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# An Intersectional Analysis of LGBTQ Online Media Coverage of the Pulse Nightclub Shooting Victims

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**ABSTRACT**

This study illustrates the radical potential of intersectionality to offer a more deeply critical analysis of hierarchies in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. The author examines how 377 reports from the five most-trafficked LGBTQ Web sites represented victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, FL. Findings support previous scholarship that has emphasized Latinx exclusion, as the articles generally failed to present the victims in an intersectional way, focusing on their LGBTQ status and excluding their Latinx identities. At the same time, a significant minority of the reports emphasized Latinx queer people, most frequently in a way that continued to prioritize LGBTQ identification, sometimes even advancing stereotypical representations of Latinx communities as extraordinarily focused on faith, family, or "machismo." Moreover, none of the articles considered xenophobia as a potential motivating factor in the shooting, and the reports typically presented policing agencies in a neutral, and sometimes even positive, way.

**KEYWORDS**

Pulse nightclub shooting; intersectionality theory; Latinx; racism in LGBTQ communities; anti-transgender violence; immigration; Latino; Latina; race/ethnicity; mass shootings

> Almost every one of them was either Black or Latinx. They were someone's brother, father, sister, daughter, family, and friend. They served in the military, worked at the local coffee shop, and brought joy to children's lives at theme parks. They were the people HRC fights for every single day. —The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) explaining its tribute to the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting (Wright, 2016)

This article builds on the work of intersectional feminist approaches that have drawn attention to the limitations of reducing intersectionality to inclusion, as such tactics have sometimes resulted in the incorporation of more multiply marginalized groups into already-existing structures of inequality without substantially changing those unequal structural conditions (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Zinn & Dill, 1996). Thus such attempts at inclusion may limit the transformative potential of intersectionality to reorganize conventional arrangements and to reduce or eliminate inequities, simply including a greater number of multiply marginalized people into frameworks

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that fail to take their interests seriously (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Hancock, 2016; Spade, 2013). In this article, I argue that work focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people would benefit substantially from more deeply incorporating and internalizing feminist intersectionality theory into its scope and agenda, not only in terms of including more queer people of color but also in terms of critiquing structures of inequality beyond heteronormativity. The Pulse nightclub shooting, which occurred on June 12, 2016 in Orlando, FL during "Latin night" at an LGBTQ nightclub, provides a particularly important site for exploring representations of multiply marginalized groups of queer people, given that the vast majority of the 49 victims, as the quote above from HRC suggests, were LGBTQ people of color. Over 90% of the victims have been identified as Latinx,[1] with 23 of the 49 recognized as Puerto Rican, some of whom also identified as Black (La Fountain-Stokes, 2016; Torres, 2016).

Critiques of the media coverage of the shooting have generally focused on how reporting tended to underscore the LGBTQ status of the victims while simultaneously erasing their Latinx identities, which often led to an implicit whitening of those who died (Ramirez, Gonzalez, & Galupo, 2018; Torres, 2016). Focusing on 377 online LGBTQ representations of the shooting, this article adds support to positions that have emphasized Latinx exclusion, while also complicating such perspectives, given that Latinx queer people were included in a significant minority of these reports. Indeed, even HRC here—a gay-rights organization that has been critiqued for focusing on the needs and concerns of relatively privileged groups—underscored that most of the victims were LGBTQ people of color (Nair, 2010; Spade, 2015). Although HRC's emphasis on the military and their broad description of "someone's brother, father, sister, daughter, family, and friend" may seem fairly typical of their work, the underscoring that "almost every one of them was either Black or Latinx" demonstrates that traditional gay-rights groups did not always erase the victims' racial and ethnic identities. To be sure, HRC's tribute was designed to draw attention to, not exclude, these identities; in the front windows of their headquarters, this tribute was eight stories tall with images of all 49 victims above the phrase "We Are Orlando" (Wright, 2016).

If HRC's tribute was designed to highlight the victims, even making them more visible, how can such a representation be troublesome? My argument in this article is that coverage of Latinx LGBTQ people, on its own, does not automatically aid in the process of addressing inequities experienced by this group. HRC's tribute here is reification rather than erasure of the victims. If HRC, arguably the most widely agreed-upon representation of a gay-rights organization that focuses primarily on the concerns of White and wealthy LGBTQ people, can claim those individuals who died at Pulse as "the people HRC fights for every single day," then it is worth questioning not simply how the victims' race and ethnicity has been excluded from dominant narratives

but also how this aspect has been underscored to reaffirm mainstream gay-rights approaches. HRC perhaps used this tribute to counter their reputation as an organization that tends to serve the interests of White gay men; yet their alignment with the victims here could appear sensible only given the larger context in which those who died were constructed as LGBTQ more frequently than Latinx. In contrast, perceiving the victims as LGBTQ people of color makes it difficult to view them as the people HRC "fights for every single day." Moreover, HRC's proclamation of "We Are Orlando," surrounded by the faces of queer people of color, suggests that groups not known for their intersectional work on behalf of multiply marginalized LGBTQ people may link themselves with the victims—in this case, by adorning the building with their images—despite significant differences that exist between those who died and those whom their advocacy work benefits. Certainly, gender and sexuality scholars have critiqued the invoking of this "we" in the Internet-based campaign "We Are Orlando" for shifting representation of the victims away from LGBTQ people of color, as some groups and individuals with relatively little in common with the victims, including but not limited to HRC, have employed this "we" to highlight homophobia, not to underscore intersecting oppressions faced by queer people of color (Halberstam, 2016; Park, 2016).

