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Unraveling the Intersecting Meanings of Interpersonal Violence: The Embodiment of Gender and Race in Attributions and Characterizations of Violence

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ABSTRACT

We examine the meaning of interpersonal violence using labeling and embodiment perspectives. We systematically explore the process of marginalization from the vantage point of college students. Using one-on-one interviews, we report on the characterizations and origin of labels used to describe those perceived to engage in violent behavior. Grounded theory is employed to inductively develop hypotheses. Three themes emerged: The Embodiment of Violence; The Deviance of (White) Women's Violence; and The Enduring Stereotype of (Black) Male Violence. We discuss the process used to impugn gendered and raced meanings upon violence. We delineate how assumptions about gender, race/ethnicity and the body influence e marginalization process. Knowledge-sources used to base judgments about behavior and group membership are identified. We add to labeling and embodiment perspectives while broadening the understanding of labels associated with violent offenders and their origin.

While there has been considerable classic research on how stigma is associated with deviant or criminal involvement (Kenney 2002), the social implications of stigma (Cree et al. 2004; Goffman 1963), and the ways in which deviant individuals and groups cope with stigma (Siegel, Lune, and Meyer 1998), there are relatively few empirical investigations on the process of deviant categorization development (e.g., how deviant labels come to be), especially among the socially privileged. As a result, it is unclear how the privileged make sense of or describe social ills such as interpersonal violence. Moreover, we know little about the source(s) of information relied upon to stigmatize categories of people and their behavior. In this manuscript, we examine how college students, a relatively advantaged group, describe the violence of women and African American men. We utilize qualitative research to better comprehend the labeling process from the vantage point of the privileged in order to advance theory and to better understand how forms of interpersonal violence are understood.

Literature review

Classic research on the processes of marginalization has included topics such as the social interpretation of delinquency (Herman and Schwendinger 1976) and the construction of marijuana use (Orcutt 1975). Other work has focused heavily on individual responses to stigma in terms of the defensive tactics used to reduce or avoiding stigmatization. For example, defensive strategies used to

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cope with stigma have been examined from a variety of specific topics such as interpersonal violence (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004), delinquency (Williams et al. 2007), substance abuse (DeFronzo and Pawlack 1993), sexualities (Hammersmith 1985) and HIV/AIDS positive status (Halkitis and Parsons 2002; Siegel, Lune, and Meyer 1998; Susan et al. 2010). However, the imputation of deviance by members of society as a process vis-à-vis labeling has not been as thoroughly documented. Here, we examine how perpetrators of interpersonal violence are described and understood using labeling theory (Becker 1963) and social embodiment theory (Ferraro and Shippee 2009; Messerschmidt 2012) as theoretical frameworks.

Research has shown that those who occupy marginalized status (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities) are often subjected to harsher judgments and are more likely to be labeled deviant by others (Peralta 2010; Schur 1971, 1983; Urla and Terry 1995). For instance, (white) women are discredited, devalued, and labeled deviant when they violate established gender norms (Schur 1983). When women ascribe to the feminine archetype, women are often portrayed by the media as "good girls" or "virgins" who are less susceptible to victimization (Meyers 1997). In contrast, (white) women who cross gender boundaries by engaging in physical athletics, working in non-traditional careers, confronting men, and living alone are seen as "bad girls" who deserve to be punished through violence (Meyers 1997). How women are controlled is often via societal restrictions on the female body, its movement, and its objectification (Theberge 2003). We specify "white women" above in acknowledgement that white women and women of color have long experienced the social world quite differently. Women of color, for instance, are more likely to work outside the home and are less likely to marry than whites in part because of disproportionately higher imprisonment rates and inadequate educational attainment among Black men (Wright and Younts 2009). For these reasons and more, women of color experience the social world differently due to structural and economic conditions.

African Americans as a social group have endured marginalization inflicted by institutions such as slavery. They continue to endure modern forms of harsh social control by the criminal justice system (Alexander 2012; McCorkel 2013; Novisky and Peralta 2015) and other social institutions such as employment structures (Pager 2003). Moreover, research has demonstrated that African Americans have long embodied the stereotype of "the criminal" and are commonly considered to be "predisposed" to violence (Alexander 2012). African Americans have also been stereotyped as using drugs and alcohol (behaviors strongly correlated with interpersonal violence) at higher rates than whites, which is not empirically supported (Mary et al. 2009; Peralta and Steele 2009). Race, for African Americans, is realized in the body and in particular, by the color of skin (Howarth 2006). Given this context, we ask, how do relatively privileged individuals (i.e., college students) regard and think about interpersonal violence?

The social construction of Black violence

Those who hold "other" or marginalized statuses, such as racial/ethnic minorities or non-heterosexuals, are susceptible to deviant labels merely for their appearance or presumed involvement in deviant activities (Cooper 1990; Goff et al. 2014; McCarry 2010; Messerschmidt 1997; Schur 1971; Wilson, Hugenberg, and Rules 2017). Black men have long been considered a threat to power structures and white society in general. For example, Black men are often depicted as larger, stronger, more muscular, and more threatening than white men of the same size (Wilson, Hugenberg, and Rules 2017), while Black boys, by the age of ten, are portrayed as older and less innocent than their white counterparts (Goff et al. 2014).

