

# Relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence in hate incidents in South Africa

Tanya Pieterse

Department of Psychology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Vanessa Stratford

Department of Psychology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Juan A Nel<sup>1</sup>

Department of Psychology, University of South Africa, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

*The study reported here explored the relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence through the descriptions of hate incidents experienced in South Africa. Data were collected during a five-year longitudinal study conducted under the auspices of the Hate Crimes Working Group, using its Hate and Bias Monitoring Form and an accompanying user guide. Thematic analysis was used to create categories, themes and interpretations of hate incidents. Six primary themes emerged: i) the victim is less than human or like an animal; ii) humiliation of the victim; iii) use of extreme overkill or destruction; iv) the victim is to blame; v) messages conveyed by hate incidents; and vi) intentional unfair discrimination. These themes are discussed in relation to the existing body of literature on symbolic violence. We argue that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence in hate victimisation. Symbolic violence creates a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes socially acceptable by constructing the circumstances in which overt violence could take place. Overt violence occurs when symbolic violence is no longer effective in controlling vulnerable groups, with offenders blatantly resorting to reinforce power differences between themselves and their victims. Overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by sending a message to victims directly, as well as to their larger communities, in terms of their undesirability, not belonging, and being third-class citizens. Effective violence prevention has to take this relationship into account, especially as South Africa grapples with related legislative and policy responses.*

**Keywords:** symbolic violence, hate incidents, bias; message crimes, violence, prevention

## INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a young democracy with a constitution internationally regarded as one of the most progressive, fair and just in the promotion of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom for all. This country is, however, increasingly also known for its continuous struggle with injustices, as well as endemic violence and crime (Breen, Lynch, Nel, & Matthews, 2016; Harris, 2004; Judge & Nel, 2018). The alarming reality is that the South African Constitution – a declaration by the people for the people (Republic of South Africa, 1996) – is inadequate, in and of itself, in upholding the values and rights enshrined therein without supporting legislation. A case in point is the recently Cabinet-approved Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development [DoJ&CD], 2018) aimed at the protection of those

<sup>1</sup> Please direct all correspondence to: Prof. Juan A Nel, Department of Psychology, University of South Africa, Pretoria 0003, South Africa; Email: nelja@unisa.ac.za



who are targeted on the basis of characteristics, such as their race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression.

Recent research conducted under the auspices of the Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG),<sup>2</sup> reports on the reality of such hate and bias incidents in South Africa, as well as the effect these incidents have on victims, communities and society as a whole (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). The HCWG research that informed the study on which this article is based, highlights how intolerance, prejudice and injustices in this country fuel animosity, hatred and hate victimisation, affecting the everyday lives of many.

Acts with criminal intent of terror, civil unrest and war often involve overt violence, i.e. the intentional use of physical force to inflict injury or damage to property (Van der Linden, 2012). Importantly, violations of people's rights can also comprise extreme psychological violence, humiliation and intimidation, verbal abuse and hate speech; an assault on the mind, similar to a physical blow to the body (Van der Linden, 2012). Less visible, more subtle forms of violence, which often are not perceived as violence, form the focus of this article. Pierre Bourdieu (2001) contributed greatly to the understanding of how symbolic violence, in particular, transpires in everyday interactions, such as language, spatial arrangements, social practices and dispositions, as well as in legislation (Stewart, 2014).

Before illuminating what is understood by hate incidents, the primary focus of this article, symbolic violence, is discussed and expounded to explain how these acts transpire and how they relate to overt violence in hate incidents in a mutually reinforcing manner. It is important that policy makers and practitioners, and others, tasked with violence prevention, take note of this form of violence due to its emotional and psychological effect on the victim. As with hate victimisation (Breen et al., 2016; Nel & Breen, 2013), it is safe to assume symbolic violations also not only affect the psychological well-being of the individual victim, but the outcome extends beyond the victim, to the group to which the victim belongs or is perceived to belong.

## RELEVANT BODY OF LITERATURE

### SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

Violence can be defined as an extreme form of aggression that could result in acts such as assault, rape or murder. Factors that contribute to violence range from frustration, exposure or observing acts of violence, observing others' actions as hostile, even when they are not, and provocation resulting from environmental factors (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). Violence, however, is not limited to overt acts of physical harm such as abuse, force or infliction of pain, but more often includes subtler acts of psychological harm, that involve assaults on the dignity, identity and sense of worth of the victim (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004).

In examining the concept of psychological violence, one has to understand certain social practices and processes we engage in our everyday lives (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016). The levels of suffering inflicted by subtler forms of violence are frequently enabled by institutional processes, discourses, inequalities, indifferences and power relationships (Scheper-Hughes, 1996).

