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## **Hate Crime: An Emergent Research Agenda**

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# HATE CRIME: An Emergent Research Agenda

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■ **Abstract** Hate crime is difficult to define, measure, and explain. After summarizing some of the leading conceptual issues and theoretical perspectives, we discuss the practical difficulties associated with data collection. Although the research literature remains small and largely descriptive, recent studies have begun to relate hate crime patterns to economic cycles, population flows, and changes in the political environment. The task ahead is to extend these analyses to other settings and levels of aggregation.

## INTRODUCTION

Those seeking to understand the nature and origins of bigoted violence are likely to be disappointed by extant scholarship on prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Although many scholars aspire to explain behavioral manifestations of intergroup hostility, this literature is dominated by the investigation of attitudes and beliefs. Study after study examines how adults regard minority groups and policies designed to advance minority interests (for a recent overview, see Sears et al., 2000), typically relying on surveys to gauge what is variously termed prejudice, intolerance, racism, or xenophobia. Although survey researchers assess prejudice in increasingly sophisticated ways (see Fazio et al., 1995; Hurwitz & Peffley 1998), they devote relatively little attention to the study of prejudiced conduct, apart from voting behavior. Behavioral manifestations of prejudice figure more prominently in the work of social psychologists, but the laboratory experiments that dominate this literature are often contrived and rely almost entirely on undergraduate subjects. A small number of field experiments or unobtrusive studies of bigotry (Crosby et al, 1980; Kremer et al., 1986; Fix & Struyk 1993) focus on behavioral data to assess the pervasiveness of prejudice, but these studies tend not to link patterns of behavior to contextual factors such as economic conditions, levels of residential segregation, and the like. It might take the better part of a lifetime to read

the prodigious research literature on prejudice, particularly if one were to include studies that investigate the manner in which institutions, organizations, and social groups have introduced, perpetuated, or dismantled discriminatory practices and policies throughout the world. Yet, scarcely any of this research examines directly and systematically the question of why prejudice erupts into violence.

This lacuna has grown increasingly apparent in recent years as scholars have turned their attention to the subject of hate crime. The term hate crime is commonly used to refer to unlawful, violent, destructive, or threatening conduct in which the perpetrator is motivated by prejudice toward the victim's putative social group. Although hate crime can scarcely be called a new phenomenon, the term came into currency in the United States during the 1980s, following a series of well-publicized incidents directed at Jews, Asians, and blacks. The topic of hate crime, and the term itself, gained prominence internationally as a wave of what was otherwise termed racist or antforeigner violence swept Northern Europe during the 1990s. These incidents and the publicity surrounding them attracted unprecedented attention from both journalists and policy makers. For the first time, public agencies and community organizations made a concerted effort to document incidents and track patterns. Although data gathering proved to be fraught with problems, it helped foster a nascent research literature, particularly in the United States and Germany.

This article attempts to describe the principal research questions in this literature, assemble important empirical results, and suggest directions for future investigation. We begin by explicating the concept of hate crime, distinguishing it from ordinary crime, bigoted attitudes, bigoted but lawful conduct, state-sanctioned discrimination, and ethnic warfare. Next, we summarize leading theories of why hate crimes occur, drawing out, where possible, their testable empirical implications. Turning to the research literature, we provide an overview of the empirical studies that have examined the social, political, and economic contexts in which hate crimes are more likely to occur. To complement these ecological studies, we also consider ethnographic and survey evidence concerning the psychological characteristics of hate crime perpetrators and the social milieux in which they operate. Finally, we discuss what extant theory and evidence imply about ways of reducing the incidence and severity of hate crime.

## DEFINITIONS

The terms hate crime and bias crime were coined in the United States during the 1980s, as journalists and policy advocates groped for new terminology to describe bigoted violence directed against Jews, blacks, and homosexuals.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Germany's Basic Law and federal statutes forbid racist, Nazi-inspired, and other extremist behavior and organizations. As a result, legislation in Germany tends to skew the definition and measurement of hate crime toward its ideological and organized forms (cf. Aronowitz 1994).

Unlike other neologisms, such as ethnoviolence (Pincus & Ehrlich 1994), racially motivated crime (Green et al., 1998b), antiforeigner violence (Krell et al., 1996), or heterosexist violence (Herek 1992), hate crime encompasses unlawful conduct directed at a wide array of different target groups. Moreover, the term refers not simply to acts of violence, but also to crimes involving destruction of property, harassment, or trespassing. Thus, such disparate phenomena as cross burnings in front of homes owned by blacks, vandalism directed against Jewish cemeteries, and assaults against men leaving putatively gay bars are brought together under a common heading. Existing definitions specify various (a) applicable target groups, (b) forms of illegal conduct, and (c) types of motivation as characteristics of hate crime. Before offering our own views, let us first summarize the range of existing definitions.

### Applicable Target Groups

To proponents of hate crime legislation, the breadth of conduct that can be encompassed within the definition of hate crime is one of its main virtues. Still, there is little agreement across jurisdictions on the list of protected groups. Fewer than half of all states with hate crime laws specify sexual orientation as a protected category (Wang 1994) because, ironically, legislators are frequently unsympathetic to laws designed to help gay men and lesbians or in any way legitimate their "lifestyles" (Berrill & Herek 1992, pp. 291-93; Jenness & Broad 1997, p. 42; Haider-Markel & Meier 1996). Social scientists tend to be more inclusive in their definition of hate crime, but the boundaries differ from one scholar to the next. For example, Boyd et al (1996, p. 819) define hate-motivated crimes as "crimes committed against persons or property that are motivated by the perpetrator's hatred or prejudice against the racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual identity of the victim." Craig (1999, p. 139) and Barnes & Ephross (1994, p. 247) broaden this definition somewhat to include physical disability, while Craig & Waldo (1996, p. 113) offer the most expansive definition: "Crimes that are motivated by hate include words or actions intended to harm or intimidate an individual because of his or her perceived membership in or association with a particular group." In the latter definition, all groups become protected categories.

