Homophobic Sexist Violence in Canada

Trends in the Experiences of Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Canada

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L'auteure examine ce qui a été écrit sur la prévalence et la nature de la violence homophobique et sexiste subie par les gais, les lesbiennes, les bisexuelles, les trans du Canada, ainsi que ceux et celles que l'on associe à ces groupes. L'auteure a réalisé un sondage auprès de 1,068 personnes, dans lequel elle a tenté d'évaluer s'il y avait lieu, la corrélation entre la violence homophobique et la race et le genre.

Although homophobic sexist violence is now widely recognized as a serious problem in Canada, social science data concerning the prevalence and consequences of such crimes is limited. In the present study, questionnaire data about victimization experiences were collected from three grassroots Canadian studies including 1,068 self-identified lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, heterosexuals, and queers (593 males, 475 females) in three provinces (Ontario, Alberta, and New Brunswick).

In this paper, patterns of female victimization from the surveys and scales of victimization are reviewed. Methodological and substantive issues in empirical research on homophobic violence are discussed. Rich qualitative data is provided on the experiences of female victims, coping mechanisms, reporting experiences and the impact of fear of potential violence. This work contributes to the literature on the prevalence and nature of homophobic sexist violence experienced by Canadian women.

Using survey data from a convenience sample of 475 women who self selected their involvement in three community-based studies of anti-gay/lesbian violence, the varieties of gendered victim experiences of heterosexed violence are described. In analyzing the qualitative data from the Toronto, Calgary and Fredericton studies I hope to contribute to our knowledge about patterns of homophobic sexist victimization. This exploratory research also attempts to assess whether there is a relationship between homophobic violence and gender and race.

Conceptualizing Homophobic Sexist Violence

Within the last decade there has been an attempt to go beyond conceptualizing gay male victimization along a continuum with male-on-male violence to the exclusion of analyses that focus on women's experiences of lesbophobic sexist violence. Lack of analysis of the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality allows researchers to ignore the complex nature of violence directed toward individuals and queer communities. This theoretical exclusion blinds North American research on anti-gay and anti-lesbian violence to the influences of misogyny, racism and heterosexism in the social construction of gay bashing. For example, North American researchers attempt to explain undifferentiated heterosexual male violence through the lenses of relative deprivation, labelling theory, differential association theory, power-control theory, cultural and psychological heterosexism, masculine hegemony and alienation without attention to women's experiences of homophobic and sexist crime (Comstock; Herek and Berrill; Berrill; Wert-heimer; Ehlrich; Samis). The focus on explaining male-on-male violence limits an explanation of diverse experiences of homophobic violence. Instead, they focus on theories of masculinity and crime that have been applied to all male-centric research on male crime since the beginning of academic crime research. At the same time, the gendered nature of previous criminological research on men is little acknowledged. As a result, anti-gay violence research does not consider how violence impacts on women as women and as lesbian women; nor does it consider how race/ethnicity deeply impacts on the experience of homophobic and sexist violence. North American researchers tend to let the statistics on race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, speak for themselves, while at the same time expanding on the experience of gay men, with the assumption that to do so speaks for

everyone in the sample. For example, Kevin T. Berrill suggests that sexism is the cause of anti-gay/lesbian violence, yet does not expand on this proposition in his analysis of statistics on anti-gay/lesbian violence. The deconstruction of this trend lies in feminist examinations of the androcentric nature of research on gay bashing (Jenness and Broad; Wolf and Copeland). According to Valerie Jenness and Kendall Broad the political context in which knowledge about homophobic violence is produced influences the ways in which we think about bias-motivated crime. The negligible analysis of gender and race in anti-queer violence activism supports the denial of the most pervasive form of anti-woman violence, as well as the reality of patriarchal and sexist oppression.

In a patriarchal and misogynistic culture the continuum of violence toward women is expressed in forms ranging from sexist language and harassment, to explosions of violence such as rape, assault, battery and murder. Although such violence is traditionally seen as intimate and personal, it is systematically reproduced through mainstream institutions that reinforce sexism. The omission of gender in the definition of bias-motivated hate crimes reflects the fact that even when violence against women is understood to be a pervasive form of hate violence, it remains ill-defined and often invisible except in feminist analyses. It is this definitional exclusion that affects the ways in which gender-based victimization and murder is conceptualized or not conceptualized as homophobic sexist violence. The exclusion of female gender, as well as racial and ethnic difference in the anti-gay/lesbian violence literature supports this conceptual exclusion (Jenness and Broad 419). This theoretical exclusion runs through most of the anti-gay/lesbian violence research to date. The gaps in the existing research needs therefore to be reassessed to consider the exclusion of crime motivated by gender hatred in the analysis of women's experience of homophobic sexist violence.