For this reason, agents of social control have been mobilized based on the belief that Black men are a physical danger to (white) citizens. Empirical documentation of this social process can be found in white and Black differences in arrest (Kochel, Wilson, and Mastrofski 2011), conviction (Chiricos and Crawford 1995; Doerner and Demuth 2010; Steffensmeier and Demuth 2001), and imprisonment rates (Roeder et al. 2015; Tonry 1994); as well as in the likelihood to experience police interrogation, searches, traffic stops (Hagan and Foster 2006; Lundman and Kaufman 2003), and police brutality (Fryer 2016; Klinger et al. 2016). Also, Black boys are more likely to be disciplined

and expelled compared to their white counterparts who commit similar deviant acts (Pesta 2018; Smith 1989). As a result, the general population continues to believe that Black boys and men are more violent and hence more dangerous than their white counterparts.

The deviance of women's violence

There is a double standard for use of aggression norms between men and women. Based on established gender norms and the embodiment of gender (e.g., modalities of bodily comportment (Young 1990)), it is often assumed that "good girls don't fight" (Campbell 1993: 38) and boys are expected to be physically aggressive in many contexts (Poteat, Kimmel, and Wilchins 2010). Thus, violent women are often perceived as comic, insane, odd, laughable, and as deviations from what is expected of female bodies (Campbell 1993). It is for this reason, that the word "catfight" has become a gendered term that is associated with intra-women aggression (Pivec 2013). By associating women with cats, the system of hegemonic masculinity is maintained because violent women are posited as "others," who are deviating from prescriptions of appropriate female bodily movement (Theberge 2003). In a study by Cobbina, Like-Haislip, and Miller (2010), interviews showed how young urban men reaffirm their masculinity by suggesting that female fighting is "stupid" and "ineffective." Participants suggested that the violence was emotionally driven by conflicts (often involving gossip, jealousy, envy, and love) and "catfights" were not taken seriously because women sometimes used knives and blades instead of guns. Similarly, Britton (1999) suggests that when women commit acts of violence, the violence is somehow less severe and often mocked. Hollander (2002) finds that female interpersonal violence is linked to female emotional fragility. Thus, even though women can and do aggress and become violent just as men do, women's bodily actions are often trivialized. This is likely due to gendered labeling processes informed by expectations that women engage in bodily constraint and confinement (Young 1990).

Men who engage in interpersonal violence are subjected to judgments and social expectations as well. However, the labels attached to men who participate in interpersonal violence, including intimate partner violence, are often less negative in comparison to the more deviant and derogatory labels placed on "others" (e.g., women, Latinos) (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Barter 2009; McCarry 2010; Messerschmidt 1997). This is primarily because the media provides a shared symbolic language that identifies certain practices as signs of a lauded masculine character. Specifically, children's media glorifies men's power and comic books make male characters seem athletic, aggressive, and heroic (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Also, motion picture studies have shown that masculinity is highly and significantly correlated with offending (Eschholz and Bufkin 2001). These depictions ultimately define what it means to "do gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) and are an important part of expected bodily comportment among boys and men (e.g., having greater bodily confidence; willingness to test and use their bodies in active ways within athletic and interpersonal contexts).

Thus, when men take part in interpersonal violence, they are adhering to socially expected gender roles/bodily prescriptions and are affirming their masculinity in the process (Barter 2009; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; McCarry 2010; Messerschmidt 1997). For example, Cobbina, Like-Haislip, and Miller (2010) found that young men discussed the importance of fighting in gangs, and using guns to defend their masculinity and protect their loved ones. Messerschmidt (1993: 107) also suggests that men take part in robberies to be identified as a "hardman" (i.e. a certain type of masculinity). Indeed, men seem to embody violence – men use their body in the pursuit of control and power. Moreover, their bodies are often the targets of violence as documented in official and unofficial crime reports and media representations (Boyle 2004). This gendered context has troubling implications: is violence against women normalized and thus less likely to be challenged? Is violence by women against men a deviation from normative expectations? If so, what are the repercussions of these structural arrangements and expectations for experiencing interpersonal violence among men and women in contemporary society? And, how might race mediate these associations?

The intersection between race, gender, and deviance is complex and multifaceted. The social embodiment of race and gender frames this study: emobidment is understood here as the use of the

body to illustrate and define the meaning of being a woman or a man; of being white or Black. Here we attempt to shed light on the construction of labels and their meanings as an embodiment process. We further examine how these meanings are used to differentiate the marginalized from mainstream members of society in active subordination processes. In our research, we ask: How might the body be used to understand and describe interpersonal violence, especially in raced and gendered terms?

The present study

In this paper, we investigate the construction of labeling and embodiment processes in regard to how individuals think and discuss interpersonal violence victimization and offending using a relativistic framework. Doing so uncovers the process of labeling from the vantage point of labelers (Link and Phelan 2001). By interviewing college students about their knowledge sources, their underlying assumptions about deviant behavior (i.e., interpersonal violence), and how labels are used, we provide a contemporary analysis of labeling and embodiment perspectives steeped in the sociological tradition of social interaction analysis via direct one-on-one interviewing. The emergent themes presented here also contribute to the growing literature on the embodiment of race and gender.

Classic works in the sociology of deviance inform our theoretical framework (Berger 1963; Goffman 1963; Kitsuse 1962; Liazos 1972; Spitzer 1975; Sykes and Matza 1957). We based our research design on an understanding that deviance unfolds, and that deviance categorization is identifiable only in relation to interpretational and interactional processes through which acts and actors are socially defined to be deviant (Orcutt 1975; Schur 1971). Adopting a relativistic framework of analysis addresses important critiques of deviance scholarship. Scholars, for example, have argued convincingly that power has been largely absent from research on deviance. More specifically, deviance scholars have been criticized for mainly focusing on the powerless and the marginalized (see Liazos 1972). We directly address this shortfall in the present study.