Formulating a principled defense of any particular list of protected groups is complicated further by the two-sided quality of each category. To specify, for example, that hate crime encompasses violence motivated by racial hatred means that both white-on-black and black-on-white attacks are lumped into the same classification. Whatever its merits as public policy or as a vehicle for consensus building, an evenhanded definition that makes no distinction between attacks committed by dominant as opposed to subordinate groups poses a challenge to those who seek to explain why hate crime occurs. Should one expect that the same factors that propel straight-on-gay attacks also produce gay-on-straight attacks? Scholars such as Craig (1999, p. 139) sidestep this problem by defining hate crime to be "an illegal act involving intentional selection of a victim based on a perpetrator's

bias or prejudice that relates to either the actual or perceived status of the victim” but stipulating that “[v]ictims of hate crimes include members of racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, as well as the physically challenged.” By this definition, hate crime is restricted to unlawful conduct directed at subordinate groups.

## Forms of Conduct

What kinds of unlawful activity constitute hate crime? The expansive definition by Craig & Waldo given above encompasses activities ranging from violence to “words ... intended to harm.” More restrictive definitions confine hate crime to violence against persons or property, a category that usually includes criminal threats but rules out behaviors such as illegal housing discrimination. Most US statutes conform to the latter definition and enhance the punishment for conventional forms of crime when they are committed by someone motivated by bigotry.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, a number of states also have specific prohibitions against cross burnings and institutional vandalism, acts that involve criminal mischief and trespassing. Unlike Germany, which forbids the display of Nazi flags and dissemination of racist literature, the United States allows individuals and political groups to advocate racial hatred and even genocide. Thus, while right-wing political activity is often discussed in conjunction with hate crime (Hamm 1994a, Kleg 1993), the two are conceptually distinct.

## Motivation

A common ingredient in the aforementioned definitions is bigoted motivation. The perpetrator attacks out of contempt or disdain for the perceived social characteristics of the victim. Motivation presents a range of conceptual and epistemological problems (Berk 1990). Must this motivation be the exclusive reason for the hate crime in question, or is it sufficient for prejudice to be one of several motives? When hate crime is defined to encompass only those acts entirely motivated by animus, crimes such as robbery and rape are presumably excluded from the definition. When animus need be just one of several motives, however, the definition becomes porous. Any trace of hate motivation in the selection of targets or the manner in which a crime is carried out would then warrant its classification as a

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence (1999) points out that hate crime statutes in the United States vary in the kinds of motivations they ascribe to the perpetrator. Regulations promulgated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the wake of the Hate Crime Statistics Act define bias crime as criminal conduct motivated in whole or in part by negative attitudes toward the victim’s group, whereas other statutes, including the statute upheld by the Supreme Court in *Wisconsin v. Mitchell*, require only that the perpetrator select the victim because of his or her putative group membership. The latter standard potentially encompasses crimes such as purse snatching, which may not arise from misogyny but may involve the discriminatory selection of female targets. For further discussion of the nature and diffusion of hate crime law, see Jenness (1999) and Grattet et al (1998).

hate crime. As a practical matter, this definition generates a presumption that intergroup crime is hate crime. This presumption has special relevance to hate crime statutes that include gender as a protected category, since rape may be regarded as an expression of misogyny.

One interesting but apparently incidental feature of definitions that require hate motivation is that, under ordinary circumstances, only individuals can commit hate crimes. Motives per se are generally not attributable to states, political parties, or other corporate entities that authorize violence against a particular group. In our view, the exclusion of institutions from the purview of these definitions is fortuitous. The study of spontaneous or loosely coordinated actions by individuals and small groups has a very different feel from systematic persecution carried out by a state. Granted, the two can be causally related, as when a state encourages (or does nothing to discourage) acts of violence against particular groups. But a theory of why actors within states and other organizations authorize and pursue certain courses of action will doubtless look very different from a theory that seeks to explain why street-level actors behave as they do. Somewhere in between are ethnic riots (Horowitz 1985, 2001) and acts of bigoted violence carried out by members of right-wing groups, which range from spontaneous acts of pell-mell violence to carefully orchestrated acts of terrorism.

If we accept that motivation is an essential ingredient in hate crime, what kind of motivations suffice? One is the desire to terrorize a broader social group, as when a person scrawls anti-Semitic threats on a synagogue or singles out a victim who will be “made an example of.” A second motivation is more elemental: The perpetrator lashes out against targets because he fears or despises the group to which they belong. In both cases, specific targets are selected based on their putative group characteristics. A different form of motivation is a desire to elevate one’s esteem in the eyes of others or oneself. The gang member who believes that his attacks against other racial groups will command greater status in the eyes of his peers may single out victims on account of their race, even if he harbors no special racial hatred (Levin & McDevitt 1993). Whether this kind of other-directed hate crime satisfies the definition has direct bearing on the classification of many incidents involving juveniles, who often protest that their conduct was a prank rather than a manifestation of hatred toward the target group.

These practical concerns loom large when considering the issue of motive. Even under ideal circumstances motivation is often difficult to discern. While it is tempting to rely on extrinsic evidence of bigoted motivation—e.g., the perpetrator hurled racial epithets during the attack or has a history of bigoted statements and conduct—one can never pin down motivation with certainty. Racial epithets might be exchanged during an altercation not because an assault was racially motivated but because name-calling is simply the parlance of violent struggle. A perpetrator’s history of racial hatred is relevant but nonetheless circumstantial evidence. In sum, the task of establishing empirical criteria for discerning motivation is as complex and difficult as that of formulating persuasive definitions.

## Synthesis

Faced with so much conceptual uncertainty, it is tempting for scholars to regard the very notion of hate crime as specious—an outgrowth of “identity politics” rather than a serious object of inquiry (cf. Jacobs & Potter 1998). To be sure, it is difficult, if not impossible, to adjudicate among the competing definitions on purely conceptual grounds without imposing a series of rather arbitrary stipulations. Still, a great many conceptual issues can be reexpressed as empirical questions. Imagine, for example, that researchers develop a statistical model describing the causes of hate crime. To what extent are the quantitative results affected when they expand or contract the definition’s scope? That is, how do the results change when cases of hate crime are admitted or dropped depending on different criteria concerning motivation, unlawful conduct, or target groups? If results are consistent across different definitions (cf. Krueger & Pischke 1997; Green & Rich 1998), one may conclude that definitional issues do not bear directly on the question of how hate crime covaries with other variables. On the contrary, if results do vary with definition, then a further empirical question is whether these patterns of change are interpretable theoretically. Finding that “ordinary” white-on-black murders have different predictors than corresponding racially motivated homicides suggests that hate crime has its own special characteristics. By the same token, finding that black-on-white hate crime has different correlates from white-on-black hate crime suggests the importance of distinguishing between majority and minority perpetrators. This inductive approach does not resolve questions of definition but transforms them into issues that themselves become part of the research process.

## THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF HATE CRIME

### General Typology

The ambiguities and debates surrounding the definition of hate crime are reflected in the competing theoretical explanations of this phenomenon. Varying explanations for hate-motivated crime reflect different elements of the possible definitions, alternatively emphasizing, for example, the circumstances of criminal acts, the sources and translation of motivations, or the sociocultural construction of hate targets. Any typology of hate crime theories must distinguish between two broad levels of analysis: individual and societal.

Individual-level analyses seek to understand the psychological causes that impel people to commit hate crimes. Sometimes these causes are sought in enduring psychological orientations or propensities; in other cases, hate crime is said to arise because individuals with certain kinds of beliefs and aversions find themselves in situations where these psychological attributes are brought to the fore. In contrast to individual-level analyses, macrosociological theories focus attention on broad social forces, such as modernization, integration, or economic downturn, that may lead to a surge in aggregate rates of hate crime. Just as Durkheim (1951)

proffered an etiological analysis of suicide by constructing suicide as a “social fact” and looked for the sociostructural correlates of suicide rates without regard for the circumstances and personal profiles of individual suicides (i.e., their morphology), the second, sociological approach to hate crime seeks to establish the social, economic, and political conditions favorable to the proliferation of individual hate crimes. Not surprisingly, given the extreme difficulty of studying hate crime (or suicide) by tracking individuals over time and recording their behavior, most theoretical accounts of hate crime adopt this societal level of analysis.

Although researchers do not always state their theoretical premises explicitly and often combine perspectives into multicausal narrative accounts, it is possible to identify at least six general types of explanation for hate crime: (a) psychological, (b) social-psychological, (c) historical-cultural, (d) sociological, (e) economic, and (f) political. Our classification of different researchers and explanations within this rather coarse typology is meant to indicate the variety of approaches and competing potential hypotheses for continuing hate crime research. We briefly delineate the theoretical approaches subsumed within these six types before considering some theoretical syntheses.

### **Psychological Traits**

Most theoretical accounts of hate crime assume a necessary psychological cause, since leading definitions of hate crime presuppose individual hostility toward the victim’s social group. Individual-level psychological accounts of hate crime, however, limit themselves to the analysis of the cognitive and affective processes by which perpetrators identify their victims, generate hostility, and become disposed to aggression and violence. This approach both defines and explains hate crime as an extreme or disproportionate form of prejudice (Kleg 1993; Roberts 1995) and usually draws on Allport (1954), according to which the common cognitive shorthand of stereotyping coupled with affective disorders, ranging from frustration to guilt avoidance, projection, and paranoia, pushes individuals to acts of discrimination, ranging from avoidance to insults, assault, and extermination. Theories of authoritarian personalities (Adorno et al, 1950; Altmeyer 1981) elaborate this model of hate crime by characterizing the psychological attributes and formative experiences of individuals most liable to resort to prejudiced violence (Maaz 1991; Heitmeyer 1992; Hopf et al., 1995; Modena 1998; see also the discussion of Pfeiffer in Sharma 1999). Although the idea that a particular personality profile can identify hate crime perpetrators appeals to journalists as well as educators, social workers, and police, individual psychological accounts do not suffice, for as attitudinal surveys confirm (Green et al., 1999), hate criminals may have authoritarian tendencies, but only a small subset of authoritarians are hate criminals.

### **Social-Psychological Explanations**

To get at the sufficient causes of hate crime, social-psychological theories seek to identify not only the source of potentially violent prejudicial orientations but

also the circumstances under which they will express themselves. Models of small group dynamics suggest how contagion, conformism, extremification of attitudes, disinhibition, and yearning for group acceptance can all conspire to push a person to acts of hate crime (Böhnisch & Winter 1993; Erb 1993; Willems et al, 1993; Watts 1996; Rieker 1997; Wahl 1997). Accounts of hate crime committed by members of white supremacist groups, in particular, tend to attribute this behavior to peer-group pressure (Kleg 1993, p. 182) or group norms (Hamm 1994b). Ethnographic studies emphasize the power of community norms (e.g. Rieder 1985; Suttles 1972) or racist youth subcultures (e.g. Sichrovsky 1993; Frindte et al., 1996) as forces that legitimate and encourage attacks against out-groups.

Other social-psychological approaches focus on the interplay between psychological orientations and broader societal influences. European scholars in particular attribute a significant causal role to the electronic and print media. Not only does media coverage of hate crime, particularly sensationalist coverage of spectacular events, allegedly have a demonstration effect that can produce a hate crime contagion (Esser & Brosius 1995, 1996), the media can also instigate hate crime by formulating, propagating, and legitimating stereotypes about potential target populations. Linguistic, semiotic, and communications analysts stress the role of the media in creating meaning and hence the motives for hate crime (Weiss 1993; Scheffer 1997; Jäger & Kretschmer 1998). Political scientists emphasize the media's dissemination of hate-mongering political discourse produced by elites, parties, and other organized groups (Leenen 1995; Karapin 1996; Koopmans 1996). The media, it is argued, make possible politicians' cynical manipulation and exacerbation of existing racist or homophobic sentiments for electoral ends (Thränhardt 1995; von Trotha 1995).

## Historical-Cultural Accounts

An emphasis on political discourse also characterizes historical-cultural explanations of hate crime, although from the latter perspective discourse is not subject to short-term manipulation. Instead, political discourse and political culture as well as propensities for hate crime are rooted in longstanding, if not immutable, cultural traditions and patterns of behavior. Thus, for example, one Canadian scholar suggests that the lower rate of violent hate crime in his country relative to the structurally similar United States is attributable to Canada's history as a "peaceable kingdom" with a tradition of deference to authority (Ross 1992, p. 94). Indeed, the very manner in which societies define and debate hate crime depends on their political-cultural traditions, so that a similar occurrence might be termed a racial incident in Britain, an attack on republican values in France, and a problem with refugee policy in Germany. Although historical-cultural explanations seldom, if ever, succeed in demonstrating causality, they nonetheless gain plausibility in light of striking and consistent differences in rates of hate crime between similar societies (cf. Koopmans 1996), assuming of course that these differences are not artifacts of reporting criteria and data collection.

