

A Picture of Hate Crime: Racial and Homophobic Harassment in the United Kingdom

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Introduction¹

Despite the various concerns that have been expressed about the concept of hate crime (Gelber 2002; Iganski 2002; Mason 2001; Stanko 2001), there is little doubt that it has been accorded considerable legal, social and political purchase since the early 1990s. It is increasingly employed as an umbrella term to refer to crimes motivated, at least in part, by the perpetrator's prejudice against a perceived characteristic of the victim. The forms of prejudice most commonly recognised as coming within the ambit of hate crime are those that are associated with the victim's 'minority' status (or perceived status), such as those based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, colour, religion and, to a lesser extent, disability and gender. As a concept, hate crime has the advantage of highlighting the likely connections between these various forms of prejudice. One of the disadvantages of the concept is its tendency to gloss over the differences between these behaviours.

Over the last ten to fifteen years a considerable body of research has emerged, both on the question of hate crime in general and on specific forms of hate crime such as racist and homophobic violence (Bowling 1999; Cunneen et al 1997; Jenness & Broad 1997; Jacobs & Potter 1998; Mason 2002; Fomsen 2002). This research has produced an increasingly sophisticated profile of the problem as well as an analysis of the various legal and educational avenues designed to address it. From its inception, hate crime research has generated a lively debate over its own definitional boundaries. This debate has centred not just on the complexities of assessing whether a particular incident is or is not a hate crime but also on the subtle question of determining how hate crime is to be defined. This article is concerned with one such definitional issue: the question of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of hate crime. A popular and early image of hate crime tended to portray it as a form of 'stranger danger', that is, a random act involving a perpetrator and a victim who are complete strangers to each other. This image has now been effectively challenged in a number of empirical studies (discussed further below).

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This article aims to contribute to this debate. It presents the findings of a study of allegations of racial and homophobic harassment recorded by the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), focusing on incidents that are recorded as potential breaches of the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997* (UK) (PHA).² The article, and the study upon which it is based, have two broad objectives. The first is to compile a profile of the general characteristics of allegations of racial and homophobic harassment reported to the MPS. This includes victim characteristics, suspect characteristics and incident characteristics (such as time of incident, location of incident, type of harm, and relationship between victim and suspect). One unusual feature of this study is its inclusion of both racial and homophobic incidents. The study considers the extent to which racial and homophobic harassment differ on these broad characteristics. Where appropriate, these findings are also compared with existing research on MPS records of racial and homophobic crime *as a whole*.

The second aim of the article is to consider what these patterns can tell us about the relationship between victim and perpetrator in this particular form of hate crime. By examining this relationship in the context of data on the location of harassment incidents, the article raises a number of questions about the way in which the relationship is understood by victims and, in turn, defined by research. It suggests that traditional approaches to measuring this relationship, which tend to centre on the *degree* of intimacy between victim and perpetrator, might be helpfully developed by greater recognition of the *contexts* within which victim and perpetrator know each other. In particular, the article argues that where a perpetrator is recognised by a victim as someone who is familiar or local to his/her area of residence or work, this does not necessarily mean that the victim *knows* the perpetrator. Indeed, it may be that a perpetrator can be simultaneously someone who is a stranger and someone who is familiar to the victim.

Background to the Study

Victim-Perpetrator Relationships in Hate Crime

There is a strong assumption within the hate crime literature that the perpetrators of such crimes are overwhelmingly strangers to the victims (Lawrence 1999; Wang 1999; McDevitt et al 2002). This is supported by a significant body of empirical research (Perry 2001; Medoff 1999; Boeckmann & Turpin-Petrosino 2002). For example, Levin and McDevitt's influential study of hate crimes recorded by the Boston police during the 1980s found that 85% of incidents involved offenders whose identity was unknown to the victim (Levin & McDevitt 2002). The 2000 British Crime Survey categorized 54% of the perpetrators of racially motivated incidents as 'strangers' to the victim. Only 7% were said to be 'well known' (Clancy et al 2001:36). In terms of homophobic violence, most victimisation studies have also found that the majority of perpetrators are unknown to the victim (Herek et al 2002; Attorney General's Department of NSW 2003).

