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## Evaluating the Severity of Hate-motivated Violence: Intersectional Differences among LGBT Hate Crime Victims

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### ABSTRACT

This article employs an intersectional approach to examine the ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people evaluate the severity of hate-motivated violence. Previous studies of LGBT hate crime victims have typically focused on the psychological effects of violence. In contrast, this article explores the sociological components of hate crime by comparing the perceptions of poor and working-class LGBT people of colour with the perceptions of white, middle-class LGBT people. Data were collected from semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted in New York City, with 44 people who experienced anti-LGBT violence. Results indicate that middle-class white respondents were more likely than low-income people of colour to perceive their violent experiences as severe, even though the latter experienced more physical violence than the former. This finding suggests that the social position of LGBT people plays an instrumental role in structuring how they evaluate the severity of hate-motivated violence.

### KEY WORDS

bias crime / gay men / hate crime / intersectionality / lesbian women / race / sexuality / social class / violence

### Introduction

Although intersectionality frameworks have been used to examine hate crime policies and perpetrators (see McPhail, 2002; Perry, 2001; Strolovitch, 2007), they have not been utilized to explore the experiences of hate crime victims. This article, in contrast, employs an intersectional approach

to examine the ways in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people evaluate the severity of their violent experiences. Previous studies examining the severity of hate-motivated violence have focused primarily on the psychological effects of hate crime (Iganski, 2001; McDevitt et al., 2001; Rose and Mechanic, 2002). Conversely, this article builds on intersectionality scholarship to explore the sociological components of bias-related violence, thereby continuing the shift away from an individualistic analysis of hate crime (Grattet, 2009; McGhee, 2005; Meyer, 2008; Moran and Skeggs, 2004). Results are based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 44 people who experienced anti-LGBT violence. Findings suggest that middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour evaluated the severity of hate-motivated violence in different ways. In particular, middle-class white respondents were more likely than low-income people of colour to perceive their violent experiences as severe.

## The Severity of Hate-motivated Violence

Hate-motivated violence, broadly defined as any act of violence motivated by bias or prejudice, has increasingly become an area of scholarly concern (Grattet, 2009; Green et al., 2001). Despite the growing body of research on bias-motivated violence, studies of hate crime victims remain scant (Perry, 2003). Among the few studies that have focused on victims, most have examined the psychological effects of hate crime, suggesting that bias-motivated violence often contributes to symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as anxiety, anger and despair (Herek et al., 1997; Otis and Skinner, 1996). Subsequent research has found that victims of hate crime report more trauma-related symptoms than victims of non-bias crime and non-victims (Herek et al., 1999; McDevitt et al., 2001; Rose and Mechanic, 2002). This research has also distinguished among various forms of violence, and, while several studies have shown that victims experience more trauma-related symptoms from physical attacks than from verbal violence and property-based crimes (D'Augelli and Grossman, 2001; Herek et al., 1997, 1999), other studies suggest that verbal abuse can be as traumatic as physical violence (Boeckmann and Liew, 2002; Rose and Mechanic, 2002).

Psychological studies of hate crime victims have undoubtedly revealed the degree to which hate-motivated violence may have traumatic psychological effects. Nevertheless, these studies generally suggest that hate crime may 'hurt more' than other forms of violence, implying that the amount of trauma that victims report is largely contingent upon the type of violence they experience (Iganski, 2001: 626). The cumulative effect of this research implies a hierarchical ranking system, with hate-motivated physical violence usually placed toward the top and verbal violence and non-bias crime placed toward the bottom (Herek et al., 1997; McDevitt et al., 2001). These understandings of violence have brought attention to LGBT people's physically violent experiences, yet they have not been explored from an intersectional perspective.

