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"My School Could Have Done More": Black Students' Reflections of Educators' Interventions on Peer Discrimination

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ABSTRACT

Black students in K-12 settings are facing heightened rates of discrimination from their peers. Although discrimination may primarily be racial in nature, other aspects of students' racialized experience (e.g., wealth status, gender, nationality, etc.) are often targeted as well. Despite rising issues of peer discrimination toward Black students and their intersecting identities, few works have investigated how school personnel distinguish such discrimination and/or deploy intervention practices as a response. This study interviewed Black ($n = 15$) and Biracial/ethnic ($n = 2$) high school graduates (ages 18–21) about their experiences with peer discrimination, educators' approaches to such discrimination, and participants' insight on preferred intervention approaches. An intersectional framework and the Transformative Social Emotional Learning framework were used to phenomenologically analyze the data. Results indicate that participants experienced *intersectional* discrimination from high-school peers, and school personnel rarely intervened on peer discrimination in a culturally responsive manner. However, participants' preferred intervention responses mirrored more actionable, culturally responsive intervention approaches to peer discrimination.

1 | Introduction

Black adolescents experience high rates of discrimination as they navigate secondary school settings (Hope et al. 2015). Such rates have been shown to increase in the last few years (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019), and the source of such discrimination often comes from Black students' school peers (Byrd and Carter Andrews 2016) of varying racial backgrounds. Although the type of peer discrimination towards Black students is often racial in nature, Black students may face multiple forms of discrimination based on intersecting identities (e.g., gender, wealth status, nationality, etc.) that are linked to their race (Denise 2012). However, issues related to race, its accompanying identities, and peer discrimination often go undiscussed in schools (Joseph-Salisbury 2020; Kumi-Yeboah et al. 2021; Ruck et al. 2021). Equity and social justice literature has yet to unpack information on school personnel's preparedness to intervene on pupils' racial and intersectional discrimination towards Black students. Nonetheless, proper intervention against peer discrimination should protect Black students' identities (i.e., be culturally responsive) and their social emotional wellbeing as peer discrimination is linked to negative mental health outcomes (Bottiani et al. 2020; D'hondt et al. 2016; Verkuyten et al. 2019).

The present study qualitatively investigated the types of discrimination recent Black high school graduates experienced from their peers, their perceptions of school personnel

Summary

- Black students experience intersectional discrimination from their peers at school.
- School personnel struggle to respond to discrimination among students in ways that are helpful and impactful.
- Interventions on peer discrimination should be culturally responsive, including elements related to advocacy, empathy, and racial equity education.

intervention on peer discrimination, and their preferences on how school personnel should respond to discrimination. This study integrated an intersectional and a culturally responsive, social emotional (SEL) framework to understand the complexity of peer discrimination and the appropriateness of present and preferred interventions, respectively.

2 | Racial and Intersectional Peer Discrimination Toward Black Students

Discrimination, or behaving in a manner that demonstrates one's biases toward groups with specific identities (Montoro et al. 2021), is a common experience among Black students in secondary settings. Literature suggests that of the identities students experience discrimination for, racial identity is among the highest (Garnett et al. 2014; Southern Poverty Law Center 2019), and Black students in particular may experience discrimination on a weekly or daily basis (English et al. 2020; Seaton and Iida 2019). Scholars suggest that peer discrimination toward Black students has been increasing since 2016 (Huang and Cornell 2019), and peer discrimination takes multiple forms. For example, subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., microaggressions) towards Black students may consist of race-based teasing among friend groups (Douglass et al. 2016) and faulty assumptions about their skills (e.g., athletic) and behavior (Banks et al. 2022). However, peer discrimination may often be overt and blatant. Overt discrimination may include the intentional use of racial epithets or slurs (Henderson et al. 2020), racialized jokes intended to diminish Black students' self-worth (Henderson et al. 2020; Mulvey et al. 2016), exclusion from social activities (McNeil Smith and Fincham 2016), and race-based threats or physical assault (Henderson et al. 2020; Seaton and Douglass 2014). Both subtle and overt forms of racial discrimination may be further convoluted when additional, intersecting identities tied to race are considered.

Intersectional theorists (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Harnois 2014) suggest that individuals with multiple identities often experience discrimination through the lens of intersecting inequalities (e.g., sexism and racism). The complex nature of Blackness cannot be fully understood without considering how race intersects with other identities (gender, language, SES, etc.; Harnois 2014). In fact, adolescents with multiple marginalized identities may experience discrimination more frequently than their peers with only one or no marginalized identities (Denise 2012); this is particularly the case in school settings (Byrd and Carter Andrews 2016). For example, Black school girls may experience gendered discrimination linked to their image (Essien and Wood 2021; Rosario et al. 2021). Black people of darker skin tone experience name-calling by peers (e.g., "ugly"; Landor and McNeil Smith 2019, 798), and Black people of lighter skin tone may also experience discriminatory taunting (e.g., "not being Black enough," Landor and McNeil Smith 2019, 798). Additionally, Black students who receive financial welfare support report feeling discriminated against based on their wealth status *and* race compared to Black adolescents from higher SES backgrounds (Denise 2012). Students with additional racial identities (i.e., multiracial) may experience higher rates of discrimination from peers and feel pressured to prioritize one racial identity over another (Banks et al. 2022), and Black immigrants may feel pressured to adhere to Western cultural expectations (Coutinho and Koinis-Mitchell 2014; Mukiibi 2015; George Mwangi and English 2017). Moreover, these multiple identities, which cannot be fully pulled apart from one another (Warner and Shields 2013), may also be targeted by Black students' school peers (Byrd and Carter Andrews 2016). These targeted intersectional identities warrant concern because of the linkages between peer discrimination and negative social-emotional and behavioral outcomes on Black students.

Heightened racial discrimination among Black students' peers is associated with higher mental health concerns. Peer discrimination at school has also been linked to poorer psychological maladjustment (e.g., lowered self-worth; Benner and Graham 2013), increased substance use (Jelsma and Varner 2020), and high depressive symptoms (Allen et al. 2022; Butler-Barnes et al. 2013; Cogburn et al. 2011; Lavner et al. 2022). These outcomes may be further convoluted when additional identities, such as gender, nationality, and SES, are added to the equation (Denise 2012). Present approaches to discrimination may not consider many of these intersectional elements. The identity-based nature of discrimination, alongside its potential mental health consequences, highlights the necessity of interventions that address the cultural, social, and emotional elements of pupil discrimination.

2.1 | School Staffs' Preparedness to Intervene

Scholars have encouraged educators to identify and intervene on student discrimination (Leath et al. 2021; Losinski et al. 2019). Although discrimination reduction interventions exist, best practices in research on pupil discrimination interventions are limited, and present literature suggests that school personnel need assistance with addressing discrimination (Grapin et al. 2019). For example, when presented with hypothetical examples of student discrimination, educators have indicated that they would intervene on such discrimination if they noticed it (Baker et al. 2023); however, these hypothetical claims may not translate in actual school settings. Recent reports suggest that intervention attempts are not occurring at a reasonable rate, indicating that school personnel fail to address up to 40% of instances of discrimination that occur at school (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). Case studies further corroborate reports of limited interventions in the face of discrimination. For example, a study found that educators' failure to respond to blatant racial tension between Black and White

high school students led to a preventable, large-scale altercation, and school staff inadequately addressed the traumatization that Black students experienced by denying them formal support in coping with the discrimination that led to the event (Hardie and Tyson 2013).

Further research indicates that even when educators intend to intervene on racial discrimination, their approaches may not adequately resolve the problem. School personnel may rely on color-evasive approaches to address discrimination, or they may fail to intervene in a comprehensive manner that addresses both the targeted and the discriminating students (Baker et al. 2023). Intervening in discrimination requires school personnel to be knowledgeable and skilled enough to adequately support offended students and explain the harms of biased actions to discriminating students (Baker et al. 2023). This skill level becomes more complex when discrimination is intersectional in nature, as it requires understanding of how multiple marginalized identities are being targeted at once and recognizing issues of intersectionality, which is a skill many school personnel have yet to develop (Pugach et al. 2019). Thus far, the limited literature on this topic suggests that school personnel need strategies on how to address discrimination among students.

