Internalised Homophobia or Externalised Transphobia: Violence Against Trans Women in a Sexual or Romantic Context

Introduction

Violence against transgender people is a global issue (Winter *et al.*, 2006), and existing studies have highlighted the prevalence of violence against them (see Chakraborti *et al.*, 2014). Research frequently documents the prevalence of this type of crime in public, where physical violence is meted out by strangers in retaliation for perceived transgressions against the gender binary (see Reback et al, 2001; Xavier et al., 2007). Whereas sexual violence motivated by hatred or prejudice and perpetrated by acquaintances and intimate partners against trans[1] people in private (sexual or romantic contexts) tends to be under-researched. Although, it has been noted that trans people were more often victimised in private residences by someone known to them or a more recent acquaintance ('pick-ups') compared to anti-gay violence (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2001). Nevertheless, there are debates within the literature regarding whether the perpetrators of violence against trans people are strangers or those known to the victim/survivor (see Stozer, 2009). The reason being that the numbers may vary across studies because of definitional issues regarding the categorisation of offenders, location and forms of violence. However, it is the aforementioned gap in the literature regarding violence against trans women within an intimate context which we seek to address in this chapter. It should also be noted that language associated with gender identity is constantly evolving, this highlights the fluid nature of gender identities, and that this chapter reflects the generally accepted language at the time of writing. Furthermore, although there is no universally accepted definition of 'transgender'. The work of Hines (2010:1) is drawn upon to define 'transgender' as:

> "a range of gender experiences, subjectivities and presentations that fall across, between or beyond stable categories of 'man' and 'woman'. 'Transgender' includes gender identities that have, more traditionally, been described as 'transsexual',

[1] Trans is a commonly used abbreviated form of the term 'transgender' which is inclusive of all trans and non-binary gender identities.

and a diversity of genders that call into question an assumed relationship between gender identity and presentation and the 'sexed' body".

This definition has been employed as it acknowledges gender expressions that fall between and beyond the western gender binary. Those whose gender identity is congruent with their natally assigned sex are referred to as *gender-aligned*[2]. A substantial amount of research that explores issues impacting trans people allows gender-aligned people to be normalised reinforcing the gender narrative that trans people are in some way 'extraordinary' (Johnson, 2015) rather than being inclusive of the diversity of gender identities.

The focus of this chapter is the relationship between toxic masculinity, its fragility and internalised homophobia that may be experienced by perpetrators, after they have engaged in sexual or romantic relationships with trans women. This relationship is explored regarding the victimisation carried out by the perpetrator when the relationship has ended and includes consideration of when the perpetrator was aware of the victim's trans identity before engaging in a relationship, and also when disclosure occurs after the relationship has ended. By drawing upon empirical data from a larger study (Colliver, 2018) it is demonstrated how toxic forms of masculinity and internalised homophobia may be expressed through projected externalised transphobia that may be actualised through physical and verbal violence against their sexual or romantic ex-partner.

The concept of 'toxic masculinity' has been examined in relation to misogynistic attitudes and violence against women and girls (Scaptura and Boyle, 2020; Yar and Drew, 2019). However, the relationship between toxic masculinity and violence against trans people is relatively underexplored despite research indicating that men who feel their masculinity is threatened is a predictor of opposition to trans peoples' rights (Harrison and Michelson, 2019). Butler (2015, cited in Tourjée) has argued that trans women are perceived as rejecting manhood thus evidencing the unstable nature of masculinity. The use of violence against trans women may therefore be motivated by this perceived threat to their sense of maleness, by those who consider their masculinity to be an inherent,

[2] The term 'cisgender' may sometimes be used pejoratively, so, in recognition of this the second author, Dr Joanna Jamel has recommended that an alternative term *'gender-aligned'* be used in this chapter. The first author has agreed with this usage. However, any concerns relating to the use of this term within this context should be directed to the second author, as it was their suggestion to use this replacement term.

essential feature of their identity. In this sense, the very existence of trans women may be understood as a symbolic assault on the very essence of masculinity. Nevertheless, violence against trans women in the context of sexual and romantic relationships appears to be a more complex phenomenon driven by a variety of motivations. This chapter will thus examine how men may overcompensate for their perceived emasculation and loss of heterosexuality. The negative emotions of anger, fear and shame are thus frequently funnelled into the manifestation of violence perpetrated against trans women and it is this phenomenon that will be examined next.

Understanding Violence against Trans People

Violence against trans people is most frequently discussed and understood within hate crime frameworks. Notably, official definitions of hate crime are generally one-dimensional, focusing on incidents of hate crime as singular events without acknowledging the social context within which hate crimes occur. Despite the term 'hate crime' gaining popularity after the racially aggravated murder of Stephen Lawrence and the publication of the Macpherson Report (1999), this term does not appear in any formal legislation in the UK. Despite this, in the UK, hate crime has been defined by the College of Policing (2021) as:

> "any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on the same characteristics [i.e., a person's race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender status]".