We examine power as it relates to the systematic labeling of those prone to marginalization by those of relatively privileged positions: college students. Our original research question was: How do college students discuss and describe interpersonal violence? What emerged via interviews were primarily discussions of (white) women's violence and African American men's violence. Given the emergent themes, we present and discuss our participants' descriptions of violence in the context of labeling and social embodiment perspectives.

We examine labeling from the vantage point of labelers in order to better understand the social process of stigma and deviant label attribution. Rather than research the discredited as has been the norm in sociological research, we examine dis-creditors and their use of discrediting labels to create and act on assumptions about categories of people and behavior. The sociology of race and gender inform our research process and provides a framework from which to examine the structural nature of deviance labeling, marginalization, and categorization. Qualitative interviews centered on college student participants' thoughts and beliefs about interpersonal violence revealed an understanding that embodied categories of people were central to an understanding of what interpersonal violence is. What emerged from the data was evidence of a social process that created distinct and embodied categories of people that were associated with different forms of interpersonal violence (Howarth 2006; Theberge 2003).

Methods

We engaged in a study of the meaning, development, and application of deviant labels from the vantage point of the labeler. One-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Rubin and Rubin 1995; Strauss and Corbin 1990) with college student participants from a large public urban Midwest University provided an understanding of deviance labeling and the process of marginalization. We argue that college students are relatively privileged compared to those who do not continue their education after high school. College students tend to aspire to professional careers, have the resources to attend college, have access to information and knowledge, and likely have familial support to pursue their aspirations (Watt 2007).

Upon entering college, however, students are often unaware of their own identity and what it means to be a part of a multicultural environment. Many students may never have had to engage in "difficult dialogues" about diversity, privilege, and social justice.

As a result, college students can perpetuate or challenge stereotypes as they take part in conversations with faculty and classmates and learn more about their own privilege (Watt 2007). For this reason, college students are ideal candidates for understanding power and the process of labeling. Moreover, all of our participants were heterosexual; thus, they are members of a dominant social category (i.e., heterosexuality). Using semi-structured interviews as part of an inductive qualitative design, we explicitly investigated the process behind the development, maintenance, and use of stigmatic labels.

Research site

Education is closely linked to privilege, most notably class-privilege (for full review, see Adam and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010). Those with a higher-class standing are able to cultivate more prestigious career aspirations among their children, are generally more able to afford higher education and often have great success in school (Adam and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010). As a result, the college educated have access to high paying jobs and positions of power in all sectors of society including the media, law, academia, policy, law enforcement, business, and the arts (for examples see Adam and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010). A recent study by Pew Research Center (2014) found that those with a Bachelor's degree make more money than those without a degree. The college educated are therefore a privileged population, as they have the means to attend college as well as acquire education that will advance their social class standing. Though there has been a pattern to "study down" via researching less privileged groups within society and schools in particular, some argue the need to "study up" and "[consider] class privilege and educational advantage" to better understand how inequalities are shaped and reinforced (Gaztambide-Fernandez and Howard 2010: 2).

At the university from which participants for this study were drawn, first-generation students represent approximately ¼ of undergraduate students. Approximately 35% were Pell-eligible meaning they were from low-income families and eligible to receive Pell Grants. Nearly 3/4 of students were full-time students which indicates students were able to focus on their studies rather than having full-time employment status outside of school. Approximately 80% of students at this Midwest University receive financial aid in the form of disbursed loans, grants, scholarships, and/or Federal Work Study. It is important to note that financial aid received may be (financial) need-based, scholarship, and/or athletics – the university deems each of these sources as "financial aid."

Analytic strategy

We gathered data on the meaning of various negative labels in terms of their contemporary use and linked this data to the socio-historical origins of specific labels. The inductive analytical procedure used on these data (i.e., grounded theory, see Charmaz 2000; Glaser 1995; Lincoln and Guba 1985) provided insight into the process of deviant labeling (e.g., condemnation) which was critical for a better understanding of the dynamics of conformity and non-conformity, marginalization, and oppression. Grounded theory approaches reverse the traditional direction of research (i.e., hypothesis formation → hypothesis testing via data collection and analysis). Using a grounded theory orientation, we gathered data used to develop theory and hypotheses for future testing. Such a technique is critical for informed data driven theory, hypothesis exploration, and concept development. Because the sociological literature has found compelling associations between race/ethnicity and gender for interpersonal violence, we took note of the gendered and race/ethnicity-based meanings attached to assumptions or knowledge of who belongs to each of the behavioral/identity dimensions under investigation.

To better understand the meanings and social processes associated with labeling, we probed many aspects of deviance attribution: 1) Where labelers draw their knowledge from (and hence their power); 2) How labelers create or reinforce social reality by applying (or not applying) deviant labels; 3) The

presumed behaviors and characteristics associated with individuals belonging to people presumed to be involved in interpersonal violence; 4) The underlying social norms and values that contribute to assumptions of and reactions toward deviant/criminal behavior and deviant statuses; 5) The process of molding individuals into the "other;" 6) How those of marginalized status (e.g., race and gender minorities who are also college students and participants in the study) might contribute to the marginalization of the "other"; and finally 7) The relevance of group membership (e.g., political activism, community work, church involvement, and or student group participation) to the development and maintenance of deviant labeling.