In contrast, however, there is a growing body of research that challenges the assumption that the vast majority of hate crime is committed by persons who are strangers to the victim (Bowling 1999; Sibbitt 1997; von Schulthess 1992; Tomsen 2002; Moran & Skeggs 2004). In 1997, Mason pointed to empirical findings which revealed that a significant proportion

2 This study is part of two larger projects funded by the Australian Research Council: one on the concept of harassment within legal discourse (Investigators: Gail Mason and Anna Chapman) and the other on the changing nature of intolerance towards sexual minorities (Investigators: Stephen Tomsen, Gail Mason and Kevin Markwell).

of homophobic incidents against lesbian women involved 'some type of prior relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (even if only as an acquaintance)' and that a good proportion of these incidents took place in the 'private' domain, such as at home or in the workplace (1997:23). These findings suggested that hate crime towards lesbian women did not fit the accepted image of a typical homophobic incident as a random attack by strangers in a public place. Recently, similar concerns have been raised in relation to other forms of hate crime by research which lays claim to a wider and more diverse body of evidence. In particular, recent data on all racial and homophobic crime recorded by the London Metropolitan Police (discussed further below) suggest a relatively low degree of involvement by suspects who are strangers to the victim: in only 10.2% of racist incidents and 14.9% of homophobic incidents was the suspect characterised as a stranger (Stanko et al 2003; URHC undatedA). Collectively, these findings question the image of 'stranger danger' that tends to dominate popular discourse on hate crime.

Clearly, some of this variation is the product of genuine empirical differences between the behaviours under investigation. Racist and homophobic crimes are not monolithic forms of conduct. Their characteristics differ according to the demographics of the offender and victim, the location of the incident, the severity of behaviour and injury, the offender's specific prejudice and motivation, and the type of conduct under examination. For example, hate crime that is primarily constituted as harassment (as under the PHA) is more likely to involve repetitious conduct and, hence, a familiar perpetrator, than hate crime that is constituted by a traditional criminal offence such as assault (which is more likely to involve a single incident).

Methodological factors are also implicated in the divergent research findings in this area. In particular, there is considerable variation between studies in terms of how the victim-perpetrator relationship — and the categories of stranger, acquaintance, friend, family member and so on — is measured. Some research categorises this relationship in detail, for example: 'no knowledge of the perpetrator'; 'knowing the perpetrator by sight'; 'knowing the perpetrator as a casual acquaintance'; and 'knowing the perpetrator personally' (Attorney General's Department of NSW 2003). Other research relies upon a small number of broader categories such as 'stranger', 'casual' and 'well known' (Clancy et al 2001).³ Hence, a casual acquaintance, for example, may be categorised in one study as a person known to the victim and in another as a stranger to the victim. Despite these differences, there is one consistent factor across all studies in this area. In tune with criminological research in general, the victim-perpetrator relationship tends to be operationalised in terms of the degree of intimacy between individuals; that is, victim-perpetrator relationships are distinguished from each other according to the depth of knowledge or extent of contact between the parties. The ability of such definitions to account, not just for the magnitude of the relationship, but also the qualitative contexts within which victims know perpetrators, is taken up in the Discussion section of this article.

The London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Harassment and the Understanding and Responding to Hate Crime (URHC) Project

The MPS defines a racist or homophobic incident as 'any incident which is perceived to be racist [or homophobic] by the victim or any other person' (MPS 2000:8). The MPS has a policy of recording, and responding to, all hate crime incidents,⁴ irrespective of whether

3 Small sample sizes may well limit the ability of research such as this to provide a more detailed breakdown.

4 The MPS adopts a wide definition of hate crime recommended by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO): 'Hate crime is taken to mean any crime where the perpetrator's prejudice against an identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised' (ACPO 2003:10). Thus the MPS definition of hate crime includes both racist and homophobic incidents.

there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a prosecutable crime has taken place. In practice, this means that incidents recorded as hate crime by the MPS include a vast array of situations that range from extremely serious attacks to incidents of a more minor nature. According to policy, an incident will be flagged as racial or homophobic if either the victim or the attending police officer believes it to be so.

Harassment has been a specific crime in England and Wales since 1997 under the *Protection from Harassment Act 1997* (UK). The primary criminal offence is contained in section 1. It states: 'A person must not pursue a course of conduct (a) which amounts to harassment of another, and (b) which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of the other'. Instead of dealing with an acute incident, which most offence definitions do, the PHA is designed to prohibit behaviour which is 'continuous and where the whole is infinitely worse than the sum of the parts or any individual part' (Howard 1996:788). This includes conduct for which it might be difficult to achieve a prosecution under other offences, such as on-going verbal remarks, letters, or graffiti which may not contain direct threats but which are nonetheless distressing to the victim. Whilst the legislation is used largely to prosecute stalking cases (Harris 2000:9), it is also designed, and used, to provide an avenue of redress against racist and homophobic harassment (Mason 2003).⁵

*The Study*⁶

One of the ways in which the MPS has sought to confirm its stated commitment to addressing racist and homophobic crime in the London region is through the establishment of a dedicated research and policy-oriented project on hate crime, namely the Understanding and Responding to Hate Crime (URHC) project.⁷ The URHC project is responsible for the compilation and analysis of an ongoing database on hate crime incidents reported to the MPS. It examines the nature of hate crime as well as the response of the Community Safety Units to this information (URHC 2002:10). In order to do this, the project undertakes the detailed and time-consuming task of identifying all crime reports stored in the Crime Report Information System (CRIS) that are 'flagged' by the investigating officers as hate crime incidents (for example, as either a racial or homophobic incident). CRIS reports comprise a quantitative and qualitative record of information that is routinely collected by police officers about an allegation, as well as any subsequent investigation. At the time of the study, the URHC project had compiled data on all hate crime incidents recorded during the period January to June 2001. This database included a total 9201 incidents flagged by the MPS as racial incidents and 754 flagged by the MPS as homophobic incidents.

