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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: As COVID-19 has let many students into remote learning environments and exacerbated inequality among marginalized individuals, there is a growing concern about Bias-Based Bullying (BBB) in online spaces among school-aged youths. Learning modality and perceived school fairness may affect youth's likelihood of reporting BBB.

METHODS: Data were collected as part of ''No Place For Hate'' (NPFH) project, which was conducted by an equity office of a school district. A sample of middle and high school students (N = 1117) in the school district was used as an analytic sample. We conducted a series of independent samples *t* tests and calculated a hierarchical stepwise multivariate regression model to examine the proposition.

RESULTS: Results demonstrated that students in fully remote modality reported slightly higher levels of witnessing BBB ($t = 2.29$, $p < .05$), lower perceived school fairness ($t = -2.94$, $p < .01$), and higher levels of likelihood of reporting BBB ($t = 2.31$, $p < .05$). Results of the regression model showed that perceived school fairness was positively associated with likelihood of reporting BBB, even when considering the influences of sociodemographic characteristics, learning modality, and experience of witnessing BBB.

CONCLUSIONS: Findings of this study suggest that learning modality and perceived school fairness can meaningfully explain witnesses' likelihood of reporting BBB. Additional research should continue investigating how schools can encourage students to increase their likelihood of reporting and adopt the bystander response of reporting against BBB at school to ensure school health and safety.

Keywords: bias-based bullying; reporting behavior; school fairness; COVID-19; remote learning; adolescents.

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Bias-based bullying (BBB) is defined as physical, verbal, or relational aggression in which an individual is targeted based on perceived member- ship to a historically marginalized group, including race/ethnicity, sexual or gender identity, or immigrant status. A number of national studies provide evidence that bias-based incidents are especially prevalent across primary and secondary school contexts. Jones and colleagues[1] found that 17% of surveyed youth, 10- 20 years old, experienced at least 1 bias-based incident in the past year; youth reported being bullied based on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion, among other characteristics. In a similar study, over 1-in-5 youth reported being targeted because of their perceived race, sexual orientation, disability, or gender over the past year.[2]

While any form of bullying has negative impacts on youth, individuals who are victimized by bias- based incidents are at greater risk of adverse effects.[3] Several negative psychosocial, behavioral, and academic outcomes have been linked to frequency of BBB.[4] Psychosocial outcomes of BBB include increased feelings of sadness, decreased self-esteem, loss of friends, and limited sense of school belonging and safety.[1,3-5] Studies also found that bias-based targeting was associated with higher rates of suicidality, particularly among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ),[6] and black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) populations. Behavioral outcomes that present as a result of BBB commonly include school avoidance, increased severity of substance use, limited engagement in scholastic activities, and greater engagement in high-risk behaviors, such as drunk driving and suicide attempt.[1,3,7]

It is widely agreed that bullying has a negative impact on bystanders as well.[8-10] Similar to generalized bullying, bystander responses to BBB include passive avoidance, victim support, or joining the bullying.[11] Little research has examined factors related to bystander responses in BBB contexts. Adolescents' level of fear, individual characteristics, relationships, and personal experience were related to the behavioral motivation of bystanders during BBB.[11] Considering that BBB is related to bias, privilege, and discrimination, the developmental intergroup approach (ie, children's developing understanding of social identities and related intergroup processes) was employed to understand bystander responses.[12] Intergroup membership and identification[13,14] and actual or perceived group norms on endorsing discrimination[12,15] were associated with different bystander responses.

While discrimination is often unchallenged among adolescents because bystanders do not recognize the need for intervention and do not know how to intervene,[16] many bullying prevention and intervention programs at the school, district, and state levels encourage students to report bullying.[17] When bullying incidents are reported, administrators address them in collaboration with school

counselors,[18] and, in some cases, report these incidents to law enforcement officers.[19] Whereas a number of studies examined reporting behaviors in bullying in general, there was limited attention on reporting BBB. Williams et al[11] reported that high school students rarely involve adults such as teachers or parents during BBB situations. However, students in 1 study who observed school personnel correcting BBB and who heard fewer discriminatory comments made by teachers were more likely to report BBB.[20]