Research only loosely points to some practical steps towards addressing discrimination, such as developing positive student–teacher relationships (Mulvey et al. 2021) and expressing empathy toward targeted students (Baker et al. 2023; Grapin et al. 2019). However, formal guidelines on *how* to best intervene on pupils' intersectional discrimination towards Black students do not appear to exist. One step in determining how to best intervene is to consider culturally responsive frameworks that account for students' social-emotional needs. Culturally responsive interventions consist of practices that affirm students' identities (Villegas and Lucas 2002), which includes race, and enhance students' cultural competence (Ladson-Billings 1995). In the context of pupil discrimination, a culturally responsive approach could prompt school personnel to validate Black students whose identities are targeted and hold discriminating students accountable in a manner that highlights the historical, social, and racial underpinnings of their behavior. Both requisites not only encompass cultural responsivity, but also highlight potential for social emotional learning (SEL).

2.2 | Frameworks

2.2.1 | Intersectional Framework

There are many complexities associated with the notion of being Black. While Blackness has been constructed to distinguish people based on skin color, judgments toward Black people are also predicated on ones' ability to approximate and navigate many elements of dominant White culture. This may include intersecting identities, such as being seen as an American citizen, achieving a certain wealth status, or adhering to standards of beauty (e.g., skin tone and hair texture; Morrison 1993). When these ideologies are internalized by youth, which includes non-Black *and* Black youth, they can lead to racist, classist, sexist, and/or language-based (i.e., intersectional) peer discrimination. Moreover, while intersectionality was originally conceptualized for gendered racism (Crenshaw 1989), it now spans across many identities that accompany race and gender (e.g., socioeconomic status, nationality, etc.; Denise 2012). Researchers have used intersectional frameworks to understand Black students' perceptions of discrimination (Byrd and Carter Andrews 2016; Cooper et al. 2022). However, an intersectional approach has yet to inform how to best respond to pupil discrimination toward Black students. Thus, this study uses an intersectional approach to better understand the variety of identities that are targeted when Black students face discrimination from their peers.

2.2.2 | Transformative Social Emotional Learning

Pulling from an established culturally responsive SEL framework is a step toward conceptualizing how to best intervene on student discrimination. One such framework is Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL; Jagers et al. 2018). The TSEL framework consists of competencies that prompt school personnel and students to "...learn to critically examine the root causes of inequity and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems" (Jagers et al. 2018, 3). Such inequities include those that derive from discrimination and White supremacy (Legette et al. 2022). Much literature focuses on implementing TSEL competencies among students; however, scholars acknowledge that school personnel must also engage in TSEL competencies to combat inequities in schools (Jagers et al. 2018, 13) and to protect Black students (Legette et al. 2022). Given that they are the foundation setters of school culture and purveyors of school expectations, school personnel's demonstration of these competencies may be a necessary precursor to introducing and implementing such expectations among students. This notion sets a strong foundation for utilizing TSEL to prepare school personnel to intervene on student discrimination toward Black students with diverse identities. This is particularly the case for three of the five TSEL competencies: Social Awareness, Responsible Decision Making, and Relationship Skills.

The tenets of the Social Awareness competency are empathy and respect for diversity (Jagers et al. 2018, 2019). It requires educators to enhance their knowledge of inequities and develop the skills to "dismantle...privilege and white supremacy" (Legette et al. 2022, 283). If applied to pupil discrimination intervention, Social Awareness could position staff to recognize intersectional discrimination and equip them with the skills to intervene.

Responsible Decision Making consists of considering other's well-being and making decisions that are socially and inclusively grounded (Jagers et al. 2018, 2019). Legette et al. (2022) suggests that school personnel reflect on how racialized perceptions influence their disciplinary decisions. In the context of pupil discrimination, Responsible Decision Making may require staff to make decisions that protect the well-being of their Black students and ensure that their (i.e., school personnel's) identity-based perceptions do not thwart their ability to adequately hold discriminating students accountable to their actions.

Relationship Skills consists of establishing on-going relationships with diverse individuals and groups, resolving conflict, and navigating cultural differences (Jagers et al. 2018, 7). Thus, educators must establish genuine connections with Black students and advocate for racial justice (Legette et al. 2022, 284). Building student–educator relationships on which cultural understanding is the foundation may allow Black students to trust their educators to appropriately intervene on discrimination and yield more organic responses to student discrimination.

2.3 | Present Study

The data from the present study is derived from a larger qualitative data set that sought to understand how the source of discrimination at school (staff, peer, parents, etc.) disparately effects how Black students cope with and respond to racial discrimination. This study aimed to relay the types of intersectional discrimination Black students face from their own perspectives. We also sought to discover whether school personnel are utilizing culturally responsive SEL interventions to address peer discrimination. We further use students' (i.e., participants') perceptions to better understand the implications of school personnel's present intervention and to inform how school personnel should intervene in the future. We aim to inform and improve upon the current school-wide approaches on discrimination, as many of the intervention practices are solely informed by teachers' and school staff's perspectives rather than students who experience discrimination.

Through focus groups and individual interviews, Black high school graduates were asked to reflect on their racialized experiences in school. The data answered the following research questions: (a) What types of discrimination are Black students experiencing from their peers and what intersecting identities are being targeted? (b) What intervention approaches do educators presently use to address racial or intersectional discrimination, and in what ways do these approaches align with the TSEL framework? And (c) What intervention approaches do Black students prefer educators to implement to address peer discrimination, and in what ways do those preferences align with TSEL framework? This study also explored patterns across theses three questions; that is, the authors sought to discern whether types and degrees of intersecting identities were qualitatively related to types of discrimination experienced, interventions experienced, and intervention preferences.

3 | Methods

3.1 | Researchers' Positionality

Data were analyzed by three researchers. Researcher 1 is a Black woman who holds a doctorate in school psychology and has experience providing services to students of varying racial backgrounds. Further, her research centers on how to best support Black students who experience discrimination in school settings.

Researcher 2 is a Black woman who holds a doctorate in school psychology and has experience providing mental health services to students from varying racial backgrounds and social economic statuses. This researcher also has experience consulting on implementing school-wide behavioral and mental health supports in elementary, middle, and secondary school settings. Her research focuses on culturally responsive practices that foster Black student wellbeing in schools.

Researcher 3 is a Black woman who holds a doctorate in education and has experience teaching in secondary classrooms and preparing preservice teachers to teach for equity and social justice in urban and suburban settings. Her practices are driven by intersectional research conducted with Black girls across contexts of public, private, and independent schools.

As a collective, all researchers believe schools have a responsibility to engage in justice-based practices toward marginalized groups. This responsibility requires school personnel to appropriately respond to discrimination that they witness or are made aware of; the latter of which requires school personnel to engage in practices that promote trust in a manner that allows Black students to safely initiate communication about the discrimination they experience. The following data was analyzed through this perspective.

3.2 | Participants

To join the study, participants must have: (a) identified as Black or multiracial with African ancestry, (b) been 18 years or older, (c) attended a high school for more than 2 years (i.e., no home schooling), and (d) graduated high school during or after the 2019 school year. This data was collected during the 2022 and 2023 school year.

Participants consisted of 17 ($N = 17$) undergraduate students from a Mid-Western University. Participants identified as Black ($n = 15$) or multiracial/ethnic with African ancestry ($n = 2$). Participants were between the ages of 19 and 21 years old. Most participants ($n = 12$) graduated high school within a year of data collection; three participants graduated high school within 2–3 years of data collection, and two participants graduated within 3 and half years of data collection. Regarding gender, most participants ($n = 13$) identified as women, three participants identified as men, and 1 participant identified as gender nonconforming.

3.3 | Procedures

Before recruitment, we received approval from the Cleveland State's Institutional Review Board to conduct this study. To recruit participants for interviews, emails with study information were sent to university organizations whose members consisted of the target population (e.g., Black Student Union). Researchers also recruited participants through a credit system in which psychology students at the university received class credits for participating in research. Participants who were ineligible for credit received a $20 gift card for their participation. Most participants (87%; $n = 15$) received credit for their participation.

Before the interview, participants were asked to complete a brief entrance survey that inquired about students' personal demographics and their perceptions of their schools' demographics. Interviews immediately followed the completion of the entrance survey. Of the 10 interviews, 7 were individual interviews, and 3 were focus group interviews of which 2–4 participants were interviewed at the same time. One focus group interview was held virtually due to COVID restrictions, and all other individual or focus group interviews were held in person. This variability within interview format provided rich information while also allowing for a great breadth of topics to be covered (individual interviews) and greater depth and sensitivity of such topics (focus group; Guest et al. 2017), which may enhance our understanding experiences of and responses to peer discrimination. Interview times ranged from 25 to 60 min. Each interview was audio recorded using Otter.ai, a program that simultaneously recorded and transcribed the interviews using artificial intelligence. Two research assistants revised and edited the transcripts for accuracy before data analysis.

