondents with no surgical transitions are also statistically significantly more likely to experience physical abuse. Moving to binary interactions, trans women who are visibly trans experience the highest percentages of physical abuse in the past year at 18.7%. In addition, non-white visibly trans respondents experience significantly higher percentages of physical abuse at 20.3%. The triple interaction highlights trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions experience the highest levels of physical abuse at 20.4%.

Finally, the effects of sexual assault are perhaps the most telling: trans women—labeled visibly trans or not—are highly likely to experience sexual assault. At 35.7% and 29.4%, trans women who are visibly trans and trans women who are not visibly trans experience much higher chances of sexual assault compared to trans men and non-binary individuals. This is the only interaction where respondents who are visibly trans and respondents who are not visibly trans experience similar levels of sexual assault. Looking at the triple interaction, trans women who are visibly trans with no surgical transitions have the highest predicted probabilities of experiencing sexual assault in the past year at 36%. However, trans women who are visibly trans with at least one surgical transition and trans women who are not visibly trans with at least one surgical transition experience similar levels of sexual assault that are not significantly different from each other, once again suggesting trans women are at high risk for sexual assault, regardless of visibility.

## Discussion

Despite the expansion in transgender and gender non-conforming academic literature in the last decade, there is still ambiguity surrounding the effects of visible transness for trans and non-binary individuals. Using the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, I assessed how visible transness—or perceived gender non-conformity—exposes trans and non-binary individuals to heightened levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault. Further, I evaluated how visibility of trans identities intersects with gender, race, and transition status to investigate trans and non-binary individuals that encompass multiple marginalized identities. By doing this, I add to and expand on current literature that aims to understand the role that visible transness has in trans and non-binary lives.

This study offers four major findings to support and expand on current research. First, as found in previous research, respondents who are considered "visibly trans"—or perceived as gender non-conforming—experience significantly higher levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault than respondents who are considered "not visibly trans"—or perceived as gender conforming (Vidal-Ortiz 2009; Miller & Grollman 2015). In other words, the more often an individual is visibly recognized as transgender, the more they are subjected to verbal harassment, physical abuse, and/or sexual assault. This was consistent across all models, regardless of intersections of gender, race, or surgical transition status (the only exception is for trans women experiencing sexual assault, which is discussed further below). However, we can see that race specifically heightened the experiences of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault, specifically for non-white individuals (this is discussed next).

These findings directly speak to Goffman's (1963) and Miller and Grollman's (2015) concept of *stigma visibility*, which suggests that visible, conspicuous, and known markers on the

body reveal a person's stigmatized status to others and therefore lead to heightened levels of victimization. In addition, Crenshaw's (1991) explanation of how combinations of marginalized identities (i.e., marginalized racial status, marginalized gender status, perceived gender nonconformity) compound victimization can help explain why respondents with multiple visible stigmas (or intersections) experience higher levels of victimization. However, more research should evaluate the relationship between visible transness and visible non-whiteness and how these identities influence the victimization faced by trans people of color.

A second major finding extends on the previous one, which is the alarming prevalence of high levels of victimization experienced by non-white respondents who are visibly trans and trans women who are visibly trans across all binary interactions. In Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4, it is evident that non-white respondents who are visibly trans and trans women who are visibly trans experience statistically significantly higher levels of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual harassment. Although the triple interactions that include race show no statistical significance, this could be due to the small non-white sample size (18%). Even with a smaller sample size, the race variable was statistically significant for non-white individuals who are visibly trans (shown in Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4) which could comment on the prevalence of victimization experienced in non-white trans communities, especially for trans women of color and Black trans women (Crosby et al. 2016; Foristiere 2020; Grant et al. 2011; Lombardi 2009).

Broadly speaking, these findings speak to the minority stress model and the weathering hypothesis, which suggest that people of color and other minorities are more likely to experience

significant stress and poorer life outcomes from the daily victimization they face[7] (Levitt & Ippolito 2014; Geronimus et al. 2006; Meyer 1995; Rood et al. 2016). My study along with previous research have found that non-white individuals and trans women experience high levels of different types of victimization (Bettcher 2014; Bradford et al. 2013; Serano 2007; Westbrook & Schilt 2014). My research contributes to newer studies that discuss how queer people of color are especially at-risk for high levels of victimization, and therefore are susceptible to minority stress and/or social weathering (Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006; Serpas & Garcia 2021). Due to the statistically significantly higher levels of victimization faced by non-white individuals who are visibly trans and trans women who are visibly trans, research on minority stress and social weathering suggest these experiences could lead to significantly worse life outcomes (Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006; Serpas & Garcia 2021). While my questions are unable to formally investigate this due to the nature of panel data, I suggest these frameworks be centered by researchers as longitudinal trans and non-binary data becomes more available to better understand the lifelong effects of victimization for visibly stigmatized individuals.

A third major finding is that surgical transitions might not be a long-term or sustainable option for decreasing trans visibility, and in turn, decreasing levels of experienced verbal harassment. Figure 1 and Model 1 show that respondents with no surgical transitions are more visible and also have significantly higher chances of experiencing verbal harassment. However, when looking at the interacted figures, we can see that the relationship between visible transness and surgical transition is complicated. Whether respondents were visibly trans or non-visibly trans, having at least one surgery did not ameliorate the effects of verbal harassment, except in

[7] The weathering hypothesis was originally used to describe Black women's experiences (Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006) but it has recently been expanded to investigate queer people of color (Serpas & Garcia 2021).

the case of trans men who are non-visibly trans. While the surgical transition variable should be investigated further for better understanding, it seems that surgery can mitigate the effects of visible transness. However, having at least one surgical transition does not protect trans individuals from the effects of verbal harassment, physical abuse, or sexual assault. Presented in the first triple interaction figure (Figure 5A), those who have had any surgeries still suffer from high predicted probabilities of experiencing verbal harassment in a similar pattern to those who have not had any surgical transitions.

This is important to consider moving forward, as transitional surgeries can be beneficial for gender affirmation and improved mental health (Glynn et al. 2016; Major and O'Brien 2005; Sevelius 2013; Sevelius et al. 2019). However, trans studies scholars should be cautious to promote surgery as a sort of mitigating factor for gender nonconformity. Since gender is a social construct that many scholars argue is fluid and in need of reform (Duggan 2003; Miller & Grollman 2015), promoting gender-specific surgeries can continue to perpetuate gender rigidity and lead to greater gender violence (Cavanagh 2010; Connell 2010; Duggan 2003). While surgeries can be positive and necessary steps in some individuals' transitions, it should not be relied on or highlighted as a sort of "fix."

The final major finding is that trans women may be more susceptible to sexual assault. Figure 4 and Figure 7 show the significantly high levels of sexual assault faced by trans women, regardless of other intersecting identities or visibility. This is different from the previous models, as visibility is a major predictor of experiencing verbal harassment and physical abuse for trans women. In both the binary and triple interactions, trans women were much more likely to experience sexual assault, regardless of visibility.