For the purposes of the present study, the URHC provided the following two samples from its existing database: a sample of 20 CRIS records randomly selected from all allegations recorded as 'Protection from Harassment Act offences' and flagged as a racial incident (RI) for the month of January 2001; and a sample of 20 CRIS records randomly selected from all allegations recorded as 'Protection from Harassment Act offences' and

5 There are several pieces of legislation, in addition to the PHA, that may be used to prosecute hate crime. In particular, sentence enhancement provisions will apply to certain offences if they are 'aggravated' by race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. See: *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*; *Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001*; *Criminal Justice Act 2003*.

6 Further methodological details (as well as results) can be found in Mason (2003) and Mason (forthcoming).

7 The URHC project originated as a joint investigation between the MPS and Professor Elizabeth Stanko of the Royal Holloway University of London, funded by the Home Office Targeted Policing Initiative. The project has since been fully incorporated into the Diversity Directorate of the MPS.

flagged as a homophobic incident (HO) for the period January-June 2001.⁸ Although it is not always clear from the CRIS report who has described the incident as a hate crime, in most cases it appeared to be the victim or the attending police officer or both, who made this assessment.⁹ In the reports examined for the present study, basic information was not always recorded in the categories provided on the CRIS form (thus leading to missing data for some characteristics, especially in relation to the suspect). However, an examination of the more detailed qualitative information in the reports enabled a number of independent assessments to be made regarding various incident characteristics (such as type of injury and whether the victim had any knowledge of the suspect's identity).

It is important to note that the data in this study are confined to reports identified by the MPS as constituting possible contraventions of the PHA. This is an assessment made by the investigating officer. This does not capture all reports that might involve conduct of a harassing nature, many of which may be recorded under another offence category (such as threatening or offensive telephone calls). A report may be more likely to be categorised as a PHA offence if it involves more than one incident or if there is reason to believe that there may be further incidents in the future (this is because harassment under the PHA is defined as a 'course of conduct' that requires two or more incidents). In addition, as the PHA is designed to provide an avenue of legal redress for incidents that do not involve physical violence or overt threats, it is possible that PHA reports may be less likely than some other reports (such as assault) to include incidents involving physical violence.

Results

One of the most striking findings of the study is the absence of significant differences between racial and homophobic reports in terms of the general characteristics of the incidents. Although some of the variables in the study are relatively broad, the picture they present, and the similarities they highlight, provide a useful overview of racial and homophobic harassment in collective terms. The characteristics of these harassment incidents can also be compared with the characteristics of racial and homophobic crime as a whole, that is, to reports of *all* types of crime (not just harassment) recorded by the MPS during the same period and flagged as a racial or homophobic incident. This information on hate crime allegations as a whole is based on both published and unpublished data of the URHC project (thus all references to hate crime allegations 'as a whole' are to URHC data). Results are presented primarily in quantitative terms. Qualitative case studies, which are summaries of individual allegations, are incorporated into the Discussion to exemplify the nature of racist and homophobic harassment.

*Victim/s Characteristics*¹⁰

Number of Victims/Recipients of Harassment: In 40% of cases the victim was the only recipient of the harassment. In 25% of cases the victim was in the company of others who also appeared to be recipients of the harassment, such as children, family members or

8 The number of HO incidents for January 2001 was 101. Of these, only 33 fell under the category of PHA offences. Given this small number, it was decided to draw the HO sample from the larger pool of HO allegations for the six-month period January-June 2001, which produced 102 HO incidents under the category of PHA offences.

9 Burney and Rose (2002) highlight how individual and institutional differences in police procedures and practices can shape the application of the hate crime 'flag'.

10 These findings are based on the characteristics of the first victim only (Victim 1). Many CRIS reports contained details on more than one victim. URHC data are also based on Victim 1.

friends.¹¹ It is important to note, however, that in those cases where the victim was the only recipient, he or she was not necessarily completely alone. In some instances, others were present as witnesses but were unlikely to experience the harassment as being directed towards them (this includes customers and work colleagues).