## Employing an Intersectional Approach to Examine the Perceptions of LGBT Hate Crime Victims

Intersectionality theory explores the ways in which systems of oppression such as race, class, gender and sexuality simultaneously structure social relations (Collins, 2000[1990]). Intersectional approaches have traditionally challenged hierarchical understandings of oppression, suggesting that one system of oppression (e.g. sexism) cannot be understood as more fundamental than another (e.g. racism) because both systems are inextricably linked (Crenshaw, 1991; Razack, 1998; Spelman, 1988). Instead, intersectional approaches posit that relations of domination should be understood as an interlocking web of mutually reinforcing power structures, each of which depends on the others (Collins, 2004; McCall, 2005). These approaches, for example, have focused on the continued salience of social class and the effects of class as it intersects with other systems of oppression (Moran, 2000; Taylor, 2007). Rather than hierarchically ranking systems of oppression, intersectionality theory suggests that each system operates in different yet overlapping ways (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

If we accept that systems of oppression cannot be hierarchically ranked, then we should also accept that individuals' experiences of oppression cannot be categorized in hierarchical ways. Previous studies examining the severity of hate-motivated violence, however, have implied that certain forms of violence are more severe or damaging than others (Herek et al., 1999; McDevitt et al., 2001). Examples of this practice include victims being asked to describe their 'most serious' violent experience (Rose and Mechanic, 2002: 16) and to explain the crime in which they felt that they were 'in the greatest physical danger' (Herek et al., 1997: 201). In these studies, victims describe only one violent incident in detail. As a result, these research methods require victims to discount many of their violent experiences, privileging one violent incident over others.

This article attempts to move away from hierarchical understandings of hate-motivated violence, while at the same time accepting that victims may rank forms of violence on their own. This approach privileges rather than marginalizes the voice of victims. As other hate crime scholars have noted, the experiences of victims have not featured centrally in the literature (Blee, 2007; Boeckmann and Turpin-Petrosino, 2002). This deficiency has arguably led to a homogenized portrayal of LGBT hate crime victims, with little attention focusing on the differences among them (Dunbar, 2006). Indeed, previous studies of LGBT hate crime victims have focused primarily on the experiences of white gay men, overlooking those of lesbian women, transgender people and LGBT people of colour (Dunbar, 2006; Perry, 2003). These studies also tend to overlook the relevance of social class in structuring LGBT people's violent experiences (Dunbar, 2006; Moran, 2000).

Examining the differences among LGBT people remains particularly important, as intersectional approaches have documented the many ways that traditional scholarship has sustained the interests of privileged groups (Crenshaw, 1991; Glenn, 2002; Razack, 1998). Feminist intersectionality theory, for example,

has challenged some gender scholarship for generalizing from the experiences of white, middle-class women (Collins, 2000; Zinn and Dill, 1996). In contrast, intersectional approaches suggest that not all women experience oppression in the same way, as poor women of colour, for instance, confront obstacles unique to their own social position (Crenshaw, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).

Building on feminist and intersectionality scholarship that has explored how individuals' experiences differ based on their social location (see Rasche, 1988; Taylor, 2007; Williams, 2006), this article examines differences between middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour in terms of how they evaluate the severity of their violent experiences. Given the demographic characteristics of the interview sample, I have combined race and class categories, comparing the perceptions of white, middle-class LGBT people with the perceptions of poor and working-class LGBT people of colour. Employing an intersectional approach, this article expands our understanding of hate-motivated violence by revealing how LGBT people of different social positions may evaluate the severity of their violent experiences in distinct ways.

## Methods

Data presented in this article are drawn from a dissertation project which focuses on race, class, and gender differences among LGBT hate crime victims. To examine these intersectional differences, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 44 people who experienced violence because they were perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. This interview sample was compiled through LGBT advocacy and service organizations in New York City. Seeking a diverse sample, I recruited participants from a wide range of organizations, many of which provide services for LGBT people of colour. At these organizations, recruitment fliers were placed on a bulletin board or in a waiting room. The flier read: 'Have you experienced violence because you are (or were perceived to be) lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender?' A broad, open-ended question was used on the flier to attract participants with a variety of violent experiences and to allow respondents to define violence on their own terms.

During the interview, participants were asked to describe their violent experiences in detail. I then asked follow-up questions regarding their understanding of hate-motivated violence and their perception of its severity. Respondents also completed a short questionnaire in which they provided basic demographic information. The interviews lasted from approximately one to three hours; the median interview was 102 minutes.

I transcribed each interview shortly after it occurred and then developed a coding scheme to organize the data. These qualitative coding techniques helped extract patterns among respondents' answers (Berg, 2004; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Continuing data collection was then used to refine the coding scheme and sharpen my analysis of the discovered themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1994).

