

## **Queer Is the New Black? Not So Much: Racial Disparities in Anti-LGBTQ Discrimination**

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*The present study examines the intersection of race and sexual orientation in the experience of discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people. The results of the study suggest that while a majority of LGBTQ individuals report being victims of anti-LGBTQ discrimination, racial minorities experience even greater levels of anti-LGBTQ discrimination than do White LGBTQ people. The findings suggest that the intersection of race and sexual orientation creates elevated levels of discrimination risk beyond the already elevated rates of discrimination experienced by members of the LGBTQ community for LGBTQ racial minorities.*

**KEYWORDS** *LGBTQ, sexual minorities, discrimination, racial minorities, anti-LGBTQ*

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, race and sexual orientation, among other identities, have been underpinning factors in the discriminatory practices in the United States. Racial discrimination has been experienced by every racial minority group in the country and is not limited to one specific racial group (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Williams, 1999; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Likewise, sexual orientation is another social identity that has been and continues to be marked by discrimination (Herek, 2007). Because of the widespread discrimination experienced by both racial and sexual

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minorities, anti-discrimination laws have been one focus of social movements' efforts to improve the quality of life for members of these groups. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it illegal to discriminate against individuals based on race or ethnicity (Pub. L. 88-352) (Title VII), and while there are no federal laws protecting individuals based on their sexual orientation, numerous states and local jurisdictions have implemented policies protecting individuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., The California Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) (Gov. Code, § 12900 et seq.).

Both the topics of racial discrimination (Kessler et al., 1999; Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2003) and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals (Herek, 2007) have received attention from scholars. However, much less research has attended to the intersection of race and sexual orientation to understand the differential risks associated with intersecting marginalized identities for discriminatory experiences. Given that individuals experience the world through the lens of a totality of their identities, both marginalized and privileged (Warner & Shields, 2013), failure to attend to this complexity provides only a limited understanding of the experience of oppression. The aim of this study is to understand the intersection of sexual orientation and racial/ethnic identity and how it impacts the experiences of discrimination for LGBTQ people to advance the scholarship toward this more complex view.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as the inequitable treatment of a group or individual in social settings because of the individual's social identity and has been categorized into structural and interpersonal types (Jones, 2000). Structural discrimination refers to policies and practices that limit access to goods and services to specific groups of people, whereas interpersonal discrimination is the unfair treatment of individuals that is not systematic, but occurs on a micro basis between people (Jones, 2000). Research indicates that both people of color (Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2003) and LGBTQ people (Harper & Schneider, 2003) commonly experience discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, education, and human services. Discrimination is the direct manifestation of prejudice. While prejudice is a feeling, either favorable or unfavorable, toward a person with insufficient warrant, discrimination is acting upon a prejudice. Discrimination has immediate and serious social consequences, because it results in the denial of equal treatment to individuals or groups based on social identities (Allport, 1954).

## WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

Workplace discrimination of LGBTQ employees is widespread (Factor & Rothblum, 2007; Rosser, Oakes, Bockting, & Miner, 2007; Sangganjanavanich, 2005). Existing research indicates that 25% to 60% of LGBTQ employees report workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007), causing many LGBTQ individuals to fear negative consequences for disclosing their sexual orientation (Connell, 2012). Research suggests that LGBTQ individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace if there are policies in place to protect them from discrimination (Connell, 2012; Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). These fears seem to be justified as research demonstrates that once LGBTQ individuals come out at work, they are often discriminated against (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007). For example, in terms of income, openly gay men earn, on average, 10% to 30% less than heterosexual men for the same job when they are open about their sexual orientation (Badgett et al., 2007). Race adds an additional dimension of discrimination in the workplace for LGBTQ individuals, particularly in terms of income and promotions (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007). LGBTQ people of color earn lower salaries and achieve less workplace advancement than White LGBTQ individuals regardless of job performance or qualification (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007).

Relatedly, transphobia contributes to high rates of employment discrimination for transgender individuals. Researchers point to the difficulty of some trans females to “pass” or look like cisgender females as a reason for employment discrimination (Boles & Elifson, 1994; Nemoto, Iwamoto, Wong, Le, & Operario, 2004). Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Doll, and Harper (2006) found that 61% of trans female youths of color report employment difficulty. During the transitioning process, transgender individuals often experience discrimination in being refrained from receiving a promotion, being demoted in their current position (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001), and having reduced customer contact as forms of transphobia (Chow, 2005).

## HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

LGBTQ individuals face housing insecurities beginning in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. A disproportionate number of homeless youths identify as LGBTQ (Hunter, 2008), and as adults LGBTQ individuals are more likely to experience rental discrimination because of their sexual orientation (Lauster & Easterbrook, 2011), particularly in small towns or rural communities (Swank, Fahs, & Frost, 2013), than their heterosexual counterparts. While lesbian mothers and gay fathers experience higher rates of housing denial

compared to heterosexual families, lesbian mothers experience significantly higher rates than do gay fathers (Lauster & Easterbrook, 2011), indicating intersecting identities, such as gender, may play a role in increasing the likelihood of sexual orientation-based discrimination. Another area of concern for the LGBTQ community is housing discrimination based on gender identity and expression. Unfortunately, there has been limited research looking at housing discrimination comparing transgender and cisgender members within the LGBTQ community; however, transgender individuals experience higher levels of employment discrimination compared to cisgender individuals in the general society (Wilson et al., 2009) and the lack of resources likely contribute to homelessness and housing difficulties. Weber, Boivin, Blais, Haley, and Roy (2004) found that homelessness is a major risk factor for transgender youths because of transphobia from family members and strained social support systems.

### Discrimination and Health Outcomes

Discrimination not only impacts employment and housing opportunities for LGBTQ people, but also is additionally linked to adverse health outcomes. Experiences of homophobia and transphobia have an adverse effect in health for LGBTQ individuals (Gates, 2013). LGBTQ youths are at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, and suicide than their heterosexual counterparts and those who are targeted for harassment and discriminatory behavior show some of the highest rates of suicide and suicidal ideology (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Bontempo & Augelli, 2002; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Cochran & Mays, 2000; Russell & Joyner, 2001). LGBTQ people of color face additional social stigma because of racism within the LGBTQ community and homophobia within their racial communities (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Jenne, & Marin, 2001; Greene, 2000; Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost; 2008). These additional stresses are associated with increased depressive symptoms in LGBTQ people of color compared to White LGBTQ individuals (Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009).

Similar to the health outcomes for LGBTQ individuals who experience discrimination and harassment, people of color frequently have negative health outcomes based on their experiences of racism and discrimination in the health care system (Shavers et al., 2012). These experiences are associated with adverse health outcomes for African-American, Latino/a, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian/Pacific Islanders, including higher mortality (Barnes et al., 2008), high blood pressure (Lewis et al., 2009; McClure et al., 2010), and increased likelihood of mental health issues (Pascoe & Smart, 2009). Researchers found that African-Americans who experience frequent discrimination are at a higher risk for adopting negative coping strategies such as substance abuse and reduced physical activity, and practice fewer

health-seeking behaviors (Bennett, Wolin, Robinson, Fowler, & Edwards, 2005; Gibbons, Gerrard, Cleveland, Wills, & Brody, 2004).

Social science researchers argue these health outcomes are directly related to the discrimination faced by minority groups. Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) argues that while everyone experiences both individual and social stress, particular groups of individuals who are marginalized in a social context experience a different type of stress directly related to their marginalized status. Minority stress is unique to members of minority groups; it is additive to general stressors, chronic, and socially based (Meyer, 2003). The combination of social stressors and environmental stressors is linked to the adverse health outcomes for individuals who have multiple marginalized identities in a society.

### Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory is founded on the principle that individuals hold multiple identities and that these identities interact to shape lived experiences (Warner & Shields, 2013). Race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class are among the identities that impact how individuals experience their social environment. These identity categories not only describe group membership but also depict the historical and continuous relationships with social inequity and stigma (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality theory points out the nuanced association between identities and the social environment, emphasizing the unique influence of power and privilege of particular social locations and identities (Mahalingam, 2006).

Intersectionality theory was developed investigating the unique influence of race on the lived experiences of Black women, including their experiences of discrimination. As scholars suspected, their experiences of discrimination were not solely rooted in either race or gender. Depending on the social environment, Black women experience discrimination similarly to the discrimination experienced by Black men, in some cases similarly to that experienced by White women, and in still other cases there was an additive contribution of race and gender on the level of discrimination experienced by the Black women (Crenshaw, 1994). In this utilization of intersectionality, there was an expression of discrimination based on the interacting identities for these women. Whereas intersectionality has been primarily applied in the context of race and gender (Cole, 2009), the principles of intersectionality extend beyond these two identities and are applicable to any marginalized social identities.