This is consistent with previous research and solidifies similar qualitative claims on the risk of experiencing sexual assault for trans women (Serano 2007; Lombardi 2009). These statistics are alarming and beg for more attention, as past studies have connected violence and sexual assault with the rising deaths of trans women, especially trans women of color (Crosby et al. 2016; Foristiere 2020). This study shows that sexual assault continues to be a huge problem for trans women and should be evaluated further to better understand how sexual violence affects trans women's lives.

In conclusion, visibly trans respondents experience high levels of victimization which could be an effect of stigma visibility (Goffman 1963; Miller & Grollman 2015; Vidal-Ortiz 2009); therefore, this variable should be investigated further. In addition, minority stress and social weathering could be at play so longitudinal studies involving trans people of color are needed for further analyses on the long-term effects of racist transphobic victimization. Further, the health effects of surgical transitions should be measured longitudinally to get a better understanding of individuals' gender presentation changes. Finally, the alarming percentage of sexual assault faced by trans women in the past year clearly shows a very specific vulnerability that deserves a deeper investigation.

*Implications*

These analyses provide important insight to the social costs that still exist for individuals who are perceived as straying away from the binary gender system. I concur with past research on the high social risks of gender nonconformity, especially as binary gender norms and transphobic sentiment continues to gain momentum in social and academic spaces. As the awareness and commodification of transgender and non-binary existence continues to trickle into hetero-cis mainstream culture, we must remain critical to its effects on trans lives, and especially

trans people of color. Perhaps most importantly, trans studies scholars should engage more heavily with literature written by trans people of color, as their experiences are most important in understanding how visible transness affects their experiences with verbal harassment. For example, Black trans activists such as Miss Major Griffin-Gracy have been organizing and writing on the experiences of Black trans women and theorizing for effective social change since before the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (Gossett, Stanley, & Burton 2017). In addition, literature written by trans individuals suggests that the rise in trans visibility is directly correlated with the rise in policing and violence against trans people (Nothing 2013; Gossett, Stanley, & Burton 2017). Incorporating and highlighting lived experiences of trans individuals is the only way we can know the true effects of transgender victimization.

Because visible transness relates to an increased chance of experiencing different instances of victimization for this sample, I argue that this intense and constant victimization can lead to harmful life and health outcomes, which is consistent with previous literature (Knutson et al. 2021; Miller & Grollman 2015; Pfeffer 2014; Rood et al. 2016; Singh 2013; Stryker 2008). We know continuous instances of victimization lead to poor physical health, mental health, and life outcomes for trans individuals, especially trans folks of color (Meyer 1995; Rood et al. 2016; Serpas & Garcia 2021; Cochran & Mays 2000). While the intersections of race, gender, and socioeconomic status make up a lot of current research on victimization, visible transness should be assessed as a kind of stigma visibility that can also add to the level of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and/or sexual assault trans individuals may face.

Meaningful reforms should be included in policy, education, and healthcare. In terms of policy, hundreds of anti-trans bills are currently circulating in 47 states working to prevent trans and non-binary Americans from accessing basic human rights (*translegislation* 2023). Under the

guise of "saving children from sexual predators" these policies incite trans panics and literally kill trans and non-binary individuals. For example, multiple states (including Oklahoma) are introducing bills that ban gender-affirming care into adulthood (*freedomforallamericans* 2023; "2023 anti-trans"). Even more common are the rising "drag bans" which are leaving trans and non-binary drag artists jobless, homeless, and at higher risk of experiencing victimization (Davis & Kettrey 2022). Trans individuals and especially trans folks of color who are visibly trans are already at high risk of experiencing high rates of verbal harassment, physical abuse, and sexual assault—per data from 2015. With record-breaking anti-trans legislation being introduced across the country in 2023, trans and non-binary lives are in serious danger. Further, in order for meaningful reform to take place in educational and healthcare settings, our lawmakers must first enforce protections for trans and non-binary lives. With the overwhelming amount of trans folks of color (and especially Black trans women) being targeted and killed daily—in many cases by police violence—trans people's survival in this environment is severely threatened. Through this policy-imposed and modern-day form of genocide, meaningful structural reversal of these harmful bills' effects is urgently needed.

Education-based changes are also needed for trans and non-binary people's safety. Gender as a whole should be rethought and retaught in a way that aligns with years of scientifically-based research (Vidal-Ortiz 2009; West & Zimmerman 2009; Westbrook 2016). As education on gender in primary schooling improves, the political sphere that gender currently revolves in could gradually decrease while also equipping individuals with tools to express and discuss gender. Educational reform is also needed in higher education, office settings, policing, and healthcare, just to name a few. For example, educational trainings on vulnerable populations should be enforced in law enforcement agencies to better understand the specific risks trans and

non-binary people face. The influx of Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 from increasing police violence on Black individuals shows the systemic anti-Blackness that exists in American law enforcement (McTighe & Haywood 2017; Spade 2013; Stotzer 2014). This includes Black and Brown trans and gender non-conforming individuals who experience alarmingly high rates of police violence and murder (Carpenter & Marshall 2017; Foristiere 2020; McTighe & Haywood 2017; Nothing 2013). While laws are desperately needed to ensure this does not happen, educational resources for law enforcement officers can influence individual agency when making life or death decisions. Police departments and officers should be acutely aware of the populations they serve, and funding a nation-wide law enforcement social education system is one way to save money, improve resources, and better serve human lives.

Policy and educational reforms should also impact healthcare reforms. Mental health resources should be more accessible to trans and non-binary individuals—especially those with inadequate health insurance. Further, healthcare education should include extensive information on trans health issues, as well as all of the areas where these issues can form physically and mentally. In a field that should be free of political influence, sexism and transphobia remain systemically entrenched in American healthcare which is a major necessity for all individuals but especially for our most vulnerable populations (Bradford et al. 2013; Geronimus 1992; Geronimus et al. 2006; Griffin et al. 2019). Until serious healthcare reforms are made, along with policy and education reforms, trans and non-binary individuals will continue to be forced into unstable conditions.

*Limitations and Future Research*

This study dealt with a few limitations, including issues with data and variables. First, the current study uses data with a mostly white sample (82% white), which does not allow us to

understand the multidimensionality of race in these relationships. This is problematic because current population estimates suggest there is a great deal of racial diversity among transgender people (Meyer et al. 2015). In addition, new findings by Maghbouleh, Schachter, and Flores (2022) suggest Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) individuals experience different levels of victimization than white individuals, suggesting a deeper investigation to how race is typically coded in quantitative studies. Future research should prioritize racial diversity when collecting data on transgender and gender non-conforming issues, as the intersection of race complicates and adds layers to the experiences of trans and non-binary people. In addition, the nature of snowball sampling could be a source for the limited data on race, so re-thinking how we collect data for groups who encompass multiple marginalized identities should be considered (Compton, Meadow, & Schilt 2018).

Second, the trans visibility measures were limited. From my analyses, I mentioned that both visibly trans and non-visibly trans non-binary individuals reported high levels of verbal harassment. This could be due to the wording of the question ("people can tell I am trans even if I don't tell them") which might be unclear for non-binary individuals, and therefore, might not be the best variable to capture perceived gender nonconformity. Researchers should rethink trans visibility questions in surveys to better capture perceived gender nonconformity.