Symbolic violence is regarded as a form of internalised oppression or humiliation, the legitimisation of inequality, and hierarchies of expressions of class power that could take on many forms, such as sexism, heterosexism,

<sup>2</sup> The **Hate Crimes Working Group (HCWG)** is a multi-sector workgroup that was established in late 2009 with the common goal of lobbying for interventions to address hate crimes in South Africa, and has been playing a pivotal role in advocating and lobbying for legislative changes significant to hate crimes (Nel, Van Wyk, & Mbatha, 2013).



racism and xenophobia (Bourdieu, 1997). These forms of oppression or domination exist within a so-called 'established order', with certain rights, privileges and injustices. These forms are very often overt and exercised through various social practices, found in, among others, political, economic, cultural and social structures (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourgois, 2001; Weinger, 2005). Through such social practices, a collectiveness is formed, and so-called symbolic boundaries are established between different groups. It is within these symbolic boundaries, where individuals are placed in different categories, that various forms of oppression are exercised. During these processes, individuals develop attitudes and dispositions, creating a self-established symbolic power that frames how oppressors act towards others, as well as how the oppressed believe they should behave in everyday engagements (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002; Weinger, 2005).

Considering how oppression operates, political violence typically refers to violent acts administered in the name of a political ideology or movement, often enacted by a government, the police or the army (Bourgois, 2001). Structural violence refers to the political-economic structures of society that contribute to conditions of physical and emotional harm that include high morbidity, poverty, exploitation and abuse of people (Bourgois, 2001). The concept of everyday violence can be described as routine practices and manifestations of violent incidents of intolerance and misrecognition that are experienced as normative by the vulnerable group(s) (Bourdieu, 1997; Scheper-Hughes, 1996). As evident from the HCWG research, such oppressive and violent everyday acts are too often perceived by victims as acceptable, tolerable and even natural (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). The result is that perpetrators regard their actions as a form of moral righteousness, by promoting some sort of deceptive social order and conventional set of norms, whether socially, political or economically, that marginalise individuals or groups, invalidating and eroding their rights (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Acts of symbolic violence are exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge, sentiment and deception. Psychological, symbolic forms of violence may instil greater hurt and harm than physical violence (Bourgois, 2001) precisely because it is invisibly embedded in various symbolic structures of social behaviour, communication and cognition and frequently regarded as legitimate by perpetrators and victims alike. As a result, this form of violence is referred to as 'silent violence', where victims give consent unwittingly to the oppression, victimisation and violence and thereby lose their voice (Bourdieu, 2001; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016; Wacquant, 2004).

## HATE INCIDENTS

In everyday life, intolerance, bias, discrimination and misrecognition of individuals and groups are experienced, paving the way for hate victimisation of those who do not conform to certain norms or expectations. Hate incidents may include acts of bias, but also crimes motivated by prejudice towards someone's identity or immutable characteristics, including their race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability or other similar attributes and/or a combination thereof. Such violent incidents may include damage to property, assault, rape, murder, discrimination, hate speech and intimidation (Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013). Hate speech involves any intentional form of communication that is hurtful and harmful, and portrays hate, a threat, abuse or insult to a person or group of persons who share similar characteristics or beliefs (DoJ&CD, 2018). Hate incidents also (implicitly) aim to communicate a message to members of a targeted group that they are unwelcome, that they do not fit the norm, and that their safety is at risk (Breen & Nel, 2011; DoJ&CD, 2018; Noelle, 2002).

In our country, crime in general is of great concern; however, it is in particular violations targeting vulnerable groups, such as non-nationals and sexually and gender-diverse people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (hereafter LGBTIQ+) that have attracted international attention (Breen et al., 2016; Nel & Breen, 2013). Despite numerous efforts to prevent them – including campaigns, as well as changes to the legal landscape to protect and promote the recognition of marginalised groups – hate incidents persist (Breen et al., 2016; Browne, Bakshi, & Lim, 2011; Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013).



Considered as ‘crimes of ignorance’ (Harris, 2004), prejudice, stereotypes, assumptions and misinformation are a causal factor in driving hate incidents and thereby the related fear thereof (Nel & Breen, 2013). This prejudice and misinformation are at times propagated in critical societal structures such as education systems, police services, and even in healthcare services (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Aggressors are blinded in terms of the wrongness of their actions by their judgements of ‘difference’ as threatening, and the perceived societal approval of engaging in violence and/or discrimination (Walters, Brown, & Wiedlitzka, 2016). In fact, “most, if not all, hate crimes are linked by perceptions of threat. Threats can be linked to economic stability, access to social/state resources, people’s sense of safety in society, and/or values and social norms” (Walters et al., 2016, p. 9).

