

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PEOPLE'S EVALUATIONS OF ANTI-QUEER VIOLENCE

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The author uses an intersectionality framework to examine how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people evaluate the severity of their violent experiences. Previous research focusing on the severity of anti-LGBT violence has given relatively little attention to race, class, and gender as systems of power. In contrast, results from this study, based on 47 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, reveal that Black and Latino/Latina respondents often perceived anti-queer violence as implying that they had negatively represented their racial communities, whereas white respondents typically overlooked the racialized implications of their violent experiences. Furthermore, while lesbians of color emphasized their autonomy and self-sufficiency to challenge this discourse, Black and Latino gay men underscored their emotional and physical strength to undermine perceptions that they were weak for identifying as gay. Results also indicate that LGBT people experience forms of anti-queer violence in different ways depending on their social position, as Black lesbians faced discourse that neither white lesbians nor Black gay men were likely to confront. Thus, these findings suggest that topics primarily associated with homophobia should be examined through an intersectional lens.

Keywords: *race; class; gender; sexuality; violence; criminology/delinquency; men/masculinity; race/ethnicity*

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Most studies that have focused on violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people have overlooked the intersections among race, class, and gender (Mason 2002). Conversely, I examine LGBT, or queer, people's violent experiences through a feminist and intersectional lens, exploring the evaluations of 47 respondents interviewed in New York City. In particular, I build on studies that have examined the severity of anti-queer violence, focusing particular attention on LGBT people's evaluations of physical and verbal abuse (Herek, Gillis, and Cogan 1999; Rose and Mechanic 2002). Previous research has suggested that lesbians and gay men generally perceive homophobic physical attacks as more severe than verbal abuse or violence that is not based on their sexuality (D'Augelli and Grossman 2001; Dunbar 2006; Herek et al. 1997). In contrast, my results reveal significant intersectional differences, thereby dispelling the notion that LGBT people evaluate forms of anti-queer violence in uniform ways.

Scholarship examining the severity of anti-LGBT violence has typically focused on the traumatic psychological effects of hate crime—that is, physical violence rooted in bias and based on aspects of one's identity such as race, religion, or sexual orientation (Iganski 2001). Although studies of hate crime victims have drawn attention to an important research area, they have arguably led to a homogenized portrayal of LGBT people, with little attention to the differences among them (Dunbar 2006; Mason 2002). Examining these differences remains important, as homogenizing LGBT people's experiences marginalizes the concerns of queer people who are the least privileged (Cohen 1997; Ward 2008). I use an intersectional approach to examine the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality simultaneously structure respondents' evaluations of anti-queer violence. Thus, while previous research has focused primarily on the homophobic implications of anti-queer violence (see D'Augelli and Grossman 2001; Herek, Gillis, and Cogan 1999), my results indicate that multiple systems of oppression shape LGBT people's evaluations of their violent experiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersectional theory contends that social phenomena are often best understood by examining the overlap of institutional power structures such as race, class, gender, and sexuality (Choo and Ferree 2010; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). In contrast, approaches that take only one system of oppression into account sometimes provide homogenized and distorted views of marginalized groups, advancing the interests of more privileged individuals (King 1988; Zinn and Dill 1996). Much of intersectional

theory, for example, has critiqued race-only or gender-only frameworks, which may ameliorate the effects of one system of oppression, while simultaneously reinforcing other power structures (Bettie 2003; Cohen 1999; Ward 2008). As a result, intersectional approaches have suggested that attempts to redress social inequality should account for the multiple and simultaneous effects of systems of oppression, taking into consideration the experiences of individuals who are oppressed along multiple axes of inequality (McCall 2005; Zinn and Dill 1996).

Although intersectional theory has revealed some limitations of using singular frameworks for understanding social phenomena, studies of LGBT hate crime victims and social movements concerned with preventing anti-queer violence have focused overwhelmingly on homophobia and heterosexism, revealing the psychological costs of homophobic violence (Dunbar 2006; Herek, Gillis, and Cogan 1999; Jenness and Broad 1994). Anti-queer violence, however, can typically be explained not only by sexuality but also by gender, as many of its forms occur when LGBT people "do gender" inappropriately (Perry 2001; West and Zimmerman 1987). Nevertheless, with a few notable exceptions (see Mason 2001, 2002; Perry 2001), studies of LGBT hate crime victims have typically neglected the gendered implications of anti-queer violence, overlooking how gender and sexuality are simultaneously implicated in LGBT people's violent experiences (Mason 2002). Herek (1990), for example, notes that lesbians and gay men both experience violence for violating gender norms, yet conceptualizing homophobic hate crime as emanating from "cultural heterosexism" ignores the role of sexism and misogyny in shaping forms of anti-lesbian violence (see Herek et al. 1997). Concurrently, research that has accounted for gender has sometimes downplayed the role of homophobia, with one early and influential study of anti-lesbian hate crime conceptualizing "lesbianism as an extension of gender and conceptualiz[ing] anti-lesbian violence as an extension of misogynistic violence" (von Schulthess 1992, 71). This understanding of anti-queer violence as shaped primarily by gender has informed subsequent work, as Perry (2001, 110) conceptualizes "gay-bashing as a response to doing gender inappropriately," making little reference to homophobia and heterosexism.

Adopting a feminist intersectional perspective, I view gender and sexuality as overlapping rather than competing systems of inequality, not privileging one system over the other. Most studies of LGBT hate crime victims, focused on the effects of homophobic violence, have been unable to account for the ways in which LGBT people's violent experiences may be based on racism and sexism in addition to, or even instead of, homophobia and heteronormativity (Madriz 1997; Mason 2002; Moore 2011).

