

those who had reported, 65% were dissatisfied with their experiences with authorities. Witten also found that 77% had at least told someone about their victimization, even if they did not tell authorities. But of those who had not reported to authorities, 28% said they were afraid of reprisal from the perpetrator, 11% feared abuse by the medical/legal system, 29% felt it would not make a difference if they reported or not, and 8% wanted to protect the perpetrator. [Lombardi et al. \(2001\)](#) found that a 7.7% of respondents also had suffered unjustified arrests, adding another reason there appears to be poor relationships with police and other authorities. As previously stated, [Reback et al. \(2001\)](#) also found that 37% of the perpetrators of verbal abuse were police.

2.3. Harassment, verbal abuse, and other non-physical violence

“At one point we were getting followed around by men that were talking shit. It’s like being a dog and making circles, looking to see who’s following you” Interviewee ([Felsenthal, 2005](#), p. 213)

In addition to sexual and physical violence, there is evidence of high rates of more subtle, yet pervasive violence. [Xavier \(2000\)](#) reported that 26% of respondents reported experiencing street harassment, but [Lombardi et al.’s \(2001\)](#) participants reported rates over twice that, at 56%. However, neither of these studies directly asked whether or not participants believed that their victimization was specific to their gender non-conformity. However, [Witten \(2003\)](#) reported that 48% of respondents felt that they had experienced harassment due to their transgender status at some point in their lives. [Clements-Nolle et al. \(2006\)](#) specifically asked whether or not their participants had experienced “verbal gender victimization,” and 63% of their respondents answered that they had experienced verbal gender victimization. [Dang \(2007\)](#) found that 69% of transgender Asian Pacific Islanders had reported discrimination based on their gender identity.

There are few reports of specific kinds of violence outside of sexual assault, physical assault, or verbal assaults. However, [Witten \(2003\)](#) found that 67% of those participating in the Transcience Longitudinal Aging Research Study reported having experienced emotional abuse violence, 26% had experienced some type of neglect, and 8% had experienced exploitation. In addition, when asked specifically about crimes based on their gender identity, 23% reported that they had been victims of sexual harassment, and 41% had been followed or stalked. [Xavier \(2000\)](#) also reported that 18% of participants had experienced intimidation in some form, in addition to vandalism (4%), and blackmail or extortion (2%). Finally, [Lombardi et al. \(2001\)](#) reported that 23% of participants had been followed or stalked.

2.3.1. Perpetrators of harassment and verbal abuse

Possibly due to the pervasive nature of harassment and other forms of violence, only one study inquired specifically about the perpetrators of verbal abuse and harassment. When asked in general about verbal abuse, 80% of participants in [Reback et al. \(2001\)](#) reported being victims of verbal abuse because of their gender identity or presentation. However, unlike physical or sexual violence, most respondents reported that a stranger was the perpetrator (71%), but 37% were abused by police, 22% were abused by parents, 22% experienced abuse from neighbors, 17% from siblings, and 16% from friends. Another 14% were verbally abused by relatives outside the immediate family.

3. Hotline calls and social service reports

Throughout the United States there is a network of anti-violence programs under a variety of guises and names that serve their communities in a variety of ways, but emphasize a focus on preventing and punishing violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Although these organizations are often located in

major metropolises (e.g., [Community United Against Violence \[CUAV\]](#) in San Francisco, Center on Halsted/Horizons Anti-Violence Project in Chicago, Triangle Foundation in Detroit, or the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Program), the individual organizations can receive calls or information from a wide geographic area. For example, in their 2005 report, CUAV in San Francisco reported incidents from 15 counties in California besides San Francisco County (2006). In addition to any local publications or reports that each organization authors yearly, many of these organizations report their data to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects (NCAVP). The NCAVP has been generating a yearly report about hate motivated incidences since at least 1997. Even since the late 1990s this organization has had the foresight to include gender identity in its data collection efforts. Thus, it is one of the few nationally representative samples, even if the data are heavily skewed toward the 10–20 city and state organizations that have reported to NCAVP in the last ten years.

This is not to say that NVACP is the only group collecting data. For example, *It’s Time, Illinois! Political Action for the Gender Variant Community* routinely writes reports for Illinois, gathering information from the Chicago Commission on Human Relations as well as reports made directly to their agency. The totals counted by this organization are often different from those reported by the NCAVP. For example, *It’s Time Illinois!* (2001) reported only one hate crime in all of Illinois in 1999, but the NVACP reported four in Chicago alone.

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs has found among 20 regions in the United States since 1997 that there were 2133 hate crimes against transgender people. This is an average of 213 hate crimes per year. In addition, the “Remembering Our Dead” Program has tracked 353 murders of transgender people worldwide since the 1970s.

3.1. National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP)

As can be seen in [Table 3](#), the average number of crimes over the last decade from just these 20 NCAVP chapters alone suggests that there are an average 213 hate crimes with anti-transgender motivation reported to Anti-Violence programs per year in the United States. However, although the NCAVP report has information about perpetrators, locations, extent of injuries, demographic information about victims, types of crime, and a host of other variables, none of this information is separated by type of crime or type of victim. Thus all descriptive information about the crimes against transgender people are combined with information about crimes against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. So other than estimating incidence, the NCAVP offers little other data about hate crimes targeting transgender people.

3.2. Tracking transgender murders

“People have tried to kill me since I was a child” Interviewee ([Witten & Eyler, 1999](#), p. 461)

In addition to tracking through hotline calls and service requests, other organizations have begun collecting information about the murder of transgender people. Organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center’s *Intelligence Report* collect information based on news accounts, police reports and other sources. Their report claimed that there were 27 murders of transgender people in 2002 and the first nine months of 2003 alone ([Moser, 2007](#)). In addition, this report suggests that at the time it was written, of those 27 cases, arrests had been made for only seven cases.

Another source of information about murders of transgender people is a report titled “50 Under 30” from the Gender Public Advocacy Coalition (GPAC). The report related stories of 51 transgender and gender non-conforming individuals under the age of 30 who were murdered in the United States between 1995 and 2005. In collecting

Table 3
NCAVP annual national reports of hate crimes with transgender bias motivation.

NCAVP chapter	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average per city
Central Coast	0	0	0								0.0
Chicago		0	4	3	1	1	2	2	3	11	3.0
Cleveland	1	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	0		1.2
Colorado	0	4	5	5	12	35	16	5	24	60	16.6
Columbus	6	15	6	6	11	21	26	32	36	44	20.3
Connecticut					6	0					3.0
El Paso	1	11									6.0
Houston	3	3	4	1	2	10	2	0	2	1	2.8
Kansas City								4	5	1	3.3
Los Angeles	17	24	27	23	15	34	15	86	53		32.7
Massachusetts	14	13	2	12	7	7	3	5	0	0	6.3
Michigan/Detroit	2	3	13	6	7	7	5	5	9	8	6.5
Minnesota	0	0	1	10	4	4	8	3	5	12	4.7
New York	0	5	52	58	68	61	73	75	74	81	54.7
Orlando	0	0									0.0
Pennsylvania						3	8	11	3	7	6.4
Providence	0	1	0	0	0						0.2
San Francisco	0	32	56	70	66	96	85	84	50	64	60.3
St. Louis	0	0	0								0.0
Vermont								9	1	8	6.0
Average per year	44	114	173	195	199	281	244	321	265	297	213.3

Blank cells are when there was no information available about a particular location in a given year.

Sources: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

information about these murder victims, they also attempted to gather some basic demographic information as well. They found that most victims were people of color (91%), most victims were poor and lived in major cities, most were biologically male but had some variant of a feminine presentation (92%), few murders received media coverage, all the assailants were male and used extreme levels of violence, and most of the murders were not investigated as hate crimes (71%), and most assailants go free. Only 46% had been solved, compared to 69% of other murders (Wilchins & Taylor, 2006). In addition, as of 2006, the “Remembering Our Dead” project, sponsored by Gender Education and Advocacy and authored by Gwendolyn Ann Smith has reported 353 transgender people murdered across the globe since the 1970s.

4. Police reports

The federal government currently does not include gender identity in legislation covering hate crimes – neither in sentence-enhancements nor in mandated tracking of hate crimes in the Uniform Crime Reports. Furthermore, although police agencies record victim data such as race, gender, and location, in the Uniform Crime Reports for crimes *not* motivated by hate, these reports also do not include information about gender identity. Hence, the Uniform Crime Reports published by the FBI offers no information about violence against members of the transgender community.

However, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, New Mexico, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Vermont include gender identity in their hate crime laws that cover a variety of criminal acts, though none specify statistical tracking (Human Relations Commission, 2005). When surveying reports from states that include gender identity in their definitions of hate crime, and that publish reports about their data collection, these states provide very little information on hate crimes based on gender identity. Of the 10 states that cover gender identity in their hate crime laws, none reports any gender-identity based hate crimes. At this point, it is unclear whether or not gender identity based hate crimes are being reported to police. Then, if they are being reported, it is possible that these reports are being subsumed in either the sexual orientation or gender based hate crime sections of these yearly summaries.

Data from the police can also occur in unexpected places. Among the other 40 states, one can find sporadic inclusion of gender identity based hate crimes, even among those who do not include gender

identity in their hate crime laws. For example, in 2001 Connecticut reported a hate crime against a “transsexual” (listing it under sexual orientation based hate crimes), and New York in 2002 reported one hate crime based on “gender identity expression.”

Police reports are one of the most commonly used for estimates of violence. However, in the case of violence against transgender people, reports suffer from a variety of problems that make estimating the total incidence of violence challenging.

4.1. Social surveys and police reporting

“I got raped at 18 because they wanted to set me straight. I went to the police and the police said to me, ‘he who lays with dogs should expect to get fleas,’ that’s what I got. So from that moment on I knew the police were never gonna help me.” Interviewee (Moran & Sharpe, 2002 p. 279)

Evidence of reporting assaults to the police coincides with theoretical pieces that suggest that transgender people are hesitant to report to authorities (Moran & Sharpe, 2002; Moran & Sharpe, 2004). As previously discussed in both the sexual violence and physical violence sections, transgender victims are unlikely to report to police.

Based on this limited evidence, it appears that reporting physical violence to the police is distressingly low. This troubling rate could exist for many reasons, however, two research projects might offer an insight into why reporting rates are so low. Lombardi et al. (2001) found that a 7.7% of respondents also had suffered unjustified arrests, and as previously stated, Reback et al. (2001) also found that 37% of the perpetrators of verbal abuse were police, and 14% of perpetrators of physical assaults were police personnel. Thus, one could infer that authorities such law enforcement may have a low level of trust with transgender victims of violence.

5. Methodological limitations of violence and transgender people

Although these three sources offer a wide variety of information about the violence faced by transgender people, it is important to consider the limitations in each source. Each of these data gathering strategies has numerous methodological issues that are too numerous to discuss reasonably within the scope of this paper. However, there are significant issues shared by all three forms of measurement, and

that are unique to each, that are critical for understanding how these different sources inform us about violence against transgender people.

Foremost among these methodological issues are issues of sampling. Police reports have sampling issues directly related to biases in reporting. Vulnerable populations have notoriously low faith in the police, and often have low crime reporting rates (e.g., Harlow, 2005). Relying on social service records or hotline calls also suffers from sampling issues because of inequality of access and willingness to report. Although one could assume that those people who have access to these types of services dealing with experiences of violence that are trans-sensitive will decrease the reporting bias, there are still those who are unwilling to access them for a variety of other reasons. Finally, self-report surveys often use samples that are easiest to access and the most visible, such as transgender people accessing drug rehabilitation centers, HIV/AIDS services, or who are engaged in sex work. This clearly does not reflect a representative sample of the wide variety of transgender people in the United States and around the world.

In addition to sampling bias, there is another methodological issue shared by all three sources of data. Transgender people suffer a similar problem with categorization that lesbian, gay, and bisexual people do — namely, there is confusion about what defines a transgender person. This confusion is not just among the general population, but even the portions of the population expected to be serving transgender people. For example, when interviewing prosecutors about gender-based hate crimes, McPhail and DiNitto (2005) found that interviewers had to explain the differences between hate crimes based on gender and sexual orientation to many prosecutors.

There are indications that prosecutors are not alone in being unable to effectively do their jobs in regard to transgender people, and government attempts to consolidate a system of measurement to help clarify and standardize this process have failed. After being dropped from initial hate crime laws and early workplace anti-discrimination laws in the 1990s, in 2007 both the House and Senate passed versions of a hate crime law, called the Matthew Shepard Act, that would have mandated the FBI to count transgender hate crimes in the United States as they counted those based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. The bill would have also provided federal resources to jurisdictions that needed help investigating and prosecuting any hate crimes that they felt they were unprepared for, including those based on gender identity. However, because this bill was attached to Defense spending in the Senate version, later attempts to reconcile the language of the House and Senate versions proved unsuccessful, and this bill has effectively died. This means that currently there is no federal system for collecting statistics measuring the violence against transgender people, or laws that clarify the relationship between gender identity and violence. Thus, discrepancies in how transgender people are categorized, how data are tracked and stored, and how it is presented will continue.

Besides sampling issues shared by all three sources, there is also a serious methodological issue in how questions are framed or are being asked or included in data. Police data only include those crimes where a police officer had the foresight to ask about or recognize someone's non-standard gender identity, then report it in official documentation, and to investigate how gender identity might have contributed to a crime. The NCAVP chapters generally use a standard intake form emergency calls and requests for social services, which increases the standardization of their results, but they only report a single number — the total number of victims — without actually reporting or digging deeper into other information in the victim reports. Although self-report surveys tend to have the highest level of data, often due to the fact that their main focus is not violence or victimization, the information is highly simplistic, and questions are often added as an afterthought with little true planning. For example, the most common questions of “have you ever been raped” or “have you ever been the victim of violence” with only “yes” or “no” answers do not offer a lot of

insight into violence other than a raw number of people who have been victims of some kind of violence. The reasons that a meta-analysis is not possible from current self-report surveys are because of the wide variety of questions and their generally poor construction, making comparisons across self-report studies nearly impossible.

All three sources also share the problem of offering little in the way of explanation for how or why transgender people are victimized. Although there are many theoretical suggestions (e.g., Felsenthal, 2005) for why transgender people are targeted for high levels of violence and discrimination, little to no data exist or are being reported that offers insight into the reasons. Stotzer (2008) re-analyzed data from five years worth of reports of hate crimes against transgender people made to the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, and found suggestions in the crime details that the reasons for hate crimes against transgender people are far more complex than just possessing non-normative gender-identities. There was evidence of intersections of gender identity, race, class, and education as causes for the crimes of violence against transgender people. However, the self-report surveys to date have asked few questions about violence, and even fewer about crime details that could illuminate causes. Organizations that report their data about violence against transgender people, such as the NCAVP, often have rich data from their intake surveys, but report on just the bare essential descriptive statistics with little statistical complexity. Finally, large-scale police reports often have nothing more than a raw number of crimes reported. Thus, this methodological issue becomes a large barrier to implement effective laws or policies when so little is known about the violence being perpetrated against transgender people.

Although there are more methodological issues that could be discussed at length in regard to measuring violence against transgender people from all three sources, what is clear is that better methods need to be employed to get more accurate data about transgender people. Right now inconsistent methods — including non-representative sampling, inconsistent survey questions, confusion about the category of “transgender”, and more — are only allowing hints of the scope of the problem of violence against transgender people. Improvement in methodology would move the field closer to an accurate approximation of the violence transgender people encounter throughout their lives. As this field moves forward, more research can focus on the strengths of transgender people that have allowed the transgender movement to grow throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Identifying the nature and extent of the violence is on the first step in understanding the effect that violence has in the lives of transgender people.

6. Conclusion

When combining all three forms of violence reporting it becomes clear that among transgender people, known others are physically and sexually assaulting transgender people at high rates, and strangers are physically and sexually assaulting transgender people, but also harassing them and causing other types of violence and abuse. These acts of violence are not single incidents, but happen across a lifetime, and often a single individual experiences multiple acts of violence or intolerance on a daily basis. However, although these three sources can offer some information about raw numbers of victims, and some information about types of crimes, the data are extremely limited by methodological concerns that make it impossible to determine causes or determinants of violence. Thus, these sources of information can offer a hazy picture of the problem without the clarity needed to effectively implement changes to law or policy, and even less for determining what are appropriate services for preventing violence or dealing with it effectively when violence does happen.

Not only are transgender people suffering from physical assaults, sexual assaults, and harassment in public places by strangers, but a large portion also suffer these forms of violence in their homes from people that they know. Self-reports have offered the highest level of

details about the prevalence of hate crimes, suggesting that the majority of transgender people will experience violence in their lifetimes, and that risk for violence starts at an early age. Reports from hotline calls and to the police offer an estimate of the high incidence of hate crimes against transgender people as well. However, the problems inherent to police reports — namely the lack of data being collected on bias crimes against transgender people because gender identity is not included in hate crime legislation — make estimating a national incidence rate difficult. Legislation aimed at including gender identity into federal hate crime tracking mandates can help to solve this problem in police reporting.

Policy is often based on “official” sources such as law enforcement crime statistics; however, transgender victims of violence are almost absent from the law enforcement view of crime. Yet, without adequate statistics on the victimization of transgender people, it is unlikely that these issues of violence will move onto law enforcement’s agenda. Self-report surveying is starting to bridge that gap, but with severe limitations on methods where convenience sampling of the most vulnerable transgender people does not give a complete view to the needs of transgender people to protect them from, and support them after, experiences of violence. And although the Herculean effort of special interest groups such as the NCAVP are to be admired, these data too are sadly skewed based on victims who are willing to report, and those who live near one of the urban anti-violence projects in the country. Therefore, at this point, although these three methods are painting a beginning to illuminate the public about the violence faced by transgender people, they are not yet adequate to truly understand the nature, severity, consequences, or antecedents of this violence.

What is beginning to emerge from these multiple sources of data are the increased risks of variety of types of violence, though in particular sexual violence, faced by transgender people. This risk starts early in life and continues throughout the lifetime. Transgender people appear to be victimized by strangers and people they know, including their families and loved ones, with equal frequency. In addition, it appears that this violence occurs at home, at work, and in public places. Although transgender people face these heightened risks and horrific instances of violence, the transgender movement is still growing and flourishing. However, in order for effective laws and policies to be enacted, and for effective social service organizations to be implemented, research that addresses the serious methodological failings of these three data sources must be addressed.

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