In this article, I argue for a more deeply critical analysis of hierarchies in LGBTQ communities, drawing on intersectionality's capacity for social transformation, as its theories, methods, and advocacy projects have a long history in emancipatory politics, with intersectional work being defined in large part by its critical approach to power relations rather than by its use as shorthand for including a diversity of perspectives (Crenshaw, 1991; May, 2015; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). As such, this study adds to a large body of intersectional scholarship that has drawn attention to the problems with mainstream approaches, such as forms of feminism and LGBTQ studies that have proved essentializing of people of color, which intersectional feminist perspectives have rebuked, even as traditional frameworks have been quite resilient in absorbing and appropriating these critical theories (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2004; Spade, 2015). Intersectional approaches have been used to examine a wide range of social dynamics, and yet research has only begun to explore the Pulse nightclub shooting through this lens (Acosta, 2016; Koons, 2016; McCall, 2005). A small but growing body of research has focused on Pulse, including studies on its psychological effects (Croff, Hubach, Currin, & Frederick, 2017; Stults, Kupprat, Krause, Kapadia, & Halkitis, 2017). More scholarship is needed, however, that accounts for the intersectional identities of the victims (Acosta, 2016; La Fountain-Stokes, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2018). Acosta (2016), for example, has emphasized Latinx erasure in media coverage, arguing for scholarship "to re-center the victims and the many ways that their lives represent that of so many queer

Latinx" (p. 108). Similarly, La Fountain-Stokes (2016) has asked, "What can GLBTQ liberation offer us, when leaders, journalists, and regular people ignore the multiplicity of oppressions and fail to see these in an intersectional framework?" (p. 100).

This scholarship emphasizing Latinx exclusion has been enormously important, but it has been largely theoretical in scope, as more empirical work is needed to uncover how the victims have been represented, including in LGBTQ media (La Fountain-Stokes, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2018). In one of the few empirical research projects to focus on Latinx invisibility, Ramirez et al. (2018) investigated the online narrative responses of 94 LGBTQ people of color following the shooting, finding that "participants voiced their frustrations with the lack of an intersectional focus across race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality" (p. 590). All these analyses point to the lack of intersectional representation of the victims, in mainstream media as well as LGBTQ communities, and yet the assumption throughout much of this work has been that greater representation, or less erasure, of Latinx identities would have improved the coverage. The aim of this article is not to dispute this understanding, as greater intersectional inclusion is important, but to add more nuance to this perspective by drawing attention to the ways in which traditional LGBTQ frameworks may incorporate Latinx queer people and continue to privilege sexuality as the predominant axis of inequality. My analysis has implications for intersectionality in LGBTQ communities, given that this inclusion of Latinx queer voices often served to bolster, not undermine, conventional gay-rights approaches.

Although intersectional work has revealed that the experiences of Latinx LGBTQ people and other queer people of color cannot be adequately understood through frameworks that privilege homophobia and heteronormativity at the exclusion of other forms of inequality, scholarship has also shown that mainstream LGBTQ media representations have often placed primary emphasis on sexuality, even when including queer people of color into their narratives (Negrón-Muntaner, 1996; Quesada, Gomez, & Vidal-Ortiz, 2015; Venkatesh, 2016). In these representations, a critical approach toward anti-LGBTQ prejudice may be present throughout, and yet the same rigor is not applied to other forms of inequality (Chávez, 2013; Nair, 2010). More broadly, research has pointed to the marginalization of Latinx queer people in LGBTQ media and traditional Latinx representations, as well as mainstream narratives (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rodríguez, 2014; Terriquez, 2015). Scholarship addressing immigration has been especially critical of this marginalization, as conventional media representations have often overlooked the challenges confronting Latinx LGBTQ immigrants, despite evidence that this group of people, particularly those who are transgender or gender-nonconforming, experience disproportionately high rates of violence from

U.S. immigration agencies (Chávez, 2013; Costanza-Chock, 2014; Terriquez, Brenes, & Lopez, 2018).

While this growing body of scholarship exploring media representations of Latinx queer people has drawn important attention to this group's marginalization, more work is necessary to examine how these dynamics operate in the context of the Pulse nightclub shooting, including analyses of how some media represented the victims in problematic ways (Calafell, 2017; Chávez, 2016; Ferguson, 2018). As such, this article focuses on representations of the victims in LGBTQ online media, showing that the inclusion of Latinx queer people did not typically alter the privileging of sexuality and that, occasionally, this inclusion involved a stereotypical positioning of Latinx communities as regressive with regard to religion, family, or masculinity. In contrast, I argue that intersectional scholarship and activism can help resist these traditional LGBTQ media representations by challenging frameworks that position superficial inclusion as sufficient.

My analysis in this article focuses primarily on the framing of the victims' Latinx identities, given that most scholarly critiques of media representations have emphasized Latinx exclusion (Acosta, 2016; Torres, 2016). Still, this article also focuses on some concerns related to Black LGBTQ people, as Pulse has been described as an Afro-Latinx space by some patrons of the club, and Black and Latinx identities are obviously not mutually exclusive (Okopnik, 2016; Rodríguez, 2003; Vidal-Ortiz, 2016). Consequently, my analysis includes an examination of how the reports sometimes positioned "security" or policing agencies in a neutral or positive way, marginalizing concerns confronting Black, as well as Latinx, queer people. As 23 of the 49 victims have been identified as Puerto Rican, the specificity of their experiences remains important to address, as has been highlighted in some other work (Calafell, 2017; La Fountain-Stokes, 2016); it is not my intention here to marginalize Puerto Rican LGBTQ people's experiences, but to draw attention to representations of Latinx queer people, broadly defined, and to avoid marginalizing the other 26 victims who were not identified as Puerto Rican (for more on the diversity of victims' racial and ethnic identities, see La Fountain-Stokes, 2018). In what follows, I first outline my methods, before detailing how the reports privileged the victims' sexuality status, which most frequently involved rendering invisible their Latinx identities. My analysis then turns to how the articles included Latinx queer voices and experiences, typically in a way that reinforced the primary emphasis on sexuality rather than on race and ethnicity. At the same time, I end this article outlining reports that focused on Latinx queer people in an intersectional way, pointing to the potential of frameworks that highlight the experiences of multiply marginalized LGBTQ people.