While most studies of hate crime victims have used a survey method, some social scientists have argued that an interview method best captures the ways in which respondents create meaning (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Weiss, 1994). Previous interview studies of LGBT hate crime victims have employed highly structured interviews with a uniform (but small) number of questions asked to every respondent (see Herek et al., 1997). This approach allows for a large sample size, but it prevents respondents from actively constructing their own narratives (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). In contrast, I employed a less structured approach, allowing respondents to guide much of the discussion and to describe their violent experiences in depth.

The interview sample consists of 17 women, 17 men and 10 transgender people. All of the men identified as gay and 13 of the women identified as lesbian; two women identified as heterosexual and two as bisexual. Eight of the transgender people identified as male-to-female (MTF), one as female-to-male (FTM) and one as intersexed. In what follows, I sometimes refer to respondents as 'queer people', using this phrase as interchangeable with 'LGBT people'. Participants ranged from 20 to 62 years old; the median age was 41. Twenty-one participants identified as black, 13 as white, eight as Latino and two as Asian. In terms of educational background, five participants had dropped out of high school, 14 had a high school diploma, six had taken some college courses, 16 had a college degree and three had a postgraduate degree. Every respondent described experiences of anti-LGBT verbal violence. All but six respondents described experiences of anti-LGBT physical violence; all of these respondents were white and middle class.

Quantifiable socioeconomic classifications were avoided in the hope of allowing respondents to describe their perceptions and experiences of social class (Taylor, 2009). In addition to educational attainment, respondents were asked to self-identify in terms of social class and to describe their occupational history in detail. Race and class seemed to intersect on these measurements of social class, with most LGBT people of colour being unemployed or identifying as working class and most white respondents describing upper middle-class jobs. Moreover, of the 19 participants who did not attend college, 18 were black or Latino. Conversely, all but one of the white respondents had a college degree. Thus, with regard to the intersection of race and class, most middle-class participants were white and most low-income respondents were black or Latino. This division along race and class lines arose in part from my sampling technique: most of the organizations where I placed fliers appeared to serve a largely middle-class white population or a predominantly working-class black and Latino population.

The following sections explore differences among respondents along the lines of race and class. The categories of 'middle-class white respondents' and 'low-income LGBT people of colour' are meant to reflect race and class differences found within the sample. Of course, these categorizations are imperfect, as race and class identities are more fluid than these categories would suggest (Taylor, 2007). A few white respondents, for example, had fluctuated in and out

of working-class jobs and some people of colour had previously worked in middle-class occupations. Nevertheless, most white respondents had worked primarily in upper middle-class jobs throughout their lives and most people of colour were unemployed or had worked primarily in working-class occupations. At the same time, considerable differences could be found within each of these groups, as poor LGBT people of colour, for instance, may interpret and experience anti-queer violence quite differently than working-class LGBT people of colour. Still, in this study, the most salient differences in terms of how respondents evaluated the severity of their violent experiences were between middle-class white respondents and low-income LGBT people of colour. While the larger project on which this article is based also focuses on the variation within these race and social class groups (Meyer, 2008), this article focuses primarily on the differences between them.

## Results

Results indicate that LGBT people's reference groups – the groups with which they compare themselves – affect the degree to which they perceive their violent experiences as severe (England, 2010; Hyman and Singer, 1968). That is, LGBT people most often emphasized the severity of their violent experiences when comparing themselves with someone whom they perceived to have experienced relatively little violence. Since poor and working-class LGBT people of colour were typically friends with individuals who had encountered a lot of violence, and white, middle-class LGBT people were not, the latter were more likely than the former to perceive their violent experiences as severe.

### The Role of Others in Structuring How LGBT People Evaluated the Severity of Their Violent Experiences

Poor and working-class LGBT people of colour were often encouraged by their friends and family members to compare themselves with individuals who had encountered a lot of violence. For instance, Jayvyn, a 33-year-old black gay man who worked as a secretary, felt that he was consistently compared with people who had experienced more violence than himself: 'For the longest time, I didn't see it as a big deal. Everyone kept telling me, "Well, you weren't hurt, you weren't killed, like so and so." But I *was* hurt. I mean, I had the scars to prove it.' When Jayvyn expressed the severity of his violent experience – he was called a 'punk faggot' and had several glass bottles thrown at him on the street – others diminished its importance by classifying it as commonplace. By suggesting that Jayvyn could have been murdered, others constructed his violent experience as comparatively insignificant.