Throughout the articles written by and for women one finds a move away from the pathology or psychology of the perpetrator to a focus on the elements supporting systemic hatred of lesbian and bisexual women. In particular, the specificity of lesbian and bisexual women's experiences of anti-lesbian violence is analyzed. Rather than stressing the symbolism that underpins homophobic behaviour, feminists point to systemic issues that support anti-lesbian violence. Carole Ruthchild argues that: "violence against gay men and lesbians is a systemic issue" (1). Ruthchild believes that while violence against lesbians and gay men is often the result of individual choice, these choices are supported "in response to signals which exist throughout society and which are universally understood. Such signals suggest that lesbians and gay men do not deserve the same degree of respect as heterosexual members of the community" (1). Instead, Ruthchild deconstructs the systemic biases at work in societies which uphold and sanction gay-bashing in its many forms through law, heterosexual privilege, patriarchal origins of society and the centrality of procreative marriage, resistance and backlash in the media, and acts of gay and lesbian bashing murders.

Gail Mason relies heavily on feminist frameworks to explain the phenomenon of what she terms heterosexed violence. She sees both similarities and differences between violence condoned against gay men and lesbians and violence experienced by heterosexual women and lesbian women. Mason stresses the importance of locating violence against lesbians within the conceptual framework used to explain violence against women in general. She asks what heterosexed violence looks like by exploring the typicality and specificity of anti-lesbian violence, uncovering ambiguities in the stories victims have to tell. For example, many of the women she interviewed stress the difficulty in assessing whether they are victims due to their gender or their sexuality. She therefore thinks that violence against lesbians and bisexual women must be examined in a "wider contextual framework than that offered by the notion of anti-homosexual violence" (1997: 22).

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Mason conceptualizes anti-lesbian violence along a continuum of violence against women in general. She thinks that lesbians as homosexuals and women constitute a double positioning occupying a distinctive place within a heterosexed culture, so that violence against lesbians is a reaction to a woman's femaleness as well as her suspected lesbianism. Mason stresses the necessity of separating lesbianism from the same framework used to explain male homosexuality because "heterosexism (or homophobia) is a gendered hegemony" (1997: 23).

Classification of violence into discrete categories becomes problem-

atic when the diversity of lesbian experiences cannot be fully explained using a framework that fits male experience of anti-gay violence. A gender-specific knowledge of heterosexism is necessary in order to separate the male experience of heterosexed violence from the female, while at the same time considering similarities. Second, the ethnocentric nature of most anti-gay theory and research it were, marks lesbians and bisexual women in situations not of their choosing. The symbolic stamp, as Mason calls it, leads to an inability to observe anything other than sexuality. The lesbian becomes only lesbian, rendering insignificant other characteristics about her in the frame of public marking. Using the work of Iris Marion Young, Mason suggests that this marking is one of cultural lence that appears to involve antipathy on the part of the perpetrator's toward a particular racial group, to which the victim is assumed to belong" (Mason 2002: 7).

In utilizing a theoretical perspective which emphasizes intersectionality "as a major means of conceptualizing the relation between violence and difference" (Mason 2002: 9), this article attempts to map the

Lesbian women, and those assumed to be, were attacked in restaurants, in laundromats, at parties, in meetings, in bars, in gay and lesbian and straight neighbourhoods, on public transit, in police stations, and in theatres. Women are targets for homophobic sexist violence in ordinary circumstances of work and life.

also needs to be addressed by the concept of specificity. Mason criticizes the notion of a unified subjectivity that makes anti-gay violence seem like a white male phenomenon. She stresses that the interconnections between race, sexuality, and gender need to be explored in order to uncover the specificity of heterosexed violence. Third, Mason focuses on the effects of violence as an ambiguous territory where lesbians who are victimized learn to fear for their safety. Mason sees violence against lesbians as an attempt to intimidate them into staying in the closet and remaining silent (1997: 26). Lesbians tell her that their fear is based in their "sense of vulnerability due to sexual preference and an awareness of a continuum of violence against women" (26).