Third, due to the nature of the questions, the timeline for respondents' surgical and physical transitions could not be determined. Because this could be a major determining factor in visibility, these data are limited. Future research should also investigate the effects of specific types of surgical transitions, their cumulative effects for trans people, and the different stages of gender transition as factors of visibility in order to better understand trans visibility and its relationship with increasing types of victimization (such as physical abuse and sexual assault).

In sum, we know that visibly trans—or perceived gender nonconforming—people experience higher rates of verbal victimization, physical abuse, and sexual assault, but how do we combat these inequalities? Future research should aim to highlight and celebrate gender diversity and fluidity in a light that does not suggest or praise binary markers of gender. In addition, future research should examine the specific effects of how other intersecting identities affect one's visible transness. For example, does having a marginalized race put an individual at risk for heightened visibility on its own, and does this increase one's risk as being recognized as visibly trans as well? Future research should work to unpack these complicated questions.

*Concluding Remarks*

In a time of increased anti-trans legislation, nation-wide protections for trans and non-binary individuals are needed. However, it is important that our westernized binary rigidity not define what "kinds" of trans people deserve rights. We have seen in past attempts to protect trans populations through legislation that the most vulnerable and "uncategorizable" trans individuals still lack protection, and in some cases, are pushed further into the margins due to accompanying gender panics (Westbrook & Schilt 2014). In other words, suggesting that more protection and rights will be granted to those who abide by binary gender norms will continue to harm and marginalize trans folks, but especially trans folks of color. As trans studies scholars wait for the data and report of the 2022 US Transgender Survey, I wonder how my own findings and results might change with this updated data. In our current environment where trans and non-binary individuals are targeted through policy and practice, finding ways to promote and celebrate gender ambiguity and fluidity will ideally help foster awareness and accessibility for trans and non-binary bodies.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

| | | | | **Trans Men** | **Trans Women** | **Non-Binary** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | SD | N | Mean | Mean | Mean |
| **Dependent Variables** | | | | | | |
| *Verbally Harassed in Past Year* | | | | | | |
| No | 44% | 0.50 | 11,659 | 48% | 48% | 37% |
| Yes | 56% | 0.50 | 14,729 | 52% | 52% | 63% |
| *Physically Attacked in Past Year* | | | | | | |
| No | 87% | 0.34 | 23,992 | 87% | 88% | 86% |
| Yes | 13% | 0.34 | 3,668 | 13% | 12% | 14% |
| *Sexually Assaulted in Past Year* | | | | | | |
| No | 79% | 0.41 | 10,018 | 85% | 73% | 78% |
| Yes | 21% | 0.41 | 2,679 | 15% | 27% | 22% |
| **Key Independent Variables** | | | | | | |
| *Trans Visibility* | | | | | | |
| Not Visibly Trans | 56% | 0.50 | 14,664 | 59% | 46% | 62% |
| Visibly Trans | 44% | 0.50 | 11,724 | 41% | 54% | 38% |
| *Gender* | | | | | | |
| Trans Men | 30% | 0.46 | 7,870 | | | |
| Trans Women | 33% | 0.47 | 8,704 | | | |
| Non-Binary | 37% | 0.48 | 9,814 | | | |
| *Race* | | | | | | |
| White | 82% | 0.38 | 21,711 | 80% | 85% | 81% |
| Non-White | 18% | 0.38 | 4,677 | 20% | 15% | 19% |
| *Surgical Transition* | | | | | | |
| No Surgical Transitions | 68% | 0.47 | 17,860 | 62% | 48% | 90% |
| At Least One Surgical Transition | 32% | 0.47 | 8,528 | 38% | 52% | 10% |
| **Controls** | | | | | | |
| *Physical Transition (Non-Surgical)* | | | | | | |
| No Physical Transitions | 34% | 0.48 | 9,083 | 21% | 14% | 64% |
| At Least One Physical Transition | 66% | 0.48 | 17,305 | 79% | 86% | 36% |
| *Age* | | | | | | |
| 18 to 24 | 43% | 0.50 | 11,432 | 47% | 24% | 58% |
| 25 to 44 | 40% | 0.49 | 10,557 | 43% | 45% | 33% |
| 45 to 64 | 14% | 0.35 | 3,713 | 9% | 26% | 7% |
| 65+ | 3% | 0.16 | 686 | 1% | 5% | 2% |
| *Region of Residence* | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 21% | 0.40 | 5,437 | 22% | 18% | 22% |
| Midwest | 21% | 0.41 | 5,505 | 21% | 21% | 21% |
| South | 27% | 0.45 | 7,222 | 27% | 29% | 26% |
| West | 31% | 0.46 | 8,165 | 30% | 32% | 31% |
| ***N*** | | | 26,388 | 7,870 | 8,704 | 9,814 |

Source: 2015 US Transgender Survey

Table 2. Logistic Regressions on Verbal Harassment in Past Year by Gender, Race, Transition Status

| | **Model 1** | | **Model 2** | | **Model 3** | | **Model 4** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) |
| **Main Effects** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans* | 0.708*** | (.027) | 0.683*** | (.048) | 0.684*** | (.030) | 0.649*** | (.033) |
| *Gender* | | | | | | | | |
| Trans Women | 0.266*** | (.034) | 0.190*** | (.045) | 0.267*** | (.034) | 0.250*** | (.035) |
| Non-Binary | 0.460*** | (.035) | 0.488*** | (.044) | 0.460*** | (.035) | 0.443*** | (.035) |
| *Race* | | | | | | | | |
| Non-white | 0.066 | (.034) | 0.067* | (.034) | 0.014 | (.044) | 0.067 | (.034) |
| *No Surgical transition* | 0.150*** | (.034) | -0.152*** | (.034) | -0.149*** | (.034) | -0.233*** | (.043) |
| **Interactions** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women* | | | 0.151* | (.067) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary* | | | -0.078 | (.067) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-White* | | | | | 0.136 | (.070) | | |
| *Visibly Trans x No Surgical Transition* | | | | | | | 0.179** | (.058) |
| **Controls** | | | | | | | | |
| *No Physical Transition (Non-Surgical)* | -0.050 | (.035) | 0.055 | (.035) | 0.051 | (.035) | 0.057 | (.035) |
| *Age* | 0.006 | (.006) | 0.006 | (.006) | 0.005 | (.006) | 0.006 | (.006) |
| *Age Squared* | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) |
| *Region of Residence* | | | | | | | | |
| Midwest | -0.014 | (.040) | -0.015 | (.040) | -0.015 | (.040) | -0.015 | (.040) |
| South | -0.114** | (.038) | -0.114** | (.038) | -0.114** | (.038) | -0.114** | (.038) |
| West | 0.061 | (.037) | 0.061 | (.037) | 0.061 | (.037) | 0.061 | (.037) |
| ***N*** | 26,388 | | 26,388 | | 26,388 | | 26,388 | |
| *AIC* | 33,859.206 | | 33,850.066 | | 33,857.449 | | 33,851.487 | |
| *BIC* | 33,965.555 | | 33,972.776 | | 33,971.979 | | 33,966.016 | |