The interview guide

Dimensions of inquiry: mechanisms, process, domains, and knowledge source.

The guide was constructed to tap into the mechanisms, process, domain and knowledge source(s) of interpersonal violence. Mechanisms refer to the mechanics of labeling (e.g., labeling as verbal, physical, social). Process refers to the sociological movement between learning and using knowledge to form and act upon behavioral or physical social categories. Domain refers to the types of behavior or identities within each dimension (e.g., violent behavior can have the domain of perpetrator or victim and the types of violence can include intimate partner violence or stranger violence). Questions pertaining to "knowledge sources" are directly concerned with where knowledge is obtained and which knowledge sources are the most influential (e.g., church, family, or media). The semi-structured interview guide is available in the appendix.

The primary author developed the interview guide to be used as a tool to uncover the strategies and techniques used by research participants in impugning meaning – to explore how individuals render people "different" – and the verbal, behavioral, and social techniques involved in the process (e.g., active avoidance, shaming, degradation). The interview guide was developed in a series of meetings held with the primary author's research team. It is important to note that due to the grounded theory design, the inductive approach, and the exploratory nature of this study, the interview guide evolved slightly to adjust to response patterns, data saturation, and the experience of participants (grounded theory approaches place emphasis on the expertise and experience of those being questioned and not on the researcher). Also important is that research participants were never asked about their involvement in interpersonal violence – the design of the study was strictly intended to investigate attitudes and assumptions about other people, other people's identities, and other people's behavior. Therefore, minimal intrusion into the personal lives of research participants structured the design of the study overall and the interviews in particular in order to foster trust and comfort in answering questions about interpersonal violence.

Participants

The sample consisted of college students (n = 30; we reached saturation by the 25th interview) (see Table 1). The sample was split evenly by sex: 50% male and 50% female. The majority of the sample was white (60%), with 37% identifying as African-American and 3% as Hispanic. The ages ranged from 18–37, with a median age of 20.5. Religious affiliation was determined, with 47% (n = 14) of the sample identifying as Christian, 13% (n = 4) claimed no religious affiliation, 10% (n = 3) identified as Catholic, and the remaining 30% (n = 9) were a compilation of other religious affiliations. All participants identified as heterosexual. Participant eligibility was limited to students at one urban Midwest University who were recruited through announcements (via email), flyers, and classroom visits. Interviews were conducted by members of the research team. Confidentiality and informed consent forms were provided to all participants. Pseudonym's were used in this study to mask participant identities. Approval for the study was procured from the Institutional Review Board.

Table 1. Demographics, N = 30.

	%	n
Males	50	15
Females	50	15
Age	20.5 *	
White	60	18
Black	37	11
Hispanic	3	1
Christian	47	14
Catholic	10	3
Other Religion	30	9
No Religion	4	0
* median		

Students self-selected to participate in the study; thus, there may have been a selection bias. Specifically, if a student did not feel comfortable talking about the aforementioned topics, he/she may not have volunteered. Also, students were primarily recruited from one department on campus, which may have created additional selection bias. Regardless, it is important to note that students were recruited from introductory courses and that not all participants were sociology or criminology majors. Individual instructors who opted to promote the study may have offered extra credit for participation in the study. Aside from that possible incentive, no other incentives were offered to participants.

Interviews were conducted in private offices at the University in which the study took place and lasted approximately one hour. Members of the research team individually took part in the interview process (the Principal Investigator (male; an Associate Professor) and female and male graduate students). All materials associated with the study were kept in a locked office and in an encrypted/password protected online data storage portal (Sharepoint). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Notes were written during and after each interview to augment each transcription.

Data analysis

Grounded theory, as an analytical strategy, requires a continuous process of data collection, transcription, data analysis and interpretation, and engagement with the literature to facilitate an informed set of emergent themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As data were being collected, the research team developed a classification scheme for ordering the codes, themes, descriptors, and labels most frequently used across participants for each dimension. The classification scheme included an in-depth incorporation of the gendered and or race/ethnic-based underpinnings associated with each form of stigma (i.e., label).

Line-by-line open coding of the data occurred by individual members of the research team (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The research team met periodically to discuss the coding process and to conduct systematic inter-rater reliability checks to ensure that the coding of the data was consistent across research team members. Any emergent concepts and or themes not agreed upon by the team were discarded. Those codes that were approved were kept and are used here as data to illustrate agreed upon emergent themes. Our process of mutually agreed upon concepts and themes met qualitative standards for rigor and specificity.

Results

Table 2 displays demographic data and data on what knowledge sources participants deemed important in shaping their attributions and characterizations of interpersonal violence. Of note, the sample was mostly white and Christian. Media was the most common source of information about violence. Women were considered most likely to be victims of interpersonal violence and men

Table 2. Counts of attributions and characteristics of interpersonal violence by respondent demographic.