Perception of school fairness represents the evaluation of distributive and procedural justice among identified factors within academic learning environ- ments.[21] School fairness is commonly assessed as an indicator of school climate and has been linked to a number of positive academic and psychosocial student outcomes including behavioral (ie, academic attentiveness and prosocial action), emotional (ie, valuing of education and school connectedness), and cognitive (ie, desire to perform well and apply learning) engagement.[22-26] Moreover, scholars maintain that perceptions of school fairness may be a protective fac- tor, buffering youth from the negative effects of peer bullying and bias-based victimization.[7] Conversely, research findings demonstrate a positive link between perception of school unfairness and peer bullying behaviors.[27]

Assessing perceptions of fairness across race and other social identity markers has allowed scholars to garner a more comprehensive understanding of how latent factors disproportionally affect BIPOC youth. Indeed, BIPOC youth are more likely to rate schools as unfair,[28,29] and may experience more adverse outcomes as a result of unfair perceptions.[25,30] Taken together, these studies suggest that perceptions of fairness hold complex yet meaningful academic and psychological implications for diverse youth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the context for bullying and aggressive interaction among students in schools.[31] Many schools across the nation were forced to close and shift to remote learning across the U.S. in March 2020, and there was a sudden decrease in in-person interaction and a dramatic surge in the use of digital technology.[32,33] As COVID-19 has led many students into remote learning environments, there is growing concern about potentially increasing incidents of bullying and harassment in online spaces.[34] In particular, students who identify as a member of marginalized social groups may experience more exposure to discrimination or inequality during COVID-19. Indeed, a growing body of research documents that marginalized individuals report increased discrimination and harassment when they have a history of mental health concerns,[35] are racial minorities,[36,37] sexual minorities,[38] and are at low socioeconomic status.[39,40] As Chen and colleagues noted,[39] national disasters or crises, such as COVID-19, have often become racialized and scapegoated minority groups to be targeted and blamed. In sum, findings from the literature reveal that students in schools may experience and witness more inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic due to changes in learning environments as well as marginalized social identities.

Present Study

Few studies have investigated how BBB and school fairness are perceived in school settings. Particularly, there is no existing study that compared different learning modalities, which are in-person versus remote learning, to examine students' perception of fairness at school, experience of witnessing BBB, and likelihood of reporting the incidents during COVID-19. We explore how students from in-person and full remote modalities perceive bias and fairness in their schools, centering on witnessing BBB, perceptions of fairness, and likelihood of reporting when exposed to BBB. The overarching goal of the present study was to identify associations among learning modality, witnessing BBB, perception of school fairness, and likelihood of reporting BBB, with consideration of sociodemographic characteristics.

We developed 2 specific research questions. The first research question was to identify group differences between in-person and fully remote students in witnessing BBB, perceived school fairness, and likelihood of reporting BBB. The second research question was to examine the association between likelihood of reporting BBB and sociodemographic characteristics, learning modality, witnessing BBB, and perceived school fairness.

METHODS

Participants

The present study is a part of the ''No Place For Hate'' (NPFH) project, which was conducted by an equity office of a school district. Study participants were initially 1328 middle and high school students in the school district. We excluded 211 participants who reported attending a virtual classroom (n = 36) or did not respond to the learning modality item (n = 175) from the initial sample, which resulted in 1117 cases for the final analytic sample. For gender, 58.91% (n = 658) identified *Female*, 36.08% (n = 403) identified *Male*, 1.79% (n = 20) identified *Non-binary*, 1.79% (n = 20) reported *Prefer not to say*, and rest of the participants were *Others*. Participants were mainly *White* (87.29%, n 975), followed by *Asian/Asian American* (10.92%, n = 122), *Black/African American* (1.52%, n = 17), and *Multiracial/Others* (0.27%, n = 3). Of the 1117 participants, 5.37% (n = 60) reported that they identified as a student with a disability and 3.76% (n = 42) reported *Prefer not to say*, while a majority of participants (90.15%, n = 1007) responded *No* to the disability question.

Measures

Individual-level variables.