All police forces in England and Wales are required to annually monitor hate crimes targeting these five 'personal characteristics'. Hate crimes account for around 2% of all recorded crime in England and Wales (Home Office, 2020). Hate crimes against trans people account for the smallest amount of all recorded hate crime, composing around 2% (Home Office, 2020). However, of all five monitored strands, hate crimes against trans people saw the largest annual increase in the year 2018-19, up 37% from the previous year (Home Office, 2019). The most recent Home Office (2020) report indicates a further increase in the year 2019-20 with a total of 2,540 transphobic hate crimes recorded. As these reports rely on police recorded crime, it is likely that this is not an accurate reflection of how much transphobic hate crime occurs in England and Wales, as hate crime has been shown to be underreported (METRO Charity, 2014; Williams and

Tregidga, 2013). Indeed, other studies have shown high rates of victimisation of trans people (Bradley, 2020; Chakraborti *et al*, 2014). Whilst police recorded data rely upon Home Office definitions of hate crime, academics and researchers have engaged with the concept of hate crime more holistically (Perry, 2001).

Thus, academic definitions of hate crime tend to acknowledge wider and complex social structures that create a social and cultural climate in which oppressed, minority and marginalised groups are seen as legitimate targets for hate (Perry, 2001). Furthermore, the lack of a universally agreed definition of hate crime has resulted in the language associated with 'hate crime' being subject to considerable scrutiny, with commentators noting the problematic nature of such emotionally charged discourse (Gerstenfeld, 2004; Hall, 2005; Sullivan, 1999). Nevertheless, Chakraborti and Garland (2012) have argued that perpetrators of hate crime are not prejudiced all the time and not every perpetrator is motivated by 'hate'. In hate crime scholarship, Perry's (2001) conceptualisation of hate crime has emerged as key when discussing victimisation, and Perry claims that:

> "Hate crime … involves acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed towards already stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order. It attempts to re-create simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrator's group and the 'appropriate' subordinate identity of the victim's group. It is a means of marking both the Self and the Other in such a way as to re-establish their 'proper' relative positions, as given and reproduced by broader ideologies and patterns of social and political inequality" (2001:10).

The definition provided by Perry is a more nuanced account of hate crime, directly explaining individual victimisation through wider social, cultural, and political structures that permeate society. In defining hate crime, Perry (2001) argues that a number of social hierarchies are established that relate to various identity characteristics including race, class, and gender. The existence of these hierarchies creates 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' in which people may organise themselves socially. It is argued that those who occupy a position within the 'in-group' may experience feelings of insecurity about their dominant

place within social hierarchies, particularly during times in which subordinated, and minority groups achieve social and political recognition. Feelings of insecurity may therefore manifest in violence against subordinated groups as a form of 'social policing'. Violence therefore has a dual purpose. Firstly, it serves to remind a subordinated group of their inferior position within social hierarchies, and secondly, serves to re-establish the dominant group member's superior position at the top of a social hierarchy. Violence against trans people can therefore be seen as a form of 'gender policing', in which they are subordinated due to their rejection of normalised gender roles.

A similar account has been provided by Doan (2010: 635) who has argued that trans people encounter a "special kind of tyranny – the tyranny of gender – that arises when people dare to challenge the hegemonic expectations for appropriately gendered behavior in Western society". In this sense, gender oppression occurs when others attempt to apply and enforce heteronormative and hegemonic expectations of binary gender identities and presentation. The very existence of trans people may thus be considered as an attempt to "contest the 'natural' connections between sexed embodiments and sexed lives" (Browne, 2004: 333). Violence and abuse may therefore be understood as arising from an incongruence between an individual's claimed gender identity and how others read and interpret their gender presentation, which Browne (2004: 332) has described as 'genderism' which relates to the "hostile readings of gender ambiguous bodies".

Whilst the above may explain the perpetration of violence against trans people by strangers and acquaintances, these explanations are less useful in understanding violence against trans people within intimate relationships. They may also not sit well within established hate crime frameworks, as perpetrators' motivations for violence may not only be the attempted subordination of the victim. Instead, it could be the complexity of interactions between the gender identities of the perpetrator and victim. Thus, these violent incidents may be better explained by examining the perpetrator's own sense of self.