Sex of Victim 1: The sex of the primary victim is one of only two characteristics that demonstrate a significant variation between RI and HO allegations of harassment (the other is the ethnic appearance of the primary victim). The majority (65%) of victims in RI incidents were female, while the majority of victims in HO incidents were male (75%). When these findings are compared with police records of *all* reports of racial and homophobic crime, not just harassment, some differences emerge. In particular, URHC data reveal that males are more likely than females to make both RI and HO reports as a whole (with HO allegations revealing a stronger sex difference). For example, 15.3% of the victims of HO incidents as a whole are female and 73.8% are male.¹² This pattern also roughly holds, but is less marked, for RI incidents as a whole: 58.8% of victims are male and 39.8% are female (URHC undatedA).¹³

Age of Victim 1: The majority of victims for both RI and HO incidents were aged between 31–50 (32.5% aged 31–40 and 37.5% aged 41–50). In comparison, the majority of victims in both RI and HO incidents as a whole are aged between 21 and 40. The major difference in the two sets of findings appears to lie not with the 31–40 age group, which is high in both, but with the fact that for hate crime as a whole, there is a much higher proportion of victims in the 21–30 age group and a lower proportion in the 41–50 age group. In other words, the victims who reported harassment appear to be older than the victims who report hate crime as a whole.

Ethnic Appearance of Victim 1: As would be expected, the ethnic appearance of the victim differed according to whether the incident was a racial or homophobic incident. In the majority of RI incidents, victims (60%) were classified as being of Dark European, African Caribbean, or Indian/Pakistani ethnic appearance (these are the categories used by the MPS in CRIS records). This appears to be consistent with police records of RI allegations as a whole.¹⁴ A notable 25% of victims were identified as being of White European appearance. In terms of HO incidents, 75% of victims in HO allegations were categorised by the MPS as White European, which is similar to hate crime allegations as a whole.¹⁵

*Suspect/s Characteristics*¹⁶

Number of Suspects: One half (50%) of RI and HO reports recorded one suspect, with a further 20% involving two suspects. Fifteen percent of incidents involved 5 or more suspects.

Sex of Suspect 1: The sex of suspect 1 was formally recorded in only 42.5% of cases. Male suspects (27.5%) outnumbered female suspects (15%) by almost 2 to 1.

11 35% were 'unknown' cases for which it was not possible accurately to determine whether the victim was in the company of others.

12 Unpublished data provided by the URHC project. An additional 10.5% of data are missing for this variable.

13 Unpublished data provided by the URHC project.

14 Unpublished data provided by the URHC project.

15 Unpublished data provided by the URHC project.

16 These findings are based on the characteristics of the first suspect only (Suspect 1). Many CRIS reports contained details on more than one suspect. URHC data are also based on Suspect 1. As with victim characteristics, the numbers are too small to provide any meaningful details on incidents involving more than one suspect.

Age of Suspect 1: Although the age of suspect 1 was not formally recorded in 72.5% of reports, it is worth noting that 22.5% of incidents involved suspects under 20 years of age and 5% involved suspects aged between 31–40.

Ethnic Appearance of Suspect 1: In 75% of both RI and HO allegations, there was no information formally recorded on the ethnic appearance of suspect 1. No conclusions can be drawn, except to note that a breakdown of the category of White European (a total of 15% or 6 incidents) reveals that a higher proportion of RI incidents involved a White European suspect: 4 out of 5 suspects in RI cases, compared with 2 out of 5 for HO incidents.¹⁷

Incident Characteristics

Time of Incident: The majority of incidents took place or commenced between midday and 6.00pm (37.5%). Only slightly fewer incidents took place or commenced between 6.00pm and midnight (32.5%). Taken together, approximately two thirds of incidents took place between midday and midnight. In general, this timeframe is consistent with RI and HO allegations as a whole.

Indication that Incident is Ongoing: Approximately half of all incidents were ongoing (42.5%) and approximately half were not (47.5%). Typical ongoing incidents tended to involve periodic verbal abuse and/or intimidation over several months or a year. In such incidents, the victim often identified one or more suspects as being involved in the incidents.

Harm and Injury: In only one incident (an RI allegation) was any physical injury or contact recorded. This was a minor injury specified in the CRIS report by the victim as 'sore hands'. Thus, 97.5% of incidents involved no injury to the victim. This is considerably higher than hate crime allegations as a whole: 3 out of 5 HO incidents and approximately 2 out of 3 RI incidents result in no injury (URHC undatedA; URHC undatedB). Although the majority of incidents (65%) involved verbal/written/visual abuse, 17.5% involved verbal/written abuse coupled with threats or intimidation and a further 15% involved some form of more serious intimidation (these differences are fleshed out in the case studies in the following section).