Another important factor is that constant fear of anti-lesbian violence stops women from openly expressing their sexuality. According to Mason, because of heterosexed hostility, lesbians attempt to make themselves invisible in order to prevent victimization. Mason suggests that the effect of violence is to "mark its subject and expose him or her to the 'trap of invisibility'" to borrow from Foucault, lesbians are "simultaneously invisible, yet marked as other" (1997: 28). This form of public branding, as imperialism in which violent marking imposes sexual desire "as the determining essence of the individual" (1997: 31). Ultimately, then, the closet is an ambiguous place, a place of hiding, but also a place in which one cannot hide when one is branded lesbian. Because sexuality is so heavily focused on in western culture, Mason thinks that attacks on lesbian sexuality should be a concern for all who value their freedom and wish to fight repression in its many forms.

In her later work Mason uses the term homophobia because it is more widely understood and used than the term heterosexism. In adopting the term homophobia she acknowledges that "individual acts of violence can never be separated from the heterosexist culture within which they are situated" (2002: 7). She also uses the term gendered violence:

> Gendered violence refers to the main forms of violence that are committed by heterosexual men towards women, particularly domestic violence, rape, and other forms of sexual assault; such violence is commonly called violence against women or men's violence towards women. (7)

Racist violence: "…refers to violence that appears to involve antipathy on the part of the perpetrator's toward a particular racial group, to which the victim is assumed to belong" (Mason 2002: 7).

gendered and racist violence that lesbians and bisexual women experience. Like Mason, I use homophobia (rather than heterosexism) to describe individual acts of anti-woman violence situated within the wider culture that supports sexism.

Comparison of Surveys

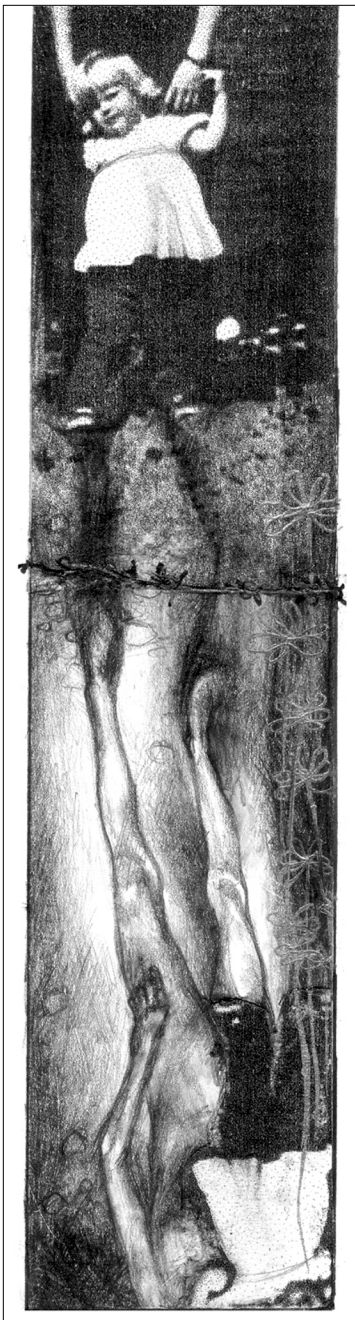
Although sample characteristics, geographic locations, and sampling strategies varied considerably, all of the surveys found harassment and victimization to be widespread. Prevalence estimates for homophobic sexist violence vary widely as a result of differing definitions of violence, data collection methods, and time periods used in different studies. Current estimates from the Toronto, Calgary and Fredericton studies (N=475) indicate that the mean proportion of Canadian women who were verbally harassed during their lifetime due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation was 49.3 per cent; 25.5 per cent were threatened with violence; 11.5 per cent had objects thrown at them; 21.8 per cent had been chased or followed; 9.2 per cent had been spit at; 10.9 per cent had been punched, kicked or beaten; 4.6 per cent had been assaulted with a weapon; 13.6

per cent had property damaged; 25.5 per cent had been sexually harassed; 9.3 per cent had been sexually assaulted; and 8 per cent had been harassed by police (or subject to police misconduct) at least once since the age of sixteen because someone presumed them to be lesbian.