Participants were asked to answer a few sociodemographic questions, including grade, gender, race/ethnicity, and disability status, to identify individual characteristics. Gender was a categorical question of *Male*, *Female*, *Non-binary*, and *Prefer not to say*. The grade item included 7 response options ranging from 7th to 12th grade. Race/ethnicity included White, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino American, Asian/Asian American, and Multiracial/Others. For disability status, a single question of ''Do you identify as a student with a disability?'' was asked with a categorical response

option of *Yes*, *No*, and *Prefer not to say*.

Modality of learning.

A single item was asked to identify participants' learning modalities. The question was ''Please select your educational mode (eg, in-person, remote, virtual).'' In-person modality reflected a traditional, face-to-face modality, whereas remote constituted a learning modality whereby students utilized a video platform to interact with individuals in a live classroom in real time while remaining at home. Virtual represented an asynchronous learning modality that allowed students to complete scholastic tasks independently. Response options were *fully remote*, *in-person*, and *virtual academy*, but we included cases where participants responded either *fully remote* or *in-person* for this study.

Students and their families were given 3 learning modality options for attending school during the 2020-2021 academic school year: in-person, remote, and virtual. Parents/guardians were asked to select a learning modality for their child(ren) at the beginning of the academic year. Students then indicated their family's selected learning modality when completing the survey.

Witnessing BBB.

Five items were used to assess students' witnessing experience of BBB and harassment. Students were asked how often they witnessed students in the school being bullied or harassed based on biases about personal characteristics. Personal characteristics in the measure include ''gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation,'' ''race, ethnicity or nationality,'' ''disability status,'' and ''speaking English as a second language.'' A stem for this measure starts from ''How often do you see students....'' Examples of specific items include ''Harassing someone because of their gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation,'' ''Joking about race, ethnicity, or nationality,'' and ''Joking or making fun of someone due to their disability?'' All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and response options ranged from ''1 = Never'', ''2 = 1-2 times per month, ''3 = Once a week'', ''4 = 2-3 times per week'', and ''5 = Everyday'' (mean = 1.63; SD = 0.72). Internal consistency (ie, Cronbach's alpha) for this measure was .83.

Perceived school fairness.

Perceptions of school fairness were assessed using 12 items that were developed based on the items on the School Climate Survey — Middle School Version (Aber et al, unpublished data, 2007, cf.[41]). Students responded to items asking how equally students are treated regardless of their personal characteristics. Personal characteristics under this measure included ''gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation,'' ''race and ethnicity,'' ''disability status,'' and ''religion.'' Items for each personal characteristic comprised multidimensional perceptions: ''student's perception in general,'' ''perception about principals,'' and ''perception about teachers.'' Examples of items include ''Students of all races/ethnicities are treated equally at your school (race and ethnicity - student's perception),''

‘‘The principals treat all students fairly regardless of their disability (disability status - perception about principals),’’ and ‘‘At your school, teachers treat students fairly regardless of their religion (religion - perception about teachers).’’ The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘‘1 = Not at all true’’ to ‘‘5 = Completely true’’ (mean 4.17; SD 0.81). Internal consistency in this study was .96.

Likelihood of reporting BBB.

Four items were used to assess students’ likelihood of reporting an act of bias or hate. A stem for the measure was presented as ‘‘How likely are you to report an act of bias or hate ... ’’ and each item was suggested with different perpetrators and victims of an act of bias. Actual items included ‘‘that is personally witnessed by you,’’ ‘‘committed by a peer (student),’’ ‘‘committed by a teacher,’’ and ‘‘committed by an administrator.’’ All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and response options ranged from ‘‘1 = Highly unlikely’’ to ‘‘5 = Highly likely’’ (mean = 3.86; SD = 0.92). Internal consistency for this measure was .89 in the current study.

