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BELIEFS ABOUT THE SHOOTER'S MOTIVES AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AMONG LGBTQ PEOPLE FOLLOWING THE 2016 PULSE NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING

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Statement of the Problem: The June 2016 mass shooting at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida was the deadliest terrorist attack in the United States since 9/11 and was an event that shocked LGBTQ people and their allies across the globe. Acts of mass violence that target marginalized groups may have consequences that extend beyond the geographic region immediately affected. Indeed, LGBTQ people may have experienced collective trauma, the psychological effects shared by a group or community after witnessing or experiencing a large-scale traumatic event (e.g. mass shootings). Furthermore, how LGBTQ people interpreted the shooting and the shooter's motives in particular, may relate to dimensions of collective trauma experienced in the aftermath of the shooting.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine how beliefs about the shooter's motives are related to differences in dimensions of collective trauma.

Methodology: Using survey data collected from (n=1,395) LGBTQ-identified respondents from June 15 to September 20, 2016, three distinct multivariate regression models were constructed to predict dimensions of collective trauma (emotional distress, cognitive burden, and fear for safety) from beliefs about the shooter's motives, controlling for relevant sociodemographic and event-specific variables.

Findings: Beliefs that the shooter was motivated by anti-LGBTQ bias and racism, were associated with increased emotional distress and fear for safety whereas, beliefs that the shooter was motivated by mental illness and religious extremism were associated with decreased emotional distress and fear for safety.

Conclusion & Significance: LGBTQ people varied in their experiences of collective trauma in the aftermath of the 2016 Pulse massacre, based on their beliefs about the shooter's motives. As such, when working with victims of collective trauma (e.g. 2016 Pulse massacre, 2017 Manchester bombing), it is important for healthcare providers to examine patients' beliefs about the event, in order to assist in their post-traumatic adjustment.

Biography

Christopher B Stults is a Doctoral Candidate in the Counselling Psychology program at New York University (NYU) under the mentorship of Dr. Perry Halkitis and a Licensed Mental Health Counsellor in independent practice in New York City. His research and clinical interests focus on the mental and physical health of LGBTQ people. More specifically, he has co-authored several publications examining Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among young gay and bisexual men. He has recently completed a study exploring Consensual Non-Monogamous (CNM) relationships (e.g., open relationships) among gay and bisexual men. He has presented his work at multiple national conferences and has served in various leadership positions at NYU and the American Psychological Association (APA). His clinical training experiences include: Montefiore Medical Center, Harlem Hospital Center, Barnard College Counselling Center, Baruch College Counselling Center, The Maes Group, and Florida International University Counselling Center. Additionally, he is an Adjunct Instructor at NYU.

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