Variations in Victimization: Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences

In all Canadian and in other studies, slight gender differences in rates of victimization are evident. In fact, the numbers often suggest that men and women experience similar lifetime percentages of homophobic sexist victimization. In all Canadian studies of anti-gay/lesbian violence men generally experienced higher percentages of violence in all victimization categories. In studies which over-represented females (such as Toronto and Fredericton) women generally experienced equal or higher rates of sexual harassment, sexual assault, assault with a weapon, attacks by family members and people they know, and reported greater fear of anti-lesbian violence.

In four Canadian studies (Toronto, Halifax, Calgary and Fredericton) women were more likely to provide qualitative data suggesting they experienced greater fear of future victimization and were more likely to modify their behaviour than were men, however, several women commented on modifying their behaviour because they are women facing sexism as well (Faulkner 1997, 2003, 2004; Smith). In order to assess levels of fear within the victim population, participants were asked whether the potential for future victimization due to their sexual orientation affected their behaviour. While women and men reported equal percentages of being somewhat and greatly affected (73.3 per cent women, 73.5 per cent men, 72 per cent transgender) women were by far more likely to provide qualitative data on how they modify their behaviour to prevent attack.



Heather Hicks, "you are a girl," small pencil drawing with collaged elements, 8" x 2.5".

Anti-Trans Violence

The low number of transgender respondents (27 in total)[1] means that the statistics are fairly unreliable in terms of providing a truth about their experience of victimization. However, in the context of this study the fact that transgenderists answered the victimization scale does merit comment. Transgender participants reported experiencing verbal assaults, threats of physical assault, being chased and followed, and sexual harassment. Across Canadian studies, transgendered participants experienced higher percentages of sexual harassment compared to lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women. Comparison of these studies' findings on trans-violence with other anti-gay/lesbian violence studies is limited because transgendered persons have not been asked to identify in most North American hate crime studies. Given the lack of information about anti-trans-violence in Canada more research is needed in this under-studied area.

Racial /Ethnic Differences

While all Canadian studies have asked about the race/ethnicity of respondents, the ethnic identity of female participants was unfortunately uniform. This was most likely the result of convenience sampling. The majority of the Nova Scotia (92 per cent), Toronto (71.7 per cent), Vancouver (86.6 per cent), Calgary (85.7 per cent) and Fredericton (82.6 per cent) respondents identified as Caucasian. In each study the percentages of lifetime occurrences of victimization provided by ethnic minority participants were compared to Caucasians, however, due to the low number of visible minority respondents, the incidences of victimization within each victimization category are not equally weighted and therefore not comparable (Smith; Faulkner 1997, 2003, 2004; Samis). Further research is needed on the combined effects of race and sexuality in visible minority experience of anti-lesbian violence. In this paper I provide information on how participants self-identified their race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation in order to show the range of visible minority experiences.

Knowledge of Attacks on Others and Fear of Victimization

Many of the lesbian and bisexual women and some heterosexual female participants also reported they fear anti-queer harassment and violence and that they anticipate such victimization in the future.

Responses show that over half of the women (56.4 per cent) are somewhat affected by the potential for homophobic sexist violence. For example, women took self-defense classes, avoided certain locations, censored their speech and dress, or avoided contact with friends or lovers in public places. Toronto, Calgary, and Fredericton women used terms such as "fearful," "hesitant," "uncomfortable," "worried," "anxious," "secretive," "angry," "more cautious," "careful," "nervous," "wary," "embarrassed," "defensive," "more covert," "conservative," "constantly alert," "more attentive," and "guarded" to describe their behaviour when they feel they may be at risk because others perceive them to be queer (Faulkner 1997; 1999: 174; 2003; 2004). Transgendered participants are more likely to be greatly affected compared to queer women and men. (24 per cent trans, 16.9 per cent women, 14.6 per cent men).

Thirty-seven percent of women from the Toronto, Calgary and Fredericton studies knew at least one person who had been a victim of anti-gay/lesbian violence compared to 48.5 per cent of men and 2.3 per cent of transgendered participants.