Procedure

Data were collected throughout the 2020-2021 academic school year during in-class lessons with English teachers. Surveys were administered via Qualtrics by teachers as students went through an asynchronous lesson on the topic of BBB. Only schools participating in the NPFH initiative were selected to participate. The NPFH initiative is a campaign project supported by the district’s Office of Equity and Inclusion, which combats prejudice and promotes justice within K-12 schools. Schools can assume the NPFH designation by (a) completing a series of all-school initiatives that promote justice through education and intervention, and (b) completing school climate surveys that assess student perceptions of the school context each academic year. The present data corpus includes the NPFH climate survey for the 2020- 2021 academic school year. Participation in the survey was optional for all students enrolled in identified schools. The response rate for all students who met the inclusion criteria was 56%. Upon completion of the full intervention, data were de-identified by school administrators before being shared with researchers.

Data Analysis

Analytic techniques were implemented in multiple steps. Above all, we divided into 2 groups according to their learning modality: ‘‘in-person’’ and ‘‘fully remote.’’ We conducted descriptive statistics and binary correlation analyses among key research variables and individual characteristics variables. To compare the 3 dimensions of variables about bias and equality (ie, witnessing BBB, perceptions of equality, and likelihood of reporting), we conducted independent samples *t* tests as a primary analytic technique. Before conducting the *t* tests, we performed tests of homogeneity to see if 2 groups are homogeneous in their group composition. Lastly, we conducted a multivariate regression analysis for likelihood of reporting BBB in a model including sociodemographic characteristics (ie,

gender, race, grade), learning modality, witnessing BBB, and perceived school fairness as independent variables. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28).[42]

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Zero-order binary correlations were conducted between each variable in the study to evaluate the research questions of group differences by learning modality and factors associated with likelihood of reporting BBB. Regarding demographic characteristics, there was a statistically significant relation between grade and witnessing BBB (r = .17, p < .001), indicating that students in higher grades reported more experiences of witnessing BBB. Grades had a negative relation to perceived school fairness (r = .17, p < .001), suggesting that students in higher grades reported lower levels of perceived school fairness compared to those in lower grades. Witnessing BBB showed a moderate negative correlation with perceived school fairness (r = .46, p < .001), suggesting that students who witnessed BBB more frequently reported lower perceived school fairness. A positive relation was found between perceived school fairness and likelihood of reporting BBB (r = .12, p < .001). There was no statistically significant relation between witnessing BBB and likelihood of reporting BBB. Descriptive statistics and results of binary correlations among the key variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Binary Correlations

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	**Grade†**	**—**					
2.	**Race‡**	**-.37*****	**—**				
3.	**Learning modality§**	**-.05**	**-.02**	**—**			
4.	**Witnessing BBB**	**.17*****	**-.15*****	**-.07***	**—**		
5.	**Perceived school fairness**	**-.26*****	**.15*****	**.09****	**-.46*****	**—**	
6.	**Willingness to report BBB**	**-.03**	**.17*****	**-.07***	**-.03**	**.12*****	**—**
Mean		**5.12**	**—**	**—**	**1.63**	**4.17**	**3.86**
SD		**1.35**	**—**	**—**	**.72**	**.81**	**.92**

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

BBB, Bias-Based Bullying.

† Grade: ranging from 1 (=6th) to 7 (=12th).

‡ Race: Race was coded as a binary variable. 1 = white (n= 975, 87.3%), 2 = non-white (n = 142, 12.7%).

§ Learning modality: 1 = fully remote (n = 465, 41.6%), 2 = in-person (n = 652, 58.4%).

Results of Independent Samples *T* Tests

For the first research question, we examined the group differences between fully remote and in-person students in their witnessing BBB, perceptions of equality, and likelihood of reporting, by conducting a series of independent sample t tests. We conducted a series of chi-square tests to assess homogeneity between 2 groups by learning modality (ie, in-person and fully remote) before examining group differences through independent samples t tests. These tests are to determine whether 2 different groups by learning modality have the same distribution of important individual characteristics, such as

race/ethnicity, gender, and disability, which might affect creating group differences. Results of chi-square tests reflected no statistically significant differences between the 2 groups by learning modality in terms of individual characteristics. Specifically, the proportions did not differ by 2 groups in terms of race/ethnicity (χ^2 = .28 p =.65), gender (χ^2 =1.95 p =.18), and disability (χ^2 =1.73 p = .63).