The pervasiveness of prejudice-motivated victimisation, the harm inflicted, and their lasting impact on safety and belonging, and resultant living in fear, are of grave concern (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013; Walters et al., 2016). This continuous fear of harm is and should be the barometer for policymakers, practitioners and politicians when implementing and advocating mechanisms to protect at-risk individuals and communities and prevent such hate victimisation (Browne et al., 2011).

In further exploring how injustices and domination impact on marginalised individuals and groups, we need to gain insight into the concept of ‘misrecognition’.

## MISRECOGNITION

Societies characterised by injustice and unfairness perpetuate the unequal participation of some individuals and communities by misrecognising their moral worth (James, 2015). ‘Misrecognition’ refers to the social processes, in everyday life, where someone, or a group is not recognised for what they are or for what they stand; the legitimacy of their identity is disregarded. These people and/or groups are also misrecognised because they were not previously recognised, and in some instances continue to be marginalised from social structures by hegemonic societal norms (James, 2015).

Hate incidents are a form of domination that authorises and legitimises self-imposed arbitrary shared norms of misrecognition. Important factors in determining how people experience prejudices and violence and that prevent vulnerable groups in particular from participating as equal partners in society – and thereby misrecognising their being – include class structures as well as cultural, national, religious, educational and institutional barriers. Therefore, symbolic violence is not only an interpersonal violence, but a form of violence that is embedded in political and business structures and institutions, in addition to social ones. In this manner, power relations are perceived not for what they actually are but “in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. xiii; Fraser, 2007).

Traits or characteristics of the norm – for example, language, dress, gender, sexual orientation and/or religion – become the drivers of domination and symbolic violence. Examples from the HCWG research that informed the study on which this article is based, include persons being beaten up for being a sex worker, or for being lesbian or gay, while deeming these categories of people as less than human; parading a person half naked in public for being different from the norm; and/or people of a different colour, religion, race or national origin being regarded as disposable items.

As a result of our colonial roots and legacy of apartheid, race-based incidents of hate are of particular relevance to South Africa. In the past – and some may argue that this remains the case today – race constructed our social, political, economic and psychological reality, and in a sense operationalised the repression, oppression and violence that occurred (Nel & Breen, 2013). Nel and Breen (2013) purport – and this is also evident in the original study that informed this article – race is but one of the characteristics that contribute to some people being misrecognised.



Across the world, an increase in global migration is being experienced in the form of refugees, asylum seekers and/or immigrants. Non-nationals are frequently regarded as 'outsiders' who are targeted in xenophobic attacks on the basis of their 'foreignness'. In this regard, South Africa has repeatedly made news headlines in recent years for the misrecognition of non-nationals – in particular those from other African countries by, for instance, violating their rights, damaging their homes, property and/or belongings, and threatening their physical safety in waves of xenophobic attacks across the country (Breen et al., 2016; Harris, 2004; Nel & Breen, 2013).

A further example of hate incidents in South Africa that has been widely reported is the misrecognition of people due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, through the targeting of members of LGBTIQ+ communities. Such individuals are stigmatised for their perceived sexual and gender 'deviance', and they frequently become victims of discrimination, harassment, hate speech, name-calling, threats and assault (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013). These homophobic and/or transphobic acts of misrecognition are shaped by religious and cultural beliefs regarding homosexuality as a sin or as something that needs to be stopped before it spreads (Judge & Nel, 2018; Nel & Breen, 2013).

Having provided an overview of symbolic violence, hate incidents and misrecognition, we now move to the discussion of the methodology and findings of the current study.

## METHODOLOGY

South Africa has various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that serve a range of sectors vulnerable to hate victimisation. Historically – and in the absence of hate crime law – some of these organisations have been using their own systems for the monitoring of hate incidents targeting their constituencies. Such disparate ways of monitoring, among others, impairs advocacy efforts to impress on government the importance of an urgent legal response to hate victimisation, given the nature and effect thereof. To remedy this situation, the HCWG developed an instrument, the Hate and Bias Monitoring Form, for use in a wide variety of vulnerable sectors, with the specific purpose to monitor hate incidents within their constituencies.

The development of the Hate and Bias Monitoring Form and its supporting user guide was informed by an international body of literature and consultation with CSOs, governmental structures, universities and individuals in the private sector. To gain a better understanding of the nature and the psychological effect of hate incidents, the HCWG undertook a longitudinal study spanning five years (2013-2017) and conducted in five provinces of South Africa (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (Unisa).

Data were collected by participating organisations, by monitoring media sources and through fieldwork. Fieldwork comprised of face-to-face interviews with victims, witnesses and caseworkers, as well as working through available organisational case files. Mostly quantitative data were collected, with some open-ended questions. The cases were screened using the definitions of hate crime,<sup>3</sup> hate speech,<sup>4</sup> and intentional unfair discrimination,<sup>5</sup> together referred to as 'hate incidents'. This was done in accordance with a draft policy framework for combating hate incidents of the DoJ&CD and the Foundation for Human Rights made available for stakeholder consultations shortly before the research commenced (Nel et al., 2013).