In the wake of Germany's hate crime wave in the 1990s, historical and cultural arguments predictably dominated both journalistic and academic explanations. Although serious scholarship discounted the claim that outbreaks of racist violence and the resurgence of the far right marked the simple revival of Nazism (Merkl & Weinberg 1997; Prowe 1997), social scientists and social critics did link contemporary right-wing extremism and xenophobic violence to the Nazi past by way of an on-going national identity crisis exacerbated by reunification in 1990 (Tuttle 1994; von Trotha 1995; McFalls 1997).

### **Sociological Accounts**

Similar to broad historical-cultural explanations in their abstraction away from individual incidents of hate crime are sociological explanations that draw on classic Durkheimian modernization theory. These accounts treat hate crime as a variant of youth violence and delinquency, phenomena attributable to the ravages of rapid social change. Hate crime results alternatively from an anomic outburst of socially disintegrated individuals or from the solidaristic reaction of a threatened community or group. In either case, hate crime is the work of collective or individual losers of modernization. This model enjoyed prominence in Germany before unification (Heitmeyer 1987) and seemed to win confirmation with the outburst of racist violence in eastern Germany after 1990. Indeed, modernization theory dominated postcommunist transformation studies of the former German Democratic Republic (Habermas 1990) in part because it offered a parsimonious and plausible explanation for antiforeigner hostility: Economic dislocation, the breakdown of social norms and authority, and unprecedented social and spatial mobility coincided with an upsurge in racist hate crime (Heitmeyer 1992; Boers et al., 1994; Hagan et al., 1995; Willems 1995; Watts 1996).

While the radical and rapid changes of postcommunist transformation suggest a temporally and spatially unique explanation for hate crime, another variant of modernization theory aspires to universal validity. "Globalization," or an unprecedented international circulation of goods, services, people, and ideas, allegedly represents a qualitative leap in modernization, the consequences of which in developed societies include the social and economic exclusion of the unskilled and undereducated as well as their easy identification as scapegoats in the growing migrant population. Such a theoretical perspective at least implicitly underpins much of the empirical research linking antiforeigner violence to immigration and unemployment rates (Alber 1994; Krell et al., 1996; Chapin 1997; McLaren 1999).

### **Economic Accounts**

Although an emphasis on social change links the two, sociological theories of hate crime stress the anomie engendered by social disintegration, whereas economic theories see the roots of hate crime in displaced frustration and competition for material resources. Raper's (1933) observation that antiblack lynchings and cotton prices were inversely correlated was interpreted by Hovland & Sears (1940) to

mean that Southern whites displaced the frustrations caused by economic downturns onto vulnerable racial targets. The theme of frustration and unmet economic needs figures prominently in Pinderhughes's (1993) ethnographic study of hate crime perpetrators in New York City and remains a prominent explanation for hate crime in general (Hamm 1994b).

The link between macroeconomic downturn and hate crime has also been interpreted as an outgrowth of intergroup competition for scarce economic resources. In their investigation of lynching patterns over time, Tolnay & Beck (1995) contend that "whites attacked when they believed that blacks were threatening their privileged access to ... society's scarce resources" (1995, p. 59). Realistic group conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell 1972), which argues that hostilities arise from power differentials among groups, has prompted several recent attempts to gauge the connection between economic hardship in postunification Eastern Germany and the proliferation of racist attitudes and acts there (Legge 1996; Krueger & Pischke 1997; McLaren 1999). Although realistic group conflict theory instructs researchers to look for connections between sources of economic contention and hate crime, it leaves open a variety of core empirical questions. Which dimensions of economic competition (jobs, housing, education) matter? Should one expect an established group to attack preemptively when a challenging group is small and weak, or when the dominant group is on the verge of losing its numerical or power advantage (cf. Green et al., 1998b, p. 373-78)? The subjective perception of "realistic" conflict may well depend on whether frustrations are made salient and mobilized by political elites and interest groups (Olzak 1989; Green et al., 1998a).

## Political Accounts

Political theories of hate crime seek to explain the mobilization of grievances—whether rooted in frustration, fear, or disdain. One political explanation of hate crime draws on social movement theory to argue that beyond the strength of their particular real or imagined grievances toward their victims, hate criminals are moved to act on the basis of the "political opportunity structure," i.e., the availability of channels to express grievances, the legitimacy of grievances within public and political discourse, and the likelihood of prevention or punishment of hate-motivated crimes (Karapin 1996; Koopmans 1996).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Another political theory of hate crime considers it not a social phenomenon that may be facilitated by political circumstances but rather a political movement per se. This conception of hate crime, however, derives from definitional confusion. Outside the United States in particular, the term hate crime is practically synonymous with extreme right-wing violence, and (as a glance at the titles in the bibliography below illustrates) an assimilation of the two phenomena often occurs. Thus, many researchers implicitly posit that hate crime arises from the prevalence and strength of racist attitudes and ideology in the population at large (Heitmeyer 1992; Frindte et al., 1996; Watts 1996; Esses et al., 1998), and some simply assume, contrary to empirical evidence, that racist violence is necessarily the work of

These arguments lead to divergent explanations of the wave of antifoignier violence in postreunification Germany. One account attributes xenophobic violence to the absence of a legitimate electoral outlet, that is, an organized right-wing political party akin to the French National Front (Koopmans 1996, p. 207). Other researchers ascribe the surge in xenophobic violence to inflammatory statements by politicians who appeared to condone racist violence (Leenen 1995; Karapin 1996) and to the timidity, incompetence, or racist complicity of the police and courts (Weitekamp et al., 1996; Hess 1997; Ireland 1997; Müller-Münch 1998). A more synoptic account of how politics engenders hate crime must therefore distinguish the cathartic effects of opportunity from the amplifying effects of elite encouragement.