Results of independent samples *t* tests indicated that there were slight but statistically significant group differences between 2 learning modalities, fully remote and in-person, identified in all key variables, including witnessing BBB (t = 2.29, p < .05), perceived school fairness (t = 2.94, p < .01), and likelihood of reporting BBB (t = 2.31, p < .05). Specifically, students in fully remote reported slightly higher levels of witnessing BBB and lower levels of perceived school fairness. Students in fully remote modality also reported higher levels of likelihood to report BBB. Table 2 summarizes the results of independent samples *t* tests.

Table 2. Results of Independent Samples *t* Tests

Item	Fully remote (n = 465)	In-Person (n = 652)	*t* value
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Witnessing BBB	1.69(0.75)	1.58(0.69)	2.29*
Perceived school fairness	4.09(0.87)	4.24(0.76)	-2.94**
Likelihood of reporting BBB	3.94(0.89)	3.80(0.94)	2.31*

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

BBB, Bias-Based Bullying.

Response options for each variable ranged from ‘‘1 = Never’’ to ‘‘5 = Everyday’’ for witnessing BBB, ‘‘1 = Not at all true’’ to ‘‘5 = Completely true’’ for perceived school fairness range, and from ‘‘1 = Highly unlikely’’ to ‘‘5 = Highly likely’’ for likelihood of reporting BBB.

Results of Multivariate Regression Predicting Likelihood of Reporting

Hierarchical stepwise multivariate regression model was implemented. No multicollinearity issue was detected from the models based on indicators for collinearity, such as Durbin-Watson and Tolerance, which indicated no occurrence of high intercorrelations among 2 or more independent variables in a regression model. Results show that variables included in step 1 were associated with the dependent variable, likelihood of reporting BBB. Identifying Asian-American was positively associated with likelihood of reporting BBB. Female and non-binary in terms of gender were also positively associated with the dependent variable. In-person learning modality was negatively associated with the dependent variable. In step 2 of the model, witnessing BBB was added to the regression model. While other variables remained unchanged, witnessing BBB was not statistically significant. Nevertheless, we left this variable in the last subsequent step to control for any difference emerging in the impact of previous experience of witnessing BBB on students’ likelihood of reporting the incidents. Results of step 3 show that perceived school fairness was positively associated with likelihood of reporting, even when considering the influences of previously included variables, such as grade, race/ethnicity, gen- der, learning modality, and witnessing BBB. Table 3 presents the results of our hierarchical multivariate regression analysis.

Table 3. Results of a Multivariate Regression Analysis

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	B (SE)	β	B(SE)	β	B(SE)	β
Grade†	0.02(0.02)	.03	0..02(0.02)	0.03	0.04(0.02)	.06
Race/ethnicity‡						
Black/African American	0.04(0.24)	.01	0.04(0.24)	.01	-0.01(0.23	.01
Asian/Asian American	0.54 (0.09)	.18***	0.53 (0.09)	.18***	0.51 (0.09)	.17***
Multiracial/others	0.81 (0.53)	.05	0.81(0.53)	.05	0.80(0.52)	.05
Gender						
Female	0.19 (0.06)	.10***	0.19 (0.06)	.10***	0.24 (0.06)	.13***
Non-binary	0.34 (0.13)	.08**	0.34 (0.13)	.08**	0.43 (0.13)	.10**
Learning modality§	-0.11 (0.06)	.06*	0.12 (0.06)	.06*	0.13 (0.06)	.07*
Witnessing BBB			-0.02(0.04)	-.02	-0.07 (0.04)	.06
Perceived school fairness					0.20 (0.04)	.18***
R	0.22		0.23		0.27	
Total adjusted R^2	0.04		0.04		0.07	
F	8.16***		7.18***		9.40***	

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.

BBB, Bias-Based Bullying.

Outcome variable of the regression model is willingness to report BBB.

† Grade: ranging from 1 (=6th) to 7 (=12th);

‡ Race/ethnicity: 1 = white, 2 = non-white;

§ Learning modality: 1 = fully remote, 2 = in-person (n = 652, 58.4%).