Indeed, although hate crime research has explored race and gender differences in terms of the frequency with which LGBT people encounter violence (see Dunbar 2006), systems of oppression have typically been examined in isolation of one another (Mason 2002). Thus, we know relatively little about how forms of inequality simultaneously structure queer people's violent experiences. Meanings of gender and sexuality, for example, may be implicated differently in forms of anti-queer violence for LGBT people of color and white LGBT people, yet this dynamic has not been fully explored by hate crime scholarship. Furthermore, although meanings of race and sexuality may have different implications for lesbians and gay men, our understanding of these intersectional differences remains limited if research continues to examine heteronormativity as separate from other institutional power structures.

I argue that systems of oppression play an important role in structuring LGBT people's evaluations of anti-queer violence. Departing from my previous work focused on social class (see Meyer 2008, 2010), here I place primary emphasis on the intersections among race, gender, and sexuality. By doing so, I expand on research that has examined LGBT people of color's experiences in managing racism in white LGBT communities and homophobia in heterosexual communities of color, as well as the heterosexism and institutionalized racism in society at large (Cohen 1999; Collins 2004; Moore 2011). Studies examining racism and classism in white queer communities have emphasized the role of advocacy and service organizations in advancing the interests of white, middle-class LGBT people, particularly white and middle-class gay men, while also marginalizing low-income LGBT people of color by constructing their views as the least reputable (Smith 1999; Ward 2004, 2008). This research indicates that despite the universalizing tendencies of the mainstream gay rights movement, LGBT people do not have uniform interests along race and class lines (Cohen 1997; Moore 2006; Ward 2008). Additionally, scholarship examining homophobia in Black heterosexual communities has focused on the role of the Black church and has emphasized how homosexuality has historically been linked with whiteness (Cohen 1999; Collins 2004; Johnson 2001). The association of homosexuality and whiteness, while not unique to Black communities, has led to notions of authenticity whereby the most "authentic" racialized identities have become constructed as exclusively heterosexual (Collins 2004; Johnson 2001; Smith 1999).

Confronting heteronormativity and institutionalized racism, white LGBT communities and Black heterosexual communities have often reinforced the whitening of homosexuality to present their social group as "respectable" to mainstream society (Cohen 1999; Collins 2004; Moore

2011). Thus, LGBT people of color frequently confront a “politics of respectability,” whereby they are discouraged from presenting themselves in a negative way and, therefore, confront pressures to hide their sexuality or gender identity—pressures that white LGBT people do not face because of their racial identity (Collins 2004; Moore 2011). Still, research suggests that LGBT people of color have frequently resisted a politics of respectability, challenging their invisibility in white LGBT communities and heterosexual communities of color (Cohen 1999; Moore 2011; Smith 1999). In contrast, white queer people do not typically have to contend with discourse that they have disappointed their racial communities, because the social construction of whiteness as an invisible social status allows white people to violate social norms without having their actions ascribed to their racial identity (Frankenberg 1993).

Building on work that has explored racial differences among LGBT people, I provide empirical evidence that white queer people are able to overlook the racialized implications of their violent experiences, while LGBT people of color, who do not have the advantage of white privilege, contend with discourse that they have disappointed their racial communities (Cohen 1997; Collins 2004). Furthermore, expanding on previous research that has explored Black lesbians’ strategies of cultivating respectability, I examine how gay men of color may challenge discourse that they have inappropriately represented their racial communities in different ways than Black and Latina lesbians (Moore 2006, 2011). Finding significant intersectional differences, I reveal that meanings of race, gender, and sexuality intersect to structure LGBT people’s evaluations.

Consistent with other intersectional work, I argue that LGBT people’s violent experiences should not be categorized in dichotomous, mutually exclusive ways. As Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 923) has argued, “Within dichotomous thinking that juxtaposes actions to words, speech can never be violent. It can only provoke violence.” Nevertheless, as studies of LGBT hate crime victims have suggested that “hate crimes hurt more” than other forms of violence, the cumulative effect of this research has been to imply a hierarchy of traumatic experiences, with hate-motivated physical violence placed toward the top and verbal abuse and non-bias crime placed toward the bottom (Iganski 2001, 626). Conversely, as intersectional frameworks contend that systems of oppression should not be hierarchically ranked, I argue that LGBT people’s oppressive experiences should also not be classified in hierarchical ways (Crenshaw 1991; King 1988). Still, although I attempt to move away from hierarchical understandings of violence, respondents did sometimes rank their violent experiences in different ways depending on their social position. Here, I examine these

intersectional differences in how respondents constructed hierarchies of violence, exploring the simultaneous effects of race, gender, and sexuality.

Despite the many contributions of intersectional theory, scholarship has increasingly problematized its emphasis on difference, arguing that intersectional approaches would be better served by examining racialized and gendered processes rather than the differences among raced or gendered bodies (Choo and Ferree 2010). Other feminist theories have problematized research that reifies socially produced differences, as such studies tend to essentialize the characteristics of social groups by ignoring the variation within these groups and exaggerating the differences between them (Epstein 1988). I focus on intersectional differences among LGBT respondents, yet to avoid essentializing these differences I emphasize the social, rather than inherent, nature of the differences described here. Indeed, the larger context in which respondents' violent experiences occurred, including race and gender norms, played a significant role in shaping their evaluations.