3.4 | Data Collection

3.4.1 | Entrance Survey

The entrance survey inquired about participants' demographic information such as race, gender, age, and number of high schools attended. Those who attended more than one high school were asked to consider the high school in which they spent most of their time for subsequent questions. The entrance survey also inquired about participants' perceptions of the racial demographics of school staff and peers (e.g., "most students/staff members at my school were the same race as me").

3.4.2 | Interviews

Interviews were carried out in a semistructured format. It should be noted that the interview questions did not originally inquire about intersectional discrimination. Nonetheless, such data from participants' responses to the race-based questions emerged anyway, and the semistructured nature of the interviews allowed for further exploration of intersectional discriminatory experiences from peers. As a result, intersectional identities noted in the data are ones that were organically shared by participants. Therefore, it is possible that not *all* intersecting identities for each participant are noted in the data.

Interviews began with the same question: "What was it like being a Black student in your high school?" In instances where peer discrimination or bias arose, the interviewer(s) inquired about the context in which the discrimination happened (who, what, and how), whether school personnel were aware of discrimination, and what intervention approaches school personnel used to address peer racial issues. Researchers also asked about participants' preferences on how educators should intervene on instances of discrimination. The Supporting Information: Appendix provides additional information on the interview questions asked during data collection.

3.4.3 | Member Checking

To ensure that interviews accurately reflected and captured the participants' comments, we engaged in member checking by emailing the completed transcripts to all participants (Birt et al. 2016), except for one who could not be reached. Participants were provided a timeframe by which they could note desired alterations, clarifications, or additions before we engaged in analysis. No participants noted a need for clarification or provided additional information.

3.5 | Analysis

The researchers of this article were involved with these data to varying degrees. The first author was responsible for data collection and analysis; authors two and three assisted with the analysis of the data. Upon concluding the data collection, the first author noted that data saturation was met when she identified redundancy in the data collected across all focus groups and interviews (Saunders et al. 2018). All interviews were qualitatively analyzed using the phenomenological thematic approach (Vagle 2014). Coding of the data took place over four phases, and three coders were involved with data analysis. All coders (i.e., authors) met during phase two through four to discuss their independent findings and to collaborate on establishing patterns and themes within the data.

During the first phase, all coders familiarized themselves with the data by reading and listening to all interviews. This was the only phase in which coders listened to the data alongside reading it; note taking was discouraged during this phase (Vagle 2014). During the second phase, inductive thematic saturation occurred when coders reread all transcripts and noted patterns that presented themselves within and across the interviews (Saunders et al. 2018). During this phase, all three coders met to discuss their positionality and share their initial notes on the data. This meeting provided a space for additional relevant questions about the data and allowed coders to note broad patterns they found during the second reading. These readings pointed to broad patterns in observation and/or experiences of peer discrimination, educators' responses to such discrimination, or participants' ideas surrounding appropriate discrimination interventions.

In the third phase, coders read the data to establish and name themes related to each research question. During this phase, they discussed commonalities and distinctions between themes each coder found independently, and they worked to come to a consensus about which themes were most relevant (Hill and Knox 2021). All discovered themes were voiced, and themes that were similar among two or more coders were kept so long as the third coder approved. In the fourth phase, coders independently selected quotes from interviews that best represented each theme. When a quote was selected by two or more coders for a theme, it was selected to be included in the results section. In cases where no similar quotes were selected, the coders discussed their rationale for quotes and then collectively selected and agreed upon which ones to use. In cases where less than three quotes represented a theme, that theme was then eliminated from the results section. For example, one theme

was eliminated because there were only two quotes (by a single participant) that highlighted an issue in which the participant's response to the discriminating peer received a harsher punishment than the discriminator. Additional preliminary themes are available upon request. Once all phases were completed, the researchers discussed which TSEL competencies best aligned or contradicted the present and preferred intervention approaches noted in the data.

4 | Results

Issues of peer discrimination specifically were noted in 8 of the 10 interviews. Twelve of 17 participants (70.58%) indicated experiencing peer discrimination. Although race was the primary reason for which participants experienced discrimination, the data revealed that their accompanying marginalized identities played a role in those experiences as well. The intersecting identities that appeared to most relate to instances of peer discrimination consisted of gender (82% women, $n = 14$), being a first- or second-generation student from varying African countries (17%; $n = 3$), wealth status (SES), having multiple ethnic or racial identities (11%, $n = 2$), and skin tone (17%; $n = 3$). Nearly all participants ($n = 16$) indicated that their own racial identity/identities differed from that of their school staff.

4.1 | Contextual Considerations

As noted above, many participants attended high school in 2020 or 2021, and therefore, were in high school during the 2020 COVID pandemic. Few participants, however, noted discriminatory acts that occurred while attending school via online platforms. Most instances of discrimination and interventions noted below occurred during in-person schooling. This may be due to the interview protocol's focus of inquiring about discrimination while in school and/or because online learning allowed for less social interactions among students.

Additionally, students were in school during the local and national actions of the Black Lives Matter movement surrounding the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. While a few participants noted that their peers had voiced discriminatory opinions on social media platforms, none voiced that they experienced discrimination while at school (online) regarding this context or topic. However, participants' exposure to systemic racism and peer reactions to such racism might have contributed to how they reflected on their experiences during high school, as this time period prompted students to reflect on their racial identities and experiences (Griffin et al. 2020; May et al. 2022).

4.2 | Description of Themes

A total of nine themes emerged from the data. These themes are housed under three categories that reflect the research questions and are labeled as followed: (a) Types of Discrimination [Black students faced], (b) Educators' Intervention Approaches, and (c) Student Expectations of Interventions. Table 1 summarizes the names and definitions of each theme within each category.

Regarding Types of Discrimination, we must note that school personnel were aware of some, but not all, instances of discrimination mentioned. This first category aimed to provide evidence that Black students experience discrimination and further highlight *how* such discrimination manifests. This category seeks to justify the authors' claim that discrimination at school is an issue worthy of school personnel's attention and response. The second category, Educators' Intervention Approaches, explicitly denotes times in which personnel were aware of discrimination among students, and it relays school staffs' response to such discrimination. Lastly, the third category highlights participants' preferences for how personnel can respond to discrimination.

It should also be noted that although we asked participants to relay experiences from high school, relevant data often emerged regarding experiences before their high school years (i.e., middle and elementary school), this information is included in the analysis below as it demonstrates needs for discrimination interventions across educational levels.

4.3 | Types of Discrimination

The themes below detail the nature of discrimination Black students faced based on their multiple identities. The types of discrimination participants faced ranged from subtle to overt. The three themes in this section were: (1) Overt Discrimination, (2) Discriminatory Teasing, (3) Micro-assumptive Discrimination.

4.3.1 | General Overt Discrimination

This overarching theme characterized types of discrimination that were unequivocally linked to participants racial and other marginalized identities, such as skin tone, SES, and gender. Overt discrimination was the most prevalent form of discrimination the participants faced (i.e., 50% of students who experienced discrimination). Some overt forms of peer discrimination noted were primarily racial in nature, in which participants were verbally referred to in racially inappropriate ways (e.g., racial epithets). Other forms of discrimination included identities tied to race. For example, Kendall noted that their experiences with discrimination in a majority white middle school were tied to having multiple forms of Black identity as their family immigrated from a country in Africa. They stated the following:

> *I'm also African...That's like a difference than...Black Americans but...it's the same thing? But...my mom has a very strong, thick accent and...She would pick me up from school every day...So like, people...the next day be like, 'Why does your mom talk like that?' Like...mimic the accent. And my mom would like, braid my hair and put it into like styles that they were not used to... they'd like mimic it...*

Here, Kendall's experience is not only tied to being Black American, but also being a first-generation African.

Another participant, Whitney, who immigrated from Ugandan and identified as Muslim, highlighted a similar experience, in which she noted that she was treated differently than her Black

TABLE 1 | Summary of themes.