Next, therefore the masculinities literature is considered regarding its engagement with the theorising of violence against trans people and gay men (Franklin, 2004; Herek, 1986; Kelley and Gruenewald, 2014), which has largely neglected the context of sexual or

romantic relationships. Furthermore, existing literature has focused on how violence against minority groups function to reaffirm a perpetrator's masculine identity where using violence is framed as a masculine act. As Franklin (2004: 25) has argued "antigay violence… is…[an] ideal way for young men to visibly demonstrate their masculinity, which includes heterosexuality as a central element". It is therefore the act of violence itself that is the manifestation of masculinity, and gay men and trans people are thus deemed suitable targets as they may be perceived to be the antithesis of heteronormative, and hegemonic personifications of gendered presentations and ideals. Thus, the identity of the victim is vital as violence against gay men and trans people can reinforce the perpetrators' masculine identity through the sanctions directed against 'deviant' expressions of gender and sexuality.

Therefore, central to the understanding of violence against trans women within the context of sexual and/or emotional relationships presented here, is the perceived threat to heterosexuality which may arise through the fetishisation of trans women which de-legitimises their identities as women. Furthermore, existing research has shown that when gender-aligned men are concerned about being read as effeminate (a central stereotype associated with homosexuality) they overcompensate by engaging in extremely hostile masculine behaviours to emphasise their masculinity in socially acceptable ways (Adams *et al.*, 1996; Heise, 2007). The *masculine overcompensation thesis* stipulates men respond to threats to their masculinity with extreme manifestations of masculine behaviours (Willer *et al.*, 2013). This is central to the arguments proposed in this chapter, as it is suggested here that violence against trans women is a manifestation of toxic and extreme masculinity which functions to re-affirm and resolve a potential masculine identity crisis. It is acknowledged that there is a multiplicity of masculinities and therefore many ways to enact and perform masculinity. The central role of heterosexuality and its relationship to masculinity is focused on in this chapter. Heteronormative masculinity is therefore critically evaluated through the consideration of the relationship between gendered expectations, sexuality, and the fragility of masculinity (Kaufman, 2007).

The concept of 'trans panic' has been explored academically (Jamel, 2018; Noble, 2012) whereby the perpetrator of a homicide seeks to use the trans person's alleged

'gender deception' as a form of justification and reduce their accountability for the extreme violence of their actions within an intimate context that results in their victim's demise. In other words, their defence is to blame the victim for precipitating the violence against themselves because of their transgender identity. These actions may thus be a consequence of the perpetrator's internal struggle and confusion regarding their sexual identity. Thus, in a number of American states particularly in those that do not protect trans people from discrimination and hate crime, the strategy of a 'trans panic' defence may be used to mitigate the actions of the defendant in a homicide case where a trans person has been murdered. In England, the use of this type of strategy is less well documented than in America. Nevertheless, it is clearly stated in legal guidance that it is not unusual for heterosexual males who have engaged in intimate encounters with trans women to afterward experience disgust resultant from this behaviour (see CPS, 2020). The consequence of which may be to react with rage and extreme violence towards the trans woman they were intimate with, and even accuse them of engaging in non-consensual sex with them (as in the Naomi Hersi case documented below). It is therefore vital that all evidence is critically examined regarding the context of the incident of fatal offence and the possible motivation of the male person in alleging the crime made against them.

The case of Naomi Hersi, she was an openly trans woman who was murdered in London in 2018 after meeting a young male named Jesse McDonald on a website called *'FabSwingers'*. They spent three days engaging in consensual alcohol fuelled chem-sex. After which, he drugged Hersi and brutally murdered her by stabbing her 40 times with a knife and broken bottle and other instruments. McDonald alleged that he was the 'victim' of rape and had thus retaliated (Duffy, 2018). Based on the discussion above, it could be suggested that McDonald's inability to cope with the internal stress and confusion resultant from this sexual encounter, may have led him to question his sexual orientation. A consequence of which was the undermining of his masculine identity and the perceived resolution being to obliterate the embodiment of this sexual conflict. Although, in the reporting of McDonald's case a trans panic defence strategy was not used. There were similar elements used, as he did claim self-defence for violently beating and stabbing her by stating he was responding to her alleged rape of him, thus blaming the victim for her own death. A defence strategy such as that related to the 'trans panic defence' may have been applied if she had not been open about her transgender status. Nonetheless, despite knowing her gender identity he still engaged in sexual encounters with her, but in the

aftermath, he experienced pervasive negative emotions in this regard resulting in his murder of Hersi.

Next, the toxicity of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity is examined. Research suggests that the stereotypical gender role expectations of gender-aligned men possessing traditional attitudes resulted in prejudice against trans people (Brassel & Anderson, 2020). Taken to extremes, this finding could be suggested as a possible motivation which fuels violence against trans people, particularly trans women, for their perceived gender non-conformity as evidenced in the study below.