## Methods

Using a grounded theory approach, I designed a qualitative research project to examine media coverage of the Pulse nightclub shooting on popular LGBTQ Web sites. Attention was devoted to LGBTQ media to focus on how the shooting has been represented specifically in this arena. Given that Web sites do not report their amount of Internet traffic, the tool Alexa was used to select highly visited LGBTQ Web sites; this tool tracks Internet traffic for everyone who has the toolbar installed on their browser and has been used in other studies to determine the popularity of Web sites, having been described as the "best-known metric for ranking websites," providing a "rough idea" of their popularity (Lai & To, 2015; Tart, 2016, n.p.). For this study, I chose the five most trafficked LGBTQ Web sites as of July 1, 2016—*Queerty, Towleroad, The Advocate, Out.com*, and *LGBTQ Nation*—and included in my analysis all of their articles on the shooting from the first week of coverage, spanning from June 12 through June 18. This selection process yielded 377 reports, allowing for an in-depth analysis of a specific time period, while also including multiple days, as well as several Web sites, in the analysis. The first week of coverage was chosen because reporting began to drop off after this point, as even the vast majority of the reports in my analysis—361 of 377—were on the first six days of coverage. In total, 47 of these reports were from *Queerty*, 101 from *Towleroad*, 117 from *The Advocate*, 51 from *Out.com*, and 61 from *LGBTQ Nation*. These Web sites' descriptions of their work varied, but they consistently emphasized their presence as a leading voice in covering gay-oriented news and pop culture; the authors of the reports were generally not journalists or academics but full-time writers, typically either employed by the Web site or working as freelance writers on LGBTQ-themed issues.

The findings presented in the following sections are drawn from this larger research project that focuses on how the Web sites represented multiple aspects of the shooting, including the shooter, Omar Mateen (Meyer, 2019). In this article, however, I focus primarily on examining the reports' coverage of the victims. A grounded theory approach was used for qualitative data analysis, with open, axial, and selective coding conducted using ATLAS.ti (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Data analysis began with open coding to identify initial concepts, including line-by-line analysis of each report (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schreier, 2012). Following Corbin and Strauss's (2008) suggestion for axial coding, whereby connections, categories, and relationships are made among the concepts generated from open coding, broad axial codes were created such as "victims—LGBTQ focus" and "victims—Latinx emphasis." Through the process of selective coding, with analysis of the axial codes and the writing of theoretical memos, core categories emerged, as this examination revealed more specific

trends in the reports (Charmaz, 2014). Some of these core categories resemble the findings presented in this article, including "stereotypical representations of Latinx communities" and "inclusion of Latinx queer voices privileging LGBTQ-identification." In what follows, I present my findings based on this analysis, revealing how the reports included, as well as excluded, Latinx queer people and experiences.

## The exclusion of LGBTQ people of color: Privileging sexuality over ethnicity and excluding xenophobia as a motivating factor in the attack

Although my analysis complicates the notion that the victims' Latinx identities were always excluded from the reports, most of the articles adopted this approach, placing exclusive emphasis on their LGBTQ status. Of the 377 reports, the vast majority—305—contextualized the shooting in relation to the victims' LGBTQ identities; the remaining 72 articles focused on some other aspect of the shooting and did not mention the victims. In comparison to the 305 reports focusing on LGBTQ status, 70 of these articles addressed the victims' Latinx identities. The phrase "gay club" or "gay nightclub" alone appeared 196 times throughout the reports, while "Latin night" or "Latinx night" appeared 22 times. Further, the articles typically focused solely on sexuality when contextualizing the shooting in relation to past events and possible attacks in the future. Twenty-three reports described men who were threatening to attack an LGBTQ space at a future time, such as articles titled "Man Threatens to Make Two Atlanta Gay Bars 'The Next Orlando'" and "Man Arrested After Vowing to 'Come Back Orlando Style' to 'Take His 50' at NY Queer Bar" (de Koff, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2016). These reports generally focused on urban locales such as Atlanta, Los Angeles, or New York City where large segments of LGBTQ people of color reside; yet race and ethnicity went unaddressed in all of these articles, and the threats were not constructed as potential violence against queer people of color. Similarly, 16 of the reports contextualized the shooting in relation to historical examples of violence against LGBTQ people, broadly defined, rather than specifically against Latinx LGBTQ people or queer people of color more generally. Six articles referenced Matthew Shepard, which made this lack of intersectionality apparent, as these reports contextualized Pulse in relation to a historical incident of homophobic violence against a White gay man. Conversely, none of the articles described histories of xenophobic or racist violence in the United States against Latinx people, LGBTQ or otherwise. This privileging and mourning of White gay death, often from an urban perspective, has a long history in media representations of anti-queer violence, as the politics of grief around the Matthew Shepard case, among others, have been structured by geography, social class, and Whiteness (Meyer, 2015; Petersen, 2011).