**Reference Categories: Not Visibly Trans, Trans Men, White, Surgical Transition, Physical Transition, Northeast**
Source: 2015 USTS
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3. Logistic Regressions on Physical Abuse in Past Year by Gender, Race, Surgical Transition

| | **Model 5** | | **Model 6** | | **Model 7** | | **Model 8** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) |
| **Main Effects** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans* | 0.485*** | (.038) | 0.472*** | (.070) | 0.446*** | (.042) | 0.513*** | (.075) |
| *Gender* | | | | | | | | |
| Trans Women | 0.233*** | (.050) | 0.158* | (.074) | 0.234*** | (.050) | 0.230*** | (.050) |
| Non-Binary | 0.087 | (.048) | 0.114 | (.068) | 0.087 | (.048) | 0.084 | (.049) |
| *Race* | | | | | | | | |
| Non-white | 0.249*** | (.046) | 0.250*** | (.046) | 0.159* | (.065) | 0.249*** | (.046) |
| *No Surgical transition* | 0.108* | (.051) | 0.109* | (.051) | 0.107* | (.051) | 0.129 | (.070) |
| **Interactions** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women* | | | 0.122 | (.098) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary* | | | -0.060 | (.092) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-White* | | | | | 0.179* | (.090) | | |
| *Visibly Trans x No Surgical Transition* | | | | | | | -0.038 | (.087) |
| **Controls** | | | | | | | | |
| *No Physical Transition (Non-Surgical)* | 0.094* | (.047) | -0.091 | (.047) | -0.093* | (.047) | -0.093* | (.047) |
| *Age* | -0.039*** | (.010) | -0.038*** | (.010) | -0.039*** | (.010) | -0.038*** | (.010) |
| *Age Squared* | 0.000 | (.000) | 0.000 | (.000) | 0.000 | (.000) | 0.000 | (.000) |
| *Region of Residence* | | | | | | | | |
| Midwest | 0.032 | (.057) | 0.032 | (.057) | 0.032 | (.057) | 0.032 | (.057) |
| South | -0.018 | (.054) | -0.018 | (.054) | -0.018 | (.054) | -0.018 | (.054) |
| West | 0.078 | (.053) | 0.078 | (.053) | 0.078 | (.053) | 0.078 | (.053) |
| ***N*** | 26,405 | | 26,405 | | 26,405 | | 26,405 | |
| *AIC* | 20,005.091 | | 20,004.940 | | 20,003.159 | | 20,006.893 | |
| *BIC* | 20,111.448 | | 20,127.660 | | 20,117.697 | | 20,121.432 | |

**Reference Categories: Not Visibly Trans, Trans Men, White, Surgical Transition, Physical Transition, Northeast**
Source: 2015 USTS
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Logistic Regressions on Sexual Assault in Past Year by Gender, Race, Surgical Transition

| | Model 9 | | Model 10 | | Model 11 | | Model 12 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) |
| **Main Effects** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans* | 0.211*** | (.047) | 0.284** | (.091) | 0.163** | (.053) | 0.202* | (.092) |
| *Gender* | | | | | | | | |
| Trans Women | 1.053*** | (.065) | 1.027*** | (.094) | 1.055*** | (.065) | 1.054*** | (.065) |
| Non-Binary | 0.330*** | (.060) | 0.419*** | (.084) | 0.330*** | (.060) | 0.331*** | (.061) |
| *Race* | | | | | | | | |
| Non-white | 0.198*** | (.056) | 0.201*** | (.056) | 0.090 | (.078) | 0.198*** | (.056) |
| *No Surgical transition* | 0.020 | (.034) | 0.013 | (.064) | 0.019 | (.064) | 0.014 | (.085) |
| **Interactions** | | | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women* | | | 0.028 | (.125) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary* | | | -0.186 | (.116) | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-White* | | | | | 0.224* | (.112) | | |
| *Visibly Trans x No Surgical Transition* | | | | | | | 0.012 | (.107) |
| **Controls** | | | | | | | | |
| *No Physical Transition (Non-Surgical)* | -0.056 | (.058) | 0.064 | (.058) | 0.058 | (.058) | 0.055 | (.058) |
| *Age* | -0.157*** | (.012) | -0.156*** | (.012) | -0.157*** | (.012) | -0.157*** | (.012) |
| *Age Squared* | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.000) |
| *Region of Residence* | | | | | | | | |
| Midwest | -0.012 | (.071) | -0.012 | (.071) | -0.012 | (.071) | -0.012 | (.071) |
| South | -0.100 | (.068) | -0.100 | (.068) | -0.100 | (.068) | -0.100 | (.068) |
| West | 0.017 | (.065) | 0.017 | (.065) | 0.017 | (.065) | 0.017 | (.065) |
| ***N*** | 12,165 | | 12,165 | | 12,165 | | 12,165 | |
| *AIC* | 11,791.438 | | 11,790.879 | | 11,789.449 | | 11,793.425 | |
| *BIC* | 11,887.720 | | 11,901.974 | | 11,893.138 | | 11,897.113 | |

**Reference Categories: Not Visibly Trans, Trans Men, White, Surgical Transition, Physical Transition, Northeast**

Source: 2015 USTS

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.0$

Table 5. Triple Interactions on Verbal Harassment, Physical Abuse, and Sexual Abuse