DISCUSSION

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has altered academic and social experiences for youth, with many schools moving from traditional in-person instruction to virtual learning or hybrid in-person and remote modalities. Given the increase in hate crimes and hate- based harassment that co-occurred at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were interested in BBB experiences of youth during this time. The aims of this study were to (1) explore group differences in high school students' reports of witnessing BBB, perceived school fairness, and likelihood of reporting BBB based on learning modality, and (2) examine associations between likelihood of reporting and related factors. We observed important differences in factors related to BBB for adolescents attending school in-person versus remote. Our findings also indicated heterogeneity among factors that influence youths' likelihood of reporting BBB behaviors.

Learning Modality and Study Variables

Learning modality was a significant determinant of study variables, as students who attended school remotely reported higher levels of witnessing BBB and greater likelihood of reporting BBB, as well as lower levels of perceived school fairness. The increased prevalence of cyber-bullying behaviors among youth populations may help to explain the effect of learning modality on witnessing and reporting variables.[43] Indeed, studies reveal a meaningful rise particularly in bias-based cyber-bullying during the height of the pandemic as remote learning became the primary mode of education.[44,45]

Consequently, those youth who opted for the remote learning modality may have been more exposed to cyber-BBB situations, resulting in greater levels of witnessing as well as reporting.

The significance of learning modality in the current study may also be explained by latent group differences among families that chose remote versus in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.[46,47] Considering bullying situations and bystander behaviors, Palmer and Abbott[12] assert that adolescents weigh morals and values as well as perceived social norms when evaluating and responding to BBB within school contexts. While scholars have yet to explore specific moral or value orientations that predict bystander behaviors during bullying situations, related studies reveal distinct outcomes according to adolescents' ascribed values. For example, one study explored the relationship of individualistic and collectivistic values with actions of racially diverse youth, and found positive associations between collectivistic values and prosocial behaviors.[48] Future research can explore whether relationships exist among moral or value orientations and witnessing and reporting behaviors.

An additional finding revealed that participants who attended school remotely reported lower perceptions of fairness than did those attending in-person. This was consistent with prior research suggesting that youth who attended school virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic were less likely to report a sense of mattering and school connectedness than those who attended in- person or a combination of virtual and in-person.[49,50] Notably, fairness, mattering and belonging have all been characterized as indicators of school climate.[51] Accordingly, it could be that attending school remotely decreases students' climate perceptions since there are less opportunities to engage with academic and social supports that are otherwise available in traditional learning environments. Alternatively, pre-existing low climate perceptions may have prompted students to choose the remote learning option in efforts to avoid adverse school conditions. Either way, given the positive association of fairness with academic achievement and prosocial outcomes,[22-26] it is critical that schools consider strategies for cultivating a positive climate particularly for remote learners.

Predicting Likelihood of Reporting

Recent BBB literature has emphasized the critical nature of bystanders in decreasing prevalence and mitigating negative effects of peer victimization.[12] Therefore, we were interested in exploring factors that may predict reporting behaviors among bystander youth. As an exploratory step, we considered whether certain sociodemographic and personal characteristics predicted participants' likelihood to report. We found that holding social identities as Asian American, as well as female and non-binary genders were significant predictors of likelihood of reporting BBB.

The second step of the model investigated n learning modality as a predictor for likelihood of reporting, revealing that those who attended school in-person, as opposed to remote, were significantly less likely to report BBB. Social factors, including peer evaluation and peer-group exclusion, largely influence decision-making and bystander behaviors for youth who witness bullying within school settings.[52] Accordingly, concern for social repercussions decrease the likelihood of youth

reporting or intervening during BBB situations. However, youth may not perceive social risks to be as great in remote contexts, as these learning environments provide more anonymity than in-person spaces. Future research may investigate strategies to mitigate social repercussions perceived within in-person learning environments.