### Research Question

The current literature suggests that LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of discrimination compared to individuals who identify as

heterosexual (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Ryan & Rivers, 2003). Similarly, studies suggest that people of color (POC) report higher rates of discrimination than do White people (Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2003). The current research study addresses three different questions: (1) What is the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ discrimination for a sample in a Western Plains area? (2) What differences exist between the rates of discrimination for LGBTQ POC and White LGBTQ people? (3) What are the nuanced differences among POC?

## METHOD

### Sample Recruitment and Characteristics

The present study utilized data from One Colorado Educational Fund's anonymous 2010 GLBT Needs Assessment, collected during January and February 2010. One Colorado Educational Fund is an advocacy organization for LGBT individuals and their families. The organization works to secure protections and opportunities for LGBT in its geographic location through public education campaigns—leveraging data and messaging as well as relationships with supporters and coalition partners. One Colorado Educational Fund programs are focused in four primary areas: LGBT health, safe schools, immigration, and racial justice and relationship recognition. One Colorado Educational Fund collected the data to assist in organizational planning efforts. The online survey, available in English and Spanish, was disseminated through One Colorado Educational Fund's e-mail list, affiliated organizations, and social networking Web sites, resulting in a final sample of 4,619 LGBTQ adult participants, who reside in a Rocky Mountain region state.

Cases from the total sample ( $N = 4,619$ ) were removed if they did not meet the inclusion criteria for analysis. First, cases were removed if the participant failed to report gender identity or race/ethnicity ( $N = 759$ , 16.4%). In addition, individuals who identified as Middle Eastern were removed from analysis because of the small sample size ( $N = 6$ ) and the resultant limited statistical power. After removing these groups, the final analytic sample was 3,854. Researchers assessed missingness, normality, and univariate and multivariate outliers. Cases that had missing data for only one of the dependent variables were retained because they only comprised .05% of the total analytic sample and were not significantly different from cases with no missing data.

### Measures

#### DEMOGRAPHIC

Basic social demographic information was collected from participants. This information included gender identity, age, sexual orientation, racial/ethnic identity, relationship status, economic status, and educational level. In the originally collected data, race was assessed with the following categories:

African-American/Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, White/Caucasian, and Other. After examination of the responses in the other category, individual responses for race/ethnicity were re-coded into the same categories with the addition of Biracial/Multiracial, and Middle Eastern categories.

#### DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination was assessed by two different questions asking participants to state if they had ever been discriminated against in two venues: in housing or in the workplace based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The respondents were given the response choices of yes, no, or unsure. Those who responded yes or unsure were combined into a category representing those who had experienced discrimination or thought that they might have experienced discrimination.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

After univariate analysis of the demographic data, researchers examined the primary research question using chi-square tests of independence to determine if there was an association between race/ethnicity overall and experiences of housing discrimination and then experiences of employment discrimination for LGBTQ people. Following that, chi-square tests were used to examine the association between discrimination and each racial category compared to all others. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS v.22 (SPSS IBM, New York, USA).

### RESULTS

Sample demographics are described in Table 1. Results of the chi-square test of independence indicate a statistically significant association between the experiences of housing discrimination and race/ethnicity  $\chi^2(5, 3846) = 88.90, p < .001$  and between the experiences of employment discrimination and race/ethnicity  $\chi^2(5, 3835) = 13.38, p = .02$ .

#### Racial Minority Comparisons

##### WHITE RESPONDENTS VERSUS PEOPLE OF COLOR RESPONDENTS

The analysis comparing White respondents to all other respondents provides us with an overall picture of the role of racial otherness in the experiences of anti-LGBTQ discrimination. In both types of discrimination examined, White