	Black Female (n=6)	Black Male (n=5)	White Female (n=9)	White Male (n=9)	Hispanic Male (n=1)	Total (N=30)
Number of times the word "catty" or "catfight" were brought up:	1		2	4	1	8
Sources students described getting their violence information from:						
Media Sources: media (3), news (3), email (1), newspapers (1), television-shows (4), videogames (1), movies (2), and internet (1)	1	3	2	4		10
Personal Experience	4		3			7
Family/ Parents	1	1	3	1		6
School		1		2	1	4
Work				1		1
Community		1				1
Church				1		1
Who is most likely to be a victim?						
Female in General	1	3	3	3		10
White Female			3	2		5
"Anyone"	4	1	2	3	1	11
"Old People"				1		1
Who is most likely to be a perpetrator?						
Male in General	1		3	2		6
Black Male	3	3	4	2		12
Black Person in General			2		1	3
Anyone	2	2	2	1		7

more likely to be categorized as violence offenders. Themes discerned from the collective analysis of individual semi-structured interviews provided the basis for a theoretical and conceptual understanding of the active labeling process and the centrality of embodiment. Three themes pertaining to the process of labeling in regard to perpetrators and victims of interpersonal violence emerged via the systematic analysis of descriptive accounts from participants. The themes were: **(1)** The Embodiment of Violence, Victimization, and Offending; **(2)** The Deviance of (White) Women's Violence; and **(3)** The Enduring Stereotype of (Black) Male Violence. The embodiment of difference via race and gender was a major emergent pattern across the three themes. Each theme centers on race, gender, and the social embodiment of deviance.

The embodiment of violence, victimization, and offending

The body was broached frequently in discussions about how participants defined violence. Often times, participants would give examples of identifying victims by their physical bruises, scars, and "bumps." According to Katie, an 18-year-old Black female, "unless you see the physical evidence, you probably won't know." The majority of descriptions of how someone could identify a victim of violence can be summed up by Mark, a 20-year-old white male: "beat-up, small, womanly, feminine, bruised and wounded with cuts." This response was typical of what we saw regarding imagery of victims of violence in the data.

Next, the association between weakness, victimization, susceptibility, and "femaleness" appears to be based on a combination of assumptions about both physical and "mental strength" differences between men and women. Angela, an 18-year-old Black female, touched on this when she described someone she knew had been a victim of violence by virtue of his visible bruises: "I was shocked because he's, um, very tall- he's actually a football player. So when you think of a football player you think of muscles and very strong, and just to see him in that position of being weak and hurt and in pain, I was just…in shock." Angela was shocked to find that a strong "football player" could be a victim of physical violence. In sum, men's bodies were generally not synonymous with violent victimization.

The association of stereotypically feminine characteristics with victimhood is also reflected in discussions about woman-to-man violence. When asked about woman-to-man violence, 21-year-old Black male, Chris, replied "I think it happens but males are more prone to violence than females…when it is reported it's like 'you're a man, why are you calling the police? You are bigger and stronger, you could

have just left.'" Here, Chris is reinforcing the notion that males are bigger and stronger than females, but also that they have a responsibility to control the situation themselves as men. By involving a third party, the police, the male victim would be legitimizing the violence perpetrated on him by a female, thus, negating his prescribed role as a 'man.' Similarly, another participant stated, "If a male was a victim of domestic violence he would be called a 'wuss'…" (Mark: 20-year-old white male).

Another common refrain from participants was that men engage in violent offending to prove they are "stronger or bigger than the other guy" (Carl: 18-year-old Black male). This connection ties in the embodiment of violent victimization to the social reality of gender and masculinity. It is understood that men use their bodies and physical strength to raise their social status as masculine men by virtue of their ability and willingness to physically harm and or intimidate 'weaker' individuals.

One participant noted that there are gender-based expectations for men that contribute to their likelihood of engaging in violent offending: "Perpetrators are typically male, like terrorists are typically male that you see, people who take out schools, typically male at this point. Which, why? I have no clue. It's just, you know, the general social thing" (Dan: 20-year-old white male). When asked why men are more likely to be perpetrators of violence, an 18-year-old white female, Tina, replied "They are stronger- they tend to have more of a temper. They…tend to be physical in everything like in sports with tackling and football, more physical in relationships, so it makes sense that they would be more physical in expressing their emotions." This quote blends together the physical, mental and social expectations of men. While it was considered typical behavior for men to use their physical strength and bodies to engage in violence, the responses shifted dramatically when participants discussed specifically women who engage in violence as described below.

The Deviance of (white) Women's Violence

Women's violence perpetration, in general, was reduced to comical imagery. Specifically, participants found women's violence toward men laughable because "it's not common." Katie, an 18-year-old Black female, articulated that "you don't hear about it a lot [be]cause males tend to be…there's a stereotype that males tend to be stronger than females so females don't really hit males." Based on this gendered assumption, some participants saw women as "smaller" and having less "power" or "physical stamina" than men. Thus, when women commit violence toward men it was viewed as non-serious because they "can't really hurt a male that much." For example, a woman might "slap" a man across the face. It is believed that such behavior does not necessarily inflict harm to the body. It is important to note, however, that some participants emphasized that it could only be serious when women use "guns" and "knives." Mike, a 19-year-old white male, said:

> the lady always grabs a knife whenever, like in the movies, they always grab, like a knife or something whenever they're trying to protect themselves. But, yeah, I would think a knife whenever a girl would attack a man.

Notice that Mike comes to this viewpoint based solely on what he has seen in movies. Respondents suggested that the media often uses contradictory images of women's violence toward men. In some cases, women are portrayed as "dainty" and unlikely to cause physical harm whereas in other instances women are seen as taking action and using weapons to protect themselves against men. Also participants argued that women's violence perpetrated against men was a "way to try to gain some control. Because [women] probably feel weaker in a lot of senses. I mean females are weaker, physically. And [women] want to be able to inflict some sort of harm if [women] can't do it any other way" (Freda: 18-year-old Black female).