While perceived fairness has been identified as a protective factor for bullying victims,[7] it may also predict behaviors related to bullying and bystander intervention. Indeed, the final step of our model revealed perception of fairness as a strong predictor for likelihood of reporting BBB. This finding was not surprising, as Way[26] suggests that when adolescents assume equal treatment and equitable application of rules, they are more likely to follow school policies. In this way, study participants who held strong fairness perceptions may be more likely to report BBB because they believe that their actions will lead to appropriate outcomes. Similar studies also indicate that individuals who hold more positive school climate and fairness perceptions are more willing to intervene in bullying and aggression situations.[53,54] Thus, it is also possible that participants who maintained strong perceptions of fairness see themselves as preserving the school's climate by reporting behaviors that contradict with characteristics of the school environment. Taken together, it appears that fairness may offset perceived social risks for reporting BBB.

Finally, we seek to clarify seemingly contradictory findings for perception of fairness and related study variables. Results for research question 1 revealed that fairness perceptions were low and likelihood to report BBB was high for students attending school remotely compared to in-person. Further, results from research question 2 demonstrated a significant positive relationship between fairness perceptions and likelihood of reporting. Considering these findings collectively with related research,[7] we conclude that fairness may operate as a mediating variable to help explain reporting behaviors across youth populations. That is, positive fairness perceptions may promote reporting behaviors for students across all learning modalities. Future research may further investigate the mediating properties of fairness in helping to explain reporting and other bystander behaviors for youth who witness BBB situations.

Implications for School Health

The present study first investigated the link between learning modality and study variables. Although most schools have returned primarily to in-person learning, observed differences for students who attended school remotely versus in-person provide useful implications for school personnel. For instance, many students who opted for remote learning over the past 2 years of the COVID-19 pandemic are now returning to schools in-person. Consequently, schools should consider integrating additional support to help youth adjust to the school's social milieu. This may be especially critical for students with marginalized identities as well as students who may have been exposed to greater instances of cyberbullying. Furthermore, school personnel may focus efforts on rebuilding school climate and re-establishing social norms for all students within the learning community in order to foster cohesion

across student groups.

The present study also explored factors that predict likelihood for students to report BBB situations. Although learning modality was one predictor for reporting behaviors, findings of the present study provide meaningful implications that are not tied to modality type. First, recognizing the significance of sociodemographic characteristics, schools should con- sider how social group norms shape bullying behaviors and bystander actions within school communities. Assessing the climate of a school community can be a first step as it can provide meaningful data to illuminate social norms that exist within student groups but that may be concealed from school personnel. Further, schools should consider adopting school-wide initiatives that foster prosocial values and morals, which may underlie reporting and other bystander behaviors. Additionally, implicit in our findings is the risk of social evaluation, which influences reporting behaviors. Given that anonymity may lead to greater reporting behaviors, schools should evaluate existing reporting procedures to ensure that students who report BBB situations do not place themselves at risk for peer retaliation.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, youth data from the NPFH survey can be only representative of the school district where the survey was administered, particularly considering that the study sample from a school district in a college town located in a rural, northeastern area might have affected sample characteristics, such as parental education level or sociopolitical stance in the household. Further investigations with diverse samples in different regions are necessary to increase the external validity. Second, we should acknowledge that this study is correlational in nature using cross-sectional data. A longitudinal investigation is recommended in uncovering the association between learning modality, perceived school fairness, and likelihood of reporting BBB. This is a preliminary study in hopes of stimulating further inquiry about predicting variables of likelihood to report and reporting behavior of BBB.

Conclusion

Although BBB represents a significant public health problem during COVID-19, existing studies have limited empirical knowledge of what can be predictive of reporting behavior against the bias- motivated incidents. The current study is the first quantitative investigation of its kind bringing learning modalities during COVID-19 and school fairness to explain youths' likelihood of reporting BBB. Findings of this study suggest that learning modality and perceived school fairness can meaningfully explain witnesses' likelihood of reporting BBB. These findings can be useful to design more effective schoolwide interventions against BBB during the pandemic or for online learning environments. Additional research should continue investigating how schools can encourage students to increase their likelihood of reporting and adopt the bystander response of reporting against all types of bullying and harassment at school, which are rooted in bias, to ensure school health and safety.

Human Subjects Approval Statement

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the last author's institution. There were no ethical issues with regard to human participants/animals in the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to the data collection.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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