**TABLE 1** Descriptive Statistics

LGBTQ Participants ( <i>N</i> = 3,854)	<i>N</i>	%
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>		
Heterosexual	13	.4
Gay	2,057	53.4
Lesbian	1,157	30.0
Bisexual	333	8.6
Queer	294	7.6
<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Male	2,161	56.1
Female	1,541	40.0
Transgender	152	3.9
<i>Race</i>		
African-American/ Black	120	3.1
Asian	67	1.7
Hispanic	347	9.0
American Indian	28	.7
White	3,166	82.1
Multiracial	126	3.3
<i>Age</i>		
18–24	520	13.5
25–34	953	24.7
35–44	950	24.6
45–54	845	21.9
55–64	461	12.0
65 and older	125	3.2
<i>Education</i>		
Less than 12 years	40	1.0
High school or GED	260	6.7
Vocational Program	85	2.2
Some College	743	19.3
College Graduate	1,461	37.9
Post-Graduate Degree	1,248	32.4
<i>Relationship Status</i>		
Single	1,444	37.5
Dating	361	9.4
In a committed relationship	2,034	52.8

LGBTQ respondents were less likely to experience discrimination than were LGBTQ people of color. Among White respondents, 9.4% reported housing discrimination, while 19.8% of respondents of color reported housing discrimination  $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 61.33, p < .001$ . Similarly, 37.7% of White respondents reported employment discrimination, which was reported by 42.8% of respondents of color  $\chi^2(1, 3835) = 6.24, p = .01$ . To understand the patterns that emerge across different racial groups, we now turn our attention to comparing each racial group to all other respondents in the sample. Table 2 describes the prevalence of housing and workplace discrimination by the sample.



**TABLE 2** Percentage of LGBTQ Reporting Housing and Workplace Discrimination by Race

Race	Housing		Workplace	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
African-American/ Black	9	7.5	40	33.6
Asian	12	18.2	27	40.3
Hispanic	86	24.9***	152	44.4**
American Indian	6	21.4	11	39.3
White	297	9.4	1,188	37.7
Multiracial	23	18.3**	62	49.2**

\*\* $p = .01$ .\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

#### EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

Compared to all other racial groups, we find that African-American/Black ( $\chi^2(1, 3835) = 1.28, p = .257$ ), Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $\chi^2(1, 3835) = .084, p = .772$ ), and Native American/American Indian respondents ( $\chi^2(1, 3835) = .006, p = .94$ ) were no more or less likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ workplace discrimination than members of all the other racial/ethnic groups combined. However, Latino/a ( $\chi^2(1, 3835) = 5.43, p = .02$ ) and bi-/multiracial respondents ( $\chi^2(1, 3835) = 6.19, p = .013$ ) reported significantly higher rates of anti-LGBTQ workplace discrimination than other racial groups. Overall, while racial/ethnic minority respondents as an aggregated group reported higher rates of workplace discrimination than did White respondents, there are nuanced differences across racial groups.

#### HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Compared to all other racial groups, we find that African-Americans/Blacks ( $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 1.751, p = .186$ ), Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders ( $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 3.22, p = .073$ ), and Native Americans/American Indians ( $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 2.92, p = .087$ ) were no more or less likely to report experiencing anti-LGBTQ housing discrimination than members of all the other racial/ethnic groups combined. Yet, Latino/a ( $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 70.36, p < .001$ ) and biracial or multiracial respondents ( $\chi^2(1, 3846) = 6.38, p = .012$ ) reported significantly higher rates of anti-LGBTQ housing discrimination than other racial groups.

### DISCUSSION

Many scholars have described the experiences of discrimination faced by LGBTQ individuals (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Harper & Schneider, 2003; Herek, 2007; Ryan & Rivers, 2003) and the findings from the current study likewise demonstrate that LGBTQ individuals are at risk for being victims of discrimination, both in housing and in the workplace. The study findings

further indicate that while LGBTQ racial minorities experience greater levels of discrimination compared to White LGBTQ people in the aggregate, there are nuanced differences among racial groups that are important to understand. The prevalence of anti-LGBTQ discrimination is not universal across racial groups, with some racial groups being more likely to report certain forms of anti-LGBTQ discrimination than other racial groups. Similar to other studies that demonstrate that racial minorities are more likely to report housing and employment discrimination (Barnes et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2005; Gibbons et al., 2004), the findings from our research provide further evidence that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to report discrimination, even among a sample of LGBTQ individuals. Surprisingly, the findings suggest that Latino/a and multiracial participants were more likely to report discrimination compared to other racial/ethnic minorities in the sample. The rate of workplace discrimination reported by Latino/as is congruent with other studies on employment discrimination experienced by Latino/as (Foley & Kidder, 2002; Lee & Ahn, 2012; Perez, Fortuna, & Alegria, 2008); however, it does not account for the discrepancies in other racial groups in reporting discrimination. It is clear that further research is needed to understand the patterns of discrimination among racial/ethnic minorities particularly when other social identities such as gender or sexual orientation are also being examined.