When an interviewer asked, "why don't we hear about female on male violence?" Katie, an 18-year- old Black female respondent said:

> men don't want to say that they're getting beat up by a female or getting beat up by their wives or girlfriends or something like that because, you know, it's for the male to be strong and not get beat up on by a girl 'cause if it is, it's considered 'sissy' or 'punk' or something like that.

These quotes illustrate the gendered expectations of masculinity whereby the "victim" is not a prescribed role for men.

Furthermore, when describing women's violence toward other women, the word "catty" or "catfight" was articulated 8 times by participants. Mike, a 19-year-old white male, expressed that catfighting is "a slang term for when girls fight." Catfights were often described as involving "bare fists," "pulling hair," "scratching," and "slapping." They normally did not include the use of "weapons" or result in serious harm (Britton 1999). Take the following exchange from an 18- year- old white female for example:

Interviewer: "What about female on female violence?"
      Tina: (Laugher) "cat fights?" (Laughter)
Interviewer: "You said "cat fights?""
      Tina: "yeah, it is just…Usually it is based on emotions. It is based on a fight that has been going on. A verbal fight just coming out. It's like you feel like you have no other way to get your point across than violence. I don't think violence is acceptable ever. Like my cousin, I was…I said like "damn" in a song or something – she doesn't think that swearing is okay at all. And she slapped me in my face. And I was like…ugh…and I got up and left.."

Also, fights among women were commonly attributed to a "guy," "gossip," or "jealously." Tina, an 18- year- old white female, noted that women engage in violence against other women because of "gossip or, somebody stole somebody's boyfriend. Something like that." Also, Bev, a 23-year-old Black female, suggested that women's violence stems from:

> …men. I think a lot of it, I mean…because girls, everybody has their own reasons from being upset about things, but the majority of it comes down to: you like my boyfriend or my boyfriend likes you or my boyfriend thinks you're cute or he made a comment about you or now I gotta tell you what he said and then you make a comment back like 'oh, that's nothing', and then I get mad about it, you know. It's always stupid in the long run. But, at the same time girls have a tendency to hold on to things. So, like, even if it was a verbal altercation and it happened six months ago, there's a chance I might fight you.

These data illustrate that women's "cattiness" is "petty" and, in most cases, will not result in serious harm (Britton 1999). "Petty" violence, which seemed to be regarded as undervalued or less impressive violence, in part seems to stem from violence that was considered to be 'emotions' based (e.g., jealousy). Even when women fought men, it was not taken seriously unless they used a weapon. It is for this reason that women might in part stereotypically be perceived to be victims and not perpetrators.

The enduring stereotype of Black (male) violence

Race emerged frequently as a social issue associated with violence perpetration and victimization. Ten out of thirty (approximately 33 percent) participants said that they relied on the media (e.g., TV, newspapers, movies, videogames, the internet, and email messages) to obtain information about interpersonal violence. Specifically, students stated that the news depicted perpetrators as "Black men" from "low income areas" who "sell drugs" and "have weapons." We note here that email messages were sent out by the university administration shortly before the study took place alerting faculty, students, and staff about criminal events on and around campus. The race of the offender(s) was noted in the email alerts: Black offenders were described to be disproportionally involved in alleged criminal offending (i.e., assault, armed robbery on and off campus). The email messaging in effect racialized descriptions of crime for the campus community given the frequency in which this topic emerged in the interview process. This form of messaging perhaps heightened awareness about a stereotypical nexus between race and violence among the campus community. According to Tasha, a 22-year-old white female, the emails normally discussed the offender as:

> a tall, dark-skinned male, wearing a hoodie with some kind of weapon, you know, at someone's house on the south side of campus. It's always the same email, just a different victim, so I just kind of delete them…

Jamie, a 21-year-old white female, echoes this point when she suggests that the "robberies… on campus tend to typically be… Black males..[who] always fit the same description." Justin, a 19-year-

old Black male also said that he was personally emailed by an administrator and advised to "not run from the cops" if he was approached because he fit the description of "pretty much all of the guys" that committed criminal acts in the area. Thus, campus emails potentially explain in part why 12 participants described a perpetrator as a Black male, 6 stated that they were male, and 3 said Blacks in general. Marissa, a 19-year-old white female, suggested for example that African Americans are more likely to be "related [to] violence instead of Caucasian people [because] they are more [likely to be] judged with criminal stuff." Angela, a 24-year-old Black female, stated that fighting is always associated with "Black males" and that she has a cousin who is in jail as a result of fighting.

To explain the disproportionate involvement of Africans Americans in criminal offending on or near the campus, Tina, an 18-year-old white female, said:

> I guess that in a way there is a lot of Black people that are angry at even just the racial situation in America. They are still angry – they are upset. They think that they were treated unfairly and when they are raised especially in a bad neighborhood which a lot of Black people are – I don't know – I'm not a racist or anything – but it is just like I don't know – I think it is more the neighborhood than the actual race. They all tend to all be in that area. And it is more where they grew up and how they grew up then the color of their skin that causes a tendency to violence.