While Jayvyn rejected others' discourse, some poor and working-class LGBT people of colour seemed more accepting of the reference groups that

were suggested to them. Jasmine, a 44-year-old black lesbian woman who worked as a security guard, described her brother's response when she told him about being assaulted for revealing her sexuality:

He told me that I was fortunate not to end up in the hospital like his friend Chris [who was stabbed in gang-related violence] ... It made sense, what he said. It could have been worse. I could have ended up in the hospital. I guess I *should* feel lucky that I didn't.

Jasmine's brother downplayed the severity of her violent experience by suggesting that she could have been hospitalized. By doing so, he seemed to minimize her experience, comparing it with a violent incident that he perceived to have resulted in more serious injuries. Low-income LGBT people of colour frequently described this type of response, in which they were encouraged to view their violent experiences as less severe than those of someone else, usually the friend of a family member. As a result, poor and working-class LGBT people of colour may have sometimes perceived their violent experiences as relatively insignificant because they had been encouraged by others to think of the violence in this way.

White, middle-class respondents were sometimes encouraged to downplay the severity of their violent experiences, too. In these situations, however, others usually compared middle-class white respondents with individuals who had encountered relatively little violence. For instance, Ted, a 33-year old white gay man who worked as a lawyer, described his mother's comparison of him with one of her friends:

Right after I told her about [being mugged and called a 'faggot'], she told me this story about her [gay] friend who was almost mugged ... It had nothing to do with him being gay and he wasn't even mugged ... I just thought, 'What does this have to do with me?'

Ted felt that his mother had diminished the severity of his violent experience by comparing him with someone who had not encountered violence. This comparison, which seemed unfair to Ted, equated his violent experience with an incident that he perceived as trivial. Like most middle-class white respondents, Ted was compared with someone who had encountered less violence than himself. Poor and working-class people of colour, in contrast, were usually compared with individuals perceived to have experienced more violence.

Although both middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour sometimes felt as if others had downplayed the severity of their violent experiences, middle-class white respondents were more frequently encouraged to perceive their violent experiences as severe. For instance, George, a 45-year-old white gay man who worked as a college professor, described the reaction of his friends to him being pushed and called a 'fag': 'Everyone said that I should go to the doctor's ... [One friend] told me that I should report it as a hate crime ... Another friend set me up with a therapist. He was a big help.' White, middle-class LGBT people encountered this type of response – in which others emphasized the severity of the violence – more often than poor and working-class



LGBT people of colour. Furthermore, middle-class white respondents were more frequently encouraged to seek help in dealing with the violence. Indeed, the support that George received was essential in motivating him to find institutionalized support. After receiving encouragement from others, George went to the hospital, met with a therapist and reported the incident to the police.

The friends and family members of middle-class white respondents frequently served as a support network, assisting LGBT people in navigating through institutionalized settings. In these situations, service providers may have – perhaps unwittingly – underscored the severity of anti-queer violence as they tried to alleviate the suffering of white, middle-class LGBT people. Indeed, through their involvement in institutionalized settings, middle-class white respondents had others listening and responding to their demands.

At times, poor and working-class LGBT people of colour also received support from their friends and family members. Even so, this assistance rarely connected low-income people of colour with institutionalized support; it rarely involved helping them find a doctor, lawyer, therapist or police officer. Instead, it usually focused on providing emotional support. Consequently, low-income LGBT people of colour did not interact with service providers as frequently as middle-class white respondents.

### The Expectations and Reference Groups of Low-income People of Colour and Middle-class White Respondents

Middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour had different expectations concerning the likelihood of experiencing violence. Most low-income people of colour, for example, thought that anti-queer violence could conceivably happen to them because they knew others who had experienced it. For instance, Tamika, a 53-year-old black lesbian woman who lived in a homeless shelter, expressed little surprise at being assaulted for revealing her sexuality: 'I wasn't surprised, I almost expected it to happen. Most of us have to go through something like this, I think ... Most of my friends have had similar experiences.' Tamika's response was common among low-income people of colour, many of whom expected to encounter anti-queer violence because their friends had already experienced it.

The expectations of poor and working-class LGBT people of colour seemed related not only to their sexual identities but also to their race and social class positions. Diamond, a 51-year-old black lesbian woman, explained the various types of hate-motivated violence that she could experience:

[Being attacked because of my sexuality] might happen again, I have no way of knowing ... It's a tough world out there. Someone could beat me because I'm black or gay or a woman or some other thing that I have no control over. I mean, I look at my friends and see that most of them have been harassed for at least one of these things.