Location of Incident: Of particular note is the finding that the vast majority of incidents took place near/at the victim's home (90%). A small proportion of incidents took place near/at the victim's place of work (10%). These two locations were the site of all 40 incidents. The URHC's analysis of RI and HO reports as a whole also found that a high proportion of incidents take place in the victim's local area. For example, using a slightly different, but comparable, process of categorisation, the URHC determined that 53.3% of HO incidents take place 'at home/in immediate vicinity', 9.9% take place 'at work' and 17.8% take place in the 'street' (URHC undatedB). In terms of RI incidents, URHC analysis indicates that 1 in 3 incidents takes place 'in/outside the victim's home', 3 in 10 take place 'at work/school', and 1 in 4 take place 'in the street' (URHC undatedA).

Relationship between Victim/s and Suspect/s: It can be seen from Table 1 that in the vast majority of incidents (82.5%) the victim knew, or believed, the suspect to be a neighbour or someone who was local to his or her residential area. In 7.5% of incidents, the suspect was identified by the victim as being local to his or her place of work. Significantly, the study found only 2 incidents (5%) involving a suspect who was not identified by the victim

17 This means that 3 out of 5 HO incidents for which suspect ethnic appearance is recorded involved other ethnicities. These were African Caribbean, Indian/Pakistani, and Arabic/Egyptian.

in one of these ways. It might be logical to assume that the high proportion of victims who have some knowledge of the suspect is directly linked to the fact that allegations categorised as potential breaches of the PHA are more likely than other hate crimes to involve suspects who are known to the victim because they involve ongoing or localised incidents (that is, it could be argued that this particular finding is predicated on the fact that the study only examined harassment cases and harassment cases are more likely to involve persons known to each other). It is highly significant, therefore, that the proportion of suspects who are strangers to the victim/s is also low in MPS data on all hate crime allegations, not just harassment. As indicated earlier, in only 10.2% of racist incidents and 14.9% of homophobic incidents are the suspects of hate crime as a whole categorised as strangers. The vast majority are categorised as neighbours, locals, school children and colleagues/customers. In other words, the finding of the present study that the victim is more likely than not to have some knowledge of the suspect is not peculiar to harassment allegations.

Table 1: Victim's Knowledge of Suspect's Identity

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Neighbour/Local to Home	33	82.5
Local to Work	3	7.5
Relative (Brother)	1	2.5
No Knowledge	2	5
Unknown (Missing)	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Discussion

Several broad conclusions can be made about racial and homophobic harassment recorded by the MPS. Significantly, reports of racial and homophobic harassment are very similar to each other. Many victims appear to be the sole recipient of the harassment and are between 31–50 years of age. As we would expect, the majority of victims who report racial harassment belong to racial 'minority' groups. In contrast, the majority of victims who report homophobic harassment are from a white European background. Given the higher level of homophobic violence that gay men and lesbians from racial and ethnic 'minorities' are believed to experience (Comstock 1991), this difference may reflect reporting practices more than anything else.

It is notable that the vast majority of victims who report racial harassment are female while the vast majority of victims who report homophobic harassment are male. One way of thinking about this is to recognise that the proportion of females making both RI and HO allegations of harassment is higher than it is for RI and HO hate crime allegations as a whole. In this context, URHC data suggest that females are somewhat more likely than males to experience 'threats' or 'threats/harassment' and less likely than males to experience 'violence' in relation to both racial and homophobic allegations (URHC undatedA; URHC undatedB). If, as tentatively suggested above, harassment allegations are more likely to involve verbal conduct than physical conduct, it may be that this is reflected in the higher proportion of females in harassment incidents, in comparison with RI and HO

incidents as a whole.¹⁸ Coupling these results with the finding that the majority of victims are 31–50 years old leads to the tentative conclusion that victims who report harassment, especially racial harassment, may be more likely to be older women than victims who report hate crime as a whole, who may be more likely to be younger men. Further research is required to confirm this.

The low level of physical injury in these reports supports the earlier suggestion that allegations classified as PHA harassment involve less serious injury than other hate crime allegations. In light of the fact that one of the stated aims of the PHA is to provide an avenue of redress for conduct that does not fall under existing offence definitions, this is not necessarily a problem and, indeed, hints at the possibility that the legislation is being effectively deployed. Nonetheless, harassment that does not involve physical violence can still engender emotional injury. The case study below provides a ‘typical’ example of written and verbal harassment reported to the MPS. It gives some sense of the anxiety that such harassment can generate and of how the PHA can be used to provide an effective remedy.

Case Study 1: An example of a racial incident of verbal and written abuse involved an Indian/Pakistani shopkeeper who reported ongoing harassment from school children. This harassment involved both graffiti to her shop and suspects kicking the outside wall of her shop whilst calling out racist comments, such as ‘Paki bastard’. The victim reported that this is a regular problem. She stated that she feels vulnerable when she is at work and that she is constantly on edge. She was concerned that this is affecting her business. Two suspects were warned by police that their actions amounted to racially aggravated harassment and were told to stay away from the shop. These suspects later apologised for their conduct.