Chris, a 21-year-old Black male also suggests that people are the product of their environment. Specifically, he states that "some communities are just in poverty… but when you're trapped [and] have to commit violence to survive, like people who have to rob a convenience store to feed their family, some people with no choice that's all they can do." This analysis is suggestive of the notion that Black people are more dangerous because most Black people are assumed to be poor, which is a false assumption. While the respondent suggests it is less about "skin color" and more about socio-economic status, the false notion remains that Black people are to be held suspect given their dispro-portionally low SES status. It is important to note that poor white people were not associated with violence perpetration – this is suggestive of the embodiment of violence via constructed race and gender differences that are rooted in the body (e.g., skin color). Additional quotes further highlight the nature of Black male bodies and their association with interpersonal violence. Allison (19), a Black female, states:

Interviewer: "Ok. Do you think race or gender or sexuality matters in terms of a person's violent background?"

Allison: "I do. Yeah, I do. I believe it's mostly Black African American, yeah Caucasians do things, but not as much I feel as though Black African American males."

Interviewer: "Ok. Why do you think that might be the case?"

Allison: "Jails and going to the courthouses and seeing the majority is Blacks, and where I grew up at I mean I grew up on a white side and a Black side so I got to see both viewpoints. And everybody's like oh you just always just cause you don't like Black people. Its not that I mean I've seen you know white friends I had do drugs and things like that, you be like they're no different than the Blacks but at the same breath, you know Blacks are always wanna blame the white people. Like oh this is the white man's world, I feel like its anybody's world. I feel as though if you, there is smart Black African American people that its, we've got a Black president. So I mean, I mean, I just feel as though its just ignorant when people like it's a white mans world, I don't believe that at all."

Allison talks about living in a "ghetto" and seeing violence as "primarily between Black and Black." Angela: a Black female responds to a question about men and violence: "Males in general? I've always seen Black males fighting, um, I actually have a cousin who's in jail from what he did… so." Chris, a Black male states:

> "Do you think there are certain groups of people that are more susceptible to being victims? I would say people that live I in the inner cities like people say you're a product of your environment inner cities are known to have more violence like a white person walking in the inner city gets jumped and two Black people in the inner city could also get jumped by a group of Black people, there's just violent areas."

Interviewer: "Why do you think there are violent areas?"

Chris: "Like some communities are just in poverty it's not always for the right reasons but when you're trapped with having to commit violence to survive like people who have to rob a convenience store to feed their family some people with no choice that's all they can do."

Interviewer: "What do perpetrators look like?"

Chris: "To me it could be anybody: but like in the media it's an African American male 18-24 from a low-income area and sells drugs has a gun that's what the media portrays."

Interviewer: "What about intra-racial violence like white on Black or Hispanic on white?"

Chris: "I think Black on white happens a lot just because a lot of Black people have bad feelings towards white people because of the media portrays white people calling Black people like you're a nigga you're nothing at all you know Black people were slaves back in the day and during Jim crow and Black people have a negative image of white image of white people like there is a fear between the races."

These quotes illustrate the extent to which Black bodies are characterized as violent and often thought "rightfully" to be subject to criminal justice surveillance thus reinforcing labeling and embodiment perspectives in the context of interpersonal violence discourse. Data also reveal the potential role university administration may be playing in creating and or reinforcing the fear of Black males among students on campus.

Discussion and conclusion

The current project contributes to basic social science on the nature of "difference making" and the social processes involved in rendering groups of people and behavior deviant. Previous research limited analysis to how individuals cope with marginalization and stigma. We examined how stigma is constructed and applied to the "other." To address the gap in the literature, we qualitatively investigated assumptions and perceptions of a specific dimension of behavior (i.e., interpersonal violence) and identity often associated with deviance via one-on-one interviews. Our data suggest that the process of rendering behavior and identity deviant is a social embodiment process that is gendered and raced. First, we detail how the body is used to exemplify physical violence (via the appearance of bruises and scratches); second, we examine gender deviance in the form of women's violence; and thirdly, we describe the social process of identifying violent perpetrators as Black men.

In sum, we found that deviance construction is a dynamic process. Lemert (1972) suggests that "the objective nature of the [deviant] act interacts with the situational context to produce a unique interpretation of deviance." Guided by this classic sociological perspective, we looked for patterns in the social process of marginalization. In particular, we found that gender and race influenced perceptions of socially disapproved behavior which adds to our knowledge on the profound significance of race and gender as influential structural features of society. The unfolding nature of deviance categorization was identifiable only in relation to interpretational and interactional processes through which acts and actors become socially defined as deviant (Orcutt 1975; Peralta and Steele 2009).

Data reveal the social processes of behavior and identity construction as well as how behavior and identity are embodied. The embodiment of marginalization, we find, takes place through the ways in which identity and behavior are assigned meaning in and through the body (i.e., the harm violence does to the body, what white female violence "looks" like and how it is understood; and the racialized bodies of suspected violence perpetrators). Our findings on the construction of deviance provide insight into basic social outcomes such as conformity, social control, and status ascension and subjugation processes (e.g., the control of bodies and movement, and the meanings of physical harm to the body). For instance, respondents appear to be socialized to identify violent victimization

through markers of visible physical evidence displayed on the body and react accordingly. Next, there was a general disregard for women's violence and/or women were socialized to use less harmful fighting practices compared to men. Women's use of physical aggression was gendered as feminine and thus unserious and a part of the subjugation of women. Next, fear of violence among men of color has social control implications and is also a subjugation process that marginalizes men of color.