Low-income LGBT people of colour often anticipated experiencing violence in the future, given that their race, class, gender and sexual identities had been attacked in the past. Furthermore, they frequently compared themselves with

their friends and noted that most LGBT people of colour seem to experience violence at some point in their lives.

In contrast to low-income people of colour, most middle-class white respondents said that they did not know anyone who had encountered anti-LGBT violence. Frank, a 51-year-old white gay man who was called a 'homo' and had a glass bottle thrown at him on the street, explained the effects of not knowing others who had experienced homophobic violence: 'It seems like it doesn't happen to most people because I don't know anyone who it's happened to. So, yeah, it was surprising.' Frank perceived homophobic violence as relatively rare because he did not know anyone who had experienced it. This understanding of homophobic violence then structured his expectations – he expected that it would not happen to him.

This finding that low-income people of colour and middle-class white people had different expectations concerning the likelihood of experiencing anti-queer violence supports much of the sociological research on reference groups, in which individuals' expectations depend on the groups that they use as a standard of comparison (Anderson, 2002; Runciman, 1966). Middle-class white respondents, comparing themselves with their friends, often did not expect to experience anti-queer violence because they did not know others who had encountered it. Low-income LGBT people of colour, in contrast, usually knew others who had experienced some sort of violence, leading these respondents to perceive violence as something they could encounter in the foreseeable future.

### Evaluating the Severity of Hate-motivated Violence

The different expectations and reference groups of low-income people of colour and middle-class white people seemed to affect the ways in which they evaluated the severity of their violent experiences. Low-income people of colour, for example, sometimes downplayed the severity of anti-queer violence because their experiences had turned out better than expected. In such cases, they often compared themselves with individuals who had experienced a lot of violence. For instance, Daniel, a 26-year-old black gay man who worked as a receptionist, was beaten by a white police officer who called him a 'faggot'. When describing this incident, Daniel compared himself with a gay male friend who was also the victim of homophobic police violence: 'The cops beat [my friend] much worse. He got it really bad, so I sorta see myself as lucky, in some respects.' Many people would probably not refer to Daniel – who was hit several times in the face – as 'lucky'. In comparison with his friend, though, Daniel could perceive himself as relatively fortunate. After all, his friend was beaten 'much worse', in a comparable situation. Similarly, Latoya, a 50-year-old black lesbian woman, was physically assaulted on the street by a man who called her a 'bitch' and a 'dyke'. Latoya seemed to downplay the severity of her violent experience by comparing herself with a friend who had also encountered homophobic violence: 'It was never too violent ... Yeah, I had some scrapes, but it's not like I had to go to the hospital or anything, like [my friend] Jacqueline ... I

know that it could have been worse.’ Since low-income LGBT people of colour knew others who had encountered a lot of violence, they sometimes focused on how their violent experiences seemed minor in comparison with those of their friends.

While low-income people of colour sometimes downplayed the brutality of their violent experiences, middle-class white respondents almost always highlighted the severity of theirs. White, middle-class LGBT people often responded to questions concerning the severity of violence with phrases such as ‘it’s a big deal’ or ‘it’s a really bad thing to have happened to me’. In contrast, poor and working-class LGBT people of colour rarely used these phrases.

Middle-class white respondents often perceived their violent experiences as severe in comparison with what other LGBT people had not experienced. For example, Mark, a 46-year-old white gay man who worked as a lawyer, underscored the severity of his violent experience – two men called him a ‘faggot’ and stalked him on the street – by comparing himself with other gay men: ‘I wanted to kill someone after it happened ... It just seems like this sort of thing doesn’t happen to most gay men. So, I guess maybe that’s why it pissed me off so much.’ Constructing his experience as relatively rare – as something that ‘most gay men’ do not encounter – made it seem extraordinarily awful.