3 A **hate crime** refers to any crime committed under the common law against (a) person(s), property, or (an) organisation(s), motivated by bias (Nel et al., 2013).

4 **Hate speech** refers to the public and intentional uttering of hatred towards another group, based on bias, with the intention to incite violence (Nel et al., 2013).

5 **Intentional unfair discrimination** takes place when victims are discriminated against in any way, based on an immutable characteristic (Nel et al., 2013).



Of the 1 026 cases documented, 945 were suitable for data analysis. The majority of the recorded cases related to nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion and race (Mitchell & Nel, 2017).

For purposes of this article, only aspects of the qualitative data of the original HCWG study were further analysed. This analysis focused on the descriptions of the incidents, previous incidents and the effect of the victimisation on the victim. Thematic analysis was conducted to classify data, categorise it and create themes. Co-coding<sup>6</sup> was done to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes that were identified. The interpretations of the data were constructed by repeated re-engagements with the data. Each incident description contributed to the interpretation to create a global picture of the outcome of hate incidents (Blacker, 2009; Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Six prominent themes emerged during the analysis of the data, namely:

- the victim is less than human or like an animal;
- the humiliation of the victim;
- the use of extreme overkill or destruction;
- the victim is to blame;
- the messages conveyed by hate incidents; and
- intentional unfair discrimination.

The findings are discussed by themes, including some case examples relevant to each theme.

Although all 945 cases were included in the data analysis for this study, only cases that were collected in the public sphere are utilised as examples. This includes media cases, incidents on social media, and incidents occurring at meetings open to the public. Such case examples are provided verbatim and unedited. All the other cases are reported on in an aggregated way, with no identifying information shared. Protecting the identities of the participants in the study was deemed to be of the utmost importance as the identification of victims of hate may lead to further victimisation (Mitchell & Nel, 2017). Moreover, anonymity was contracted with participants in the original study that informed this article.

### THE VICTIM IS LESS THAN HUMAN/VICTIMS ARE LIKE ANIMALS

The attitudes of the offenders indicate that the feelings or emotions of the victim are of no concern. For instance, after an incident in which a white man urinated on the head of a black man at a local club, the offender stated, “[I] [d]on’t see anything wrong with urinating on a black person.”

Victims are targeted because they are, for instance, viewed as *just* foreigners, Muslim people or LGBTIQ+ individuals. LGBTIQ+ individuals are seen as disposable in statements, such as, “Istabane<sup>7</sup> must be stoned”, indicating that victims are considered to be lesser beings than offenders in some way. Considering a victim as less than human or to be an animal, relieves the moral weight of treating a victim in a degrading way (Smith, 2011).

6 Co-coding refers to the coding of qualitative data by two or more independent individuals, followed by a comparison, to increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis process.

7 Derogatory term for LGBTIQ+ individuals.



Victims are not afforded basic human rights, such as the right to live. Children become nothing more than collateral damage in a war of hate directed at some sector of society. For instance, comments were posted on the Facebook page of *Carte Blanche*<sup>8</sup> stating, “Should kill Chinese children for the cure for a hangover” and “[Chinese people are] the most despicable things on this planet.” In addition, a representative of Black First Land First (BLF)<sup>9</sup> noted on ANN7<sup>10</sup> that she hopes that all white people would be killed.

Those targeted by hatred are at times likened to animals and treated accordingly. For instance, telling a non-national to sleep outside indicates that they are considered animals, or in some instances worse than animals (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004).

Further indicative of the endemic anti-black African racism in the country, Penny Sparrow, a white middle-aged realtor from KwaZulu-Natal, raised ire with a controversial Facebook post in 2016 in which she likened black beach-goers to monkeys and for which she was subsequently fined for racist hate speech by the Equality Court. Also consider the following examples:

- “Jews are pigs” (Facebook post)
- A resident of Hout Bay, Western Cape, posted on Facebook, “Too many Africans are flocking to Hout Bay. Soon there will be nothing left of it. They [black people] are monkeys and need to be tied to a rope” the resident continued, “They [black people] are like stupid animals.”

In social media posts, several references were made to the targets of the hatred – in particular non-nationals from other African countries and black Africans, in general – in derogatory terms, such as ‘cockroaches’, ‘pests’ and ‘like a f\*\*\*ing plague’. As explained in the following quotation, perpetrators have to justify their actions to make it morally acceptable to treat another human being in such a demeaning way:

For those committing violence, it requires an enormous amount of moral presumption for the perpetrators of these acts to justify the destruction of property on a massive scale or to condone a brutal attack on another life, especially the life of someone one scarcely knows and against whom one bears no personal enmity (Juergensmeyer, 2000, p. 11).