## Theoretical Syntheses

Recurrent among the aforementioned theories are the themes of competition-bred grievance, the salience of group-related discord, and normalization of violence against out-groups. Synthesizing these perspectives means integrating structural and social-psychological approaches. While structural perspectives suggest potential sources of intergroup friction, social-psychological investigation illuminates the manner in which macrosociological phenomena are apprehended and transformed into behavioral proclivities. Surprisingly few researchers, however, have drawn on both objective conditions and subjective interpretation in constructing theories specific to hate crime. One exception is Hamm (1994b), who integrates psychological, communicational, sociological, and political variables in his “modified deterrent vicarious social control theory,” but at the cost of excluding most hate crimes, which are not the work of organized ideological groups. Similarly, Koopmans’ (1996) and Karapin’s (1996) applications of social movement theory to the rise of racist and right-wing violence in Western Europe in the early 1990s combine real and perceived grievances with objectively as well as subjectively constructed opportunity structures. These models, though, seem inapplicable to the day-to-day hate crimes that occur in times or places outside the purview of any identifiable social movement.

A more broadly applicable theoretical synthesis is offered by Green et al (1998b), whose multicausal “defended-neighborhoods” model endeavors to explain both spectacular hate crime waves, such as the one that appeared to follow the massive influx of refugees into Germany in the early 1990s (Aronowitz

organized and ideologically informed Skinhead gangs or neo-Nazi thugs. Although he distinguishes between hate crime in general and the particular forms of it associated with groups such as Skinheads, neo-Nazis, or the Ku Klux Klan, Hamm (1993, 1994b,c) proposes a theoretical model of hate crime that applies only to its organized, ideological form. Hamm defends his narrow conceptualization of hate crime on the grounds that “neo-Nazi skinheads are responsible for the most egregious acts of violence in the world today” (1994c, p. 175), but in doing so he leaves the overwhelming majority of hate crimes beyond the purview of his theory.

1994), and the consequences of the movement of Asians into London's East End (Bowling 1994) and similar population flows in American cities. Like realistic group conflict theory, the defended neighborhood hypothesis postulates that interracial violence results from demographic movement in which the arrival of members of a different group prompts the violent response of the homogenous, locally dominant group. This "defensive" or exclusionary action does not, however, follow mechanistically from the power differential between the dominant and challenging groups but from the belief anchored in the collective identity of the established group that the in-migrating group threatens its status, well-being, or way of life. Since it incorporates subjective motives, the defended-neighborhood model predicts that hate crime against members of the arriving group will be greatest at the beginning of a sudden influx, not because the newcomers' greater numbers later on alter the local balance of power in their favor but because social learning changes the "host" group's collective identity and values. In other words, as familiarity defuses contempt and communities redefine their identity to include new members, the hostility that greeted the first significant group of newcomers gives way to acceptance or indifference, and those prone to violence lose the active encouragement or passive acceptance of their community.

As presented by Green et al (1998b), the defended-neighborhoods perspective incorporates many, but not all, of the central perspectives described here. Notably absent is a discussion of politics. A more general model could incorporate the role of elites in defining which boundaries must be defended, which outsiders must be excluded, and what forms of exclusion are permissible. When viewed in historical perspective, the form and frequency of hate crime seems closely connected to elite behavior; one cannot understand the advent and decline of lynching, for example, without reference to the tacit (and sometimes active) support of public officials (Finkelman 1992).

## **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The empirical investigation of the causes of hate crime remains a science in its infancy. Although a relatively large literature exists on the jurisprudence of hate crime legislation (e.g. Greenspan & Levitt 1993; Ross 1994; Jacobs & Potter 1998; Lawrence 1999), on law enforcement (e.g. Taylor 1991; Roberts 1995), and on patterns, rates, and effects of victimization (e.g. D'Augelli 1992; Barnes & Ephross 1994; Herek et al., 1997; Craig 1999), little rigorous empirical work on the causes of hate crime in North America and Western Europe has been published. To be sure, the outburst of xenophobic violence in Germany in the 1990s gave impetus to the international and occasionally comparative investigation of hate crime, yet, as we see below, not much conclusive evidence has emerged, in part due to the persistent absence of reliable, consistent, and disaggregated statistical data. Most published work consists of speculative historical narratives that adduce evidence

for a particular explanation of hate crime on the basis of journalistic accounts and aggregated statistics provided by government agencies or victims' advocacy groups. We mentioned and cited much of this literature in the previous section. The remaining empirical studies can be classified as either (a) descriptive studies, (b) morphological investigations, (c) attitudinal surveys, (d) media analyses, or (e) ecological or etiological studies.

## Data Quality

Antecedent to any causal explanation of hate crime must be its documentation. In addition to the publications of organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, Klanwatch, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, many scholarly and journalistic accounts describe and denounce incidents of hate crime, occasionally with language that betrays a greater concern with normative than with methodological issues. The sometimes lurid and sensationalist quality of this work has invited skeptics to criticize unsubstantiated claims about trends and epidemics (Jacobs & Heney 1996), but both the reports and the criticism surrounding them have contributed to scholarship on hate crime by impelling public authorities to devote resources to data collection.

In Germany, for example, the federal government did not provide a monthly report on xenophobic crimes by type and state until pressured by the parliamentary questions of a civil rights activist legislator and her publication of journalistic chronologies of hate crime (Jelpke 1993). Journalistic reports have also served as the basis for attempts to construct statistical descriptions of hate crime patterns where official statistics do not exist, are unreliable, or have only recently been collected (Ross 1992; Karapin 1996; Krueger & Pischke 1997). The latter conditions unfortunately apply virtually everywhere. In the United States, federal law requires the Federal Bureau of Investigation to collect hate crime statistics on an annual basis, but the Bureau is reliant on the voluntary compliance of state and local jurisdictions, each of which has different reporting standards. Many US states supply no information. In Germany, where federal statistics appear to be consistent and complete, the definition of antifoiegnier crimes has changed over the 1990s, and nothing guarantees consistent reporting standards across jurisdictions (Boyd et al., 1996). As a result, hate crime researchers are at a loss to make trustworthy comparisons of hate crime rates across jurisdiction. The same argument applies as well to comparisons across victim groups, since different types of victims may have different propensities to report incidents to police (Comstock 1991).