Themes	Definition	Sample quote	TSEL (mis) alignments
Types of discrimination			—
Overt discrimination	Participants' negative interactions with peers were unequivocally linked to their racial or other marginalized identities	"They avoid me, because...I wasn't speaking... or dress like an American."	—
Discriminatory teasing	Experiences of within group biases or discrimination, often in the form of race or identity-based teasing from friends or close acquaintances	"because I am darker than a lot of people...that was talked about a lot and like, kids are cruel and like...say anything."	—
Micro/assumptive	Subtle assumptions about Black students' life or experiences based on their multiple identities	"stuff like that came up with like cheer and colleges talking about, 'oh my god, you're so lucky. Like you're gonna get it because you're Black, they need Black people in there.'"	—
Intervention approaches			—
Blatant ignoring	Participants indicated that school personnel were aware of peer discrimination, but they made no attempts to intervene	"[peer] thought it was okay for him to say the N... So like, I told a teacher or something and no one, brought it up really [or] told me anything [was] done about it."	Social awareness[a] Relationship skills[a] Responsible decision making[a]
Lack of awareness	Educators were unaware of, or inattentive to, the presence or impact of peer discrimination, or they did not know how to address such issues between students	"... I feel like all the teachers at that school were very like, tone deaf sometimes or like, just didn't understand that like they had had Black students and like that they are being affected..."	Social awareness[a] Responsible decision-making[a]
Insufficient step ins	On rare occasions, educators attempted to quell discrimination or the negative emotions brought about from discrimination, but efforts are incomprehensive	"there was no doing that; there was just 'Oh, stop it--That's not cool to say that in class.'"	Relationship skills[a] Responsible decision-making[a]
Student expectations			
Hesitance in help-seeking	Educators were limited in their abilities to appropriately address peer discrimination for a variety of reasons	"there's only so much that she [the counselor] can do."	Relationship skills[a] Responsible decision making[a]
Advocate and empathize	Participants wanted school personnel to stand up for them when faced with peer discrimination and/or validate their experiences of peer discrimination	"at the very bare minimum is to... show any sort of empathy...like, 'I understand what you're going through...that's not okay."	Relationship skills Responsible decision making
Educate offensive students	Participants expected school personnel to hold offensive students accountable and inform them of implications and impact of their discriminatory actions	"You need to show...that it's serious and that children can't get away with [discrimination]... even like a schoolwide you need to like have some sort of announcement that's like, this is not okay"	Social awareness Responsible decision making

[a]Theme misalign with TSEL competency.

American peers. Whitney stated that her White peers would say that Africans "stink," and they would avoid her, stating, "like in the auditorium, every time we'd [Whitney and her sister] try to sit down with somebody they just get up and go." The overt discrimination was so prevalent that Whitney felt pressured to adjust multiple aspects of her identities, such as removing her hijab and other attire (e.g., long skirts) to "start dressing like other student[s]."

Discriminatory issues related to race and skin tone also arose among participants. Janice, who attended school with mostly White peers, noted that she was often teased for being dark skin. While she did not think of it as racist at the time, she noted "it did affect me, because you're talking about my skin tone, or like, you know, burnt jokes." Janice further went on to say that these comments negatively affected her self-esteem during adolescence.

Intersections of wealth status and physical appearance as they related to race also presented themselves in the data. For example, Kendall indicated that wealth and beauty standards played a major role in their experience before attendance of secondary school. They stated the following:

> *we're not like rich... people saw that as like an...opportunity to like make fun of it and like for gym class, you could wear like any white shoes and... my mom would like give them like Payless and like other kids would like have like Nikes and like Adidas...and so like it was kind of from students like it was like fact that I was dark. My hair would be a certain way. I didn't have that much money as everybody else just like I just didn't look like other girls.*

In this example, the discrimination tied to their race, physical features, and wealth status also ties to gender as the participant is comparing themselves to other non-Black girls.

Overall, the results indicate that participants' experiences with overt discrimination were linked to multiple identities tied to race.

4.3.2 | Discriminatory Teasing

One issue that consistently came up in the data was discriminatory teasing or being made fun of by others based on one's racial and other marginalized identities. Although discrimination from peers appears similar, this subtheme differs from General Overt Discrimination because it is specifically characterized by participants being teased by friends or peers who shared one or more of participants' racial identities. That is, Discriminatory Teasing consists of *within-group biases or discrimination*, in some cases among friends. We make the distinction between intergroup and intragroup discrimination for a few reasons. First, language expression about race among groups with similar identities can be a cultural practice (Morgan 2013). Additionally, teasing among one's own racial group can be a form of linguistic play that allows Black students to explore and discuss their identities (Lee 1995). Therefore, discriminatory comments from friends of the same racial group may be perceived differently than discrimination from peers outside of shared racial identities (Douglass et al. 2016). This appeared to be the case with discrimination towards participants with multiracial/ethnic identities. For example, Kimberlee indicated that her friends often teased her for being Biracial (Black and White), stating that:

> *They call me like a 'new crack.' So like, both of the slurs I guess...I wasn't necessarily mad at it. It just got annoying over time...if I would have told them to stop, they would have been like, 'Oh, you're just being a little baby.'*

Another participant, Alex, who identified as Black and Latino, noted that his friend group would use racial/ethnic epithets linked to his Latino identity. He indicated that "It felt bad because...they're my peers. At the same time, I'll just take it... Because I knew it wasn't like...they meant it. But yeah, it hurt sometimes." In these cases, the discriminatory teasing was often perceived as a joke, and mitigating phrases (e.g., "I wasn't necessarily mad") were used to describe how participants felt about this issue. Despite such perception, these jokes appeared, at a minimum, loosely offensive to participants of Biracial/ethnic identities.

Perceptions of loose offense among friends, however, may not extend to all intersecting identities. For example, Whitney noted that she felt included among her Black friends in comparison to her White peers. Nonetheless, she noted that being a first-generation immigrant from Uganda created feelings of "distance" between her and her Black friends, which often presented itself when she spoke. She stated that, "being Black with Black student[s] was a big deal for me because when I speak, they will not understand... or they start making fun. 'Oh, your accent is so funny.' 'Can you talk one more time?'" While she noted that her Black friends treated her well, there is no indication that such comments were only mildly offensive.

Some examples in the data suggest that biased behavior may extend beyond perceptions of playfulness within one's own marginalized group, particularly if the discriminating comments are not from friend groups. This context is still important to distinguish this from General Overt Discrimination. Intragroup discrimination may be reflective of marginalized discriminating students' internalized biases—learned through navigating white-dominant expectations and spaces (Steketee et al. 2021)—which are then projected onto discriminating students' peers in ways that are harmful. This situation presented itself in the data as it related to discrimination based on skin tone. For example, Camren felt that faulty assumptions were made about him due to his skin color. He stated, "I'm light skin...the guys on TikTok do light skin things, or whatever and they [peers] think that I do the same thing too, so it kinda offended me because I'm not the same person like them [men on TikTok]."

Kendall also indicated that they were discriminated against at a predominately Black school setting, due to their darker skin tone, "because I am darker than a lot of people...that was talked about a lot and like, kids are cruel and like...say anything." Unlike the other participants who openly indicated that the

teasing among friends was only mildly annoying, Kendall noted that being teased for being darker had a highly negative effect on them. They stated that they would avoid going to school, and they struggled to defend themselves against the teasing. This issue, in part, resulted in Kendall switching schools. These examples indicate that intragroup discrimination can be as harmful as discrimination from privileged peers. Nonetheless, addressing intragroup discrimination still may require a nuanced approach as it requires one to understand potential internalized discrimination from the discriminating student and the impact of feeling rejected or distant from one's own racial group.

An important take away from these examples is that they may reveal the disparate ways in which discrimination may be perceived according to *who* is discriminating and *what* identity is being targeted. For example, unlike General Overt Discrimination, participants who experienced Discriminatory Teasing among friends who teased Biracial identity mitigated discriminatory comments (e.g., "I wasn't necessarily mad at it," or "it wasn't like they meant it") despite it still being labeled as annoying or hurtful. These perceptions may be more tied to notions of linguistic play as identity exploration that was previously noted (Lee 1995). However, mitigation of discriminatory behavior was not extended to comments that targeted one's national background or skin tone.

4.3.3 | Microaggressions and Assumptions

These forms of discrimination from peers were characterized by assumptions about or microaggressions toward Black students based on their multiple identities. Microaggressions and Assumptions differ from the above themes in that the discrimination is inferred rather than explicit. This form of discrimination targeted a range of issues spanning from academic abilities to physical appearances and national background. For example, Tiana described how her non-Black peers would make assumptions about her college applications due to Affirmative Action. She stated that peers would say, "oh my god, you're so lucky. Like you're gonna get it [into college] because you're Black, they need Black people in there." Though Tiana expressed that she agreed with the comment at the time, looking back on it, she believed that it was a form of racial discrimination. The assumption demonstrates misunderstanding of Black academic skills and has negative implication about sense of belonging in academically advanced spaces.