## THE HUMILIATION OF THE VICTIM/S

Offenders often go beyond committing a crime, by humiliating the victim/s in public, which would not be necessary had the motive of the incident merely been criminal activity. The examples below demonstrate how humiliation serves as symbolic violence.

In one case, targets of hate, accused of witchcraft, were stripped naked and paraded around by the perpetrators, while others were called to witness, mock and laugh at them before they were murdered.

Following a dispute between co-workers, “a [non-national] man was stripped naked, sprayed from head to toe with enamel car paint..., paraded down a busy road” (Umraw, 2015).

Following a rape by three offenders, “the half-naked and bleeding [lesbian] woman ran to the neighbours” (DeBarros, 2015).

8 Investigative journalism television programme.

9 Pan-Africanist and revolutionary socialist political party in South Africa.

10 A 24-hour television news channel in South Africa.



Sometimes targets of hatred are singled out during public gatherings. For instance, a pastor called LGBTIQ+ congregants out by name in church, condemning them as 'sinful'.

Targets of hatred are often asked inappropriate questions, making them feel uncomfortable in places where they are meant to feel safe, e.g. clinics or churches. The bodies of murder victims are left naked. Victims are treated as 'circus freaks' for being different in some way. The humiliation of victims often leads to shame. This humiliation is used to keep the victims 'in their place' (McRobbie, 2004).

## THE VICTIM IS TO BLAME

Assumptions about victims, fuelled by stereotypes, are made based on the fact that they do not neatly fit into what is considered socially acceptable or normal. Misrecognition is evident in the blaming of the victim. The violence experienced by victims is misrecognised and normalised as a consequence of what is considered 'indecent', 'inappropriate', or 'socially unacceptable' behaviour (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Victims are advised to take safety precautions, instead of offenders being forced to take control of their own behaviour (Morgan & Björkert, 2006). Victims often do not challenge the behaviour of the offender, but rather find ways to avoid it as a result of the behaviour of the offender being misrecognised as intrinsically how they are (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2016).

Victims are repeatedly blamed for their own victimisation. As illustrated in the following, when a target of hate is perceived to be or acts in a way that is considered socially unacceptable, offenders rationalise that they warrant their victimisation, "They [Jewish people] got what they deserved in the Holocaust" (Social media post).

Individuals are blamed for crimes without any evidence. In some instances, the blame is linked to targets of hate in a completely nonsensical way, such as, "The fires that devastated Cape Town this week are the fault of gay and lesbian Capetonians" (Facebook post by a Cape Town pastor). Non-nationals are blamed for the high levels of crime, for instance, "Nigerians are selling drugs to ...[local] children" and "[l]abelled foreign nationals as criminals". LGBTIQ+-related examples include, "[h]omosexuals are spreading HIV", "[b]eing gay is sinful and any association will turn others gay", and "[t]his [homosexuality] must stop before it spreads to other areas". Victims consider why they were attacked on a night out: "[t]hey [offenders] must have assumed we are homosexual".

After beating up a (black) domestic worker, the (white) offender offered the following explanation for his actions, "[h]e had mistaken her for a prostitute" (Segar, 2014).

The examples mentioned here demonstrate how offenders rationalise their behaviour, arguing that the victims deserved to be treated in such a manner. The purpose of the overt violence is to restore the status quo – i.e. behaviours deemed acceptable within a community – that is generally maintained by symbolic violence.

## THE USE OF EXTREME OVERKILL OR DESTRUCTION

Overt violence takes place when symbolic violence is no longer effective in the domination of certain groups, usually because circumstances have changed (Grzyb, 2012). Changing circumstances include policy or law reform. For instance, being LGBTIQ+ is no longer against the law in South Africa, challenging heteronormative male dominance through the empowerment of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Overt violence then takes the place of symbolic violence (Grzyb, 2012).



The victimisation often goes beyond what is necessary to commit a crime. A robbery is not just a robbery; everything is destroyed during its execution. A body is mutilated beyond any necessary means to commit a murder. There is a complete destruction of the victims and/or their possessions. This is illustrated in the following examples:

“Half naked body [of a lesbian woman] found ...a toilet brush rammed in her vagina” and “They took everything.” In another instance, the body of a young lesbian woman was found. Her “eyes were taken out and her private parts mutilated” (Mametja, 2016). Another body was found “mutilated and burnt”. Three generations of women believed to be practicing witchcraft were “kidnapped, tortured and paraded naked, ...their faces badly disfigured” after being hit with blunt objects.

Overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by communicating the message: “The way you live (or who you are) is not acceptable”. This message hits home, not only to the victim, but to the larger community, as well as to those who have similar characteristics as the victim. Using this message to instil fear in others reinforces symbolic violence. In turn, symbolic violence creates the circumstances in which overt violence targeting vulnerable victims becomes socially acceptable, thus demonstrating the mutually reinforcing and cyclical relationship between overt violence and symbolic violence.

## MESSAGES CONVEYED

Hate incidents are intended to send a message to the victim specifically, or to the sector of society of which the victim is a member. For instance, these messages, among others, include that they do not belong; that they do not deserve basic human rights; that they do not have the right to practice their religion; or that they are not allowed to dress the way they want to.

Daily harassment reminds victims that they will not be able to escape their victimisation. These messages reinforce symbolic violence by telling victims that they have no power. Examples hereof are, for instance:

- “Tell themselves [gay men] that they are a man, not a woman” (Venda community leader at a public meeting describing that LGBTIQ+ individuals will still have a chance to repent and change their behaviour);
- “Go back to Europe, this country belongs to us, not you white scumbags” (Facebook post by black individual);
- In an SMS sent out once a booking has been made for their ‘date night’, a restaurant stipulates that “same-sex couples are not welcome”;
- “Nazi Germans were justified in killing European Jews” (Social media post directed at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies<sup>11</sup>);
- “Will show you that your lifestyle is wrong” (Told to a lesbian woman, during a rape incident);
- The vandalism and smearing with blood of a mosque in Kalk Bay, Western Cape; and
- Placing a pig snout on the ledge outside of a mosque in Simon’s Town, also in the Western Cape.

While words indicative of Islamophobia were not used in the last two examples the message of a total disregard for Muslim religious values are explicitly communicated by highly offensive actions. Not allowing victims to forget that they are not welcome aims at ensuring that they do not attempt to change the social order. Repeatedly exposing victims to such messaging increases the internalisation thereof. This is also evident in other South African research (Harris, 2004) where non-nationals reported that hatred towards them, the constant reminder that they are not welcome, and the fear this instilled, were worse than concerns over their legal status, job security or financial difficulties they faced.

11 The umbrella representative spokesperson and civil rights lobby of the South African Jewish community.



## INTENTIONAL UNFAIR DISCRIMINATION

Symbolic violence is evident in the withholding of services or rights, neglect and indifference experienced by victims of hate incidents (McRobbie, 2004). By denying non-national and LGBTQIA+ persons access to services, such as medical care, police services and the services rendered by the Department of Home Affairs, they are placed in a position of less power.

Turning a victim away from a hospital in an emergency indicates a complete disregard for the life of a human being. Moreover, as illustrated in the following example, some victims are even denied the right to education based on their religion: a Rastafarian child was suspended from school in Cape Town in 2016 because he had dreadlocks. The case highlights a mix of prejudice on the grounds of both religion and race because the underlying assumption informing the school's uniform codes, that certain hair aesthetics are 'professional' and 'neat', is anti-black African, in many ways.

Intentional unfair discrimination may mostly be considered as a form of symbolic violence, however, when medical services are denied, a life may in fact be lost. Denial of education may change the way an individual's life turns out. Even though the wounds inflicted may not be physical, the act of refusal is violent, with the possibility of severe consequences.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research confirm that violence is not limited to overt acts of physical harm, but frequently presents itself in symbolic acts of psychological harm and hatred that assault the dignity, identity and sense of worth of marginalised groups and their members. Furthermore, this article explains how symbolic violence transpires in the everyday interactions between people that reinforce the power differences between the various groups of society and how it is related to overt violence in hate incidents in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Overt violence occurs when symbolic violence is no longer effective in controlling vulnerable groups, with offenders resorting to reinforce power differences between themselves and their victims overtly. In turn, symbolic violence breeds the circumstances in which overt violence becomes socially acceptable behaviour, thus creating a society in which hate victimisation of certain vulnerable groups becomes normalised. In particular, overt violence reinforces symbolic violence by communicating to the victims, as well as to their larger communities, that they are unwanted, third-class citizens and because they do not conform to established societal norms, are undeserving of any respect, human dignity and/or regard for their safety. The violence experienced by victims is misrecognised and normalised as a consequence of what is regarded to be indecent, inappropriate or socially unacceptable behaviour and/ or identities. In this manner, overt hate victimisation and symbolic violence are mutually reinforcing and cyclical.

Effective violence prevention has to take this relationship into account, especially as South Africa grapples with legislative and policy responses to hate victimisation. Policy makers and practitioners, and others, tasked with violence prevention, need not only understand the damaging reinforcing relationship between overt and symbolic violence, but also its debilitating emotional and psychological effect on our society and the individual victim(s). As with hate victimisation, symbolic violations have a wider debilitating effect on victims, their communities, and the broader society, thus undermining social cohesion.