Intersectionality has been theorized more frequently than ethnographically explored (Bettie 2003). This gap persists in studies of hate crime, with some areas of the literature giving serious consideration to the intersection of race, class, and gender, particularly research on racist hate crime (see Blee 2002; Daniels 1997); yet LGBT people's qualitative experiences of violence have not been examined through an intersectional lens. In contrast, I use an intersectional approach to expand our understanding of anti-queer violence, revealing how systems of oppression simultaneously structure LGBT people's evaluations of their violent experiences.

METHODS

The data presented in this article are drawn from a larger project that focuses on race, class, and gender differences among 47 people who experienced anti-LGBT violence (Meyer 2008, 2010). To explore these intersectional differences, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews, recruiting participants from a wide range of advocacy and service organizations in New York City, many of which provide services for LGBT people of color. At these organizations, recruitment flyers were placed on a bulletin board or in a waiting room. The flyer 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 flyer to attract participants with a variety of anti-queer violent experiences and to allow respondents to define violence on their own terms. As the question on the recruitment flyer emphasizes sexuality and gender identity,

LGBT people with experiences of racist or misogynist violence are likely underrepresented among the people I interviewed. Nevertheless, although I recruited participants with experiences of anti-queer violence, I also asked respondents to describe abuse rooted in racism or misogyny (e.g., "Have you experienced violence that was not based on your sexuality, but was based on some other aspect of your identity, such as your race or gender?").

During the interview, I asked respondents to describe their experiences in detail and to explain their understanding of violence more generally. I first asked respondents to explain their definition of violence and then describe their perception of physical and verbal abuse. When asking respondents to compare physical and verbal violence, I asked questions about their perception of the similarities and differences between these forms of abuse and then asked more specific questions based on their response. The interviews lasted from approximately one to three hours; the median interview was 104 minutes. After the interview, respondents completed a short questionnaire in which they provided basic demographic information. I transcribed each interview shortly after it occurred and then developed a coding scheme to organize the data (Miles and Huberman 1994). Qualitative coding techniques were used to identify patterns in respondents' answers, and as data collection continued, the coding scheme was refined (Berg 2004; Miles and Huberman 1994).

Previous hate crime studies have typically used survey or questionnaire methods to examine LGBT people's evaluations of their violent experiences (see Herek, Gillis, and Cogan 1999; Rose and Mechanic 2002), yet some social scientists have argued that an interview method is more useful for capturing the ways in which respondents create meaning (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Moreover, interview studies examining the severity of anti-LGBT violence have generally employed highly structured interviews with a uniform (but small) number of questions asked of every respondent (see Herek et al. 1997). This method 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 detail.

Respondents' demographic characteristics and experiences of violence are shown in Table 1. In total, I interviewed 20 women, 17 men, and 10 transgender people. Twenty-one participants identified as Black or African American, 16 as white, eight as Latina or Latino (five identified as Puerto Rican, two as Mexican, and one as Colombian), and two as Asian (one identified as Chinese and one as Vietnamese). Six of the 15 lesbian respondents identified as Black, five

TABLE 1: Respondents' Demographic Characteristics and Experiences of Violence

<i>Gender and Sexuality (with Pseudonyms)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Form of Anti-Queer Violence Described</i>
Lesbians			
Diamond	51	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Latoya	50	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Aisha	53	Black	Physical, verbal
Jasmine	44	Black	Physical, verbal
Jetta	28	Black	Physical, verbal
Tamika	53	Black	Physical, verbal
Judy	43	Latina	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Page	45	Latina	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Maria	26	Latina	Physical, verbal
Tina	21	Latina	Physical, verbal
Dorothy	49	White	Physical, verbal
Martha	54	White	Physical, verbal
Catherine	46	White	Verbal
Julia	28	White	Verbal
Jill	49	White	Verbal
Bisexual women			
Leslie	50	Black	Physical, verbal
Ling	29	Asian	Physical, verbal
Heterosexual women			
Anne	41	Black	Physical, verbal
Lisa	36	Latina	Physical, verbal
Emily	55	White	Verbal
Gay men			
Andre	24	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Cole	33	Black	Physical, verbal
Daniel	26	Black	Physical, verbal
Gideon	25	Black	Physical, verbal
Jayvyn	33	Black	Physical, verbal
Kevin	62	Black	Physical, verbal
Walter	24	Black	Physical, verbal
Frankie	48	Latino	Physical, verbal
Thomas	41	Asian	Physical, verbal
Bill	51	White	Physical, verbal
George	45	White	Physical, verbal
Greg	43	White	Physical, verbal
Jacob	40	White	Physical, verbal
Mark	46	White	Physical, verbal
Paul	57	White	Physical, verbal
Ted	33	White	Physical, verbal
Bob	54	White	Verbal

(continued)

TABLE 1. (CONTINUED)

<i>Gender and Sexuality (with Pseudonyms)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Form of Anti-Queer Violence Described</i>
Male-to-female trans- gender women			
Dominique	23	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Eva	46	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Ebony	20	Black	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Lela	48	Black	Physical, verbal
Lakeisha	38	Black	Physical, verbal
Kayla	36	Black	Physical, verbal
Carol	39	Latina	Physical, verbal, sexual assault
Mary	47	White	Verbal
Female-to-male transgender men			
William	29	Latino	Physical, verbal
Intersexed			
Nevada	36	White	Physical, verbal

as white, and four as Latina; the sample also includes six Black transgender women. Among gay male respondents, eight identified as white, seven as Black, one as Latino, and one as Asian.