Somewhat more reliable, though hardly unproblematic, are comparisons within a single jurisdiction (Bowling 1993). If the jurisdiction is studied longitudinally, one must assume that the rate at which incidents are reported remains constant over time. This requirement rules out the use of data from newly created data collection agencies. For example, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations reported 4 racially motivated and 26 religiously motivated hate crimes when its data gathering efforts began in 1981; by 1989, with both increasing public

awareness of hate crime and improved police reporting procedures, these numbers had risen to 167 and 125 (Los Angeles County Comm. Hum. Relat. 1990, p. 2). An implication of this pattern is that the institutional development of monitoring agencies may give rise to spurious trends.

Several recent studies have employed cross-sectional and longitudinal comparison within jurisdiction for specific target groups. Green et al. (1998b) examined racially motivated hate crime in 51 communities of New York City, using data gathered by the New York Police Department (NYPD) for the period 1987-1995. Green & Rich (1998) studied cross burnings at the county level in North Carolina for the period 1987-1993, using data gathered by two different hate crime monitoring organizations. The most ambitious attempt to measure cross-sectional variation in hate crime is Green et al (2001), who use a multi-method, multi-trait design. Hate crime against gay men and lesbians is measured using both NYPD data and reports gathered by the Anti-Violence Project, while both census and market research data are used to assess gay and lesbian population density. Heartening to those who lament the problems of obtaining reliable hate crime reports is the central finding of this study: Despite the fact that the Anti-Violence Project and the NYPD have different reporting procedures, apply different definitions of hate crime, and report total numbers of incidents directed against gay men that differ by a factor of six, the correlation between their respective accounts of hate crime by zip code ( $n = 161$ ) is a remarkable 0.97. When citywide hate crime figures are analyzed on a monthly basis for the period January 1994-December 1995, the correlation between the two measures is 0.62 (Green et al., 2001).

The fact that different data sources paint a similar picture of cross-sectional and longitudinal variation within jurisdiction is grounds for more optimism than hate crime researchers are accustomed to showing. Before summarizing the descriptive literature, however, we hasten to point out that many forms of comparison remain problematic. One cannot, for example, compare victimization rates across target groups unless one is prepared to make the strong assumption that victims in both groups are equally likely to make their experiences known to reporting agencies, and that these agencies are equally assiduous about recording these events. Similarly, we must be skeptical when drawing inferences from the reported frequency with which hate crime takes the form of assault, vandalism, or threats, because different types of crime may have different likelihoods of being reported. Only in those rare cases where hate crime statistics are gathered using substantially different methodologies (e.g., police reports and probability surveys) can we begin to relax some of these concerns.

## **Descriptive Studies**

Much of the hate crime literature centers on the frequency with which hate crime occurs. Many studies of gay and lesbian populations, for example, seek to describe the nature, frequency, and psychological repercussions of victimization. These researchers generally agree that criminal victimization and non-criminal harassment of gay men and lesbians are both widespread and underreported to authorities,

and that the psychological correlates of victimization (including anger, anxiety, depression, and fear) are more severe and longer-lasting among victims of hate crime than among victims of non-bias-related incidents (Barnes & Ephross 1994; D'Augelli 1992; Herek et al., 1997, 1999; Hershberger & D'Augelli 1994; Otis & Skinner 1996).

As critics of this research note (Jacobs & Potter 1998), such studies rarely make use of probability samples, and to the extent that the data are gathered as part of a community event or by dissemination of the survey instrument through personal networks (D'Augelli 1992; Herek et al., 1997, 1999), respondents who have victimization experiences to report may be disproportionately likely to participate. Probability samples, however, suffer from measurement uncertainties of their own. In a few instances, random samples of the public have been asked whether they have been victimized or whether hate crimes have occurred in their county (*Los Angeles Times* Poll 1993a,b, Institute for Social Research 1995). The problem with these studies is that respondents are as likely to recall an event occurring during the past year as during the past five years, and younger respondents are significantly more likely than older respondents to report having been victimized at some time during their lives. A more effective measurement strategy may be to ask respondents to recall specific experiences with crime and then ask whether these crimes might have been motivated by bigotry (Bowling 1994; but see Herek et al., 1997).

In general, it is difficult to draw rigorous comparisons between hate crimes and corresponding conventional crimes. One of the rare efforts to compare the two systematically is Garofalo's (1991) study of police reports in New York City. Matching racially motivated hate crimes to conventional crimes of similar description committed on the same day, Garofalo found that hate crimes were more likely to involve multiple offenders and victims and to occur between strangers and in public places, and that both victims and perpetrators of racially motivated crimes were more often young and male than those in the matched set of non-bias-related crimes.

Broad comparisons between hate crime and conventional crime are complicated by the fact that different types of victims tend to report different types of crime to police (McDevitt et al., 2000). One of the more interesting and consistent patterns to emerge from official reports is illustrated by Illinois' summary of its hate crimes for 1997-1998. The state reports that 42% of the 368 antiblack hate crimes were assaults, compared with 32% of the anti-Jewish ( $n = 38$ ) and 63% of the antigay/antilesbian incidents ( $n = 117$ ) (Illinois State Police 1997, 1998). Whether hate crimes directed against gay/lesbian victims indeed are more likely to involve violence or whether factors that inhibit reporting in general (Comstock 1991; Herek et al., 1999) also censor reporting of nonviolent incidents remains an open research question.

## Studies of Perpetrators

Biographies of individual criminals and ethnographies of racist groups and sub-cultures offer a reconstruction of the motives and circumstances, or morphology,

of hate crimes. In the United States, urban ethnographers have described incidents of racial violence and tension in the context of local identity and status issues, thus lending credence to the defended-neighborhoods hypothesis (Rieder 1985; De Sena 1990). In a test of his domestic terrorism theory of hate crime, Hamm (1993, 1994b) conducted an original and daring ethnography of the nationwide neo-Nazi skinhead subculture by tracking down and securing interviews with 36 violent skinheads. For Germany, a large corpus of published interviews and in-depth biographical and social milieu studies exists (Erb 1993; Sichrovsky 1993; Engel & Menke 1995; Hopf et al., 1995; Ross 1996; Bitzan 1997; Müller 1997; Müller-Münch 1998). These studies tend to stress the arbitrary or accidental nature of involvement with a racist milieu; the importance of family dynamics, youth rebellion, and peer-group pressure; the absence of strong ideological commitment; and a resistance to formal organization. They thus echo the more compelling findings of a quantitative analysis of perpetrators of xenophobic crimes and violence, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Women and Youth (Willems et al., 1993). Based on 1398 police reports and 53 court decisions involving 148 suspects, this report concluded that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators were teenaged boys with relatively low scholastic achievement but not unemployed or from broken families or marginalized social milieus; that they had little ideological or political consciousness; that their criminal acts were collective but unplanned, arising from a group dynamic of drinking, listening to racist music, and discussing sensational media reports; and that they felt justified in their behavior by prevailing community and national attitudes toward foreigners. While neither representative of all the cases of German hate crime where no arrest was made (i.e., the overwhelming majority) nor specific enough to predict when and where more antiforeigner violence could erupt, these findings did cast doubt on arguments based on modernization and deprivation theories.