Although most racial and homophobic harassment involves verbal, written or visual abuse only, it is important to note that nearly one third of reports involve threatening and intimidating behaviour. Despite the absence of physical violence, such behaviour is deeply distressing to the victim. It can seriously impede the victim’s ability to go about his/her daily life. In some cases, such harassment may affect a whole family and make it necessary for them to leave their home. This is apparent in the following case study.

Case Study 2: An example of a homophobic incident of serious intimidation involved a victim who was driving home with her daughter when a group of youths, who had been hanging around on the street corner, started throwing bricks at the car. The suspects followed her to her house and when she stopped the car they prevented her and her daughter from getting out of the car. They scratched the boot of the car with unknown objects. During the incident, the suspects shouted abuse at the victim’s house and towards her son who is gay. The victim stated that this is an ongoing problem and that she and her family are ‘frightened for their lives’. The family experienced similar problems the previous year. Following this incident, the family moved out of their home temporarily and two suspects received first instance warnings (under the PHA) from police.

It is not surprising that all of the incidents in the study take place within the vicinity of the victim’s home or place of work. Under the PHA, harassment is constituted by a ‘course of conduct’, which generally means more than one incident. An individual is more likely to

18 As with the high proportion of white European victims who report homophobic harassment, these differences may reflect reporting practices. Further, it is possible that police may tend to record complaints by women in the ‘less serious’ category of PHA offences.

experience 'a course of conduct' by the same perpetrator/s in areas that he or she regularly frequents, such as home and work (and, indeed, in areas that are also regularly frequented by the perpetrator/s). However, this association needs to be treated with caution as it assumes that a report is only categorised as harassment when it involves a second or further incident. Whilst this may sometimes be the case, many reports included in this study describe incidents that did not involve previous victimisation (see 'Indication that Incident is Ongoing' above).

Furthermore, the high proportion of incidents occurring within the victim's local area is not peculiar to harassment complaints. This proportion is consistent (although somewhat higher) with all hate crime that is recorded by the MPS. In contrast, many other hate crime studies report a much smaller proportion of incidents that take place locally. There is, however, a tendency in such research to categorise conduct that takes place outside of, or within the immediate vicinity of, a home or workplace as street or public incidents rather than home or work incidents (see, for example, Cox 1994). Hence, the MPS data may represent a higher rate of actual reported hate crime in the local area or they may reflect a greater preparedness on the part of both the present study and the URHC project to recognise that 'hatred is often found closer to home and too often directed at the intimate partner, neighbour, friend or acquaintance' (Stanko et al 2003:31–2). In this vein, the URHC project argues that racial and homophobic incidents reported to the MPS need to be understood as part of the daily, routine lives of victims, that is, as 'ordinary' forms of violence that tend to take place in the context of everyday life. The present study on harassment supports this argument. Reported allegations of racial and homophobic harassment take place in locations that are very much a part of the victim's daily life and ordinary activities, such as travelling to work, going to the shops, going to school, or just being at home.

The URHC project takes this point further. It challenges the popular image of stranger danger by arguing that the suspects in hate crime incidents 'tend to be known to the victim: school children, neighbours, locals/local youths, colleagues or customers' (URHC undatedA). Whilst the results of the present study do lend support to this assertion — the suspects in harassment cases are primarily neighbours and locals — there is reason to be cautious about the suggestion that the victim necessarily knows such suspects. Or, to put this in a slightly different way, the vast majority of the perpetrators of racial and homophobic harassment may not be complete strangers to the victim, but does this mean that the victim knows them?

In some instances it is quite clear that the victim's relationship with the suspect is sufficiently close for him/her to identify that person by name or address. For example, in Case Study 3 below, the suspect was a close neighbour whom the victims knew well enough to identify by appearance and address as well as through the ongoing, if sporadic, contact they had with him.

Case Study 3: An example of an incident where the suspect was a close neighbour, involved homophobic verbal abuse. A lesbian couple (both White European, aged 34 and 37) reported that an elderly neighbour in their block of flats has made a series of negative remarks to them about their sexuality, such as calling them 'Lesbian slags'. Initially, both victims ignored the comments but one had recently approached the suspect attempting to discuss the issue with him, with little success. One victim stated that she believed that he was harassing them because they were gay.