I use the phrase "LGBT people of color" to denote Black, Latino/Latina, and Asian participants. As 21 of these respondents identified as Black, eight identified as Latina or Latino, and two as Asian, this research focuses primarily on the experiences of Black LGBT people and, to a lesser extent, the experiences of Latino/Latina participants. I have combined the violent experiences of multiple groups of LGBT people of color to highlight how white respondents did not confront the same pressures as other racial and ethnic groups. Of course, as only 16 white respondents participated in this project, the results presented here should be viewed as suggestive rather than definitive. Still, there seemed to be some noteworthy racial differences, as outlined below. I sometimes refer to "lesbian and transgender women," not to collapse their violent experiences, as anti-transgender violence obviously differs in significant ways from anti-lesbian abuse (see Schilt and Westbrook 2009), but to highlight the ways that lesbian and transgender women's evaluations differed from those of gay male respondents. Here, my positionality as a white gay man undoubtedly shaped the interview data; white and gay male respondents sometimes felt comfortable sharing arguably racist or sexist thoughts with me, while LGBT people of color focused on homophobia more than racism, classism, and sexism with a white, male academic. Although I have tried not

to reinforce hierarchies based on race, class, and gender, the interview process and my analysis of the data are inevitably immersed in these power dynamics. To ensure respondents' confidentiality, I use pseudonyms throughout this article.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LGBT people of color often viewed their violent experiences as implying that they had negatively represented their racial communities, while white respondents did not perceive forms of anti-queer violence in this way. Moreover, even though lesbian respondents confronted some similar forms of abuse across racial lines—violence for “converting” another woman into lesbianism, for example—their evaluations also differed in race-specific ways, as lesbians of color emphasized their autonomy to challenge notions that they had not contributed to their racial communities. Although gay male respondents perceived their violent experiences in some similar ways across racial lines—viewing the violence as an attempt to impose meanings of weakness onto them, for example—gay men of color, in contrast to white gay men, highlighted their emotional and physical strength to construct themselves as valuable members of their racial groups. In the following sections, I first outline these intersectional differences in how respondents viewed the racialized implications of anti-queer violence, and then I describe participants' evaluations of physical and verbal abuse, finding that lesbian and transgender women often perceived physical violence as indicating the possible onset of a sexual assault, while gay men more frequently constructed homophobic insults as severe.

The Racialized Implications and the Gendered Dynamics of Anti-Queer Violence

LGBT people of color regularly interpreted their violent experiences as attempts to punish them for not appropriately representing their racial communities. For instance, Jayvyn, a 33-year-old Black gay man, explained his reasons for believing that some Black heterosexual men have harassed him: “It’s like I’ve let down Black men by being gay or something. That means that I’ve identified myself with weakness, and I’m not supposed to do that.” Black lesbians made similar comments when describing the racialized implications of their violent experiences, revealing a complex intersection of race, gender, and sexuality norms. Referring to these intersections,

Latoya, a 50-year-old Black lesbian, described a violent experience that had occurred on the street, when she was holding hands with her girlfriend, a Black woman whom Latoya described as “very girly.” The violence involved a male stranger telling Latoya to “take that white shit home” and realize that her girlfriend “just needed a dick.” The man became physically violent—punching Latoya’s arm—when she told him that “no woman would touch” him, since he was “disgusting.” Describing this experience, Latoya problematized its implications:

The physical is what gets to me, that’s like telling me that I have to stop doing this. . . . Like I have to stop making [my girlfriend] a lesbian. They act like I did this to her. And it’s like I’m not supposed to because then I’m making Black people look bad. Like if I left her alone, she wouldn’t be gay. . . . They act like she has no control over herself. I didn’t do anything to her. They don’t know her. She can be who she wants.

Here, Latoya underscored her girlfriend’s autonomy, while deriding sexist and heteronormative discourse whereby masculine lesbians are viewed as corrupting feminine women—the former supposedly “make” the latter lesbian. This understanding of lesbian sexuality reinforces traditional gender ideology by constructing masculine women as active (they are “doing” the changing) and feminine women as passive (they are changed), while also stereotyping lesbians as either corrupting and controlling or flighty and complicit. In this context, Black lesbians with butch gender presentations of self could then perceive homophobic violence as an attempt to punish them for “making Black people look bad,” as they had supposedly converted Black feminine women into lesbianism.

Gay men, regardless of their racial identity, did not describe accusations that they had “made” another man gay. Butch lesbians, however, frequently perceived their violent experiences as attempts to punish them for “converting” a woman into lesbianism; approximately half of the lesbian respondents involved in this study perceived at least one of their experiences in this way. Gender and sexuality norms played a central role in these situations, as perpetrators appeared to undermine the sexual agency of the woman whom they perceived as feminine, while using physical violence against the more “masculine” partner. Furthermore, given the social construction of race in the United States, and given that most of the violence respondents described was intraracial, lesbians often had to confront different discourses depending on their racial identity. For instance, Jetta, a 28-year-old Black lesbian, argued that the severity of violence depends on its intention:

It's more about what the person is trying to do. . . . [If] they're telling me that I'm a bad African American or whatever, that pisses me off. I go to church every Sunday. I live my life how I want. A good African American—I live my life how I want. I can take care of myself. I am who I am, that's not gonna change.