Other participants, women in particular, noted microaggressive comments about their appearances. For example, Erin noted that she went to elementary and middle school with a population of Latina/o students (whose culture and phenotypes differed from her), and her peers would frequently inquire about her skin color and hair texture:

> *They asked a lot of questions because they're not used to seeing black people...like, 'Well, why is one side of your hand darker than the other side?' or like '[why do you] wash your hair like that?' 'Why does it feel like that?' 'We always like touch your hair'... 'why isn't it just straight?'"*

Erin indicated that these questions were often difficult to answer at this developmental stage. Furthermore, these statements, though seemingly innocent from a younger population, appeared to make Erin feel like an outsider among her peers, which was not easily rectifiable as she did not feel comfortable telling school staff about the comments.

Whitney also noted experiencing a line of questioning from peers that prompted feelings of othering. She noted that when she went to class, she was constantly asked questions about being African, but such questions were often offensively placed. She noted peers would ask, "'Do they have sports in Africa? Do they have deodorant in Africa? Do you have perfumes?'... 'Oh, I wonder what kind of water do you have [in Africa] ...'" Whitney stated that she often tried to ignore these questions, which were steeped in stereotypes about resources available in African countries. She indicated that she "just decided not to say anything," in response to the questions.

4.4 | Intervention Approaches

Drawing from the TSEL framework, this section demonstrates categorical themes that explicitly indicate the ways in which educators did, or did not, intervene on the discrimination Black students faced while at school. This section is comprised of three themes: Blatant Ignoring, Lack of Awareness, and Insufficient Step Ins. The themes within the Intervention Approach category specifically detail times participants believed school personnel (clinical/student support staff, one administrator, and teachers) were aware or should have been aware of the discrimination. In this and the following category, we note whether the intervention approaches and preferences utilize TSEL competencies to combat and intervene on student discrimination toward Black students.

4.4.1 | Blatant Ignoring

Participants described instances they believed warranted intervention, but they "didn't have anyone backing [them] up." School staff's blatant ignorance of discrimination often left students having to problem solve the issues without support. Many of these blatant instances revealed unequivocal racial discrimination, rather than intersectional. For example, Kimberlee described what happened when she experienced multiple occasions of racial discrimination and school personnel did little to nothing to intervene despite witnessing the discrimination:

> *I felt like my school could have done more because there [were] like, other instances where [discrimination] happened, and nothing was done about it. But then when it continued to happen...like, my one friend, she, like ended up getting into a fight over it.*

Here, a lack of appropriate intervention resulted in frustrated students defending themselves in harmful ways.

Another participant, Kendall, described an experience during middle school in which they directly experienced racial discrimination in the form of a racial slur:

he [peer] thought it was okay for him to say the N word so like I told him... 'you can't say that,' and...he was like very violent...He like would think it's funny. So like, I told a teacher...and no one, brought it up really [or] told me anything [was] done about it. So like, I would like try to defend myself but like it's really hard to defend yourself when you don't feel supported sometimes.

In this case, the teacher and school did not provide much support, and the participant was left without any resolve of the situation. Instances such as this one make it difficult for Black students to lean on school staff for assistance when discrimination occurs.

A lack of support and safety was also prominent for Idris, who experienced direct racial discrimination on an online platform from a peer at school, who then vandalized his parents' car. When he sought out support from the school administration, Idris said that personnel acknowledged the severity of the situation, but he was told that he needed proof of the online issue. After acquiring evidence, Idris returned to admin, who told him, "you should just ignore this... it's just something that happened." Idris was dismayed, saying that, "I came out of that situation with nothing being done. And that was really troubling for a long time." He further indicated that the administrator's neglect felt like "betrayal almost because you're supposed to like, trust that these people are there to help you." These findings suggested that school personnel demonstrated no support for many participants, who often had to labor to resolve issues themselves. In some cases, the blatant ignoring of discrimination resulted in emotional distress and compromised participants' trust in school personnel's ability to assist them.

Given the complete absence of intervention in the face of discrimination, Blatant Ignoring does not align with any of the TSEL competencies. In fact, Blatant Ignoring *contradicts* Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making.

4.4.2 | Lack of Awareness

Several participants noted that in the face of discrimination, teachers lacked awareness and preparedness on how to intervene. This lack of awareness was primarily due to poor skills in recognizing and addressing identity-based discrimination, ignorance of discriminatory incidences, and unawareness of the racial dynamic among the students.

When asked if their teachers were aware of some of the peer discrimination, Janice noted that her teachers were not aware or attentive towards a situation if it did not involve physical harm. She mentioned that her teachers did not intervene when her peers made intersectional discriminatory comments about her dark skin tone.

they [teachers] don't really pay attention [to] anything if it's not hurting another student in...[an] obvious way... I feel like teachers don't really find that offensive towards you know, black students...Like they don't know what to say or how to step in, in those types of situations.

This comment suggests that teachers may have been unaware of the singular and intersectional nature of the students' comments, or they were unaware of how to advocate for the participant.

Participants also indicated that intersectional discrimination related to race and social and wealth status (e.g., appearance, clothing, and socialization with peers) often went unnoticed by school staff. For example, Erin noted that educators did not pay attention to the obvious social and wealth divides among students. Additionally, Kendall stated the following:

... I feel like all the teachers at that school were very like, tone deaf sometimes or like, just didn't understand that like they had had Black students and like that they are being affected because like kids see that someone doesn't look just like them and they think that's wrong.

Here, Kendall's reflection suggests that educators' lack of awareness is largely predicated on lack of competency about how racial and cultural dynamics affect people.

The examples above demonstrate school staff's ignorance of racial and intersectional discrimination resulted in limited to no intervention for Black students. Overall, Lack of Awareness contradicts TSEL competencies, specifically, Social Awareness and Responsible Decision Making.

4.4.3 | Insufficient Step Ins

Participants described incidences when school staff intervened on discrimination with only partial success. While few participants noted instances of this form of intervention, we felt that this subtheme could inform development of responses to discrimination toward Black students.

One intervention consisted of subtle step ins, in which educators attempted to silence discriminatory remarks. For example, Whitney recalled that one teacher overheard students making negative comments about Whitney's speech (accent), indicating that, occasionally, the "teachers [would] say, 'Oh, no, leave her alone,' 'let her speak,' and 'it's fine. You can talk to me...I'm understanding what you're saying. So just stick it out.'" This subtle step in provided a sense of encouragement for Whitney in the classroom.

Despite this encouragement, subtle step ins may not be sufficient as stand-alone interventions. For example, Whitney noted that the subtle step-ins were confined to the classroom as negative comments from peers continued in less structured setting (e.g., hallways, lunchroom, etc.). She further noted that there were times when she wished an educator would do more than simply quell discriminatory comments:

[If a teacher says to students], 'Oh, stop saying that' ...if you say that, you can tell I'm sad. If you notice something, a part of you screaming everybody can hear you.... there was no doing that; there was just 'Oh, stop it--That's not cool to say that in class.'

This insight suggests that ephemeral comments fail to address the negative emotions that arise due to discrimination from Black students' peers. Overall, Whitney believed that the subtle step ins were helpful at times but were also passive.

Some statements from participants indicated that even individualized interventions did not fully combat the plight of peer discrimination. For example, Kendall, who experienced intensive discrimination across several schools, frequently met with a school mental health provider. They indicated that "she [guidance counselor] was amazing...[but] her words that she like said to me during my sessions didn't stick with me outside of a session." This finding indicates that though school personnel provided strategies and support, Kendall struggled to apply these strategies in their school community, resulting in them skipping school to avoid their peers. Such a finding suggests that discrimination intervention may need to be a part of broader school culture.

Because the above intervention attempts had a variety of potentially auspicious and deleterious outcomes, this approach does not fully align with elements of the TSEL framework, particularly subtle step-ins. While quelling discriminatory students' behavior toward Black students' identities shows small notions of Social Awareness, these fleeting attempts still left Black students' vulnerable. The intervention falls short of fully realizing Responsible Decision Making and Relationship Skills.

4.5 | Student Intervention Preferences

Participants noted their desired approaches from educators when they face discrimination. It should be emphasized that some participants who noted an opinion on an intervention approach to peer discrimination did not necessarily experience discrimination themselves. Nonetheless, responses yielded three themes: Hesitance in Help-Seeking, Advocate and Empathize, and Educate Offensive Students.