However, in most reports the victim's knowledge of the suspect is more equivocal than this. Consider Case Study 4:

Case Study 4: An example of an incident where the suspect appeared to be from the victim's local area (but not an immediate neighbour) involved a 32 year old White European man who reported a series of incidents where youths shouted homophobic abuse at him when he left his flat. The abuse included comments such as 'Poof, queer, bum bandit, and shirt lifter'. The victim stated that although he did not know exactly who the victims were, or where they lived, he would be able to identify approximately three of them.

Here, the victim stated that he would recognise some of the perpetrators again and that he thought they were local youths. Yet, he did not know who they were or where they lived. His knowledge of their identity was dependent upon the fact that he had been harassed at home by a group of young males. He deduced, probably correctly, that they lived locally. Many victims have a similar kind of knowledge about the perpetrator/s. They are sometimes able to provide sufficient information for the police to locate suspects but are unable, for example, to identify them by name. Instead, victims tend to identify perpetrators by some aspect of their appearance (such as hair colour, size, skin colour, type of jacket commonly worn, etc.) and/or by some knowledge of where the perpetrator/s live (for example, in a particular house around the corner or as a member of a particular family). In other words, suspects are identified by sight. Certainly, in some instances this identification appears to be based on having come across the perpetrators before: they are *known by sight*. But in other instances it appears to be based upon the victim's ability to recall identifying features of the perpetrators: victims *describe* the perpetrators but not on the basis of ever having seen them before.

Even if we were to accept that most perpetrators are known by sight due to some form of prior contact, it must be acknowledged that this is a very limited form of recognition. It does preclude such perpetrators from being categorised as complete strangers. Yet it would be going too far to say that the victims *know* the perpetrators in such cases (to do so would be to assume that victim-perpetrator relationships can be effectively represented via a stranger/known dichotomy). Victims and investigating officers tend to assume that if the incident occurred close to the victim's home it was committed by perpetrators who were local to the area. Whilst this is a logical assumption, it means that the knowledge that many victims have of perpetrators is confined to their recognition of these perpetrators as locals. In other words, victim recognition of perpetrators is heavily dependent upon, or refracted through, the specific location or general vicinity within which the incident occurred. When looked at in this light, a victim's knowledge of a perpetrator appears to be indebted more to his/her knowledge of *where* the harassment took place than his/her knowledge of *who* perpetrated that harassment. In other words, location is one of the modes of recognition through which victims distinguish between persons who are strangers and persons who are familiar: it is *how* they draw that line. The effect of this is contradictory: a perpetrator may be known to a victim in one capacity (as a neighbour) yet be a stranger to him or her in every other sense. Much racist and homophobic harassment (and perhaps other forms of hate crime as well) appears to embody this contradiction. It occurs between people who 'know' each other yet who are simultaneously 'strangers' to each other. This raises an important methodological question. What kind of classificatory system is used to operationalise the victim-perpetrator relationship and does it effectively represent this kind of contextual and contradictory knowledge?

As indicated earlier, criminological research on violence primarily represents variation in the victim-perpetrator relationship in a relatively linear manner according to the degree or depth of intimacy between parties. Such research allocates relationships along a continuum between the two possible extremes of stranger (where the victim has no previous contact with the perpetrator) and domestic or familial relationships (where the victim currently has an ongoing sexual or otherwise intimate relationship with the perpetrator). For example, the Women's Safety Survey, produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, uses the following categories to classify the victim's relationship to the perpetrator/s: 'current partner', 'previous partner', 'boyfriend/girlfriend/date', 'other known man/woman' (encompassing sub-categories of family member, friend, boss/co-worker, other), and 'stranger' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996:23). Measuring the victim-perpetrator relationship as a matter of degree or depth of intimacy is also favoured in hate crime research (Comstock 1991; Herek et al 2002; Attorney General's Department of NSW 2003; Clancy et al 2001; Bowling 1999). For example, the British Crime Survey — in relation to racially motivated offences and crime in general — makes an initial categorisation of perpetrators as strangers or as persons known prior to the incident (2003/2004: 53). Follow up questions seek to determine how well the victim knew the perpetrator: 'just by sight', 'just to speak to casually' or 'known well' (2003/2004: 53). Depending upon the degree of knowledge, a further question seeks to pin down the nature of the relationship on a continuum that begins with 'husband/wife/partner' and includes, among other categories, 'current boyfriend/girlfriend', 'workmate/colleague', 'friend/acquaintance', 'neighbour', and so on (2003/2004:53). These modes of categorisation do encapsulate a variety of dimensions within the victim-perpetrator relationship, such as a sense of time (previous and current relationships are distinguished), the capacity within which someone is known (work colleagues are distinguished from friends or acquaintances), and the residential location of the perpetrator (neighbours are distinguished from friends/acquaintances). However, when read in conjunction with the more general questions on how well the victim knows the perpetrator, it is apparent that the primary criterion used to distinguish victims' knowledge is the extent of familiarity or intimacy between victim and perpetrator. Moreover, although some analysis does incorporate qualitative or contextual distinctions — such as between 'strangers' who are not known to the victim and 'acquaintances' who are known 'at least by sight' (Mattinson 2001) — such categorisation ultimately represents this distinction along one unambiguous continuum of recognition.