These findings underscore the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding discrimination. From an intersectional framework, the findings indicate that the combined racial and sexual orientation minority identities have a dynamic effect on the rate of housing and employment discrimination for LGBTQ racial minorities. Other scholars researching sexual minorities and discrimination (Bauermeister et al., 2014; Bowleg, 2012) have argued a similar call for future intersectional research.

As scholars continue to study the lived experiences of the LGBTQ community, it is imperative to take into account how different social identities change the context of the experience of LGBTQ people. People in the LGBTQ community have different experiences within and outside the LGBTQ community based on other social identities such as race, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, age, and a variety of other social identities.

While these findings illuminate the experience of discrimination for LGBTQ people and the differing experiences among racial groups, it also brings up further questions. First, why do certain marginalized racial groups report higher rates of anti-LGBTQ discrimination than other racial minority groups? Future research examining why particular racial groups are more likely to report anti-LGBTQ discrimination is critical to understanding the differences that emerged in the present study. As discussed previously in this article, there have been studies that suggest that certain racial/ethnic groups are more or less likely to report discrimination. It is important to

consider that reporting discrimination may be influenced by cultural norms and shaped by previous experiences with individuals in power to whom a person would report such experiences. Future studies should explore the role of culture and the historical oppression a marginalized group faces and how it impacts their willingness to report discrimination. Another question that arises from this study is the following: How do multiple identities impact our understanding and reporting of discriminatory experiences?

Since the study is exploratory in nature, we offer preliminary recommendations for policy and practice. On a federal level, policy should be implemented that bars individuals from being discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in both public and private settings. From a social work practice perspective, these findings suggest that federal, state, and local housing authorities should provide ongoing training for individuals responsible for compliance related to claims of discrimination to better respond to claims of anti-LGBTQ discrimination in housing. Similar action should occur in the labor sector that reduces the incidence of anti-LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace. In both contexts, introduction of intersectionality as a construct and how it shapes the lived experience of LGBTQ people of color should be emphasized. In theory, these policy and practice changes should reduce the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ discrimination.

This study addresses existing gaps in the literature around the intersection of multiple identities in the LGBTQ community and how these identities impact the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. The study contributes to an understanding of the differentiated experiences of discrimination for LGBTQ people, particularly how LGBTQ racial minorities are more likely to experience anti-LGBTQ discrimination based on their race and sexual orientation. In addition, unlike many studies on GLBTQ issues and communities that utilize samples from urban coastal regions (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, & Ruprecht, 1992), the study utilizes a sample from a geographical region in the United States that is less frequently included in studies. However, there are limitations to the study. The sample in the study is composed of individuals in one geographic location. Even though the sample size adds variability and the sample is statewide, it is difficult to determine if these findings are representative of the experiences of the LGBTQ community in general, or even within the specific geographic location. Future studies should do a comparative analysis to determine if the disproportionate rates of discrimination experienced by people of color in the sample are a shared experience of LGBTQ people of color in different geographic locations, particularly in geographic locations with larger populations of LGBTQ people of color. The sample, while similar to the demographics of the study area, has a small number of Middle Eastern participants in the study. A national randomized study investigating this topic would add to the validity of the findings from the present study. The primary focus of this research is to

identify the relationship between race and discrimination for LGBTQ people. The study does not look at different forms of discrimination including access, treatment, micro-aggression, harassment, and violence. Future studies should identify the different forms in which discrimination can manifest in social settings.

From an intersectional perspective, the findings only give a small image of discrimination by only looking at two of the social identities of the participants. The findings do not capture ways in which participants felt they may have experienced discrimination. For example, individuals may report higher rates of discrimination if they had been asked about racial discrimination in housing and employment or about discrimination in general without attributing that discrimination to anti-LGBTQ causes. A truly intersectional approach would be to measure discrimination across different social identities but also capture discrimination looking at the full identity of an individual. Given the limitations of the current data, we are unable to discern experiences of discrimination based on race or other marginalized identities. For individuals who are marginalized both racially and based on their sexual orientation, it is likely difficult to discern, at times, the underlying cause for the discriminatory experience. Future studies should focus on questions that are more complex to address the intersectional identities of LGBTQ individuals.

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