Rebelling against ideas that she has failed to represent Black people positively, Jetta emphasized her autonomy, stating that she represents Black people well because she lives her life as she wants. Other Black lesbians also argued that they had represented their racial communities in a positive way, although perhaps not as overtly as Jetta. In contrast, white lesbians, free from these racialized pressures, did not typically have to confront discourse that they had disappointed their racial groups. Martha, for example, a 54-year-old white lesbian, described one of her violent experiences without making reference to her racial identity: "It'd be nice to know that I can wear all the butch-y stuff I want. That it doesn't matter. I'd just like to be able to do what I want." There were several similarities between the experiences of Martha and Jetta: both identified as butch lesbians; both had experienced violence when they were with their "more feminine" girlfriends. Both respondents also thought that the violence was directed against them, rather than their partners, because they appeared masculine in their gender presentation of self and because they were viewed as a "bad influence," supposedly converting their girlfriends into lesbianism.

Despite these similarities, their evaluations placed different emphases on autonomy. Martha and Jetta focused on their independence: Martha said, "I'd just like to be able to do what I want," while Jetta declared, "I live my life how I want." Nevertheless, Jetta focused more on the ways in which she is self-sufficient, repeatedly underscoring how she lives according to her own wishes; twice she said, "I live my life how I want," connecting this autonomy to her being a "good African American." Martha explained her desire to wear the clothes she wants, but she did not employ the narratives that were more frequently used by Black and Latina women, regarding how their autonomy makes them valuable members of their racial communities. Indeed, Jetta underscored her self-sufficiency to challenge notions that she negatively represents African Americans, while Martha, speaking from a position of white privilege, did not have to contend with discourse that she had betrayed her racial group.

Since Jetta's girlfriend was Black and Martha's girlfriend was white, the meaning of "converting" a woman into lesbianism took on different forms for these respondents. While Martha did not struggle with the racialized implications of her supposed conversion of a white woman into

lesbianism, Jetta thought that others might view this act as causing harm to her racial community; she thought that she was being punished for “making” her girlfriend—another Black woman—a lesbian. In this regard, Black lesbians who identify as butch may face particularly harsh sanctions, as the act of “converting” a Black woman into lesbianism may be viewed as preventing a Black woman from reproducing. As neither white lesbians nor Black gay men are likely to confront such discourse, Black lesbians with masculine gender presentations of self may confront these pressures in such a way that other social groups do not.

Whereas lesbians in this study often focused on their autonomy to challenge perpetrators' discourse, gay male respondents more frequently highlighted their emotional and physical strength. Here, the gender dynamic of respondents' violent experiences played an important role in structuring their evaluations; although some respondents described verbal harassment from women and physical violence from their mothers during childhood, the overwhelming majority of respondents described experiences of physical violence perpetrated by men. As a result, gay male respondents regularly perceived their violent experiences as a masculinity contest, with heterosexual men trying to impose notions of weakness onto them. In response, gay men frequently underscored the ways in which they were strong, both emotionally and physically. While gay men across racial lines emphasized their emotional and physical strength, these respondents interpreted the meaning of the violence differently based on race. That is, gay men of color often viewed their violent experiences as implying that they were weak for identifying as gay and, perhaps implicitly, for associating themselves with whiteness. For instance, Jayvyn, the 33-year-old Black gay man mentioned previously, constructed himself as strong to challenge notions that he was performing Blackness inappropriately:

I'm gaaaay. Everyone knows it, the second I walk out the door. That doesn't make me a bad African American or whatever. . . . I'm not a weak little thing. . . . I can defend myself. I know how to fight. I can get past things pretty quick. I can handle things emotionally, spiritually. They [people who have attacked me] aren't like that. They'll only go calling me names when their friends are around.

Black gay male respondents typically rejected notions that they had not appropriately represented their racial communities; instead, they usually suggested that their gender and sexual identities were a legitimate way of expressing themselves. Moreover, Black gay men regularly noted the importance of emotional strength, sometimes even suggesting that other

men could benefit from being emotionally stronger. With the statement above, Jayvyn constructed himself as emotionally stronger than his attackers, who only insult him “when their friends are around.” This type of response was one of the ways that LGBT people pointed to their perpetrators’ hypocrisy. As heterosexual men used homophobic insults in groups—when their friends could protect them—gay men constructed this behavior as signifying weakness, as indicating that their perpetrators were susceptible to peer pressure and fearful of perpetrating homophobic violence without the protection of their friends. This interpretation, then, inverts the meaning of anti-gay violence by constructing perpetrators as weak-willed, and therefore hypocritical, given that they had tried to construct gay men as weak.

While white gay men who participated in this study also perceived their violent experiences as attempts to construct them as weak, they did not seem to emphasize strength to the same extent as Black and Latino men. George, for example, a 45-year-old white gay man, described his perpetrator’s motivations in this way: “He was trying to say that I’m weak, which, whatever, I might be. The whole thing is just kinda stupid. It’s easy to be like ‘Oh, okay, you’re tough, you’re macho. Whatever, you can have that.’” Similar to most of the gay men whom I interviewed, George concluded that his perpetrators were trying to construct him as weak. Rather than emphasizing his strength, however, George casually dismissed its importance. Most of the white men whom I interviewed did not necessarily reject the value of strength in this way, yet George’s offhanded dismissal of meanings of weakness was more consistently expressed by white gay men than Black and Latino men. Indeed, with this statement, George suggested that the posturing of his perpetrator was “easy” to dismiss, which contrasts sharply with the more complex evaluations of LGBT people of color. Thus, constructing gay men as weak has different implications across racial lines, as Black gay men frequently emphasized their strength as a way of rejecting discourse that they were weak for having “given in” to homosexuality, which has been stereotypically linked with whiteness (Collins 2004; Johnson 2001; Moore 2011). White gay men, on the other hand, did not usually view meanings of weakness as having racialized implications and, therefore, because of their white privilege did not appear as compelled to emphasize their emotional and physical strength.