Other white, middle-class respondents highlighted the severity of their violent experiences by comparing themselves with their friends. For instance, Julia, a 28-year-old white lesbian woman who worked as a paediatrician, received a homophobic letter from her girlfriend’s mother. Comparing herself with other people whom she knew, Julia emphasized the severity of this experience: ‘It seems like a really bad thing, looking back on it now. I mean, I felt like, “Why would this happen to me?” ... Sure, I wasn’t killed or anything, but how many people have to go through this? ... It’s just not something anyone I know has to deal with.’ Julie later explained during the interview that she did not know other LGBT people who had experienced violence and she thought that she would not have received a harassing letter if she identified as straight. These comparisons with the people she knew led Julia to perceive herself as relatively deprived, viewing her experience as infrequent (‘how many people have to go through this?’) and severe (‘it seems like a really bad thing’). Along the same lines, Jacob, a 40-year-old white gay man who worked as a doctor, was shoved to the ground for kissing his boyfriend. Assessing the severity of the violence, he compared himself with one of his friends: ‘It felt like such bullshit ... My friend Ben, he’s always making out with his boyfriend in public, and *this* has never happened to him ... So, I thought, “Why does this have to happen to me, and not him?”’ Jacob expressed a sense of unfairness by comparing himself with someone who had engaged in similar behaviour, which made his own violent experience seem atypical and extreme.

These differences between middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour correspond with sociological research indicating that middle-class people frequently convey a sense of entitlement (Lareau, 2003; Williams, 2006). Indeed, white, middle-class LGBT people often expressed entitlement

concerning rights to their personal space, highlighting violations of these rights as reasons for viewing their violent experiences as severe. Low-income people of colour, in contrast, less frequently described their rights as being violated.

Of course, poor and working-class LGBT people of colour are not a monolithic group. Although they may have been more likely than middle-class white respondents to downplay the severity of hate-motivated violence, low-income LGBT people of colour did sometimes emphasize the brutality of their violent experiences. When doing so, they usually constructed anti-queer violence as widespread. For instance, Lela, a 48-year-old black transgender woman, described her friends' violent experiences to emphasize the severity of anti-LGBT violence in general: 'It's a big problem. All of my friends have experienced something negative because they're trans or gay. Every single one of them ... We're not going away anytime soon, either. The violence just has to stop.' Lela mentioned other LGBT people's violent experiences not to construct her own as more severe – as many white, middle-class respondents seemed to do – but to construct anti-queer violence as a serious social problem. Similarly, Jetta, a 28-year-old black lesbian woman, perceived anti-LGBT violence as ubiquitous:

It hurts because you can't escape it. It's everywhere. I know for a fact that I'm not the only one who has experiences like this. I'm not alone. If everyone could just come together to put a stop to it, then the world would be a lot better off.

Knowing others who had experienced anti-queer violence, poor and working-class LGBT people of colour often perceived homophobia and transphobia as affecting large numbers of people. Furthermore, low-income LGBT people of colour usually knew others who had experienced violence related to their race and social class positions. In contrast, middle-class white respondents, not knowing others who had experienced anti-queer violence, usually constructed their violent experiences as atypical rather than widespread.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, it would be impossible to generalize about the types of violence confronting low-income LGBT people of colour and middle-class white people; these data may not reflect societal trends. Moreover, caution should be taken in assuming that violence is normalized for low-income LGBT people of colour (Moran, 2000). Indeed, as highlighted above, low-income LGBT people of colour were often not willing to accept anti-queer violence, perceiving it as a serious social problem that needs to be addressed. Caution should also be taken with regard to associating perpetrators of anti-queer violence with marginalized race and class groups – namely, low-income heterosexual people of colour (Moran, 2000; Taylor, 2007). As other scholars have noted, focusing on random acts of stranger violence in public has led to race and class biases in the criminal justice system, with an overarching emphasis on low-income people of colour's violent actions (Moran, 2000). Thus, this article's results may apply only to public forms of anti-queer violence as perpetrated by strangers.

Despite these limitations, low-income people of colour in this sample were the most likely to encounter anti-queer physical violence. Approximately half of

the middle-class white respondents did not describe an incident of anti-LGBT physical violence; their violent experiences were verbal. Even though the poor and working-class people of colour in this sample also described many incidents of verbal violence, all of these respondents had at least one experience of anti-queer physical violence. Thus, low-income LGBT people of colour seemed to experience more physical violence than middle-class white respondents, and yet the former were less likely than the latter to perceive their violent experiences as severe.