4.5.1 | Hesitance in Help-Seeking

When asked about their preferences for discrimination intervention, some participants voiced skepticism about school personnel's intervention approaches, and the outcomes of such approaches. This skepticism manifested itself in various ways. For example, some participants thought that educators' occupational responsibilities limited their ability to address peer discrimination. Participants indicated that educators "already have so much on their plate," which made them hesitant to communicate the struggles they were facing with their peers. Another participant, Idris, noted that his school counselor referred a discriminatory issue to administration, a decision he thought was appropriate because "there's only so much that she [i.e., the counselor] can do." These examples suggest that students may have rigid views about the responsibilities of their educators and student support staff members.

Participants also voiced doubts that school personnel could appropriately intervene on discrimination without compromising peer relationships. For example, Camren noted that there may not be anonymity when personnel address peer discrimination, stating that if "[you] tell the teacher...they [peers] probably gonna figure it out that you told them [teachers]...so they're gonna think you a snitch...and...bring more drama...so I just go my own way and just don't worry about it." During this same focus group, Alex indicated that he would tell school personnel about the discrimination he faced if he thought it was affecting his schooling or health. However, Camren disagreed, stating that he "still wouldn't do it [tell an educator]. Because they really can't do anything... it's just like, a big old thing that's gonna happen...everybody gonna know in the schools... I just don't want to deal with all that pressure on me." Overall, fears surrounding compromised peer relationships may prompt students to deal with peer discrimination on their own. This preference, however, appeared to be linked to their lack of trust in educators to appropriately intervene.

In one situation, student agency in managing discrimination with limited staff support arose. Kimberlee indicated that she was trying to educate a white peer on why he should not say the N-word when a substitute educator told Kimberlee to "calm down," while ignoring the behavior of the aggressive student. Kimberlee stated, "I don't think she [teacher] should have intervened at all because I was just educating the student on like, why, like the word shouldn't be said..." Kimberlee's example suggests that there may be times where it is appropriate to provide students with room to independently solve racialized problems on their own. This, however, does not mean educators should ignore instances of discrimination. Recall that Kimberlee also noted that her school should have intervened on discrimination more often (see Blatant Ignoring).

This preferred approach did not align with culturally responsive or TSEL components. Participants' limited trust of the school staff's ability to appropriately advocate against discrimination suggests that students are aware of faults related to Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision Making.

4.5.2 | Advocate and Empathize

Several participants indicated that they wanted educators to advocate against the discrimination they experienced and, at a minimum, empathize with their situation. For example, when asked what they expected school personnel to do when facing blatant racism and colorism from their peers, Janice said she wanted school personnel to do the following:

> *Take my side and help me out because...I wasn't the type [of] person to speak up like that. But just to tell them... 'it's not okay to comment about somebody else's skin tone,' because it did make me insecure for a while.*

The latter portion of Janice's statement also suggests that intervening could have assuaged her insecurities.

The preference for empathy also was a noted expectation. When asked how the administrator should have handled Idris's overt racial experience with a peer, Idris stated that at "the very bare minimum...show any sort of empathy...like, 'I understand what

you're going through...that's not okay." The power of empathy was later highlighted by Idris stating that his social justice teacher provided emotional support months after the event had occurred:

> *He was like, 'this was awful. Like, I can't let this happen to you.' And that was something that really helped me to like, understand that situation, like grow from that, that it wasn't like, I wasn't overreacting, or I wasn't like making a big deal out of like something.*

In this case, the empathy the educator demonstrated allowed Idris's to feel validated. Other participants noted that having conversations with school staff about their experience would be helpful. For example, Whitney stated that school staff "did not come to me...my professors in college...email me [saying] 'come see me one-on-one.' They [K-12 staff] did not bother coming to me." Here, it seems that advocating and empathizing also encompasses taking the initiative to assist students who experience discrimination.

This preferred intervention approach does align with elements of culturally responsive practice and TSEL. The call for school personnel to stand by Black students and express empathy for their experience directly aligns with Relationships Skills; the actionable steps required to engage in advocacy and empathy align with Responsible Decision Making.

4.5.3 | Educate Offensive Students

Several participants noted the importance of holding discriminating peers accountable to their actions. Many participants noted that one such way of doing so is to educate them on the background and impact of their discriminating behavior. For example, Kimberlee noted that it is "important to educate the ignorant." Erin indicated that preventative measures would be helpful, such as using class time to "increase communication, [and] meet...people from different [identity] groups...[and] get to know those people on a personal level, rather than just based on what they look like." In terms of reactions to biased events, Idris noted that schools should set clear educational expectations surrounding discrimination:

> *You need to show at some point that it's serious and that children can't get away with [discrimination] I think that honestly even like a schoolwide you need to like have some sort of announcement that's like, this is not okay...*

Despite these calls for accountability, participants indicated that they were often personally responsible for remediating harmful behaviors encountered at the hands of their peers via racial and cultural education. For example, Olivia indicated that she took the "opportunity to educate somebody else" when they were "miseducated" in a way that supported biased views. Although some participants voiced a willingness to educate discriminating peers, others indicated that educating peers comes at a cost. For example, Ebony noted that "you don't really want to have to teach somebody," and that teaching someone about race "gets tiresome." In such cases, school personnel should manage that burden.

Educating the Offensive Student directly aligns with TSEL competencies, specifically Responsible Decision-Making and Social Awareness. Engaging in this theme and these competencies would ensure that discrimination is addressed at school in a manner that promotes cultural competency, and it would hold school personnel accountable to protecting Black students' well-being and energy.

4.6 | Patterns Across Categories

Some patterns within the data suggest that participants' intersecting identities and school environment may be linked to their experiences with peer discrimination. In addition to detailing participants' identities and school profiles (participants' pseudonyms, identities noted, and perception of peers' racial demographics at school), Table 2 notes the themes participants endorsed across all three categories. Although no pattern between intersecting identities and Student Intervention Preferences was detected, Type of Discrimination and Educator Intervention Approaches yielded a discernable pattern. Participants who noted having two or more identities that intersect with race *and* who did not go to schools with the majority of peers sharing their same racial identities at some point in time ($n = 4$) experienced more than one type of discrimination. These participants also reported receiving limited to no discrimination interventions from school personnel. One exception to this pattern was a Black male, Idris, who, despite only having one additional identity (i.e., nationality), also reported multiple forms of discrimination with limited intervention efforts. As a result, all students who indicated having a non-American heritage reported multiple forms of bias and at least one category of limited intervention.

5 | Discussion

The present study sought to understand Black students' experiences with racial and intersectional discrimination from their peers, school personnel's intervention approaches to peer discrimination, and Black students' preferred intervention approaches to peer discrimination. Using the Intersectional Theory (Crenshaw 1989), our analysis revealed that Black students face multiple forms of discrimination based on their intersecting identities. Regarding school personnel's approaches to pupil discrimination, our results suggest that little to no interventions are occurring. This lack of intervention misaligns with culturally responsive social emotional practices, and it fails to meet Black students' expectations of receiving support from school personnel in the face of peer discrimination.

5.1 | Intersectional Discrimination

The results revealed that the peer discrimination Black participants faced was highly intersectional in nature. In addition to race, the identities most targeted among participants were SES, gender, additional racial identities, being a first- and second-generation African student, and skin tone.

In general, our findings align with previous literature regarding experiences of intersectional discrimination among marginalized

TABLE 2 | Participant profiles and theme patterns.

Participant	Janice[a]	Ebony	Tiana	Olivia	Sarah	Kimberlee[a]	Whitney[a]	Idris[a]	Alex	Camren	Erin[a]	Kendall[a]
Identities												
Biracial						X			X			
Female	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	O
National[b]							X	X				X
Low SES[b]												X
Religion[b]			X				X					
Dark complexion[b]	X											X
Perception of peer demographic												
Same		X							X	X	X	
Different	X		X			X		X				X
Equal				X			X					X
Type of discrimination												
Blatant	X		X		X	X	X	X				X
Discriminatory teasing						X	X		X	X		X
Micro	X		X	X						X		X
Intervention approach												
Blatant ignoring	X							X				X
Lack of awareness	X		X				X			X		X
Subtle step ins						X	X	X				
Intervention expectation												
Educate		X		X		X						
Hesitance in help-seeking			X			X	X		X	X		
Advocate and empathize	X						X	X				X

Note: Participants who went to more than one high school answered survey questions according to the school they at which they spent the most time. O: Nonbinary.

[a]Denotes participants who claimed that school personnel either witnessed or was informed of discrimination.