The law has both practical and symbolic utility: not only does it create public awareness by condemning criminal acts and violence, but it also establishes crime categories that enable monitoring effort, aimed at prevention (Ududec, Peltonen, & Niță, 2015). Accordingly, there have been repeated calls by civil society for an appropriate response to hate victimisation in South Africa. These calls have translated in considerable progress being made



in recent years in developing policy (DoJ&CD, 2016) and legislation (DoJ&CD, 2018) to address such violence towards specific forms of identity. The recent Cabinet-approved *Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill* (DoJ&CD, 2018) is a vital step towards the protection of those vulnerable to misrecognition and being targeted, among others, on the basis of their race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Although a legal response to hate crimes is only one form of intervention necessary to address the complex intersection of bias and violence, it can serve as an important tool – especially to combat impunity and improve access to criminal justice for victims. The ‘symbolism’ of law reform is of utmost importance, as is the platform provided by the legal system from which to condemn violating behaviours. Such measures will not only send a clear message to society that hate victimisation, discrimination and misrecognition will not be tolerated, but will also strengthen the role of police and justice officials in holding perpetrators accountable and increasing access to justice for the victims (Breen & Nel, 2011; DoJ&CD, 2018; Ududec et al., 2015). Thus, it is in the South African government’s interest to fast-track the finalisation of the proposed hate crime legislation.

The practical restrictions and challenges for interventions aimed at the prevention and combating of overt and subtle violence ought to be recognised, upfront, however. Indeed, responding to hate victimisation remains a complex societal matter globally because such incidents require attitudinal, behavioural, and social changes. Accordingly, breaking the mutually reinforcing relationship between symbolic and overt violence in hate victimisation requires a multilevel approach, including partnerships and interventions from multiple agencies, such as government, legislators, law enforcement, and all relevant institutions, to practitioners, society and each member of our communities (Walters et al., 2016).

Understanding the relationship between symbolic violence and overt violence, and the efforts required to create awareness, entails a continuous educational process. Greater public awareness of the harm done by such violence to victims, communities, social structures and ultimately also democracy, is needed. To address the social causes underlying hate victimisation, interventions aimed at increased diversity awareness in communities, and education and training programmes for service providers, are required. Stereotypes must be examined in order to understand how harm, suffering and fear is caused and instilled by hierarchies and dominance. Indeed, the beliefs and attitudes that underlie hate victimisation need to be challenged on multiple levels (DoJ&CD, 2016; Walters et al., 2016).

A move towards a more community-focused approach with interventions that are empowering, educative and restorative in nature may be called for. Ideally such efforts should be spearheaded by government, but other relevant role players, practitioners, CSOs, researchers, and community members, too, have a role to play in initiating community dialogues and encouraging participation.

Such community dialogue and interventions should create a safe environment aimed at responding to hate incidents that occur in communities, informing participants of legislation set out to protect their rights and dignity, what is regarded as a violation, what avenues of recourse are available, and how they, too, have a part in reducing the occurrence of hate. It should be explained how such acts of hate, misrecognition and intolerance not only affect the individual, but seriously compromise the well-being of a community and society.

Through dialogue, trust can be instilled and confidence enhanced in law enforcement officials in order to utilise the resources that are at their disposal. Reporting processes, too, should be streamlined to optimise their use. These interventions should send a message to perpetrators, as well, making them aware of the consequences and that individuals know their rights. In this manner, social cohesion can be created and reinforced in an attempt to prevent hate incidents in all of their overt and subtle forms.



## REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2018). *Violence*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/index.aspx>
- Blacker, R. (2009). *A thematic analysis of psycho-dynamically-oriented supervision of observations in an acute inpatient ward* (Unpublished Doctoral thesis). University of Leicester. Retrieved from <https://ira.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/7549>
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Pascalian meditations* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London, UK: Sage.
- Bourgois, P. (2001). The power of violence in war and peace: Post-Cold War lessons from El Salvador. *Ethnography*, 2(1), 5–34.
- Breen, D., Lynch, I., Nel, J. A., & Matthews, I. (2016). Hate crime in transitional societies: The case of South Africa. In J. Schweppe & M. A. Walters (Eds.), *The globalization of hate: Internationalizing hate crime* (pp. 126–141). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Breen, D., & Nel, J. A. (2011). South Africa-A home for all: The need for hate crime legislation. *South African Crime Quarterly*, 38, 33–43.
- Browne, K., Bakshi, L., & Lim, J. (2011). 'It's something you just have to ignore': Understanding and addressing contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans safety beyond hate crime paradigms. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(4), 739–756.
- DeBarros, L. (2015, March 26). Bisexual woman gang raped a gunpoint because of her lifestyle. *Mambaonline.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.mambaonline.com/2015/03/26/bisexual-woman-gang-raped-gunpoint-lifestyle/>
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD). (2016). *Draft for public consultation: National Action Plan against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances*. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD). (2018). *Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/hcbill/B9-2018-HateCrimesBill.pdf>
- Fraser, N. (2007). Re-framing justice in a globalizing world. In T. Lovell (Ed.), *(Mis)recognition, social inequality and social justice: Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu* (pp. 17–35). Abingdon, VA: Routledge.
- Grzyb, M. A. (2012). An explanation of honour-related killings of women in Europe through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and masculine domination. *Current Sociology*, 64(7), 1036–1053.
- Harris, B. (2004). *Arranging prejudice: Exploring hate crime in post-apartheid South Africa*. Retrieved from <http://csvr.org.za/docs/racism/arrangingprejudice.pdf>
- James, D. (2015). How Bourdieu bites back: Recognising misrecognition in education and educational research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 45(1), 97–112.
- Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic analysis. In J. H. Joffe, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology* (pp. 56–68). London, UK: Sage.
- Judge, M., & Nel, J. A. (2018). Psychology and hate speech: A critical and restorative encounter. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 48(1), 15–20.



- Juergensmeyer, M. (2000). *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mametja, L. (2016, January 12). Vaal LGBTI livid after brutal killing of young lesbian. *ENCA.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/vaal-lgbti-reeling-after-brutal-killing-young-woman>
- McRobbie, A. (2004). *Notes on 'what not to wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Mitchell, Y., & Nel, J. A. (2017). *The Hate and Bias Crimes Monitoring Form Project: January 2013 to September 2017*. Johannesburg, South Africa: The Hate Crimes Working Group.
- Morgan, K., & Björkert, S. T. (2006). 'I'd rather you'd lay me on the floor and start kicking me': Understanding symbolic violence in everyday life. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29 (5), 441–452.
- Nel, J. A., & Breen, D. (2013). Victims of hate crimes. In R. Peacock (Ed.), *Victimology in South Africa* (pp. 239–253). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.
- Nel, J. A., Van Wyk, H., & Mbatha, K. (2013). *User guide: Hate & Bias Crime Monitoring Form*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Hate Crimes Working Group.
- Noelle, M. (2002). The ripple effect of the Matthew Shepard murder: Impact on the assumptive worlds of members of the targeted group. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(1), 27–50.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Act No. 108 of 1996*. Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng.pdf>
- Scheper-Hughes, N. (1996). Small wars and invisible genocides. *Social Science & Medicine*, 43(5), 889–900.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., & Bourgois, P. I. (2004). *Violence in war and peace*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Segar, S. (2014, October 18). He came-up to me and just klapped me. *Weekend Argus*. Retrieved from <https://www.iol.co.za/news/he-came-up-to-me-and-just-klapped-me-1767030#.VEI5ohaS9H7>
- Stewart, L. (2014). Rights discourse and practices, everyday violence and social protests: Who counts as subject and whose lives are real in the neo-colonial South Africa nation state? *Journal of Law, Democracy and Development*, 18 (1), 1–21.
- Smith, D. (2011). *Less than human: Why we demean, enslave, and exterminate others*. New York, NY: St Martin's Press.
- Thapar-Björkert, S., Samelius, L., & Sanghera, G. S. (2016). Exploring symbolic violence in the everyday: Misrecognition, condescension, consent and complicity. *Feminist Review*, 112 (1), 144–166.
- Ududec, D., Peltonen, L., & Niță, D. (2015). *Combating hate crimes: Guide for practitioners and decisionmakers*. Bucharest, Romania: Centre for Legal Resources.
- Umrav, A. (2015, January 09). Mechanic beaten, stripped naked and spray-painted. *The Witness*. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Mechanic-beaten-stripped-naked-and-spray-painted-20150109>
- Van der Linden, H. (2012). On the violence of systemic violence: A critique of Slavoj Žižek. *Radical Philosophy Review*, 15(1), 33–51.
- Wacquant, L. (2004). Pointers on Pierre Bourdieu and democratic politics. *Constellations*, 11(1), 3–15.
- Walters, M., Brown, R., & Wiedlitzka, S. (2016). *Preventing hate crime: Emerging practices and recommendations for the effective management of criminal justice interventions*. Sussex, UK: Sussex Crime Research Centre.
- Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. London, UK: Sage.
- Weininger, E. B. (2005). Foundations of Pierre Bourdieu's class analysis. In E. O. Wright (Ed.), *Approaches to class analysis* (pp. 119–149). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