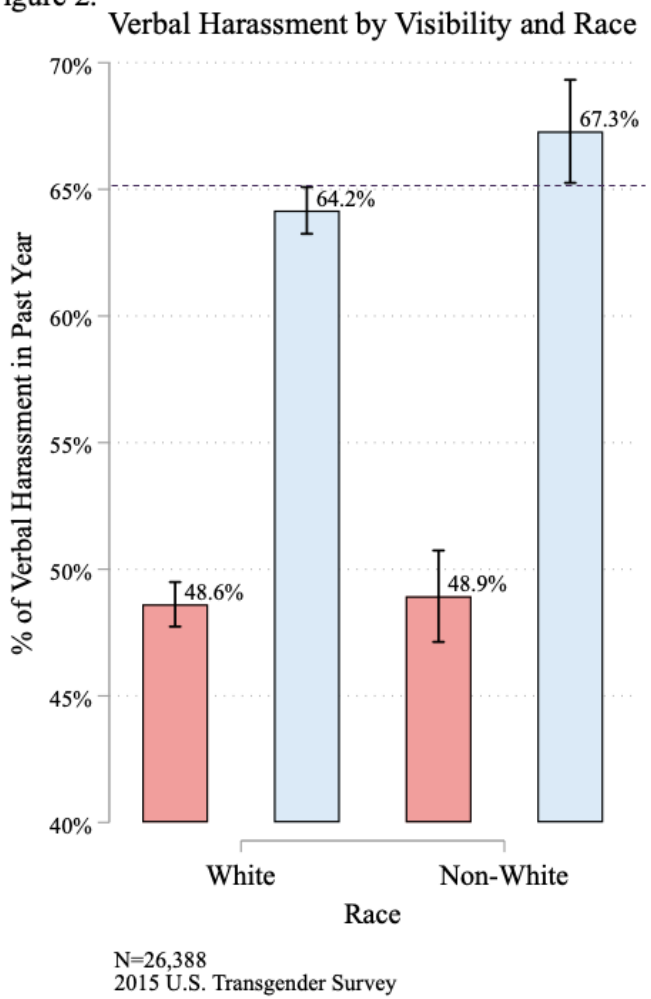
| | **Model 11 Verbal Harassment** | | **Model 12 Physical Abuse** | | **Model 13 Sexual Assault** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | β | (SE) | β | (SE) | β | (SE) |
| **Main Effects** | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans* | 0.919*** | (.091) | 0.661*** | (.137) | 0.512*** | (.089) |
| *Gender* | | | | | | |
| Trans Women | 0.423*** | (.065) | 0.206 | (.116) | -0.483*** | (.063) |
| Non-Binary | 0.683*** | (.109) | 0.499** | (.168) | 0.140*** | (.034) |
| *Race* | | | | | | |
| Non-White | 0.067 | (.034) | 0.250*** | (.046) | 0.180*** | (.033) |
| *No Surgical Transition* | 0.430*** | (.063) | 0.109* | (.052) | 0.069 | (.061) |
| **Binary Interactions** | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women* | 0.193** | (.073) | 0.103 | (.110) | -0.377*** | (.110) |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary* | -0.266 | (.163) | -.380 | (.235) | -0.276 | (.158) |
| *Visibly Trans x No Surgical Transition* | -0.395*** | (.108) | -0.256 | (.160) | -0.032 | (.061) |
| *Trans Women x No Surgical Transition* | -0.453*** | (.090) | -0.083 | (.150) | -0.142 | (.091) |
| *Non-Binary x No Surgical Transition* | -0.335** | (.121) | -0.456* | (.185) | 0.034 | (.118) |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-White* | 0.199 | (.131) | 0.093 | (.189) | 0.107 | (.127) |
| *Trans Women x Non-White* | 0.256* | (.116) | 0.123 | (.181) | 0.419*** | (.115) |
| *Non-Binary x Non-White* | 0.074 | (.100) | 0.076 | (.151) | 0.126 | (.098) |
| *No Surgical Transition x Non-White* | -0.009 | (.095) | -0.047 | (.151) | -0.029 | (.093) |
| **Triple Interactions** | | | | | | |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women x No Surgery* | 0.543*** | (.142) | 0.422* | (.212) | 0.415** | (.140) |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary x No Surgery* | 0.333 | (.180) | 0.386 | (.257) | 0.272 | (.140) |
| *Visibly Trans x Trans Women x Non-White* | -0.181 | (.177) | 0.150 | (.242) | -0.085 | (.171) |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-Binary x Non-White* | -0.012 | (.069) | 0.117 | (.219) | 0.085 | (.160) |
| *Visibly Trans x Non-White x No Surgery* | -0.075 | (.155) | 0.114 | (.215) | 0.001 | (.149) |
| **Controls** | | | | | | |
| *Physical Transition (Non-Surgical)* | 0.048 | (.035) | -0.116* | (.047) | 0.147*** | (.034) |
| *Age* | 0.008 | (.006) | -0.039*** | (.010) | 0.092*** | (.034) |
| *Age-Squared* | -0.001*** | (.000) | 0.000 | (.000) | -0.001*** | (.006) |
| *Region of Residence* | | | | | | |
| Midwest | -0.020 | (.040) | 0.031 | (.057) | 0.004 | (.039) |
| South | -0.119** | (.038) | -0.019 | (.054) | 0.017 | (.037) |
| West | 0.057 | (.037) | 0.076 | (.053) | 0.079* | (.036) |
| *N* | 26,388 | | 26,405 | | 26,399 | |
| *AIC* | 33,828.631 | | 20,000.003 | | 35,332.244 | |
| *BIC* | 33,992.244 | | 20,163.629 | | 35,495.865 | |

**Reference Categories: Not Visibly Trans, Trans Men, White, Surgical Transition, Physical Transition, Northeast**
Source: 2015 USTS
Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of Visibility by Surgical Transition Status



Figure 2.


Verbal Harassment by Visibility and Race
70%
65%
60%
55%
50%
45%
40%
% of Verbal Harassment in Past Year
48.6%
64.2%
48.9%
67.3%
White
Non-White
Race
N=26,388
2015 U.S. Transgender Survey

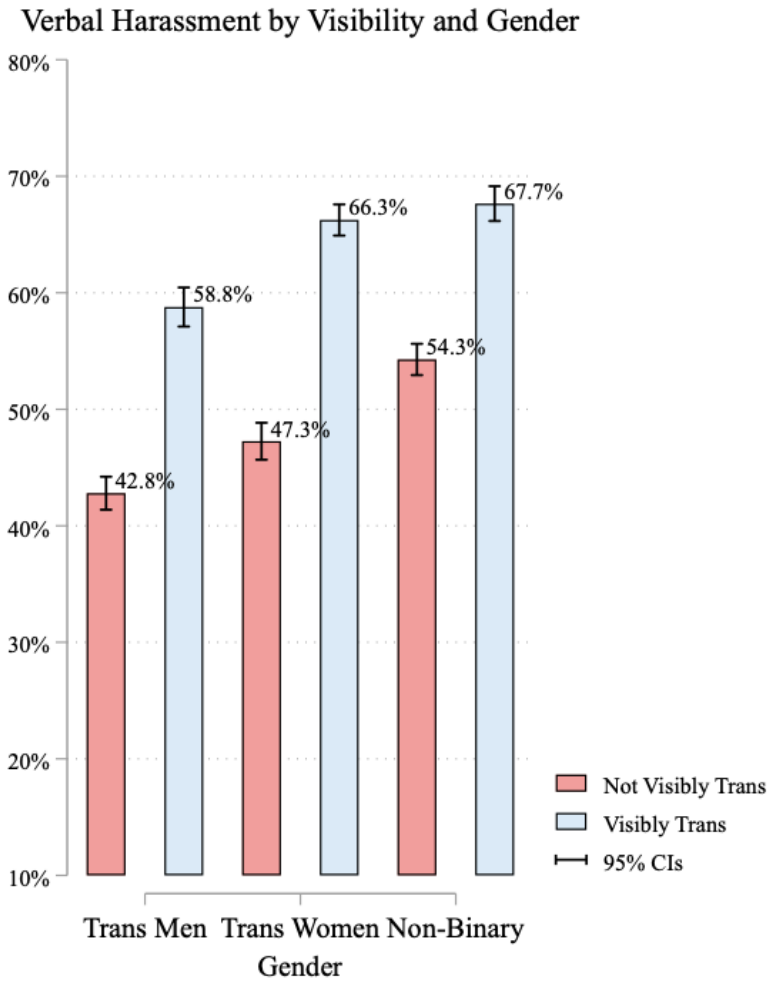

Verbal Harassment by Visibility and Gender
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
42.8%
58.8%
47.3%
66.3%
54.3%
67.7%
Trans Men
Trans Women
Non-Binary
Gender
Not Visibly Trans
Visibly Trans
95% CIs

Figure 3.