[b]Identities that were not explicitly inquired about in the interview protocol, but rather were revealed through semistructured interviewing. It is possible that participants hold more intersectional identities than are noted in the table.

adolescents. For example, previous works have suggested that being from a lower SES background compounds instances of discrimination (Fernandez and Benner 2022). Additionally, our data aligns with previous findings that girls and gender minorities experience racism linked to their appearance (e.g., hair texture, material items, and skin tone; Gadson and Lewis 2022), and their attempts to advocate for themselves are too often trivialized by school staff (Leath et al. 2019). Our qualitative insights about Biracial/ethnic participants' identities being targeted across racial peer groups aligns with previous findings that Biracial students experience heightened discrimination compared to their peers (Hong et al. 2021; Williams 2013). Participants whose families immigrated from African countries had unique experiences that have been mirrored in previous literature, which suggests that Black immigrants or generations after must navigate discrimination that is based on their race *and* their culture (Coutinho and Koinis-Mitchell 2014; Mukiibi 2015; George Mwangi and English 2017). We also feel it is important to highlight the discrimination based on skin color. While one participant noted that assumptions were made about him due to having lighter skin, there appeared to be more blatant and harsher discrimination toward those who identified as having darker skin (i.e., colorism). Such outcomes coincide with findings that students with dark complexion experience more discrimination at school (Crutchfield et al. 2022).

These findings indicate that successful interventions on discrimination need to address race and its intersecting identities.

5.1.1 | Discrimination Among Similar Peers

Despite exposure to one's own racial group during adolescence having many positive outcomes (Douglass et al. 2014; Yip et al. 2010), identity-based conflict within racial groups still may arise. School personnel should be aware of the many complexities contributing to intersectional discrimination among racially marginalized groups. In some cases, particularly as it related to Biracial/ethnic identities, participants indicated that they received discriminatory jokes from friends, and they perceived comments as jovial and only mildly irksome or hurtful. This finding is not totally surprising. Douglass et al. (2016) found that adolescent discrimination often consisted of "prejudice under the guise of humor" (74). They posited that racially marginalized students draw different—less offensive—meaning of racial teasing from *accepted* peers compared to traditional forms of discrimination (75). This may be because identity-based teasing among friend groups may be a way of understanding cultural and racial relationships during adolescence (Douglass et al. 2016; Lee 1995). This nuanced context should be considered when developing and implementing protocols for how to address discrimination from peers. That is, before engaging in "advanced" intervention, a *trusted and trained* school staff member may want to ask preliminary questions about the nature of the relationship between students and the degree to which offense was taken. Even if the intervention halts at this point, the action of inquiry, at the very least, encompasses TSEL elements of Relationship Building and Responsible Decision Making (Legette et al. 2023). Moreover, the data suggests that differential steps may need to be taken according to who is discriminating and what identities are being targeted. For example, a different approach may be necessary for Discriminatory Teasing among ill-acquainted peers or discrimination toward certain identities.

In many ways, discrimination among students who share similar identities can go beyond—or may not be perceived as—friendly teasing. For example, our data suggests that a boundary appeared to be crossed regarding issues of colorism. School personnel should know that intensive teasing (particularly as it relates to skin tone) across racial groups can have dire social-emotional consequences for youth (Crutchfield et al. 2022; McGee et al. 2016). This data suggests that the actions of intersectional discrimination appear the same across racial groups of discriminators. Consequently, school personnel may feel inclined to intervene in the same manner that they would with a privileged student. However, interventions on intragroup discrimination may need to be distinct as targeted students' responses to such discrimination may be unique. Specifically, discrimination from within one's group may harbor elements of cultural betrayal, or a violation of trust among one's own cultural group (Durkee and Gómez 2022; Gómez 2019). Interventions may need to account for potential betrayal of intragroup discrimination.

School personnel should also be thoughtful about how they intervene on discriminating students who also have racially marginalized identities. Marginalized students who act in discriminatory ways toward their Black peers should be held accountable for their actions. However, the foundation of this issue, is students' *internalized* notion of White supremacy and dominance, which schools often uphold (Tallent et al. 2023). School personnel should be cognizant of this complexity and acknowledge the role Whiteness plays in discrimination between marginalized students (McGee et al. 2016).

Overall, participants indicated that discrimination from peers across racial backgrounds resulted in negative emotional experiences ranging from feeling hurt, angered, isolated, and depressed. These experiences align with previous literature that claims Black students' discriminatory experiences are detrimental to their social, mental, and behavioral health (Benner and Graham 2013; Njoroge et al. 2021). Despite these findings justifying the need for proper intervention from school staff, the results suggest that these emotions were exacerbated by school personnel's lack of response to the discrimination.

5.2 | Present and Preferred Interventions

According to our participants, school personnel's approaches to pupil discrimination were either nonexistent (i.e., Blatant Ignoring and Lack of Awareness) or incomprehensive (Insufficient Step Ins). Such findings suggest that school personnel would benefit from support in developing interventions on racial and intersectional discrimination, and participants' responses to this study may serve as cornerstone for establishing successful intervention strategies.

Participants generally indicated that school personnel should intervene on peer discrimination. They wanted educators to demonstrate empathy towards them when discrimination

occurred and advocate against discrimination (i.e., Advocate and Empathize). Such an approach opens the door for Black students' experiences and feelings to be validated (Baker et al. 2023). Participants also noted that discriminating students should be held accountable for their actions, specifically by educating the students on why their behavior is oppressive (Educate Discriminating Student). Engaging in education may enhance discriminating students' cultural competency (O'Malley et al. 2019) and open the door for race-based discussions (Welton et al. 2015).

Although two themes indicated that school personnel should take actions to address discrimination, one theme, Hesitance in Help-Seeking, did not. Hesitance in Help-Seeking revealed that students may be hesitant to trust educators to intervene in ways that respect students' agency or decrease their vulnerability among their peers. This theme may be indicative school personnel's inappropriate handling of discrimination, exacerbating Black students' perceptions of inadequate support among educators (Bottiani et al. 2016). Nonetheless, enhancing Black students' trust in school personnel should be a goal, and relying on culturally responsive SEL practices may allow for that goal's attainment.

6 | Theme Alignments With TSEL

We used competencies within the TSEL framework to determine if present and preferred interventions on pupil discrimination were culturally responsive. These competencies call for school personnel to: be aware of and address inequities, and express empathy towards targeted students (Social Awareness), promote safety by protecting Black students and holding discriminating students accountable (Responsible Decision Making), and establish on-going relationships that promote trust among students and school staff (Relationship Skills). Understanding the degrees to which the present and preferred interventions (mis)aligned with these competencies gives insight into which approaches to avoid or endorse.

6.1 | Misalignment

All themes that illuminated present interventions that school staff engaged in among this sample misaligned with, or contradicted, the TSEL competencies. Blatant Ignoring contradicted all three competencies. Practices within this theme disregarded discrimination, leaving no room for expressions of empathy toward inequity, holding discriminating students accountable, or promotions of teacher-student relationships. Unfortunately, these findings mirror similar reports that discrimination at school is often unaddressed (Southern Poverty Law Center 2019). Another theme that encompassed unaddressed discrimination was Lack of Awareness, which contradicts Social Awareness and Responsible Decision Making. School personnel's reported inattentiveness to racialized dynamics at school constricted their inability to empathize with Black students' experiences (Legette et al. 2022) and discuss issues of racism and oppression (Singleton 2015).

Unlike Blatant Ignoring and Lack of Awareness, the theme Insufficient Step Ins demonstrates a semblance of Social Awareness in that school personnel recognized when participants were targeted. However, Insufficient Step Ins misaligns with Responsible Decision Making and Relationship Skills. These intervention attempts appeared to address either the Black students or the discriminating students, but rarely both. Furthermore, the intervention was often unsuccessful as participants noted continued experiences of discrimination and feelings of distress. That is, responsible decisions regarding student protection and accountability fell short. This theme aligns with Baker et al.'s (2023) findings, which noted that teachers' supposed discrimination interventions were incomprehensive. Furthermore, the ineffective attempts to address discrimination does not promote Black students' confidence in school staff's ability to protect them (i.e., promote Relationship Skills). Given that Black students' trust in school personnel may wane over time (Yeager et al. 2017), it is of particular importance that school staff establish relationships with students and develop ways to resolve discriminatory issues in manner that protects targeted students.