Intersectional Differences in Respondents’ Evaluations of Physical and Verbal Violence

The desire on the part of lesbians of color to live an autonomous life, free of harassment, frequently led them to condemn physical violence

more harshly than verbal abuse. Aisha, for example, a 53-year-old Black lesbian, described a man who kicked her shin on the subway after seeing public displays of affection between Aisha and her girlfriend. Comparing physical and verbal violence, Aisha minimized the effects of the latter: "Verbal's not as bad because I can go about my life. When someone says something to me, I can go about my life." In this study, Black lesbians regularly underscored the importance of their autonomy, constructing physical violence as a direct attack on their ability to be self-sufficient. As I asked Aisha to elaborate on her perception of physical and verbal abuse, she characterized the difference in this way:

A man says something to me, that gets under my skin, [but] touching me, that's something different. . . . Touching me is gettin' in my space. You're telling me not to be who I am. You're telling me that I should change—change to who you want me to.

For Black lesbian respondents, this understanding of physical violence as more severe than verbal abuse seemed in part to reflect what intersectional theorists have noted about the need for marginalized groups to create a safe space for themselves (Collins 2000). Lesbians of color, marginalized from both white LGBT communities and heterosexual communities of color, in addition to the more normative white, heterosexual institutions in society at large, appeared particularly likely to emphasize this need for a safe space and to highlight the ways in which physical violence violated their right to self-determination.

When respondents ranked forms of physical and verbal violence, gay men frequently emphasized the severity of homophobic insults. Frankie, for example, a 48-year-old Puerto Rican gay man, highlighted the long-term effects of homophobic insults to illustrate the pain these words have caused him: "What can hurt as much as anything is the words. The hitting hurts, don't get me wrong, but scars can heal and the words will stay with you." Most gay male respondents constructed physical and verbal abuse as approximately equal in their severity, yet a few of the gay men in this study constructed homophobic insults as more severe than a physical attack. For instance, Gideon, a 25-year-old Black gay man, downplayed the severity of physical violence in this way: "I can handle some crazy dude putting his hands on me. That's not a big deal to me. The constant comments is what gets [to] me. 'Faggot, faggot, faggot'—that's worse than someone putting their hands on me."

Rather than emphasizing the severity of homophobic insults, lesbian and transgender women more frequently described violent encounters as

beginning with them “just being called names,” and then escalating with the onset of physical abuse. In this regard, the comments of Carol, a 39-year-old Puerto Rican transgender woman, were characteristic:

Like first he was just calling me names, but then it got worse when he grabbed me. . . . People have called me names in the past. That I can get over. But putting your hands on me, that’s a whole new thing. That’s what I can’t stand.

Here, Carol referred to a violent experience in which a man approached her on the street, began making sexually harassing comments to her, and then, after questioning whether she was transgender, started using dehumanizing language (“you’re an it”) and calling her sexist and homophobic insults (e.g., “bitch,” “faggot”), eventually pulling her by the hair. Later during the interview, Carol noted that the man’s use of physical violence made her feel as if sexual assault might be imminent: “Putting his hands on me, that made me feel very unsafe. Like he could have tried to rape me.” This fear of sexual assault, not typically expressed by gay men, led many lesbian and transgender women to emphasize the severity of physical violence. Physical and sexual assault, of course, are not necessarily the same, and lesbian and transgender women often differentiated between them, yet female respondents frequently viewed these forms of violence as related, constructing sexual assault as more severe than verbal abuse and perceiving physical violence as indicating the possible onset of sexual assault.

While gay male respondents suggested that perpetrators occasionally used violence to prevent an encounter from becoming sexual—accusing gay men of “hitting on” them, for example—lesbian and transgender women more frequently described violence as introducing a sexual component into the encounter. Thus, even though lesbian and transgender women did not emphasize the severity of homophobic insults as frequently as gay men, female respondents did sometimes construct verbal threats as severe, particularly when these statements implied that physical or sexual violence might be forthcoming. For instance, Jasmine, a 44-year-old Black lesbian, described an experience in an elevator when a man from her apartment building said that she “needed to be taught a lesson like a good dyke” before touching her face. Jasmine perceived the man’s actions as a threat to her physical safety, as a suggestion that he could sexually assault her. Later during the interview, she argued that physical violence was worse than verbal abuse, but then immediately said, as if recalling the violent incident in the elevator:

Jasmine: That's only if [the verbal] doesn't intimidate me.

Interviewer: How might it intimidate you?

Jasmine: Like is he going to tell me something that threatens me as a woman. Tell me what he's gonna do.

Confronting the possibility of a sexual assault, lesbian respondents occasionally emphasized the severity of verbal threats, noting how these statements can invoke sexualized violence.

The differences between female and male respondents must be understood in the context of gendered power dynamics. Gay men often decrease in status for identifying as feminine, and may view homophobic insults as a particularly harsh attack on their gender and sexual identities. Lesbian and transgender women are likely to construct physical and sexual violence as severe because women frequently confront the threat of sexual assault in a way that gay men do not (Madriz 1997; von Schulthess 1992). The narratives of lesbian respondents, focusing on self-sufficiency, should also be viewed in light of gender norms that encourage women to endure hardship in a stoic manner (Madriz 1997). Furthermore, gay men's repeated emphasis on strength should be understood in the context of gendered expectations and social control mechanisms that encourage men to perform masculinity through strength (Perry 2001).