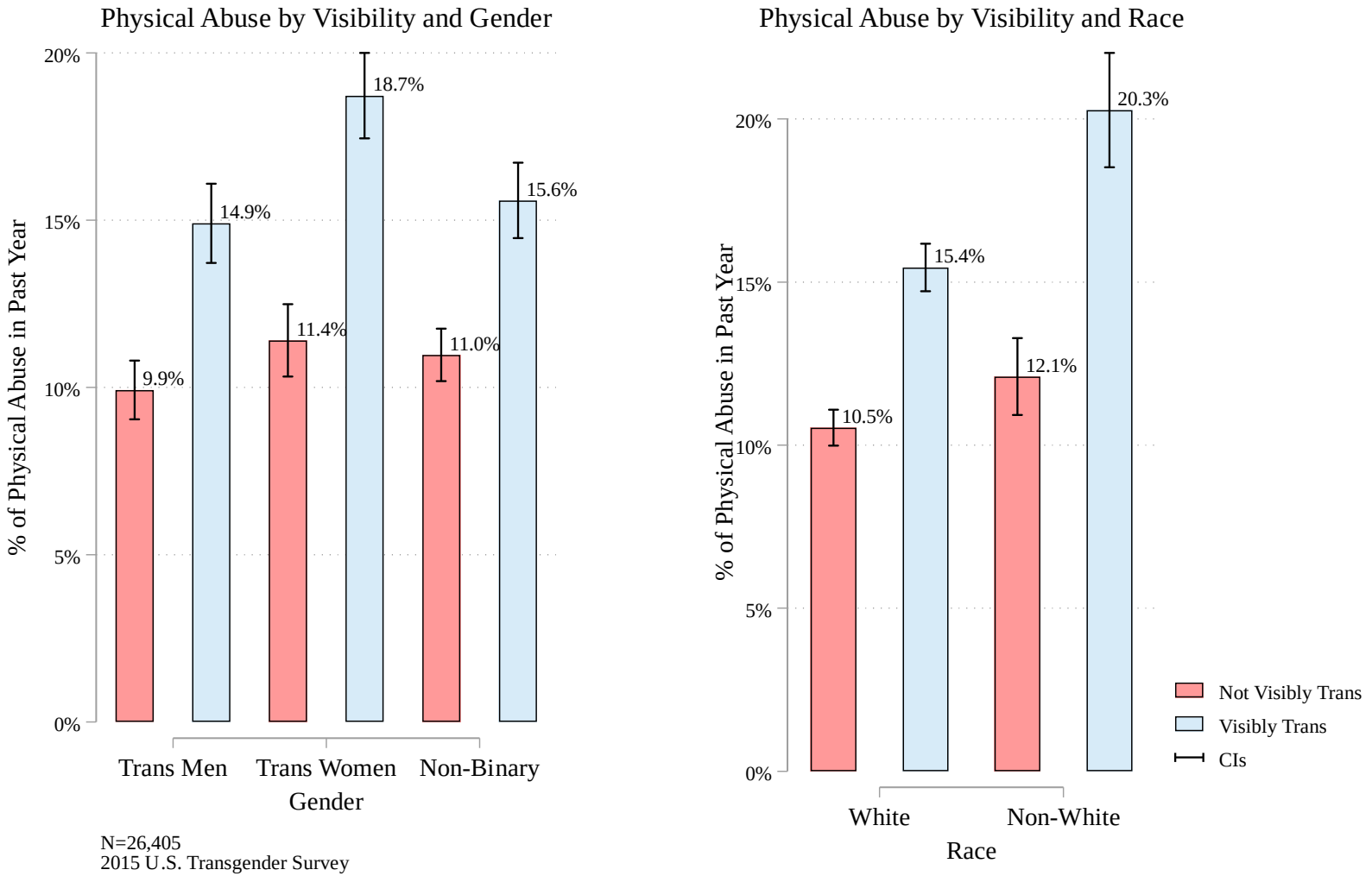
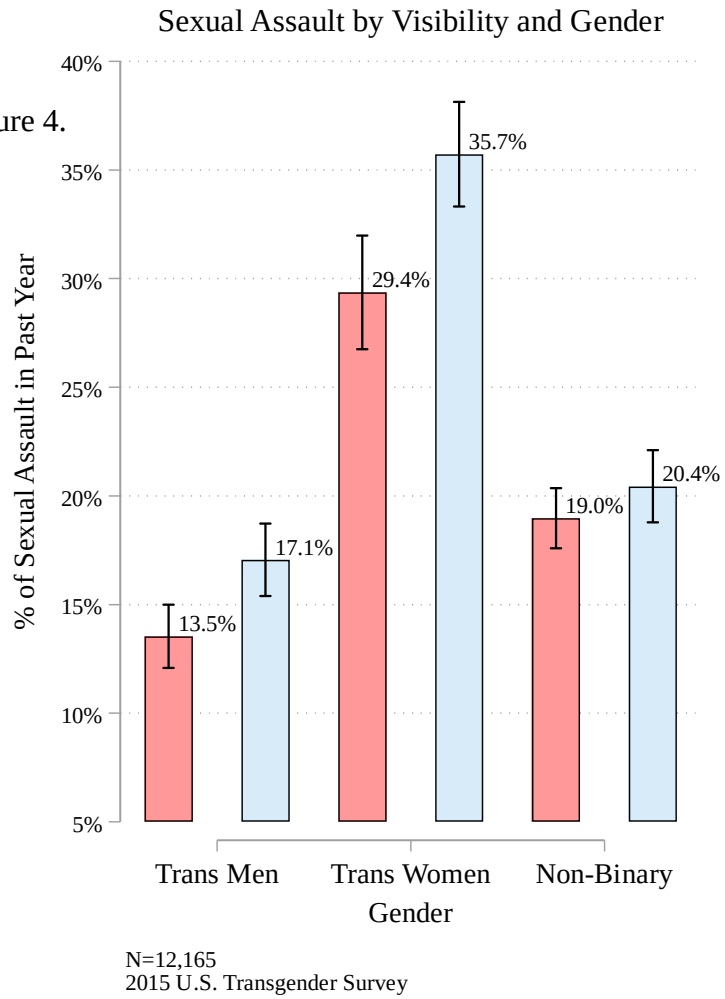

Physical Abuse by Visibility and Gender
% of Physical Abuse in Past Year
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
9.9%
14.9%
11.4%
18.7%
11.0%
15.6%
Trans Men
Trans Women
Non-Binary
Gender
N=26,405
2015 U.S. Transgender Survey
Physical Abuse by Visibility and Race
% of Physical Abuse in Past Year
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
10.5%
15.4%
12.1%
20.3%
White
Non-White
Race
Not Visibly Trans
Visibly Trans
CIs

Figure 4.