Of the preferred intervention approaches participants noted, Hesitance in Help-Seeking is the only one that misaligns with the TSEL competencies, specifically Responsible Decision Making and Relationship Skills. Although there may be cases in which no intervention is best, withholding intervention generally does not prevent future discrimination, nor does it address threats to Black students' social emotional well-being (Anderson 2018). However, *this theme seemed to derive from a lack of trust of school personnel's ability to appropriately intervene, rather than from a desire for nothing to be done about discrimination*. This insight further justifies the need for strong relationships between students and school staff.

6.2 | Alignments

Two preferred intervention themes, Advocate and Empathize and Educate the Offensive Student, aligned with the TSEL competencies. Advocate and Empathize would require school personnel to express concern for students' well-being and stand up for targeted students. This call for empathy aligns with the Social Awareness competency, while conscious acts that protect marginalized students and reduce future harmful behaviors (i.e., advocacy; Veenstra et al. 2014) aligns with Responsible Decision Making. What's more, appropriately empathizing with and sticking up for students in the face of discrimination can establish students' on-going trust in educators (Hope et al. 2015), fulfilling the Relationship Skills competency. In fact, participants noted that educators' validation of their experiences made them feel less alone, and they indicated that they trusted school personnel who did empathize with their experience.

Educate the Offensive Student called for school staff to inform discriminating peers of the underlying biases associated with their discriminatory behaviors. The theme aligns with Social Awareness and Responsible Decision Making. Though not a cure-all, educating students may be an auspicious approach to addressing discrimination (Baker et al. 2023) as it may allow them to better understand the oppressive nature of their behavior (Welton et al. 2015). This approach requires educators

to have strong understanding of inequities (i.e., Social Awareness) and ensure that their educational approach is holding students accountable in ways that promote their cultural competence (i.e., Responsible Decision Making).

6.3 | Implications for School Personnel

The results of this study reveal that school personnel of varying roles would benefit from systemic support on how to intervene on intersectional discrimination towards Black students. In fact, the data may serve as a blueprint for training school staff to use TSEL competencies and develop implementable protocols for intervening pupil discrimination. Specially, this study provides macro-level training and protocol insights related to understanding students intersecting identities, recognizing when those identities have been targeted, and acting in ways that support and discipline targeted students and discriminating students, respectively.

The data suggests that some school personnel are unaware that Black students have multiple identities that their peers target in school settings (i.e., Lack of Awareness). Therefore, school personnel could use training that enhances their Social Awareness around Black students' identities. Based on the present data, training should include insights about how discrimination among students is not singular (Pugach et al. 2019), meaning that multiple identities that accompany race may be open targets that students with privileged identities may aim for (Byrd and Carter Andrews 2016).

Insights from Lack of Awareness and Blatant Ignoring suggests that school personnel should also learn to explicitly recognize when students' identities are being attacked. Training may need to prompt school personnel to understand what discrimination is and the many forms it can take, ranging from blatant racism to microaggressions across peer groups of varying identities. Identifying when discrimination has taken place, and which identities are the target of such discrimination is also a component of Social Awareness (Legette et al. 2022).

A lack of trust in school personnel may also prompt some Black students to combat discrimination alone (Hesitance in Help-Seeking). Therefore, school personnel would benefit from support on Relationship Building with their Black students. They may specifically need assistance with learning to provide safe spaces for Black students (Legette et al. 2022), developing culturally based relationships, and making room to listen to students' concerns (Woodward 2018). Taken together, increasing awareness around intersecting identities and improving staff-student relations poises school personnel to develop formal interventions in response to discrimination.

According to the findings of the present study, school personnel may benefit from assistance in developing an actionable plan around addressing discrimination. They should go beyond Subtle Step Ins to ensure that (a) Black students feel safe, and (b) discrimination is responded to in a manner that reduces present and future harm. In other words, school staff could use assistance in engaging in Responsible Decision Making when responding to students' emotional needs (Advocate and Empathize). This may consist of checking in with how the student feels, and validating their experiences (Baker et al. 2023; Nora et al. 2011; Rendon 1994), which in turn may not only promote feelings of safety, but also assist with Relationship Building (Kitchen et al. 2024; Legette et al. 2022).

An additional step should consist of responding to the discriminating students. Interestingly, participants rarely emphasized a desire for punitive actions towards their discriminating peers, but rather they voiced a preference for offensive students to have enhanced cultural competence (i.e., Educate the Offensive Student). Thus, protocols could include formal interventions that educate discriminating students on the historical context and harms of their behavior (Banks et al. 2023). Previous studies have found that educational interventions (e.g., reading) that inform students of diversity have reduced biases (Grapin et al. 2019). Similarly, explicit and on-going conversations about racial and intersectional identities can assist students with determining what is and is not appropriate to say (Anthony-Stevens et al. 2022). These practices may improve TSEL competencies among students as well as school personnel.

6.3.1 | Implications for School Culture

While not entirely within the scope of this article, there are many other considerations to weigh when attempting to carry out the above recommendations. First among them is *who* should be responsible for responding to discrimination. According to this study, teachers, administrators, and mental health providers may all be aware of discrimination toward Black students. We argue that *all* school personnel who are aware of discrimination have a responsibility to respond and carry out the TSEL components. However, the role they play in responding may vary. For example, teachers who are aware of discrimination may acknowledge that discrimination took place (Social Awareness and Relationship Building), briefly check in on the offended student (Responsible Decision Making; Baker et al. 2023), and then refer the issue to a mental health provider (e.g., a school psychologist or counselor) and administrator. Administrators could document the discriminatory event and remind offensive students of behavioral expectations. Meanwhile, a school mental health provider may conduct mental health checks with the offended student, implement education interventions with the offensive student, and carry out any desired mediation among the two (Alvarez et al. 2022; Malone et al. 2022). In short, discrimination intervention may be best carried out if there is a system of shared responsibility among the staff.

Another consideration is ensuring that antidiscrimination expectations and TSEL practices are not just individualized but rather systemically embedded into school culture. This may include openly noting expectations around respecting marginalized groups (Bigler and Wright 2014; McIntosh et al. 2018) and ensuring that students are encouraged to protect and assist one another in the face of discrimination (e.g., avoiding peer bystander; Priest et al. 2021). These practices may establish community standards that prevent discrimination from happening in the first place (Grapin et al. 2019; Losinski et al. 2019). In short,

the students should be encouraged to endorse TSEL practices as well; however, school personnel should first model and carry out such practices (Antidefamation League 2019; Legette et al. 2023). To maintain these cultural standards within the school, practitioners, such as school psychologists, can assist educators with creating global practices that establish welcoming environments for marginalized students (Malone et al. 2022) or developing school-wide discrimination intervention protocols.

6.4 | Limitations and Future Studies

This study, though rigorous, has a few limitations to consider. First, it was noted that interview protocol questions for participants specially asked about *racial* discrimination; the questions did not inquire about intersectionality. Future studies may consider adding questions specific to students' multiple identities. This study also asked recent high school graduates to reflect on their previous experiences in high school. Future studies should inquire about peer bias and intervention among current high school students. Additionally, this study solely examined the experiences of Black students in the Midwestern region of the US Future studies should investigate the peer racialized experiences across different regions of the United States, as schooling practices and policies vary across school districts. The narrow inclusion criteria and narrowed scope of the research questions suggests this study's sample size was appropriate (Malterud et al. 2016); nonetheless, future work may consider doing more focus groups and more individual interviews than the present study to increase generalizability of the results. Incidentally, participants in this sample overwhelmingly identified as women. Future studies should consider the distinct experiences of men and gender nonconforming individuals as well. Lastly, this study intended to understand intervention approaches of school personnel, broadly. Future studies should investigate possible distinctions in approaches among personnel with varying roles (e.g., teachers vs. school mental health providers), and future studies should consider inquiring about the degree to which peer bystander and peer intervention play a role in Black students' experiences with discrimination.

6.5 | Conclusions

This study revealed Black youths' perceptions of peer discrimination at school and school personnel's intervention approaches to such discrimination. Our findings suggest that peer discrimination towards Black students is intersectional in nature, and school personnel lack tools to effectively intervene on Black students' behalf. This contradicts with *most* of participants preferred intervention, which call for school personnel to advocate for Black students and hold discriminating students accountable. The findings of this study call for school personnel to demonstrate heightened awareness of peer discrimination toward Black students and develop culturally competent skills and protocols to respond to such incidents.

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The authors have nothing to report.

Ethics Statement

This study was IRB approved by Cleveland State University's Office of Research, and it was conducted ethically. This study was IRB approved by the first authors institution and was conducted ethically. Participants' consent was acquired prior to data collection.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.