## Discussion and Conclusion

While previous studies examining the severity of hate-motivated violence have found that the amount of trauma that victims report depends on the type of violence they experience (see Herek et al., 1999; McDevitt et al., 2001; Rose and Mechanic, 2002), results from this study revealed significant differences between middle-class white respondents and low-income people of colour in terms of how they evaluate the severity of their violent experiences. These findings suggest that researchers examining the severity of anti-LGBT violence should account not only for the type of violence that victims experience but also for the social position of queer people. Indeed, it seems worrisome that most studies of LGBT hate crime victims have constructed bias-motivated physical violence as more psychologically harmful than other forms of violence, while simultaneously marginalizing the experiences of poor and working-class LGBT people of colour – a social group that may experience physical violence more frequently than other groups.

Results from this study do not necessarily contradict the findings of previous studies which have shown that LGBT people perceive hate-motivated physical violence as more severe than verbal violence and property-based attacks (D'Augelli and Grossman, 2001; Herek et al., 1997, 1999). Indeed, respondents sometimes argued that physical violence based on their sexuality or gender identity had caused them more pain than any of their other violent experiences. While taking these voices seriously, we should also be cautious about constructing hierarchical understandings of violence, as some respondents did not conceptualize their violent experiences in hierarchical terms and others perceived forms of discrimination and incidents of verbal violence as more severe than physical attacks. Furthermore, ranking forms of violence seems problematic given that many respondents found it painful when others had diminished the severity of their violent experiences. To argue, for example, that physical violence 'hurts more' than verbal abuse seems to reinforce the sentiments that many queer people encounter – that some of their violent experiences are not severe. Instead, I would suggest, along with other feminist and intersectionality scholars, that a more useful understanding of violence would define it broadly, constructing all of its forms as harmful (Collins, 1998; Richardson and May, 1999). This conceptualization of violence allows hate crime research to focus

on traditional forms of hate crime – physical violence from strangers in public – while also examining the more insidious and everyday forms of hate-motivated violence (Blee, 2007; Moran and Skeggs, 2004).

In some sense, a tension exists in this article. While cautioning against hierarchically ranking forms of violence, this article suggests that low-income LGBT people of colour had more experiences of physical violence than middle-class white respondents, which might imply that the former had more traumatic experiences than the latter. The point of this article has not been to suggest that middle-class white respondents did not confront traumatic experiences of anti-queer violence, but merely to suggest that they did not confront physical violence with the same frequency as LGBT people of colour. Thus, this article suggests that while being cautious about conceptualizing violence in hierarchical terms, we should also recognize that real differences exist in terms of the degree to which social groups may experience violence. In the same way as systems of oppression do not affect all social groups equally, individuals experience violence to varying degrees based on their social position. Nevertheless, this emphasis on the differences among social groups should be balanced with sensitivity to the traumatic experiences of all groups. As a result, this balance entails avoiding endless debates over whose traumatic experiences are the worst, while at the same time attending to the ways in which social groups may confront violence in different ways.

As feminist and intersectionality scholarship suggests, interview data are structured by the social position of not only the research participants but also the interviewer (Harding, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). As a result, my identity as a white, middle-class gay man inevitably affects the results of this study. Middle-class white respondents, for example, might have been particularly prone to emphasize the severity of their violent experiences to someone they perceived as similar to themselves. Indeed, these respondents often asked if I had also experienced anti-LGBT violence; none of the poor and working-class LGBT people of colour whom I interviewed asked this question. This difference suggests that some white, middle-class LGBT people might have underscored the severity of their violent experiences in the hope of impressing someone of a comparable social position. Nevertheless, during the interview, middle-class white respondents described fewer experiences of anti-queer physical violence than low-income people of colour. Thus, middle-class white respondents did not emphasize the severity of their violent experiences to such a degree that they described more incidents of physical violence than poor and working-class LGBT people of colour.

This article has compared the perceptions of low-income people of colour and middle-class white people to illustrate how an intersectional approach can be used to complicate existing scholarship – an approach similar to the work of intersectionality scholars examining domestic violence victims (see Crenshaw, 1991; Rasche, 1988; Richie, 1996). Whereas those analyses often outlined the common challenges confronting women of colour, this article has focused on

how the challenges confronting poor and working-class LGBT people of colour differ from those confronting white, middle-class queer people. This comparison reveals that the social position of LGBT people plays an instrumental role in structuring how they evaluate the severity of hate-motivated violence, as middle-class white respondents were more likely than low-income people of colour to perceive their violent experiences as severe, even though the latter experienced more physical violence than the former.

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