Not Being Openly Lesbian and Bisexual

Toronto, Calgary and Fredericton women said that fear sometimes motivates them to remain totally closeted in every area of their lives or closeted in certain situations. Given that this survey was conducted at Toronto, Calgary, and Fredericton Pride Week events one might expect that most people would be out in many areas of their lives. Many lesbian, bisexual, and some heteroseuxal women make significant efforts to hide their sexual orientation in certain parts of their lives. Women stated that they feel they are forced to deny many aspects of themselves in order to avoid experiencing anti-lesbian harassment or violence: "I hide my orientation. I do not exhibit 'colourful' and obvious or stereotypical behaviour. I live in the closet." (German-Canadian lesbian, Toronto); "It affects how much I am out; how much I relax in public places; who I interact with in public spaces; and how I speak to others to hide my sexuality" (Métis lesbian female, Fredericton).

Closetry

Female participants discussed the covert nature of their sexual orientation. Some stated that while they had previously been out about their sexual orientation, they were now more closeted than openly queer. Some feared that being outed would cost them their jobs, families, children, and social status: "I am not as open about my sexuality. I do not openly admit it as before" (white gay woman, Toronto); "It takes a long time (years sometimes) before I feel I can trust people with any information about my private life" (Caucasian lesbian female, Calgary); "Awareness of the possibility of anti-gay/lesbian violence or harassment has delayed me coming out." (Caucasian lesbian female, Fredericton, New Brunswick); "My partner is transgendered. We are very closeted. We also have two children and have fears for their well-being" (Caucausian heterosexual female, Fredericton, New Brunswick).

Public Displays of Affection

Female participants reported that they limit public displays of emotion and affection such as kissing, hugging, and hand-holding because of fear of their own victimization and fear for the safety of their lovers or friends: "I am afraid to be affectionate with my lover in public, and I censor my conversations" (Canadian Hungarian lesbian, Toronto); "In expressing myself publicly with my girlfriends, feeling threatened if we hold hands or are very 'out' in some neighbourhoods" (female lesbian, Calgary); "Will not do open displays of affection in public for fear of bashing" (Aboriginal bisexual female, Calgary); "Careful regarding who I tell that I have a gay son" (Caucasian heterosexual female, Fredericton, New Brunswick); "I'm more careful in new surroundings and always travel with friends at night" (Acadienne female bisexual, Fredericton, N.B.).

Dress and Behaviour

Female participants reported that they modify their dress, appearance and behaviour to look less identifiably lesbian and to look more mainstream (heterosexual) because of fear of homophobic and sexist harassment or violence. Some respondents stated that they intentionally avoid wearing symbols which could identify themselves as lesbian: "I may zip up my jacket if I have a gay T-shirt on and see people who are potential bashers" (white lesbian female, Toronto); "I'm careful about how I dress, what jewellery I wear, and also about what the people I'm with are wearing. I'm careful to look 'straight' if I'm scared" (Anglo lesbian female, Toronto); "I watch what I do in fear of bashings/violence. I cover symbols out in public" (Caucasian lesbian female, Calgary); "I am careful about overt displays/clothes which may indicate my orientation" (Caucasian lesbian female, Calgary). Some respondents mentioned that they avoid associating with other lesbians and gays because they fear they will be targeted or outed. Some mentioned that they choose not to help other lesbians and gays who are being discriminated against because they fear that they could be next. Some state that they feel that they must limit their friendships because of fear for their safety.

Street Wariness

Female participants indicated their fear of walking on streets. They named a range of precautions they take to protect themselves including:

- •avoiding walking on streets alone at night;
- •changing their route in order to avoid persons who might be watching them;
- •travelling only with friends;
- •having heightened concern and alertness when walking in known lesbian and gay areas;
- •never taking taxis alone particularly those waiting outside lesbian and gay establishments;
- •avoiding public transit.

Female respondents stated that they experience fear in certain neighbourhoods which are known to be lesbian and gay and some said that they experience fear upon leaving or being in lesbian and gay establishments because they sense that they could be a target for violence: "I am careful of where I go. When I leave certain places (bars, dances) and if I leave those places alone" (Jewish lesbian, Toronto); "I don't get into cabs when coming from a lesbian bar unless I walk to another area first" (Afro-Caribbean lesbian, Toronto); "I am very careful how I act in the workplace and how I dress or talk. Also when clubbing I do not reveal my sexuality" (female lesbian, Saint John, N.B.).

Looking at ways that women modify their behaviour compared to comments about precautions taken on the street, contradictions emerge about individual's sense of safety in lesbian and gay identified areas. Neighbourhoods and establishments which are known to be gay-positive can provide feelings of safety for some lesbians while at the same time being places where others feel the most at risk of victimization:

> *Previously I lived in a rural area where lesbianism was invisible. Nothing I could do could make people think I was a lesbian. In Toronto, especially downtown, I feel more visible and that really affects my sense of safety because of the increase in harassment which comes with it. (Caucasian lesbian, Toronto).*

Political Involvement and Resistance

Some female respondents stated that they were hesitant to be outspoken about queer political issues. They stated that they fear a violent reprisal for taking a stand. Some participants reported that they fight back both verbally and physically against homophobic sexist violence and harassment as a means of coping with their awareness of potential violence. Others increased their political will to take a stand: "I will not allow ignorance to change me" (Caucasian lesbian, Toronto); "I'm completely out and stand by who I am one hundred per cent. If someone has a problem, it's their problem, not mine" (Caucasian lesbian female, Fredericton, New Brunswick). One heterosexual participant voiced her support for queer friends: "I am proud of my gay friends" (Caucasian heterosexual female, Moncton, N.B.). One woman said that self-acceptance decreased their sense of fear: "Once I became comfortable being gay myself, I have not experienced any problems" (Caucasian gay female, Woodstock, New Brunswick).

Calgary survey respondents illustrated two polarities in political responses to the threat of violence. One is to avoid and fear involvement and the other is to fight back: "I actually won't live with tolerating a hate crime. I will not change who I am to prevent it" (Caucasian heterosexual female, Calgary). Respondents said they were hesitant to be outspoken about gay and lesbian issues or to become involved in lesbian and gay communities and public battles for human rights. Some stated that they feared a reprisal for taking a stand.

Locations of Homophobic Sexist Violence

Female participants (Toronto, Calgary, and Fredericton) were asked to provide information about where their *most recent* incident of anti-lesbian violence occurred. Female participants were given the option to provide qualitative data about other locations where anti-lesbian violence typically occurs. Women were attacked in a variety of locations including the street, school, work, and in the home. Trends reveal that women were more likely to be attacked in private spheres by people known to them. Lesbian women and those assumed to be so were also attacked in restaurants, in laundromats, at parties, in meetings, at medical offices, in heterosexual bars, in gay and lesbian and straight neighbourhoods, on public transit, in police stations, and in theatres. Simply put, women are targets for homophobic sexist violence in ordinary circumstances of work and life.

Perpetrators of Homophobic Sexist Violence

Trends developing across Canadian victimization studies reveal that survey respondents describe perpetrators of homophobic and sexist violence as average people who are acting on society's intolerance and hatred of lesbian, bisexual, transgender/transexual persons in everyday situations. For example, participants identified perpetrators as strangers, coworkers, students, youth, family members, friends, neighbours, police officers, teachers, landlords, roommates, gang members, customers, doctors, ex-partners/lovers, students, and supervisors. Adult men, male youth and strangers, whose gender was not always identified, were listed most often as the perpetrators of homophobic and sexist violence in the Toronto, Calgary and Fredericton surveys. Male youth and students were listed as the second and third most frequent perpetrators followed

by co-workers and people driving by in vehicles. Others, such as taxi cab drivers, ex-partners, house guests, lesbian and gay community groups, sex trade workers, neighbours, skinheads, police, women, family and relatives, friends and professionals were also mentioned.

Conclusions

The present study has both substantive and methodological implications for Canadian research on heterosexed violence. The data indicates that, as in the United States, homophobic sexist victimization is a common experience for lesbians and bisexuals in Canada. Findings from three Canadian studies reveal that roughly 10.9 per cent of women had experienced physical assault at some time during their lives, and another 13.6 per cent had experienced anti-lesbian property crime. Verbal harassment and threats were even more prevalent, with approximately 74.9 per cent of female participants experiencing at least one incident since age sixteen. Women experience victimization in categories that typically characterize female victimization. And women are more likely to be attacked by someone they know than men. These trends in victimization point to policy recommendations that focus on the needs of women. Outreach needs to be done to ensure that women are able to access information about victim assistance services, police and hospitals. The reports of victimization, which differ by gender and sexual orientation, suggest that differences are determined by gender rather than any other factor. Women are more likely to be attacked by men they know in the private domain compared to men who experience more violence from strangers in the public domain. Lesbians, bisexuals, and heterosexuals—all categories which large percentages of female respondents—report sexual harassment and sexual assault higher, or in some cases, equal to gay men. Gay, bisexual and heterosexual men report threats, objects thrown, and being chased/followed much more often than do lesbians, bisexual and heterosexual women. Women fear homophobic sexist attacks more than do men. The gender typicality of the victimization patterns suggests gender is the causal variable rather than sexual orientation. More systematic analysis of the data with representative samples needs to be conducted to assess the strength of the gender variable in the data set. The data reported here corroborates and extends the findings of past research. It also paints a rich portrait of homophobic sexist victimization and fear of such attacks. As in earlier studies, the homophobic sexist attacks described by participants most commonly occurred in public locations and were perpetrated by one or more males who were strangers to the victim. Yet as the narratives make clear, it would be inaccurate to conceptualize anti-lesbian violence only in terms of street crimes. Women face harassment and violence in schools, in the workplace, and in and around their homes. Although they are sometimes targeted by strangers, they are also victimized by neighbours, schoolmates, coworkers, male ex-partners, and relatives. Indeed, the stories women tell convincingly show that women risk victimization whenever they are labelled lesbian or bisexual or transgendered. I was struck by the physical and psychological brutality of the attacks women described in the qualitative data. This brutality has important consequences. For victims, it results in heightened and prolonged psychological distress after the crime. The brutality of such violence also has consequences for diverse queer communities. Bias motivated attacks function as a form of terrorism, sending a message to women who identify as lesbian transgender, and bisexual that they are not safe if they stay visible.

While women in this sample were forthcoming with information about incidents they perceived to be hate-motivated it is difficult to assess whether all cases were indeed motivated by the hatred of lesbian women. This highlights one of the difficulties inherent in hate crime research. Directly asking women if they were the victim of a hate crime or bias crime is problematic because these terms may have different meanings for different women. In addition, some women may avoid explicitly labelling their experience of hate crime out of a need to preserve a sense of personal safety or a feeling of control over events in their lives. Gregory M. Herek, Jeanine C. Cogan and J. Roy Gillis (1999) found that gay men and lesbians who generally attribute negative events in their lives to sexual prejudice have a lower sense of personal mastery and more psychological distress than those who do not make such attributions. Thus, labelling an incident a hate crime may have a disempowering effect on women (Herek, Gillis andCogan 2002: 337).

Female victims were considerably less likely to report the incident to police than to victim assistance programs such as the 519 Church Street Community Centre in downtown Toronto. The qualitative data clearly shows that concern about secondary victimization is an important reason for non-reporting, but not the sole basis for it. The reasons cited by women suggest a complex calculus in which victims considered the costs and benefits of reporting (e.g. whether or not the perpetrators could be apprehended and punished) and whether the crime could appropriately be considered a police matter.

Because the Canadian questionnaires asked about the most recent incident of homophobic sexist violence, and these may have been incidents that happened in the past, we do not know if they accurately describe current patterns of crime reporting. During the past decade, many police departments in Canada have taken measures to respond to the problem of hate crimes, often with assistance from state and federal government agencies. Police officials increasingly are working with mi-

nority communities to improve their response to hate crimes. Undoubtedly, police personnel in many provinces still need clearer policies and better training for dealing effectively with hate crimes based on sexual orientation. But to the extent that non-reporting persists as a problem, effective remedies will have to come from queer communities as well as the criminal justice system. Outreach to lesbian and bisexual women is necessary to overcome their long-standing suspicions of the police. Such efforts will have to originate not only in criminal justice agencies but also in community organizations.

Because the present study was conducted with a convenience sample, generalizations from the findings must be made with caution. I hope that other researchers will attempt to replicate the results with samples from other geographic areas that include women from diverse backgrounds. My hope is that hate crime researchers will conduct more studies using face-to-face interviews and focus groups as an alternative to or in conjunction with self-administered questionnaires. As I have tried to demonstrate here, bringing victims' voices directly into my research yields a more differentiated and nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of homophobic sexist violence.

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[1]Of the 25 transgender participants ten identified as lesbian, five identified as gay, seven identified as bisexual, one each identified as heterosexual, two-spirited and queer.

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