Similar conclusions emerge from other surveys of hate crime perpetrators. Green et al (1999) conducted a probability survey of North Carolina adults, with an oversample of names that had appeared in newspapers in connection with hate crimes. The 14 alleged perpetrators interviewed resembled other whites under age 40 in terms of their economic outlook and opinions on matters such as health care. The contrast between the two groups surfaced on questions involving intergroup mixing and cultural encroachment. Hate crime perpetrators were much more likely to endorse a ban on interracial marriage, express discomfort with rap music, and favor restrictions on immigration. Like Franklin (2000), who finds a connection between antipathy toward homosexuality and self-reports of violence directed against gay men in her survey of community college students, Green et al (1999) demonstrate a correlation between bigoted attitudes and behavior. These findings also suggest the importance of situational factors that go unobserved in surveys. Although their statistical analysis successfully distinguishes most hate crime perpetrators from ordinary citizens, based on attitudes, one sixth of their North Carolina sample fits the attitudinal profile of a hate crime perpetrator.

## Attitudinal Studies

Lacking reliable data on hate crime, some scholars have chosen to study attitudes that strike them as correlates of bigoted conduct (Craig 1999; Craig & Waldo 1996). In Germany, a great deal of survey research has been conducted with young people, who are most prone to acts of xenophobic violence. The best known of these studies is the so-called Bielefeld study (Heitmeyer et al., 1992; see also Heitmeyer 1987, 1992) based on a panel study of over 1000 western German youths between 1985 and 1990. It debunks simplistic economic deprivation and competition explanations for extreme right-wing and violence-prone attitudes and instead attributes them to the dynamics of youth identity construction in a context of social disintegration. A nonrandom survey of 1177 eastern German youths in 18 schools in Thuringia arrived at a similar conclusion, though its authors note that the social profile of youths with extreme right-wing attitudes does not correspond to that of perpetrators of right-wing violence (Frindte et al., 1996; see also Hagan et al., 1995; Watts 1996).

Since negative stereotypes and feelings of out-group hostility are more widespread than criminal conduct expressing these thoughts and feelings, a large number of studies that purportedly explain hate crime at best supply a partial explanation for individual behavior. At the collective level, the climate of public opinion seems to be weakly associated with the overall rate of hate crime. According to Eurobarometer polling data, for example, Germany did indeed have a relatively high level of xenophobia in the early 1990s, but so did France (Halman 1994), with a rate of xenophobic violence four times lower by one estimate (Koopmans 1996, p. 193). Similarly, while Eastern Germans voice xenophobic opinions marginally more often than do Western Germans (Leenen 1995; Stöss & Niedermayer 1998), rates of xenophobic violence in the early 1990s in the East were easily double or triple those in the West (Sur 1993, Krueger & Pischke 1997). No studies of the United States have looked closely at the aggregate-level correlation between public opinion and hate crime. It is noteworthy that few opinion surveys find a correlation between respondents' tolerance and the racial composition of their cities, counties, and states (Sears et al., 1979; but see Taylor 2000; Fetzer 2000; Oliver & Wong 2000). The absence of a relationship runs counter to the findings of Green et al (1998b), which suggest a strong correlation between racial composition and hate crime. It may be that the units of analysis in these opinion studies are too large to detect this correlation, or it may turn out that the connection between hate crime and public opinion is undercut by the fact that frequently victimized groups tend to gravitate toward more tolerant settings in which to live and work.

## Media Analyses

Precisely because it attracted such spectacular media attention, the German hate crime wave of the 1990s prompted the application of media content analysis to the empirical explanation of hate crime. Temporal peaks and troughs in hate crime incidents and the clustering of peaks around (and shortly after) spectacular events,

such as the pogrom-like attacks on refugee hostels in Hoyerswerda (September 1991) and Rostock (August 1992), or the incendiary murders of Mölln (November 1992) and Solingen (May 1993), suggest that media coverage created a contagion of xenophobic violence if not a climate favorable to its initial outburst. Initial media coverage also influenced the number of subsequently reported incidents. On the basis of a content analysis of the two German national newspapers of reference, Brosius & Eps (1995) show that coverage of the four aforementioned events did shape and distort the media reporting of subsequent events, and several other quantitative time-series analyses demonstrate that both officially and journalistically reported incidents of xenophobic violence soared after key events and with a noticeable replication of types of violence (Quinkert & Jäger 1991; Leenen 1995; Esser & Brosius 1995, 1996; Koopmans 1996; Karapin 1998, 1999). Of these studies, Karapin (1996) comes closest to establishing a statistical link between politicians' hostile statements toward asylum seekers (as reported in the popular, conservative populist *Bild Zeitung*) and subsequent upsurges in racist violence. The very complexity of the causal processes that these media content analyses purport to describe, however, means that they can at best establish some media responsibility for the propagation of xenophobic violence. They cannot isolate the causal weight of factors as divergent as the cultural meanings encoded in mediated messages and the social and psychological conditions of those who receive them and translate them into action.