Sexual Assault by Visibility and Gender
% of Sexual Assault in Past Year
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
13.5%
17.1%
29.4%
35.7%
19.0%
20.4%
Trans Men
Trans Women
Non-Binary
Gender
N=12,165
2015 U.S. Transgender Survey

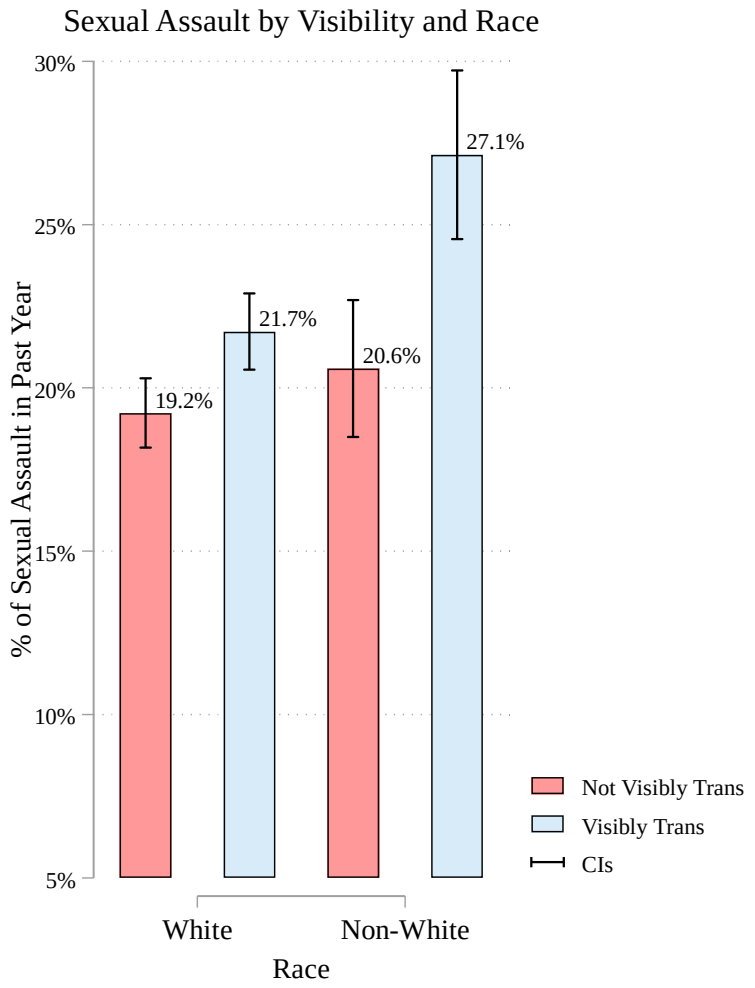

Sexual Assault by Visibility and Race
% of Sexual Assault in Past Year
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
19.2%
21.7%
20.6%
27.1%
White
Non-White
Race
Not Visibly Trans
Visibly Trans
CIs

Figure 5. Predicted Probabilities of Verbal Harassment in Past Year by Visibility, Gender, and Surgical Transition Status (A) & Probability Differences (B)