At times, the articles problematized the erasure of the victims' LGBTQ status, while simultaneously engaging in the same practice with regard to their Latinx identities. These reports, 17 in total, typically constructed Republican politicians as most guilty of LGBTQ exclusion. For instance, the author of the article titled "Why It Matters that the Orlando Massacre Happened in a Gay Bar" made this argument succinctly: "It infuriates me that conservative members of Congress have dropped 'LGBT' or 'gay' from their scripted talking points in the dark days after the Orlando massacre… But to be clear: Pulse *was* a gay club, and targeted *because* it was" [(Hamilton, 2016; emphasis in original). The author of this report problematized LGBTQ exclusion and argued that homophobia played a pivotal role in the shooting, while also excluding any mention of the victims' Latinx identities. Four other reports problematized a statement from Pete Sessions, a Republican U.S. Congressional Representative from Texas, who said that Pulse "was a young person's nightclub, I'm told. And there were some [LGBTQ people] there, but it was mostly Latinos" (Barr, 2016). The articles that critiqued this comment were not part of the 17, given that they included this "mostly Latinos" phrase; nevertheless, none of these four reports addressed ethnicity when criticizing this statement. Sessions' comment undoubtedly lacks intersectionality in its positioning of Latinx people and LGBTQ people in opposition to one another, perhaps as mutually exclusive, as if the patrons of the club being "mostly Latinos" precludes them from also being primarily LGBTQ. Still, these articles critiqued his statement through an exclusive emphasis on sexuality, for failing to emphasize this aspect of the victims, not for failing to capture that they were typically Latinx and LGBTQ. In this sense, both Sessions and the dominant framework adopted by the reports failed to present the victims in an intersectional way, privileging one aspect of their identities—the Latinx part, in the case of Sessions, and the LGBTQ part, in the case of the Web sites—over the other.

The lack of intersectionality and the privileging of sexuality over race and ethnicity was also apparent in the exclusion of xenophobia as a possible motivating factor, as none of the articles discussed this aspect as a potential cause of the shooting. Mateen's reasons for targeting Pulse remain largely unknown at the time of this writing, as the FBI has not established a clear motive; yet what appears particularly noteworthy concerning the articles in this study as well as the media coverage in general is how homophobia received a considerable amount of attention, while racism and sexism received much less and xenophobia received almost none (Brinkmann, 2017; Coaston, 2018; Walter, Billard, & Murphy, 2017). In drawing attention to the possible role of xenophobia, I am less concerned here with exploring the "real" or "true" causes of the attack, as those appear as if they may never be conclusively determined, and more concerned with resisting approaches that have used the shooting to call for more border policing (e.g., Bull, 2016).

In the reports, the lack of attention to the role of xenophobia was due to the framing of Mateen in homonationalist ways as much as the representation of the victims, given that he was frequently constructed as a "foreign threat"—an "outsider" beyond U.S. borders—even though he was born and raised in the United States (Calafell, 2017; Meyer, 2019; Puar, 2007). This construction of Mateen often led to a representation of the shooting as one in which an "outsider" had killed U.S. citizens, which foreclosed any consideration of xenophobia on the part of the shooter. The lack of emphasis on xenophobia as a potentially motivating factor is important not simply because it reveals how little attention was drawn to Mateen's native-born status but also because it has implications for U.S. immigration politics, as Mateen was constructed as foreign to the United States, while the people he killed, over 90% of whom were Latinx and some of whom were immigrants, were not (Acosta, 2016; Ramirez et al., 2018). Indeed, the articles discussed immigration in relation to Mateen more than the victims, largely omitting any consideration of the latter's citizenship or documentation status, as the word "undocumented" appeared in only one report.

Of course, describing the immigration and certainly undocumented status of specific victims would violate serious ethical and privacy concerns, as publishing this information could have caused undue stress to their families or even set in motion deportation policies. Thus my analysis here does not call for releasing this information or for exploring the immigration status of any of the specific individuals who died. Four of the five Web sites in this study, however—all of them but *LGBTQ Nation*—published the names and images of the victims, a controversial practice that could have "outed" some people who chose not to be "out" while they were alive (Koons, 2016). Consequently, the lack of attention to Latinx immigration in the reports may have been due less to these privacy concerns and more to the marginalization of ethnic inequality.

In the hope of drawing more attention to ethnicity as a field of power relations, focusing on the challenges confronting Latinx undocumented immigrants remains important; yet Latinx people have also been positioned historically as "foreign" to the United States even when they are native-born citizens. As a result, analyses of the Pulse shooting must not essentialize these associations (Chávez, 2013; Sifuentes-Jauregui, 2014). Most of the victims were Latinx U.S. citizens, not "foreign" at all (Kalish Blair, 2016; La Fountain-Stokes, 2018). At the same time, xenophobia remains an important dimension of how anti-Latinx prejudice operates in this context, given that this group has often been positioned as "foreign," including sometimes even to their country of birth. Moreover, given that nearly half of the victims have been identified as Puerto Rican, Puerto Rico's complex relationship with the United States needs to be considered in analyses of Pulse, which includes forced displacement and migration on the part of its residents, in addition to

a long history of U.S. colonialism (Calafell, 2017; Ferguson, 2018; La Fountain-Stokes, 2016). In this sense, the shooting can be viewed in part as yet another example of queer Puerto Rican generational traumas of exclusion and disappearance, as this group, as U.S. citizens, have experienced displacement from Puerto Rico, only to encounter racism and xenophobia in the continental United States including in queer spaces after their migration (Calafell, 2017; Quesada et al., 2015).

Migration and immigration were also marginalized in the articles through descriptions of nativist policies, which were mentioned predominantly in relation to Muslim, not Latinx, populations. Eighteen of the reports contextualized Mateen relative to immigration debates or described conservative politicians' demands for more regressive anti-Muslim immigration laws, and yet none of these same articles mentioned Latinx LGBTQ people in the context of calls for greater border policing. Of course, Muslim citizens and immigrants would be harmed by the expansion of many detention and deportation policies as well, but without any discussion of how individuals similar to the victims would be afflicted by more regressive immigration approaches, the articles allowed for a reading of the shooting in which greater border policing could be viewed as helpful to LGBTQ populations, even though expanding some of these policies would cause harm to many Latinx queer people.