## **Etiological Studies**

Given the distortions associated with journalistic coverage, newspaper accounts may provide an inadequate database from which to construct longitudinal or cross-sectional measures of hate crime. Yet, if the alternative to faulty newspaper data is government data of arguably lesser quality, it seems sensible to see what journalistic reports suggest about the correlates of hate crime. For example, in the absence of official statistics disaggregated below the state level, Krueger & Pischke (1997) compiled a data set of 1056 antiforeigner incidents of varying types for 543 counties in Eastern and Western Germany, on the basis of reports in over 15 regional and national daily and weekly (but exclusively western) newspapers during the period from January 1991 to June 1993. Krueger & Pischke (1997, p. 206) report that "the incidence of anti-foreigner crime is unrelated to the unemployment rate in an area." If anything, their statistical results suggest that a significant negative association between unemployment rates and hate crime existed in Eastern Germany (1997, p. 201). With respect to demographic composition, Krueger & Pischke find a strong positive relationship between hate crime and size of the foreign proportion of the population in the East but not in the West. This regional contrast is suggestive given the political circumstances in which foreigners settled in the two regions. In December 1990, the newly unified German government initiated a policy whereby new applicants for asylum were settled in the East in proportion to the Eastern states' share of the total German population. Prior to that point, immigration

patterns in East and West Germany had differed considerably, with foreign residents concentrated in the immigrant communities of the West. For the period covered by the Krueger & Pischke study, therefore, the settlement of foreigners in the East resembled something of a natural experiment, in which foreigners were settled exogenously by the government. It is telling that the sudden introduction of foreigners into the East was followed by an explosion of hate crime, particularly in areas where in-migration was most pronounced. Equally interesting, but beyond the scope of the Krueger & Pischke study, is the fact that hate crime declined, after asylum policy was made significantly more restrictive in 1993.

In-migration of outsiders plays a prominent role as well in the study by Green et al (1998b) of communities in New York City. Using the number of hate crimes reported to the police, census reports on demographic change, and unemployment statistics, Green et al report that crimes against Asians, Latinos, and blacks were most frequent in predominantly white areas that had experienced an in-migration of minorities. Consistent with the results of Krueger & Pischke, unemployment rates and other indicators of economic hardship did not correlate with hate crime, nor were there any apparent interactions between unemployment rates and other variables [see also Green & Rich (1998), which shows faint links between unemployment rates and cross burnings].

Evidence of macroeconomic effects becomes more mixed as we turn our attention to time-series analyses. The classic Hovland & Sears (1940) study, which discerned a correlation between lynching and both cotton prices and national economic conditions for the period 1883-1930, has been rejuvenated by scholarship that revisits this data. Using a more precise accounting of lynchings in the deep south, Tolnay & Beck (1995) find a statistical link between cotton prices and lynching, while Hepworth & West (1988), using more sophisticated econometric techniques, detect a link between lynchings and national economic conditions. These findings, however, have come under criticism by Green et al (1998a), who contend that these relationships are sensitive to seemingly innocuous modeling and sampling decisions. For example, when the data set is extended into the early years of the Depression, the relationship between lynching and economic conditions largely disappears.

Time-series analyses using contemporary data also show mixed evidence of economic effects. McLaren (1999) constructs a time-series analysis of official annual statistics on antifoigner crime in Germany for the period 1971-1995. Using annual national unemployment and foreign population as predictors, she finds that unemployment correlated with hate crime only in interaction with an increase in foreign population. These findings contrast with the results reported by Green et al (1998a), who analyze the monthly unemployment rates and hate crime reports in New York City over a 9-year period. Green et al find no apparent link between macroeconomic fluctuations and hate crimes directed at Asians, Latinos, blacks, whites, gays/lesbians, or Jews. It remains unclear whether these contrasting findings arise from differences in setting, data quality, levels of aggregation, or the time period under consideration.

## CONCLUSION

The dearth of hate crime research reflects both the newness of the topic and the difficulty of assembling reliable information. To a degree unusual in behavioral science, researchers are highly dependent on statistics compiled by government and watchdog organizations. The ambiguous and contested nature of hate crime means that these groups paint different pictures of who is victimized and with what frequency. In most jurisdictions, the effort expended to gather hate crime data is at best perfunctory. Thus, unlike the sociological investigation of conventional crime, the study of hate crime is not propelled by a steady stream of new data. Moreover, the absence of a data-gathering infrastructure means that when new developments occur, such as the surge in German hate crime in 1992, researchers are unable to track spatial and cross-temporal patterns. Ideally, hate crime data collection would be a continuous process that relies on multiple data sources, such as official reports, victimization surveys, and ethnographic investigation.

The study of hate crime would also profit from a clearer distinction between incidence and risk. Presently, research focuses almost entirely on incidence (the number of attacks of a given type that are directed against a certain type of victim). The literature pays relatively little attention to risk (the probability that a given behavior by a certain category of victim will result in a hate crime). For example, gay men are frequently attacked in relatively tolerant “gay neighborhoods” rather than in neighborhoods known to be hostile to them. Yet, the risk to men who hold hands in a hostile neighborhood is much greater. Following the lead of unobtrusive investigations of discrimination, studies of hate crime should endeavor to map the propensity for bigoted violence. As this is difficult and dangerous work, a useful starting point would be to examine reactions to undercover officers who, as part of their police work, pose as members of various victim groups. This behavior simulates a natural experiment in which potential hate crime perpetrators are confronted with exogenous intrusions into their environment.

Suggestions such as these may seem a bit outlandish, but it is difficult to imagine how the study of hate crime will progress without creative new approaches to data collection and research design. To date, research has largely been descriptive and exploratory. The challenge is to use the emergent hypotheses about encroachment, political discourse, and economic dislocation to guide the manner in which cases are sampled and studied. To what extent, and under what political conditions, did the severe economic downturn in Asia during the 1990s precipitate hate crime? How will the election of a right-wing government in Austria affect rates of hate crime in that country? How does immigration from the Caribbean, North Africa, and Southern Europe into a racially homogeneous and newly prosperous country such as Ireland affect its rates of hate crime? Only by capitalizing on these and other natural experiments can researchers hope to accumulate knowledge of wide applicability.

Finally, students of hate crime need to attend to the potential linkages to cognate topics, such as genocide, ethnic conflict, and discrimination. These topics overlap

with hate crime. Genocide and ethnic civil war, for example, may be interpreted as extreme instances of hate crime. The topics coincide insofar as the orchestrated violence of genocide and ethnic warfare are accompanied by uncoordinated hate crime. The challenge before hate crime researchers is to demonstrate both conceptually and empirically how hate crimes differ from other manifestations of conflict. In what way are the causal forces that precipitate hate crime different from those that lead to other forms of bigoted conduct?

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