Beyond Dichotomous Constructions: Anti-Queer Violence as Rooted in Multiple Systems of Oppression

Respondents' attempts to compare physical and verbal violence frequently revealed the difficulty of distinguishing between these forms of abuse, as their violent experiences often did not fit neatly into one category or another. Indeed, about half of the LGBT people in this study noted how physical and verbal violence overlapped. For instance, Judy, a 43-year-old Puerto Rican lesbian, described an attempted rape in which a man used a mix of sexist and homophobic insults while forcibly trying to remove her clothes. When asked to compare physical and verbal violence, Judy problematized the politics of making such distinctions:

It's hard to tell which is which. It goes back and forth. So, sometimes you don't know. . . . It can't be said that what happened is one or the other, because when both are happening, then I have to sit there and be like, "Ok, what was bothering me about it?" That would drive me crazy.

Emphasizing how physical and verbal violence occur alternately and simultaneously, Judy underscored the futility of distinguishing between these two types of abuse, arguing that such attempts require people who have experienced violence to engage in the psychologically taxing process of differentiating between concurrent events.

In contrast, some studies of hate crime victims have defined bias crimes with both physical and verbal violence solely as physical attacks, even though they are also verbal attacks (see D'Augelli and Grossman 2001; Rose and Mechanic 2002). As a result, by constructing physical and verbal violence as dichotomous, mutually exclusive categories, hate crime research may categorize LGBT people's violent experiences differently than some LGBT people would do. Narrow definitions of violence have already been critiqued extensively in the domestic violence literature, yet this same understanding of abuse, where all of its forms are understood as harmful, has not been incorporated into studies of hate crime victims (DeKeseredy 2000). Indeed, to suggest that "hate crimes hurt more" than other forms of violence reinforces problematic discourse that victims may confront—that some of their violent experiences are not severe (Iganski 2001, 626). Forms of violence obviously differ in terms of their severity, but constructing extremely broad categories of abuse does more to conceal these differences than to reveal them. Moving beyond hierarchies, while accepting that LGBT people may rank forms of violence on their own, I have focused on the meaning that queer people attribute to their violent experiences, without entirely discarding distinctions between physical and verbal abuse. Nevertheless, as studies of hate crime proceed, this dichotomy of physical and verbal violence may prove less useful, as research continues to examine multiple forms of anti-queer violence.

By emphasizing the effects of different types of violence (e.g., physical or verbal, bias-motivated or not motivated by bias), studies of LGBT hate crime victims have frequently overlooked other important effects, such as the role of race, class, and gender in structuring LGBT people's evaluations. As research has focused primarily on the negative consequences of homophobic attacks (see D'Augelli and Grossman 2001; Herek, Gillis, and Cogan 1999), our understanding of anti-queer violence remains limited, as the violent experiences of white lesbians, LGB people of color, and transgender people, for example, are often not structured solely, or even predominantly, by homophobia and heteronormativity (Mason 2002; Moore 2011). Thus, by focusing on homophobia at the exclusion of other forms of inequality, these studies have inadvertently reinforced the interests of LGBT people who perceive their violent experiences as predominantly rooted in

homophobia—most frequently, as my other work has shown, white and middle-class gay men (Meyer 2008). Indeed, as I have outlined elsewhere, Black and Latina lesbians found it particularly difficult to determine whether their violent experiences were based on their sexuality because they often could not be certain whether racism or misogyny had also played a role, particularly when the violence was perpetrated by white men (Meyer 2008).

Although attempts to place singular emphasis on homophobia tend to reinforce the interests of LGBT people who are oppressed primarily based on their sexuality, an alternative strategy of constructing gender as competing with, or more important than, sexuality and heteronormativity also produces an inadequate understanding of anti-queer violence. Anti-lesbian violence, for example, cannot simply be understood by adding homophobia to existing frameworks of violence against women (von Schulthess 1992); indeed, homophobia does not merely amplify sexist violence, but it makes certain forms of misogynist violence possible. Still, respondents' violent experiences were undoubtedly shaped by structures of male domination, as many forms of anti-lesbian violence served to punish women for rejecting the sexual advances of heterosexual men, while perpetrators regularly used anti-gay violence to position themselves as stronger than gay male respondents. In both of these cases, homophobic violence serves as a social control mechanism designed to police gender norms and sustain the privilege of male heterosexuality. Nevertheless, in the contemporary United States, where gender nonconformity is viewed as indicative of homosexuality and where both of these identity markers are stigmatized, most forms of anti-queer violence should be understood as attempts to reinforce both gender and sexuality norms (Mason 2001).

Reactions to anti-queer violence are even implicated in this intersection of gender and sexuality, as respondents frequently mentioned how heterosexual people whom they had told about the violence implied that it had occurred because they had been "too open" or "too obvious" about their sexuality or gender identity. Respondents frequently perceived these remarks as suggestions that they should perform gender in a more traditional way (Meyer 2008, 2010). Furthermore, I have argued in this article that attempts to punish LGBT people for being "too open" about their sexuality or gender identity have different implications based on race, as Black and Latino/Latina respondents found such suggestions particularly troubling. In this sense, lesbians and gay men of color viewed criticisms of them being "too open" about their sexuality as implying that they had inappropriately represented their racial communities, while white respondents did not typically perceive such criticisms in this way.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have emphasized that respondents frequently interpreted their violent experiences in different ways, even when the violence took on similar forms. Both Black and white lesbians, for instance, experienced physical violence for “converting” another woman into lesbianism, but this act had different implications for each of these groups, as Black lesbians often thought that their supposed conversion of a woman of color into lesbianism was viewed as harmful to their racial communities. Since white lesbians did not usually view their violent experiences as having racialized implications, similar forms of abuse were perceived differently depending on the respondent’s racial identity. Thus, the ways in which LGBT people evaluate the severity of their violent experiences is not a straightforward process that can simply be measured by examining the type of abuse they have experienced.

Accounting for the overlap of multiple systems of oppression typically provides for the most satisfactory understanding of anti-queer violence. Indeed, examining my results through the lens of only one system of oppression would likely distort our understanding of anti-queer violence and perhaps even reinforce existing relations of domination (Collins 1998). Employing a gender-only framework, for example, to examine differences with regard to strength between gay men of color and white gay men, we might be tempted to view the gender performances of Black and Latino respondents as more traditionally masculine than those of white gay men, since the former more frequently emphasized the importance of strength. When also considering the intersection of race and sexuality, however, this difference can be viewed, more accurately, as gay men of color attempting to reject discourse that they were weak for negatively representing their racial communities—discourse that white gay male respondents did not confront.

While I examine intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in this article, I have not focused on important dimensions of oppression such as those based on religion, disability, or social class. Simultaneously analyzing all forms of inequality may be impossible, yet studies can appear incomplete or reductive when overlooking some systems of oppression (Cohen 1997). Moreover, while the number of inequalities addressed may be less important than the relevance of those inequalities, it remains imperative to explore the theoretical loss that occurs when some institutional power structures are not included in our analyses (Choo and Ferree 2010). Here, although my analysis of anti-queer violence remains imperfect by

not exploring the effects of social class, I have emphasized the overlapping role of race, gender, and sexuality in structuring LGBT people's evaluations to help facilitate a shift from the unitary effects of homophobia to the intersections among multiple systems of oppression. This intersectional shift would include taking into greater consideration social class inequality within queer communities.

Despite the potential difficulty of simultaneously accounting for multiple systems of oppression, much of sexualities scholarship would likely benefit from examining the overlap of heteronormativity with other institutional power structures. The emerging field of intersectional sexualities research has flourished recently (see Collins 2004; Moore 2011; Ward 2008), yet intersectional theory has arguably remained marginal to sexualities scholarship more generally (Cohen 1997; Moore 2011). As I have argued here, however, research that focuses exclusively on sexuality, homophobia, and heteronormativity frequently falls short of its potential, as the experiences of many groups of LGBT people are unlikely to be fully understood (Cohen 1997). Employing an intersectional approach to examine the lives of LGBT people necessitates not only including queer people who are oppressed along multiple axes of inequality, but also moving beyond frameworks that construct homophobia as the most predominant form of oppression confronting LGBT people. Such intersectional analyses include paying particular attention to the ways in which homosexuality is raced and classed, examining how these intersections may affect marginalized groups of LGBT people such as low-income women of color. Furthermore, as intersectional approaches continue to explore how privilege operates in LGBT communities, including how gender functions for men, race for white people, and social class for middle-class queer people, these analyses will help us to uncover the ways in which seemingly race-less and gender-less social positions play an important role in structuring individuals' experiences and perceptions. Future research should be particularly attentive to the effects of privilege and oppression among LGBT people, which includes expanding on my analysis to examine social class.

Given that queer people of color were usually describing intraracial violence based on their sexuality or gender identity, I have focused more attention on homophobia in heterosexual communities of color than on racism in white LGBT communities. This emphasis is also a result of the interactional context of the interviews, in which queer people of color may have felt most comfortable describing homophobia, rather than racism,

with a white, gay male interviewer. Perhaps suspicious of how their descriptions of racism would be represented by a white gay man, queer people of color appeared to focus most of their attention on homophobia in their race-based communities, possibly viewing me, given my race and social class privilege, as someone who outsiders would listen to and who could bring their concerns to the outside world. The results presented in this article should be understood within this context, and caution should be taken with regard to making homophobia seem as if it is relegated to Black or Latino/Latina people, as stigmatizing homosexuality is not exclusive to these communities (Cohen 1999; Collins 2004; Smith 1999). Indeed, white, heterosexual men perpetrated most of the violence described by white respondents. Thus, as regulating homophobia to Black and Latino communities has the effect of blaming heterosexual people of color for the persistence of heteronormativity and freeing white heterosexual people of their responsibility for perpetuating heterosexism, scholarship focusing on homophobia in race-based communities should be balanced with an emphasis on the institutionalized privileging of heterosexuality.

I have focused on the particular challenges confronting LGBT people of color relative to white queer people, with the latter being able to overlook the racialized implications of their violent experiences because of their white privilege. Of course, white and middle-class gay men who are privileged within queer communities may face prejudice and discrimination in society at large and may confront relatively little privilege in comparison with white and middle-class heterosexual men, as heterosexuality remains institutionally supported in such a way that homosexuality is not. Still, as the violent experiences of many LGBT people continue to be shaped by racism and sexism as much as homophobia and heteronormativity, the effects of multiple and intersecting systems of oppression should be taken into account. Indeed, the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality structured LGBT people's evaluations of their violent experiences. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on homophobia, a more productive examination of anti-queer violence would explore how sexuality overlaps with race, class, and gender to structure LGBT people's experiences and perceptions of violence. More broadly, intersectional approaches are likely to aid in our understanding of sexualities to reveal how topics traditionally associated with homophobia and heterosexism are implicated not only in sexuality norms but also raced and gendered ones.

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