Conservative discourse that has drawn attention to the shooting as a way of demanding more "immigration enforcement" relies not only on a construction of the victims as implicitly White—as "saved" rather than harmed by the expansion of this policing—but also on an obfuscation of Mateen's native-born status, overlooking how inequities in the United States may have precipitated the shooting. My analysis here calls not for a privileging of xenophobia over anti-LGBTQ prejudice, but for a consideration of how both of these factors may have been structured by Mateen's country of birth rather than being shaped by "outside" forces, as the reports frequently implied in their positioning of Mateen as a "foreign threat" (Beauchamp, 2018; Ferguson, 2018; Meyer, 2019). Emphasis on the potential role of xenophobia helps to challenge these understandings of the shooting as perpetrated by an "outsider," reframing the attack as committed by a U.S. citizen potentially motivated by anti-immigrant or anti-Latinx prejudice. Further, using this heuristic device helps to link conservative demands for greater border policing with the very prejudice that may have played a role in the attack. If xenophobia contributed to the shooting, and if conservative attempts to institute more regressive immigration policies strengthen xenophobia, then demanding such policies can only be viewed as harmful, not as beneficial, to the Latinx LGBTQ people who died.

This failure of the reports to take seriously xenophobia as a potentially motivating factor was consistent with a broader trend in the articles, where

the concerns of LGBTQ people of color remained marginalized and a White LGBTQ framework was predominant. For instance, the articles sometimes represented policing agencies in a neutral, or even positive, way. The reports described earlier that focused on potential "threats" against LGBTQ people contributed to this sense that greater "security" was needed at LGBTQ locations. In addition, 17 of the articles explained that more law enforcement would be present at many gay Pride parades after the shooting. These reports generally used descriptive rather than laudatory language, yet the discourse of providing "security" was the most common framework used to characterize this greater police presence, which implicitly positioned their involvement in positive terms. One of these articles described the New York Police Department as "beefing up security…following the Orlando attacks," while another described how Los Angeles police "are stepping up security" after arresting a man who "was headed for the Pride celebration in West Hollywood—with assault rifles and a substance that could be used for explosives" (Ring, 2016; Towle, 2016). A few of these reports, such as the latter, positioned the police as heroic in their thwarting of a potential attack, yet even when police officers were not described in such overtly favorable ways, their presence at Pride parades was positioned either as understandable, given that Pulse had just occurred, or as necessary to prevent a future attack.

The potentially negative consequences of more law enforcement officers were not typically explored, as any possible drawbacks were described in only two articles. Instead, most of these reports discussed this expansion of policing in relation to "threats"; another article, representative of this trend, described police officers at Pride parades who "will thoroughly investigate each of the threats" and "treat all of them seriously" (LGBTQ Nation, 2016). Three of these reports used the discourse of "protection," such as an article explaining that crowds at Pride parades would be "greeted" and "protected" by "more police officers" (Babwin, 2016). In this sense, the reports usually excluded the potential fear, or even violence, that many LGBTQ people of color could experience from this increased police presence. Four other articles focused on police officers who had saved a person's life during the shooting, as this favorable representation of law enforcement was reflected in other reports as well. This positive depiction of "security" agencies most frequently involved police officers, but the only time that U.S. Border Patrol was described in the articles, it was also presented positively, as participating in L.A. Pride (Reynolds, 2016). Thus most of the reports did not simply exclude LGBTQ people of color from their reporting, but generally failed to take their concerns seriously, with policing agencies presented in a largely uncritical way.

## The limits of Latinx inclusion and the maintenance of a White LGBTQ framework

While a majority of the reports excluded the victims' Latinx status, a smaller but still significant number of articles, 70, included Latinx people or experiences, and yet typically did so in a way that continued to emphasize LGBTQ identification. Of all the individuals who died, the reports devoted the most coverage to a couple, Christopher "Drew" Leinonen and Juan Ramon Guerrero. The focus on this couple can be explained in part by homonormativity and the privileging of coupled LGBTQ people relative to their single counterparts, as their deaths were presented as "extra tragic" because their lives ended before they had the chance to get married; for instance, one of these articles was titled "Instead of a Wedding, Couple Will Have a Joint Funeral" (Ennis, 2016). Queer critiques of gay marriage politics have frequently drawn attention to how hegemonic emphasis on "coupling" has established idealized modes of intimate relations (Nair, 2010). Accompanying this homonormative emphasis on a gay marriage that was tragically prevented from occurring, the focus on an implicitly cisgender, gay male couple who appeared as gender-conforming reflected the unspoken male-centeredness of the reports, as well as how the articles tended to marginalize transgender and gender-nonconforming LGBTQ people.

In addition to focusing on a gay male couple, this representation echoed the frequent emphasis on love, acceptance, and unity in the reports; the word *love* alone appeared 461 times throughout the articles. This discourse included an overwhelmingly positive representation of LGBTQ communities, which typically involved overlooking hierarchies, even when quoting queer people of color. Reports focusing on LGBTQ people of color most frequently highlighted love and unity, such as an article titled "Pulse Survivor: 'Stop Being Shady and Messy, Just Love One Another'" that quoted a survivor, Marcus Godden, as underscoring the importance of LGBTQ people sticking with one another: "As a gay community, we need to stick together and turn this whole situation around. And try to love one another" (Brydum, 2016). This focus on love and unity remained throughout the article, also paired with the downplaying of differences among LGBTQ people later in the report, as Godden was quoted in this way:

> Godden confirmed that there were "quite a few" transgender women in the club early Sunday morning—though he pushed back on the distinction between identities within the LGBT community. "It doesn't matter," he says. "L, G, B, T—lesbian, gay, bi, trans. I don't care who you are. If you are under the homosexual rainbow flag, LGBT symbol, you are part of me."