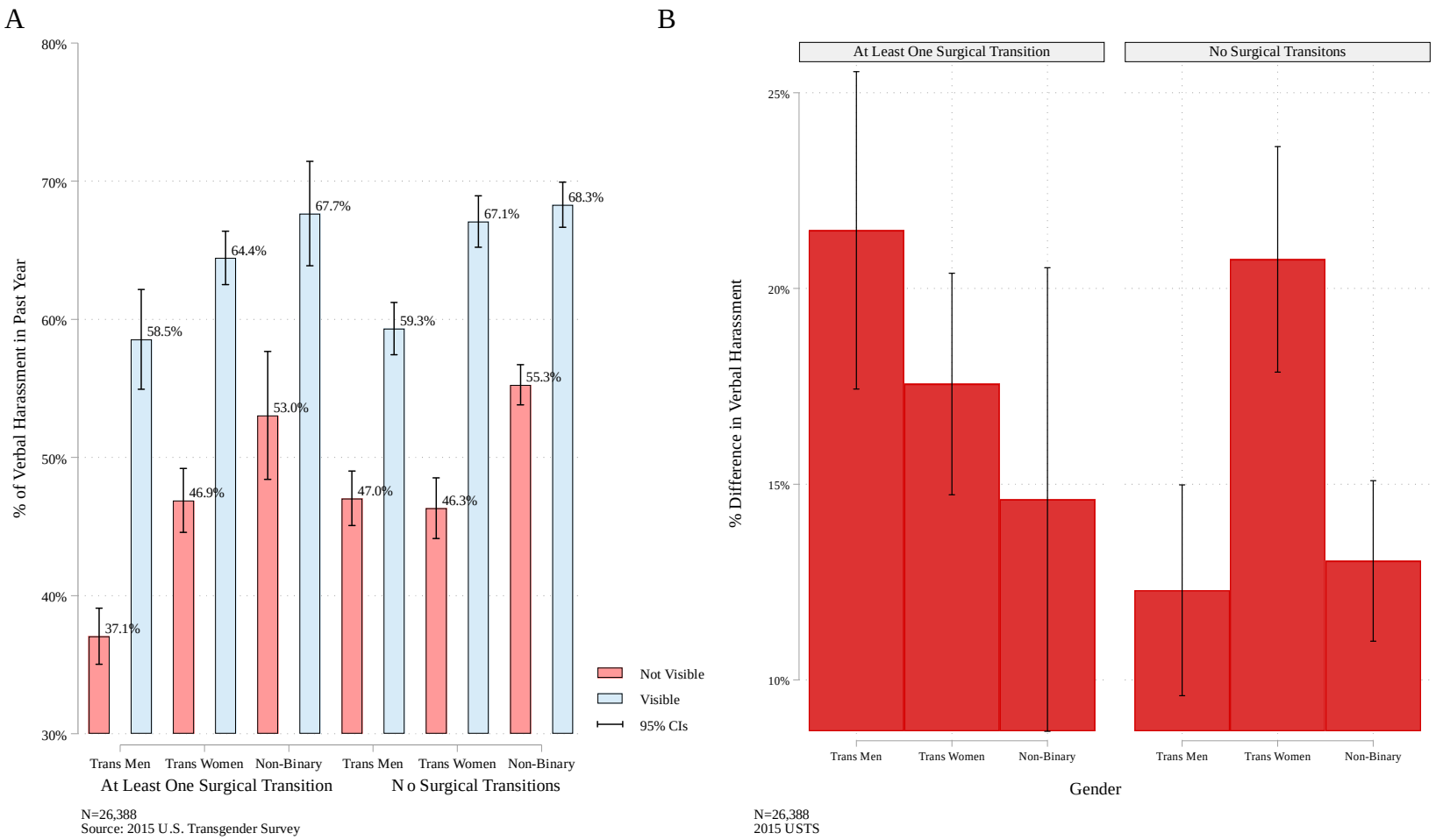
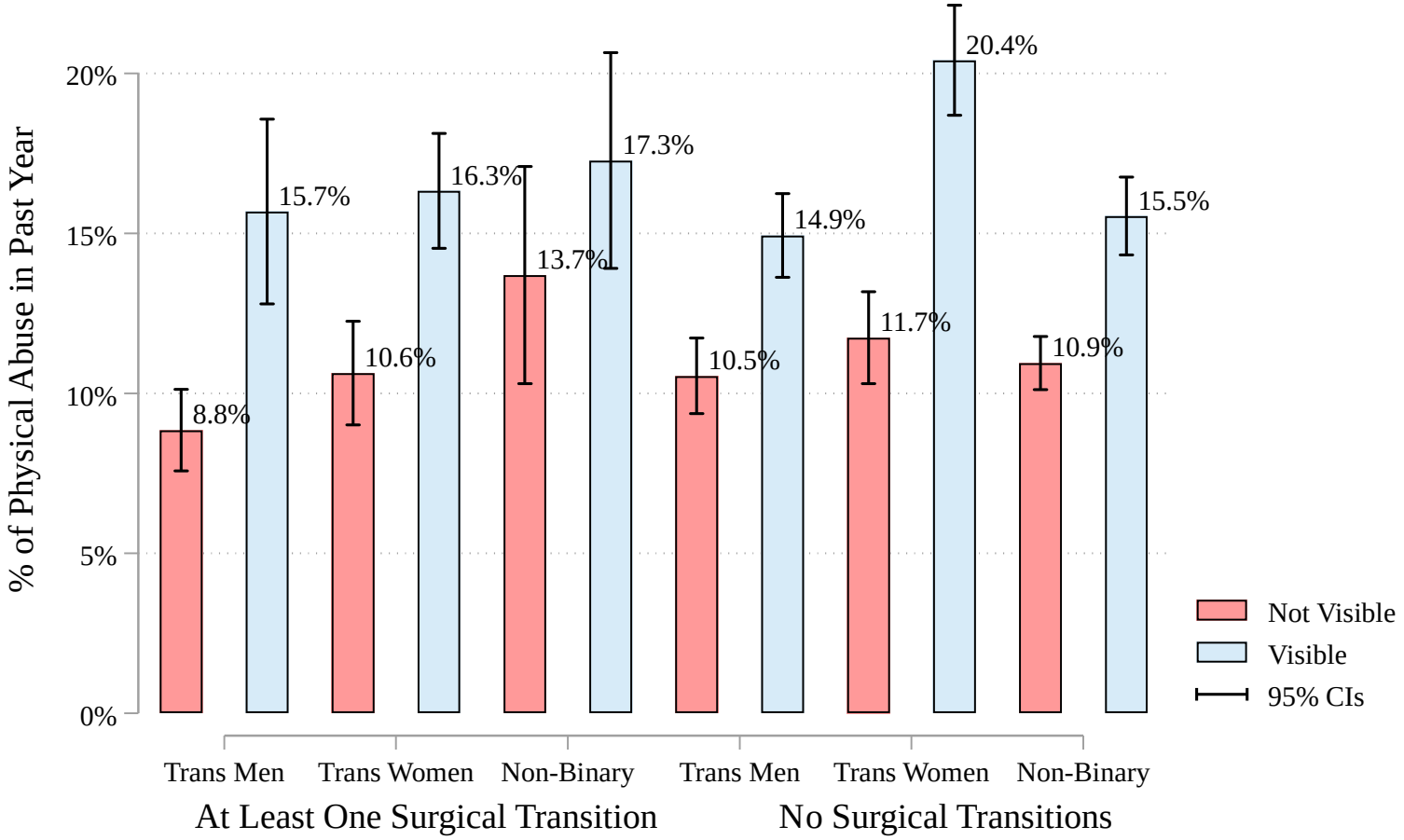
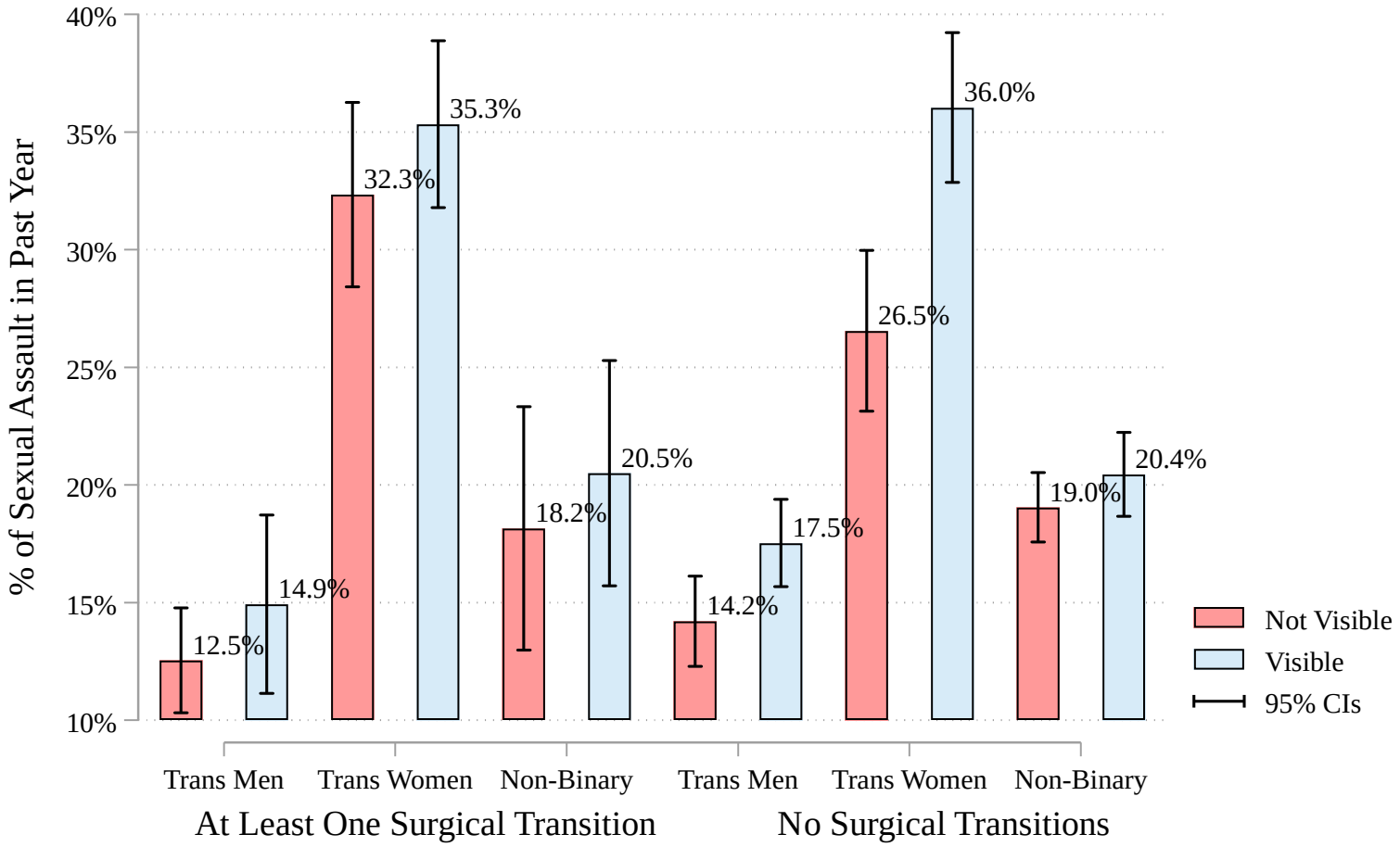


Figure 6. Predicted Probabilities of Physical Abuse in Past Year by Visibility, Gender, and Surgical Transition Status




N=26,388
Source: 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey

Figure 7. Predicted Probabilities of Sexual Assault in Past Year by Visibility, Gender, and Surgical Transition Status




N=26,388
Source: 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey