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Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data ☆

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ABSTRACT

Transgender people face many challenges in a society that is unforgiving of any system of gender that is not binary. However, there are three primary sources of data in the United States for discerning the rates and types of violence that transgender people face throughout their lives — self-report surveys and needs assessments, hot-line call and social service records, and police reports. Data from each of these sources are discussed in length, as well as some of the methodological issues for these types of data sources. All three sources indicate that violence against transgender people starts early in life, that transgender people are at risk for multiple types and incidences of violence, and that this threat lasts throughout their lives. In addition, transgender people seem to have particularly high risk for sexual violence. Future research considerations, such as improving data collection efforts, are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Transgender people face violence because of their gender nonconformity, and the nature and extent of that violence has been the focus of recent research. Documenting violence is becoming

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increasingly important as policymakers utilize these types of statistics to pass more effective and necessary policies at the local, state, and federal levels to protect people based on their gender identity and gender expression. This report summarizes the scant yet diverse research on violence against transgender people in the United States.

Although definitions of the term transgender itself are contested, 'transgender' is coming to represent an umbrella term under which resides anyone who bends the common societal constructions of gender, including cross-dressers, transsexuals, genderqueer youth, drag queens, and a host of other terms that people use to self identify their gender. This term is "gender neutral" in the sense that it includes both people born as males who express or identify their gender as female (male-to-female transgender, or MTFs), and people born female who express or identify their gender as male (female-to-male, or FTMs). Numerous studies have demonstrated that transgender people experience high levels of violence from strangers and known others alike, and that they often face a lifetime of repeated victimization. The number of gender non-conforming people in the United States is unknown, making estimates of victimization risk uncertain (Stotzer, 2007). In addition, assessing the level, extent, and nature of violence against people with non-conforming gender identities and presentations has been challenging for a variety of social and methodological reasons.

One qualitative study paints a picture of what life is life for transgender people. Wyss (2004) interviewed seven transgender high school students and asked about their experiences at school. This study discusses the "full-contact hallways" that seven gender non-conforming youth encounter in high school. Their descriptions of the physical violence are particularly informative considering the details that the youths describe. Many report that not just other students harassed them, but that people they even considered friends would either help or join with assailants during physical attacks. Two of the students were set on fire in school, one after shop class. There were also constant threats of sexual assault, or coercive sex, or physical assault, both verbal threats and notes left in lockers. The hallways were also the place to be grabbed or fondled by anyone in the school.

Despite the growing anecdotal knowledge that violence is a significant problem in the transgender community, data about this issue are not readily available. There are currently three possible sources for information about the violence and harassment that transgender people experience:

I. Self-report surveys
   Self-report surveys directly ask transgender people about their experiences of victimization, and routinely find a high prevalence of violence. These studies rely on asking transgender people directly about their experiences of victimization, and can include written surveys, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups.
II. Hotline calls and social service reports
   Advocacy groups, such as the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, publish reports of violence and harassment across the country. These estimates of the incidence of violence against transgender people come from tracking hot-line calls and requests for social services. Other organizations track murders through newspaper reports and word-of-mouth reports.
III. Police reports
   Currently, only 10 states include gender identity or gender expression in their hate crime laws. These reports come directly from crimes reported to local and state police.

This report identifies available information about violence against transgender people and other gender non-conforming people. Furthermore, this paper discusses the strengths and weakness of the methods employed in self-report surveys, advocacy group reports, and state reports. Finally, utilizing all three of these sources, the knowledge that is available about the scope and nature of victimization in the transgender community is discussed as it relates to policy implementation and social service provision.

2. Self-report surveys

Early efforts at understanding the needs of gender non-conforming individuals came from public health interest in transsexual prostitutes (i.e. Boles & Elifson, 1994; Elifson, Boles, Posey, Sweat, Darrow, & Elsea, 1993). However, there was rarely emphasis on experiences of violence or harassment due to the conflation of gender-identity issues with sex work and the emerging HIV/AIDS crisis. However, the first substantial attempts at discerning the problems with violence faced by those with non-conforming gender-identity was the "First Natioanl Survey of Transgender Violence" conducted by GenderPAC in 1997 (and further analyzed in Lombardi, Wilchins, Priessing, & Malouf, 2001). This study found high levels of violence from harassment to physical and sexual assaults.

From that start, surveys targeting gender non-conforming people conducted across the United States (and internationally) have occasionally included questions about violence and harassment, with the most recent and most comprehensive survey of trans-people being the Virginia Transgender Health Initiative Survey (VTHIS) (Xavier, Honnold, & Bradford, 2007). Most large scale self-report surveying has been done in either cities or states, and are needs assessments conducted in part by Departments of Health. These surveys are often based on convenience samples composed of people accessing social services, or through social networks and word-of-mouth. More specifically, the most common type of recruitment is through snowball sampling of a convenience sample of transgender people utilizing identified leaders in the transgender community to serve as recruiters, interviewers, and/or survey administrators (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Doll, & Harper, 2006; Kenagy, 2005; McGowan, 1999; Reback, Simon, Bemis, & Gatson, 2001; Risser et al., 2005; Sugano, Nemoto, & Operario, 2006; Xavier, 2000; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, Budd, 2005). These convenience samples usually are focused around social service organizations (most often HIV/AIDS clinics or organizations), and bars or other social gathering places for transgender people. However, many studies also targeted specific populations, such as transgender prostitutes doing street work (Valera, Sawyer, & Schiraldi, 2000), or targeting locations, such as sex workers who came in for clinic visits (Cohan et al., 2006). A few others used mixed method designs that employed some mix of face-to-face recruitment, paper surveys and interviews, and/or the use of the internet as a tool for recruiting and surveying (Dang, 2007; FORGE, 2005; Lombardi et al., 2001; Wyss, 2004; Xavier et al., 2007). Topics related to violence commonly addressed three main categories: 1) sexual violence data, 2) physical violence data, and 3) harassment, verbal abuse, and other non-physical violence.

2.1. Sexual violence

> "In my neighborhood, either they want to beat you up or they want a free blow job." Interviewee (Bockting, Robinson, & Rosser, 1998)

One of the best documented types of violence against transgendered people is sexual assault and rape. This is due in part because most studies on transgender people are linked to Departments of Public Health and focus on sexual behavior, such as condom use, unprotected sex, and anal sex, in order to draw connections with HIV/AIDS status and transmission. As a consequence, this means that there are more reports and greater levels of detail about sexual assault and rape than any of the other types of violence experiences by transgendered people.

What becomes clear from surveys of trans-people is that there is a high prevalence of sexual assault and rape starting at a young

age. While all surveys have found evidence that sexual violence is shockingly common, the proportion of transgender people reporting violence varies from survey to survey. As discussed later, these variations in rates probably result from differences in how researchers conducted their surveys, and we cannot draw firm conclusions on the actual likelihood that a transgender person will experience sexual violence. However, the most common finding across surveys and needs assessments is that about 50% of transgendered persons report unwanted sexual activity. Clements-Nolle et al. (2006) surveyed 515 MTFs and FTMs and found that 59% reported a history of forced sex or rape, Garofalo et al. (2006) also found her/his survey of 51 MTF youths that 52% reported unwanted sexual intercourse, and Kenagy (2005b) found that 54% of participants reported that they had been forced to have sex. The report with the highest percentage of people who reported being either directly involved or secondary victims (i.e., witnesses) of sexual violence was the FORGE (2005) report, which had 66% of their 264 respondents in the mid-west state that they had been the victims or witnesses of sexual violence, and 23% had been the victims or witnesses of five or more incidences of sexual violence (Tables 1 and 2).

Kenagy (2005a) also found a significant difference between MTFs and FTMs, with 69% of MTFs reported having been the victims of forced sex, where only 30% of FTMs reported a history of forced sex. However, only one other study directly tested this difference. Contrary to the Kenagy (2005b) study, forced sexual activity was a larger problem for FTMs in the Xavier et al. (2007) sample: 35% of FTMs responded they had been sexually assaulted compared to 23% of MTFs.

Other studies sometimes find lower rates of sexual violence between 10% and 15% (i.e., Xavier, 2003, Witten, 2003, and Lombardi et al., 2001). The report with the highest percentage of people who reported sexual violence is the FORGE report (2005). Results showed that 66% of the 264 mid-western respondents had been the victims or witnesses of sexual violence, and 23% had been the victims or witnesses of five or more incidences of sexual violence.

Not only is sexual violence occurring with a high level of frequency, but this violence starts at an early age. One study found that first rapes often occurred in the early teens, with a median of 14 years old for FTMs and 15 years old for MTFs (Xavier et al., 2007). The FORGE (2005) report found that young gender-nonconforming persons were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, with the majority of incidents occurring before the age of 12, and that number steadily declining with age. This claim about younger transgender people being more at risk was also found in Wyss' (2004) study on high school-aged transgendered youth. Wyss, through a mix of surveying and interviewing, found that 86% of respondents had experienced some type of sexual violence, often perpetrated by other students, because of their gender identity.

2.1.1. Motivation for sexual violence

These studies also provide insights into the motivation for sexual assaults, generating evidence that perpetrators are motivated by hatred or negative attitudes toward transgender people. It is important to keep in mind that in these questionnaires motivation of the perpetrator is determined by the victim and their perception of their victimization rather than any objective or legal determination of motivation. Although this is a common strategy for determining motivation in crime surveys, this method clearly only addresses perceptions of motivation. In Xavier et al. (2005), 13% of the 248 MTF and FTM participants reported being victims of sexual assault or rape, and that 43% of those victims believed that their victimization was because of the perpetrators' homophobia, while another 35% of victims reported that it was the perpetrators' transphobia that led to the assault. Witten's (2003) participants were asked if they believed they had ever been the victims of a hate crime: 23% were classified by the participant as sexual harassment, 15% as sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, and 6% had been raped because of their gender identity. In the Xavier et al. (2007) study of transgender Virginians, over half (57%) of the participants reported they felt the reason for one or more of the incidents of forced sex was due to their transgender status, gender identity, or gender expression, with 71% of MTFs attributing that motive to one or more of the incidents, compared to 40% of FTMs.

2.1.2. Perpetrators of sexual violence

Perhaps one of the most disappointing findings from self-report surveys are the findings that the largest percent of perpetrators of sexual violence are people who are known to the victim, including partners and family members. In a study of primary and casual sex partners, Risser et al. (2005) found that 16% of the 67 participating MTFs reported being forced to have sex by a casual sex partner, and 25% had been forced to have sex by their primary partner. Additional evidence for this trend comes from Xavier et al. (2007), who found that among those who had reported incidents of forced sex, 35% involved a person who lived in the participant's household at the time of the assault. In addition, in a survey of 26 MTF prostitutes in Washington D.C., Valera et al. (2000) found that 35% reported being raped since they entered prostitution. The most common perpetrator of these rapes were customers (60%), someone else (40%), and their pimp (20%).

Additional details about the perpetrators of these crimes comes from Xavier et al. (2007), who found that acquaintances were the most

Table 1
Self-report survey reports of the prevalence of violence against transgender people motivated by their gender identity or gender expression (as reported by victims).

	McGowan (1999)	Reback et al. (2001)	Lombardi et al. (2001)	Witten (2003)	Wyss (2004)	FORGE (2005)	Xavier et al. (2005)	Clements-Nolle et al. (2006)	Xavier et al. (2007)	Dang (2007)
Location	New York	Los Angeles	USA	US and abroad	Not spec.	Mid-west	D.C.	San Francisco	Virginia	USA
Sample										API
MTF	83		84			77	188	392	112	14
FTM	11		81			121	60	123	34	6
Other/not specified		244		174	24	16				52
Sexual assault/rape			13%	15%	86%	28%	[a]10%		[a]15%	
Sexual harassment				23%						
Violence "or crime"	33%		27%				[a]15%			
Physical assault/beaten		47%	20%	39%	86%			36%	[a]28%	49%
Robbed			14%	[b]29%						
Objects thrown at you			17%							
Assaulted w/a weapon			10%							
Followed/stalked			23%	41%						
Harassment			56%	48%						[c]69%
Verbal abuse		80%						83%		

[a] Reflects the fraction of the entire population.
[b] Witten (2003) reported "muggings" specifically, but this statistic was counted into the "robbery" category.
[c] Dang (2007) included 'discrimination or harassment' together.

Table 2
Needs assessments and academic survey reports of the prevalence of general violence against transgender people (no particular motivation associated with victimization).

	McGowan (1999)	Valera et al. (2000)	Xavier (2000)	Witten (2003)	Kenagy (2005a)	Kenagy (2005b)	Kenagy and Bostwick (2005)	FORGE (2005)	Risser et al. (2005)	Xavier et al. (2005)	Cohan et al. (2006)	Garofalo et al. (2006)	Clements-Nolle et al. (2006)	Sugano et al. (2006)	Xavier et al. (2007)
Location	New York	D.C.	D.C.	US and abroad	Philadelphia	Philadelphia	Chicago	Mid-west	Houston	D.C.	San Francisco	Chicago	San Francisco	San Francisco	VA
Sample		Sex workers									Sex workers	Youth		Racial Minorities	
MTF	83	26	180		49	113	78	77	67	188		51	392	332	112
FTM	11		60		32	69	33	121		60			123		34
Intersex			4												
Other/not specified				174				16							
Violence/"crime"			43%							43%	++53.2%				
Physical assault		65%	16%	45%	51%	51%	60%							^^37%/20%	40%
Emotional abuse				67%											
Neglect				26%											
Exploitation				8%											
Assaulted w/a weapon		88%	17%												
Sexual assault/rape	**29%	35%	14%	19%	53%	54%		66.0%	^16/25%			52%	59%		27%
Threatened		88%												^^80%/64%	
Harassment			26%												
Robbed			14%												
Intimidation			18%												
Vandalism			4%												
Blackmail			2%												
Abduction			2%												
Bombing			1%												

Witten (2003) reported "muggings" specifically, but this was collapsed into the "robbery" category.
^Risser et al. (2005) separately reported casual sex partner sexual violence, and primary partner sexual violence (casual partner/primary partner).
**McGowan asked "Have you ever been a victim of domestic violence or rape?", and we are unable to determine what percent is rape vs. other forms of domestic violence.
++Cohan et al. (2006) reported specifically on sex work related violence, without specifying what type of violence.
^^Sugano et al. (2005) separated prevalence by age, during childhood/during adulthood.

common perpetrators of sexual violence (48%), followed by complete strangers (26%), father or stepfather (16%), a former spouse or partner (14%), current spouse or partner (12%), and a brother or sister (12%). According to the FORGE (2005) report, amongst those who had identified the genders of the perpetrators of sexual assaults, 90% of victims said they had at some time been assaulted by a male perpetrator, 30% of victims had been assaulted by a female perpetrator, and 12% had been assaulted by a transgender perpetrator (totals do not add up to 100% because a single victim could have been a victim in one assault by a male perpetrator and in another assault by a female, etc.). In addition, they found that the most common relationship to the victim that the perpetrator had was as a family member (39%), an acquaintance (35%), an intimate partner (29%), a stranger (25%), a date (20%), or an individual in a helping profession such as police or healthcare/social service providers (11%).

2.1.3. Police and other authorities

Within the transgender community it is common knowledge that interacting with authorities invites a certain level of possible victimization, or revictimization for transgendered people. Only two studies directly ask about reporting sexual assault to the police. The Xavier et al. (2007) found that 83% of victims of sexual assaults did not report any of the incidences to the police. The FORGE (2005) report found a similar statistic — that only 9% of victims reported their sexual assaults to police, and that 47.5% did not tell ANYONE about their sexual assault. However, an interesting finding that might elucidate the lack of reporting to authorities was the fact that victims reported that 4.9% of incidences of sexual violence were perpetrated by police, and in 5.9% of cases the perpetrators was a social service or health care provider.

In summary, studies conducted since 1999 have shown that transgender people are the victims of a great deal of sexual violence, specifically sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, rape, and attempted rape. In addition, this violence is often being perpetrated specifically because of their gender identity or expression. Perhaps most painful, in only about a third of cases the perpetrator is a complete stranger, suggesting that a large volume of the sexual victimization of transgender people is at the hands of people they know, and that this victimization begins at an early age.

2.2. Physical violence and abuse

> "I had these three guys that didn't like me and I'm not totally sure why they didn't. But I think a lot of it had to do with my gender expression and my sexuality and just basically who I was. […T]hey beat my ass on my fifteenth birthday [with a leather belt….T]he guy that I was with […] just sat back and watched while they did this to me" Interviewee (Wyss, 2004, p. 716)

In addition to high rates of sexual violence victimization, transgender people also suffer from a high prevalence of physical violence. The study with the highest level of detail about physical assault specifically is the study by Xavier et al. (2007). Among trans-Virginians, 40% reported experiencing physical assaults (since age 13), and the mean age of the first physical assault was at 16 years old. Of those who had reported being victimized, 18% reported one incident, 23% reported two incidents, 30% reported three to five incidents, 17% reported six to 19 incidents, and 12% reported 20 or more incidents of physical violence. This demonstrates that although there is some evidence for the lifetime probability of being victimized is high for transgender people, there is also a heightened risk of being multiply victimized. Of those who reported that they were victims of physical assault, 69% felt that for at least one or more of those incidences, the primary reason for victimization was their gender identity.

Physical violence appears particularly problematic for transgender sex workers. Valera et al. (2000) found that among MTF sex workers in Washington D.C., 65% had been physically assaulted, and that the most common perpetrator was a customer (71%). Weinberg, Shaver, and

Williams (1999) found that among sex workers in the San Francisco Tenderloin, in the last 12 months the mean number of rapes by a client was 0.013 per person, the mean number of times beaten by a client was 0.23, and the mean number of times robbed by a client was 0.52. Cohan et al. (2006) found that among 126 sex workers in San Francisco, 53% had experienced sex work related violence, which was higher and significantly different from the percent of male or female prostitutes who reported violence. Most often, the perpetrator was a customer (43%), though they had experienced violence at the hands of the police (17.5%), and their employer/manager/pimp (9%). In a qualitative study by Nemoto, Operario, Keatley and Villegas (2004), MTF sex workers identified their increased danger of "discovery" from potential clients who did not understand their transgender status. One participant summarized the constant danger by aptly stating "No one's going to kill a gay man if he finds a dick between his legs. No one's gonna kill a gay woman if he finds a pussy. But they will definitely put a knife through a tranny's throat if they see breasts and dick" (p. 729).

2.2.1. Motivation for physical violence

Evidence about hate or bias motivation can also be found in other studies besides the Transgender Virginians study. Just as with sexual violence, perpetrators' motivation for physical violence is most often based on the perceptions of victims, or their interpretation of the reasons behind the crime, or even their labeling of the crime as a "hate crime." When asked about experiences of "anti-transgender violence or hate crime," 33% of participants in McGowan's (1999) study of 94 transgendered people in New York reported being victims. Xavier (2003) (Xavier et al., 2005) reported that 43% of respondents had been the victims of "violence and/or crime," and of those who were victimized, 75% said that they believed at least one of their experiences of violence or crime was related to their gender identity. Clements-Nolle et al. (2006), asked the general question of whether or not participants had experienced "physical gender victimization," and of the 515 participants, 36% reported that they had been victims. Reback et al. (2001) in surveying transgendered people in Los Angeles County found that 47% of the transgender participants reported being victims of physical abuse or were beaten because of their gender identity.

2.2.2. Perpetrators of physical violence

Reback et al. (2001) asked a follow-up question about perpetrators, and found that incidents involved strangers (37%), police (14%), parents (9%), siblings (4%), neighbors (4%), other relatives (3%), and even friends (3%). Witten (2003) also asked about crimes motivated by gender-identity motivated hatred, and found that among other crimes, such as sexual assaults and harassment, participants also reported being the victims of muggings based on hate (29%) and being beaten based on hate (39%).

This breakdown of perpetrators was similar to those found in Xavier et al. (2007), again suggesting that known others are the primary perpetrators of physical violence against transgender people. They also reported data on perpetrators, finding that 31% of physical assault perpetrators were living with the victim at the time of the assault. Again, the complete strangers were the most common perpetrators (47%), followed by acquaintances (27%), 'other' persons (who did not fall into the set categories (27%), fathers or stepfathers (16%), mothers or stepmothers (9%), current spouse/partner, brother/sister, or a former spouse or partner (8%). This suggests that similar to sexual violence, perpetrators of physical violence are often known to the victims.

Kuehnle and Sullivan (2003) also found that 30% of perpetrators were landlord/neighbor/tenants, 20% of the time the perpetrator was a stranger, 20% of perpetrators were "pick-ups," and 10% of the time the crimes were committed by an acquaintance/friend, law enforcement/security personnel, or service providers respectively. In addition, Kuehnle and Sullivan (2003) is one of the few studies that asked about the location of physical violence, and compared "anti-gay" violence against male, female, and transgender victims. Of the 10 transgender victims who reported violence to a social service agency, 50% reported that their victimization occurred in a private residence, 20% of crimes occurred on public transportation, 20% occurred in public accommodations, and 10% occurred in the street or in a public area.

Similar to sexual violence, physical violence is occurring at high rates, happens often, and takes a variety of forms from physical assault to attempted bombings and abductions. In addition, transgender people have high rates of multiple victimization of physical violence, and the perpetrators are often people known to the victim.

2.2.3. Violence in the home

Two studies conducted by Kenagy have asked the question: "Have you ever experienced violence in your home?" This question is broad enough to include incidences of domestic violence as well as attacks from strangers or family without being able to differentiation between them.[1] Although it is unclear what type of violence is occurring in the home in these surveys, it is still an important question when so much violence pervades the lives of transgender people. Kenagy and Bostwick (2005) found that 66% of respondents reported experiencing violence in their home, while Kenagy (2005b) found that 56.3% of participants reported experiencing violence in the home, with a statistically significant difference between MTFs (67.3%) and FTMs (38.7%) ($p<.05$). Similarly, both studies asked about "physical abuse" which is difficult to determine whether it meant abuse in a domestic situation, or physical abuse in a wider lens of physical assault. However, Kenagy and Bostwick (2005) found that 60% of victims reported being physically abused at some pointing their lives, and Kenagy (2005b) reported that 51.3% of participants had reported being physically abused, with a significant difference between MTFs (65.3%) and FTMs (29.0%) ($p<.01$). Although the question is too vague to determine situations of domestic violence vs. other types of crimes in the home, these responses suggest that transgender people are not safe even in their own homes.

2.2.4. Feelings of safety

One unique study asked transgender people about their thoughts and beliefs about their own personal safety and life expectancy. Kenagy and Bostwick (2005) found that 56% of MTFs and FTMs reported that being transgendered made them feel unsafe in public, and 43% reported that being transgendered made them feel uncomfortable in public as well. In addition, there were statistically significant differences between FTMs and MTFs. FTMs (85%) were significantly more likely to say they felt unsafe ($p<.0001$) than MTFs (43%) and uncomfortable (FTMs = 73%, MTFs = 30%, $p<.0001$). Perhaps the most tragic results of this study were in the answers to questions about life expectancy. 40% of all respondents said they expected that their lifespan will be shorter than normal (reasons given were queer-bashing, being killed by police, the effects of hormones, and HIV status).

2.2.5. Police and other authorities

A story similar to that of report sexual assault to the police emerges with physical assault and violence. The VTHIS found that 70% of victims of physical violence did not report any of their assaults to the police. When examining just the most recent incident (which happened an average of 6.6 years prior for FTMs and 11 years prior for MTFs), only 26% reported their assaults to police. Witten (2003) found that of the 89 respondents who had experienced violence, only 22% had made reports to the authorities, and another 4% reported that they 'sometimes' had reported their victimization to police. However, of

[1] For further information specifically about domestic violence among transgender people, some national statistics by the NCAVP are available. However, intimate partner violence is beyond the scope of this paper.

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 Transscience 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 a 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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