Twelve of the articles suggested that LGBTQ people need to "come together," such as another report indicating that "the community needs to be united" and "needs to come together as one" (Morales, 2016). This article quoting

Godden was only one of two to emphasize that many transgender women were in Pulse at the time of the shooting, and yet this report contextualized his statement around downplaying rather than highlighting differences among LGBTQ people. In general, the articles quoted few transgender people emphasizing their particular concerns or LGBTQ people of color describing issues, beyond homophobia, specific to themselves. Moreover, it remained striking how infrequently transgender Latinx people appeared in the reports. As a result, the inclusion of Latinx voices and experiences still tended to involve the presence of a relatively narrow segment of Latinx LGBTQ people. With regard to Godden, it is undoubtedly a troubling practice to determine the race and ethnicity of individuals based on images in these reports, as such a method can serve to essentialize racial and ethnic difference; yet Godden may have identified as Black or Black Latinx, as his picture appeared at the beginning of the article. Still, given that his included quotations focused on LGBTQ communities rather than on race and ethnicity, this aspect of his identity remained unknown.

Regardless of his precise identity, the important exclusion in this report and the vast majority of the others was that queer people of color's voices and experiences were not used to underscore the ways in which LGBTQ people differ in their exposure to violence and oppression. Another one of these articles downplayed such differences even more starkly, by contending that the shooting "will galvanize and remind us once again that trans, gay men, lesbians, and intersex are all one family and unfortunately, hated in equal measure" (Herrera, 2016). Given that the shooting could have been used to highlight how some queer people are more vulnerable to premature death than others, positioning the attack in this alternative way—as a time to overlook the differences among LGBTQ people and unite around this identity—reveals that traditional gay-rights media may use such events not to underscore the marginalization of queer people of color but to emphasize LGBTQ community identification. In addition, the reports marginalized queer people of color's engagement with these communities through intersectional advocacy work; the activism of the Dreamers and Black Lives Matter, for example, did not appear in any of the articles. Conversely, mainstream gay-rights organizations appeared more frequently, typically in a positive way, as HRC was referred to 58 times and GLAAD was addressed on 14 occasions.

In contrast to the generally positive representation of LGBTQ communities, the few articles that discussed Latinx communities positioned them as barriers to "coming out." This construction of Latinx communities as inhibiting the disclosure process for queer Latinx people was explicitly stated in only five reports; yet 15 additional articles positioned the victims as closeted, and the most common advice to appear throughout all the reports was for the reader to "be proud" of their LGBTQ identity or to live as "out and

proud" after the shooting. Consequently, the articles overwhelmingly positioned outness in positive terms, and when this aspect of the victims was discussed, they were most frequently constructed as closeted. This positioning of the victims tended to present them in a relatively homogeneous way and appeared to be rooted largely in speculation, as they likely differed in their degree of outness (La Fountain-Stokes, 2016). Nevertheless, the assumption that the victims were closeted appeared in 20 of the reports, and the only potential reason or explanation given in any of these articles was in the five reports that connected this lack of outness with their Latinx communities, such as in the following article that quoted a variety of Latinx service providers, some of whom positioned the victims as not fully "out":

> Imagine those folks who were not out to their families, or who were barely starting to come out to their families," says Jorge Gutierrez, national coordinator for Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement. "We know how important family is to us as Latinos. Now they don't have that opportunity to be authentic, in their homes with their own families. (Shah, 2016)

This service provider allowed for the possibility that some of the victims were in the process of "coming out" to their families; yet this article in general positioned the victims as closeted due to their Latinx communities, also emphasizing "the cultural taboos around homosexuality" in "the Latino population." Further, this report quoted another leader of a nonprofit organization—Marytza Sanz, the president of Latino Leadership—as describing Latinx families as lacking an openness toward homosexuality: "Culturally, our families, they're not too open." Scholarship has long critiqued this trope of Latinx families as instituting an essentialized and monolithic representation of Latinx people, implicitly positioning them as heterosexual, conservative, and family-oriented (Cantú, 2011; Carrillo, 2017; Carrillo & Fontdevila, 2014; Sifuentes-Jauregui, 2014). This emphasis not only marginalizes Latinx LGBTQ families but also reinforces nativist sentiments in the United States that establish heterosexual Latinx people as "culturally different" from their White counterparts because of the former's purportedly greater homophobia, despite some evidence from national survey data that shows lower rates of support for lesbians and gay men among White Americans (Pew Research Center, 2017, p. 42).

While the article above focused on family, other reports addressed religion or masculinity, such as the following editorial written by a Latino gay man: "I know firsthand just how difficult it is to fully embrace your sexual or gender identity when you come from a Latino household defined by factors like faith or machismo… Plain and simple, it's tough being a minority twice over" (Olivares, 2016). This emphasis on "faith or machismo" similarly draws on ideas of Latinx families as conservative with regard to gender and sexuality, positioning these attributes as the cause of Latinx LGBTQ people struggling

to embrace their sexuality or gender identity. This report, in its description of how "it's tough being a minority twice over," adopted an additive understanding of oppression where anti-LGBTQ discrimination in Latinx communities was constructed as a considerable problem, while racism and xenophobia in LGBTQ communities, as well as the broader U.S. society, were not given meaningful attention. Moreover, as these reports described anti-queer prejudice in Latinx communities, these dynamics were decontextualized from inequities in the United States. In short, anti-LGBTQ discrimination in Latinx communities was understood as arising not from complex historical legacies that involve overlapping systems of oppression such as imperialism, institutional racism, and heteronormativity, but from a naturalized "culture" that posits Latinx communities as extraordinarily focused on family, religion, or "machismo." Such ideas serve to reinforce longstanding imperialist legacies that position White U.S. citizens as "better," or even "more evolved," than their Latinx counterparts, ultimately buttressing hierarchies based on ethnicity (Muñoz, 1999; Rodríguez, 2014).

Although most of the reports that included Latinx LGBTQ people continued to reflect a privileging of sexuality and homophobia, the categories of Latinx "exclusion" and "inclusion" that I have distinguished between throughout this article were not always as clear-cut as this divide would suggest. To be sure, 30 of the 70 articles that included Latinx LGBTQ people did so in one sentence, most typically by explaining that many of the victims were Latinx or that the attack had occurred on "Latin night." Thus even when their Latinx status was "included" in the reports, it was often done so relatively quickly, without any in-depth exploration. These 30 articles undoubtedly represented a superficial engagement with Latinx inclusion; yet as I have shown throughout this section, reports that focused more centrally on Latinx queer people also usually continued to prioritize LGBTQ identification and, at times, added an additional stereotypical depiction of Latinx communities.

## Exceptions to the dominant narrative of the reports: Latinx intersectional approaches

Four of the articles focused on Latinx queer people without privileging their LGBTQ identities or advancing stereotypes of Latinx communities, ultimately countering the dominant narrative in the other reports. For example, one article, titled "Queer Latinos After Shooting: 'Mi Existir es Resistir' [My Existence is Resistance]," emphasized multiple times how media representations tended to erase the Latinx status of the victims, quoting several Latinx activists and social service providers saying, "Don't erase the identities of those who died" and "It's almost as if the LGBT Latino community is nonexistent," among other similar statements (Villarreal, 2016). While the

male-centered *Latino* was used throughout most of the article, this report also defined *Latinx* and pointed to the presence of "trans people of color" at Pulse. Further, this report quoted Jennicet Gutierrez, a Latinx transgender activist who had interrupted former President Obama at the White House in 2015:

> I spoke up and challenged President Obama on the violence that trans women are facing, especially inside immigration facilities… We had a victory in marriage equality, but for us, it's not really a priority, and now we are seeing the backlash with so much anti-trans legislation throughout the nation and the killings that are happening to trans women—black and Latinx.

While the reports most frequently included queer people of color's voices to highlight similarities among LGBTQ people, this report points to the potential of Latinx inclusion, as the specific concerns of multiply marginalized groups were emphasized. Certainly, Gutierrez underscored the violence facing transgender women in immigration detention facilities—an issue those who are Latinx face disproportionately—as well as violence more broadly against Black and Latinx transgender women.

Though exceptional in this study, these reports demonstrate that focusing on queer people of color has the potential to destabilize White LGBTQ frameworks, even if this emphasis does not automatically undermine such dynamics. Another one of these articles, titled "Queer Latinx Reactions in the Wake of the Orlando Tragedy," was the only report to use the word "undocumented," with a quotation from Ariel Cerrud, a queer Latino health advocate, who also problematized the association of law enforcement with safety: "We don't need guards, police, or the perpetuation of violence from law enforcement… If you are a queer undocumented person, you don't want to see a police officer with a gun in the place you're supposed to have a good time" (Jenson, 2016). While other articles focused entirely on "threats" against LGBTQ people, this troubling of law enforcement was a single quotation, which may have allowed the reader to view it as one individual's "opinion." That is, the emphasis on "threats" was given considerably more weight throughout the reports, as some of the articles were structured entirely around this topic, whereas none of the reports focused predominantly on the problems with greater policing or the challenges confronting undocumented Latinx LGBTQ people.

Although the dominant narrative of the articles presented queer communities in an overwhelmingly positive way, two of the reports that remained exceptions focused on racism in LGBTQ communities. One such article, titled "Queer Latinx: Tired of Being Targets," was the only report to refer to "White supremacy," also describing the "disregard of black and brown bodies" and arguing that many Latinx LGBTQ people "don't feel safe in white-dominated queer spaces" (Ortiz-Fonseca, 2016). Another article

similarly highlighted racial and ethnic inequities in queer communities, as this report was titled "The Time Two White Gay Men Heckled a Latina at a Pulse Vigil" (Givens, 2016). This report focused on a vigil at the University of Missouri at Columbia, where a Latina queer woman gave a speech in which she pointed out that the crowd at the event was predominantly White, while those killed at Pulse were overwhelmingly people of color. In the speech, she is quoted as emphasizing racial justice and asking the crowd, "Who are you really here for?," which prompts an unknown woman to respond, "We're here for everybody," and two White gay men to yell, "We are here to be uniting, not dividing, which is what you are doing now." These comments are framed as problematic, as an example of queer people of color "being silenced" and as evidence that "the mere mention of race is categorized by some as 'divisive.'" This article, undoubtedly exceptional in its drawing attention to the silencing of a Latina queer woman by two White gay men, nevertheless contrasted sharply with the dominant framework of the reports that encouraged LGBTQ people to be unified. Indeed, the White gay men's statement that "we are here to be uniting, not dividing" was similar to the narrative that many of the other articles were advancing, as this report's emphasis on hierarchies in LGBTQ communities was extraordinarily unusual.