In regard to the email alerts about crime events on campus sent to the campus community prior to the study, several issues are in need of discussion. Such messaging may have significant unintended consequences in shaping fear of crime and centering fear on the Black male body. We know that crimes committed by strangers are more likely to be reported to the police and that intra-racial crimes are more common compared to interracial crime (Baumer and Lauritsen 2010). Crimes that are reported to police and then described in email alerts are more likely to be: a) stranger-based crimes and b) interracial crimes (Black offender, white victim) due to racial segregation, the fear of Black men in general and white's reliance on police to resolve criminal matters (Drakulich 2012). This intersection of race, criminal offending, victimization, and the construction of crime may: 1) create unsubstantiated fear of Black students, staff, and faculty among white students, staff, and faculty; 2) create a hostile social space for Black individuals who live and work on campus by rendering these individuals suspects and not members of the legitimate university community; and 3) displace fear of crime from more probable sources of crime (perpetrators known to victims) to the least likely offenders (strangers of a different race).

Limitations and future research

Although participants often cited various ways that they have been exposed to violence (e.g. media sources, friends, parents, personal experience, and school), a potential limitation of this study could be the fact that students were recruited from social science departments. Several participants stated that they were a sociology or criminology major or that they had taken criminology classes which may have impacted their crime perspectives. Also, while this is a qualitative study whose purpose is not to generalize to a specific population, our data are limited to a very specific group of students in the Midwest. Research in different regions of the country would be helpful toward establishing a pattern of racialized, gendered, and embodied attributions and characterizations of offenders and victims. Curiously, discussions of white versus Black female violence did not emerge as a major theme. Finally, women's violence in general was discussed as a non-serious event and it was largely white women's violence that was discussed with any depth or specific context. Perhaps this was because we had more white female respondents compared to Black female respondents.

Findings from this research are important for future work in this area for three reasons. First, this study may provide data-driven guidance for the development and improvement of survey instruments used to assess the prevalence and incidence of interpersonal violence and related deviant acts. Second, the methods used in this study may be useful for uncovering contemporary social norms and values that create the basis for marginalization and the social-psychological underpinnings of discrimination. For instance, scholars need to probe respondents about where they receive their information on violence. Then, once participants list examples, interviewers can ask more detailed questions such as: 1) What television show exemplifies violence? 2) How is the television show violent? 3) Who is normally involved in the violence? Doing so will provide a deeper understanding into the labeling process beyond that which is discussed in this paper. Third, researchers should look into how university administrators construct and reinforce assumptions about race and gender in their communications about crime to their campus community. Future research should examine the different form(s) stigmatization might take and the social process thereof (e.g., verbal, behavioral, institutional), and the rewards and costs that are likely associated with actively marginalizing the "other."

Future qualitative research should attempt to recruit students, campus wide, who may not have been exposed to criminology or sociology classes, to see how findings might differ. The location of the university is interesting in that it is a university in the midwestern portion of the US, and it is in

an urban setting, yet only a few miles from vast rural stretches, very small communities and farming areas. The university draws from both urban and rural populations. Views, especially race-related views, likely would differ significantly among an all rural population of college students versus an all urban population of participants. Future work should control for such rural vs. urban differences – especially for topics of race and ethnicity.

Findings from this project suggest that privileged group membership may enhance self-conception(s) via collective action aimed at separating "them" from "us," thus, disempowering those who are different or at risk for becoming marginalized. We find that the labeling process affirms and validates majority status and hence majority culture. The documentation of these social processes provides grounded theoretical insight not only into the nature of deviance categorization, but also into label development and the social embodiment of interpersonal violence in general, assumptions about race and offending in particular, and women's violence overall.

In closing, we argue it is important to understand power by researching the relatively privileged to better understand marginalization processes in total. If the goal is to challenge racist and sexist views, it is important to promote critical thinking and to create inclusive and diverse learning settings so that those who will hold positions of power in the future will be empowered to create contexts where violence is accurately understood, where violence among women is taken seriously, and where men of color are not feared. Because interpersonal violence is relatively common in US society, it is important for the populace to understand and recognize the multiple ways in which it occurs and manifests (e.g., physical, emotional, and psychological forms of violence and victimization). Related, there may be implications for how women's violence might be misperceived. For instance, how might intimate partner violence among lesbian couples or female-to-male violence be reacted to by law enforcement where women's violence might be considered less problematic and less harmful (Novisky and Peralta 2015)? Finally, how might hyper-vigilance surrounding men of color's behavior be fueling police use of force and other forms of formal social control against men of color? What are the social and psychological implications of the stereotypes surrounding minority men's potential for violence among: men of color, women in general, and social stakeholders (e.g., professors, administrators, and employers)?

Next, this research has implications for the professional workplace environment. It cannot be assumed that the college educated are free from racist and sexist beliefs. Our study suggests that these beliefs do in fact exist and may have an impact on the professional workforce. Although the number has been steadily increasing, only 33.4% of people over age 25 have a four-year degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). Since the college-educated population typically has more access to leadership positions (Adam and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010), they are integral in constructing the workplace culture (Keyton 2005). The person who holds the power in an organization models appropriate behavior expected of employees and decides what behavior, comments, and jokes are acceptable. If a workplace culture is accepting of discriminatory/sexist/racist activities or ideology, there is a possibility that ideology will "spillover" into an employee's private life (Barnett 1994), thus affecting families, community life, and the general population's perceptions of deviant behavior.

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