There is little doubt that this level of detailed analysis is essential if hate crime research is to come to terms with the empirical complexities of the victim-perpetrator relationship and avoid the temptation to collapse variation into polarised categories of stranger versus known perpetrators (for example, by characterising acquaintances as strangers or neighbours as known perpetrators). However, the difficulty in defining the relationship in this way is that it does little to account for the fact that differences in the victim-perpetrator relationship cannot always be reduced to a linear question of the degree of intimacy between parties. The present study on harassment is a good example of this. Perpetrators of harassment are not, in the main, complete strangers to the victims. They are often persons whom the victim has seen before, passed in the street, or served in a shop. Thus victims tend to have some knowledge of the perpetrator's identity. This is a form of knowledge that is grounded in the experience of having been harassed in close proximity to one's home or work. It makes the perpetrator more than a total stranger, yet someone who is far removed from the depth of intimacy that exists between friends, partners or family members. Thus to recognise a perpetrator in this way is to 'know' him/her in a very specific capacity: one that is understood according to the location of the interpersonal interaction between the parties — the space within which the interactions take place — rather than the depth or

degree of these interactions. Although the 'spatial' dynamics of hate crime have been well documented (Bowling 1999; Moran & Skeggs 2004), the location of hate crime incidents has yet to be acknowledged as one of the key qualitative or contextual dimensions through which victims recognise those who harass them.

Nonetheless, as indicated above, this is an ambiguous and rather circular form of knowledge. A perpetrator may be known to a victim in one capacity, as a person who lives nearby or whose life crosses paths with his or her own, yet be a stranger to him or her in every other sense. This has implications for future research. It suggests that hate crime research would be well served by modes of categorisation that aim to highlight the contradictory and contextual nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship instead of reducing this relationship to mutually exclusive categories that prioritise only one of its many dimensions.

Conclusion

Despite the concerns that have been expressed about the concept of hate crime, it is increasingly employed as an umbrella term to refer to crimes motivated by the perpetrator's prejudice against a particular group of people, particularly prejudice based on race, sexuality, ethnicity and religion. Although the concept of hate crime has the disadvantage of glossing over the differences between these forms of prejudice, it does prompt us to think about the connections between them as well. Such connections should not be overstated. Nor should they be overlooked.

The research results presented in this article suggest that racial and homophobic harassment have more in common with each other than is commonly acknowledged. Most reports of racial and homophobic harassment involve more than one perpetrator verbally abusing or intimidating a victim who is 31–50 years old and who is often (but not always) the sole recipient of such abuse. Such incidents take place near the victim's home and are perpetrated by someone the victim recognises as a local. At least half of this harassment involves an ongoing problem. Although most complaints of harassment do not involve physical violence, nearly one third involve some form of threat to the victim or conduct that amounts to serious intimidation. The main difference between racial and homophobic harassment appears to be that the victims of the former are more likely to be female whilst the victims of the latter are more likely to be male. In addition, the victims of racial harassment are primarily from racial or ethnic 'minority' groups. The victims of homophobic harassment are primarily white. Harassment is very similar to all forms of hate crime recorded by the MPS. The most significant differences include the following: most victims of racial harassment tend to be women while most victims of racial hate crime as a whole are male; victims of racial and homophobic harassment tend to be older than victims of racial and homophobic hate crime as a whole; and fewer reports of racial or homophobic harassment involve physical injury when compared with reports of racial and homophobic hate crime as a whole.

In terms of the relationship between victim and perpetrator, there is now a considerable body of empirical evidence that challenges the popular image of hate crime as primarily a form of stranger danger. The findings presented here add to this challenge. The majority of perpetrators are persons who are recognised by the victims as locals or neighbours. The localised nature of this harassment means that many perpetrators are not absolute strangers to the victim. However, this does not mean that the majority of incidents are committed by perpetrators whom the victim 'knows'. The victim's knowledge of the perpetrator's identity tends to be refracted through, or dependent upon, the location within which the incident

took place. Victims know or deduce information about *who* the perpetrator is on the basis of *where* the incident took place. This way of 'knowing' the perpetrator highlights the uncertainty and ambiguity of the victim-perpetrator relationship in this form of hate crime (and perhaps in other forms of hate crime as well). The victim may not know the perpetrator in any other capacity than as a neighbour or a local. This is a relationship that demands a method of analysis that is sufficiently subtle to represent the complex space, and overlap, between perpetrator as stranger and perpetrator as familiar.

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