## Conclusion

Scholarship problematizing media coverage of the Pulse nightclub shooting has often focused on Latinx exclusion, challenging these representations by asking for greater inclusion and more emphasis on the victims' Latinx identities (La Fountain-Stokes, 2016; Torres, 2016). As my analysis has shown, however, the assumption that focusing on Latinx LGBTQ people would improve the coverage is not necessarily well founded, at least in arenas that do not already take ethnic inequality seriously, as the reports in this study that included Latinx queer voices typically did so without incorporating any critical analysis of xenophobia or U.S. immigration politics. Consequently, while my main argument is that inclusion of Latinx queer people in LGBTQ media will not always be sufficient for disrupting a White LGBTQ framework, the implications of this argument for intersectional scholarship suggest that calls for greater representation of multiply marginalized groups need to be accompanied by demands for transformative structural changes (Cho et al., 2013; Hancock, 2016; May, 2015). The inclusion of Latinx LGBTQ people has the potential to destabilize nativism and xenophobia, but in these reports, their inclusion tended to shore up such forms of inequality, reinforcing nativist ideas, for example, of Latinx communities as especially homophobic. Intersectional perspectives must continue to account for the limitations of reducing intersectionality to inclusion, as these

reductive approaches can diminish the radical potential of such theories (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Zinn & Dill, 1996).

In the reports, centering Latinx queer people usually failed to disrupt the privileging of sexuality over race and ethnicity. A model that privileges sexuality is, of course, not only a White LGBTQ model but also a male and middle-class one, given that White gay men with class privilege benefit most from such an approach, while other queer people must concern themselves with combating multiple systems of oppression (Cohen, 1997; Collins, 2004; Spade, 2013). One avenue for resistance, in response to the reports that positioned policing agencies as providing greater "protection" or "security," involves addressing whom these agencies "protect" and "secure," given that such a framework remains implicated in Whiteness and does not account for the interests and experiences of many LGBTQ people of color (Beauchamp, 2018; Meyer, 2015; Spade, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Further, in the articles, Latinx inclusion typically operated through an emphasis on Latino, cisgender gay men; this focus marginalized other Latinx LGBTQ people, including the many transgender Latina women who died at Pulse (Edelman, 2018; Koons, 2016). Thus intersectional analyses attuned to a more holistic understanding of how power operates in LGBTQ communities remain particularly necessary, as conventional gay-rights media may include multiply marginalized people only by continuing to focus primarily on cisgender gay men.

My analysis here has centered on LGBTQ online representations, where coverage of the shooting may differ in some obvious ways from other media outlets. Research has suggested, however, that mainstream, non-LGBTQ media also largely privileged homophobia and "terrorism" as explanations of the shooting, in addition to focusing more attention on the victims' LGBTQ status than on their Latinx identities (Ramirez et al., 2018; Walter et al., 2017). Some Latinx online media, on the other hand, appeared to provide more nuanced representations of the victims, highlighting the importance of immigration and xenophobia, while other parts of these media may have privileged the victims' Latinx status over their LGBTQ identities (Guevarra, 2016; Villarreal, 2016). This study is limited in that my results can speak only to traditional LGBTQ media, and future research should continue to explore the differences among various media outlets; to be sure, the degree to which xenophobia and homophobia were emphasized likely varied considerably. In terms of LGBTQ media, the privileging of homophobia is hardly surprising in mainstream arenas, and yet resistance to these approaches must avoid naturalizing such a framework, given that the marginalization of race and ethnicity in these domains should not be viewed as inevitable but as the product of a particular formulation of LGBTQ politics that favors White gay men with class privilege.

Alternatives to a traditional gay-rights approach have begun to thrive recently with intersectional work among LGBTQ people, perhaps exemplified

most prominently by activist groups such as the Dreamers and Black Lives Matter, which have employed a politics of solidarity, informed by anti-racist feminist traditions that have also been committed to anti-capitalist critique (Mohanty, 2003; Taylor, 2016; Terriquez et al., 2018). The Dreamers, for example, developed in part in response to disproportionately high rates of violence experienced by Latinx LGBTQ immigrants at the hands of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), calling for policies to defund and abolish ICE; when doing so, its members have often "come out" not only as queer but also as undocumented (Chávez, 2013; Costanza-Chock, 2014; Terriquez, 2015). With regard to Pulse, many intersectionally motivated LGBTQ groups, such as the Atlanta-based Georgia Trans Latina Coalition and the New York City–based Audre Lorde Project, resisted mainstream media narratives that attempted to use the shooting to call for more policing of U.S. borders, as these groups reframed the violence as a product of U.S. inequities (Aponte, 2016; Ferguson, 2018; The Audre Lorde Project, 2016).

While more hope for LGBTQ people marginalized in multiple ways likely resides in these newfound intersectional activist groups, it also remains necessary to convince some LGBTQ organizations to take race, class, and gender inequality more seriously. Organizations such as HRC appear unlikely to adopt these intersectional models in the near future, but it remains essential to convert a greater number of organizations away from a sexualities-only framework and toward approaches closer to the work of the Dreamers or the Movement for Black Lives. Intersectional scholarship, as well as intersectional activism, can contribute significantly in this regard by critiquing frameworks that position superficial inclusion of multiply marginalized LGBTQ people as sufficient or commendable. As such inclusion may help to reaffirm single-issue, gay-rights advocacy rather than help to move toward an intersectional feminist approach, scholarship that draws greater attention to multiply marginalized LGBTQ people must involve a critical analysis of power relations (Chávez, 2013; Meyer, 2017; Spade, 2015). Indeed, as I have shown in this article, demands for greater queer Latinx inclusion may accomplish relatively little if not accompanied by a deep structural critique of how power operates based on race and ethnicity, both within LGBTQ communities and the wider U.S. society.

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## Notes

1. *Latinx* is used throughout this article as a way of being more inclusive of nonbinary, intersex, and transgender people, or others who may not view themselves according to a strict gender binary, which is implied in constructions such as *Latino/a*. Still, the use of *Latinx* is not without its concerns, as it can be used by those in the Global North and then applied to individuals in the Global South who are entirely unfamiliar with the term. I note these concerns here given that some of the victims may have been from contexts in which *Latinx* is not used, yet I have settled on this imperfect term to be as inclusive as possible of individuals who do not identify as either Latino or Latina.

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