Methodology

The data presented in this chapter was collected as part of a larger research study that investigated what might be defined as 'low-level' incidents of transphobic hate crime. A total of 396 online surveys and 31 semi-structured interviews were completed as part of this research study, alongside an analysis of comments that were posted on YouTube videos relating to 'gender neutral' toilets (Colliver *et al.*, 2019; Colliver and Coyle, 2020; Colliver and Silvestri, 2020). This chapter draws upon empirical data collected from the 31 semi-structured interviews conducted with trans people who live within the United Kingdom and were aged 16 and over at the time of the interview (see Colliver, 2018 for further details). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to develop a more extensive and contextualised account of trans people's experiences of victimisation. The data were collected and analysed throughout 2018. The focus of the interviews was on participants' experiences of hate crime targeting their gender identity with a specific emphasis on 'micro-crime' victimisation (Colliver, 2021). However, despite the emphasis on victimisation including verbal abuse, harassment and online victimisation, participants also regularly discussed other forms of victimisation including physical and sexual violence. The interview data were fully transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was then subjected to a thematic analysis that was informed by the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Participants were recruited for this research project primarily through social media, but also through several organisations offering services and support for trans people. Purposive sampling was used to reach trans people who had experienced some form of victimisation targeting their gender identity that lived in the United Kingdom

and were aged 16 and over at the time of participation. Specific attention was given to recruiting those who may be the most marginalised within trans communities with an emphasis placed on recruiting a diverse sample. Community and support groups were engaged with through utilising existing professional relationships held with organisations across the UK. Additionally, key public figures were identified on social media and were approached to promote the research project, which was particularly effective at building positive relationships between the researcher and participants. A diverse sample was achieved for both the online survey and semi-structured interviews in relation to participants' ethnicity, religion, disability status, age, and gender identity and this was reflective of the wider UK population.

In relation to participant demographic information for participants in the semi-structured interviews, 23% of participants were non-binary, whilst 31% and 44% were male or female, respectively. The majority of participants identified as White British (54.8%), however, a range of ethnic backgrounds were represented within the sample including Black British (10%), British Asian (3.2%), Black African and White British (3.2%), Black Caribbean and White British (3.2) South American (3.2%), Bangladeshi (3.2%), Irish Traveller (6.4%), Thai (3.2%) and Pakistani (3.2%). Several participants also identified as Christian, Sikh and Muslim and a smaller number of participants identified as Buddhist and Pagan. The average age of participants was 32 years old with ages ranging from 17 to 67 years old. In relation to disability status, 30.3% of participants indicated that they lived with a disability, including sensory, mobility and long-term health conditions. All participants spoke English and for the majority this was their first language with varying degrees of fluency. Four participants spoke English as a second language. Unfortunately, trans people who did not speak English at the time of interview are not included in this study.

Considering the sensitive nature of the research topic and the inclusion of under 18s within this research project, particular care was paid to the design of this study, to ensure that the research was ethically considerate and compliant with the British Society of Criminology's (2015) 'Statement of Ethics'. The lower age limit was set at 16 to avoid issues of requiring parental/carer consent for participation. It was acknowledged that requiring parental/carer consent could result in a potential participant having to disclose

their trans identity to their parent or carer which could place them at risk of significant harm exceeding the risk associated with participating. Therefore, 16 and 17 year-old participants were recruited without parental/carer consent. It was considered that retelling incidents of victimisation could result in participants experiencing emotional and/or psychological distress. In order to address this risk, Colliver drew upon a national network of organisations that agreed to fast-track participants into relevant support services if needed, and all participants were provided with contact details for a local support service. Informed consent was recorded both written and verbally. Careful consideration has also been paid to ensuring that participants remain anonymous, and therefore, pseudonyms (that participants chose themselves) are attached to the data presented throughout this chapter.

In what follows, qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews is drawn upon to provide a critical analysis of the ways in which masculinities and internalised homophobia are manifested in the perpetration of violence against trans women.

"Looking Big" in Front of Potential Partners – Violence against Trans Women as a Public Performance

The main focus of this chapter is on violence against trans women within the context of romantic and/or sexual relationships between the perpetrator and victim. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that violence against trans women can also be performative in the social context of establishing heteronormative relationships. Narratives within the research data suggested that the victimisation of trans women particularly in public spaces was a mode through which gender-aligned men perform their masculine identity. In this sense, the toxic nature of masculinity may be seen as central in gender-aligned males' normative dating expectations. Trans female victims of violence perpetrated by these men in front of gender-aligned women was often understood to be a means for men to 'look big', evidence their dominance and assertiveness in order to impress these women. For example, Rachel, an 18 year-old female explains about the abuse she received when engaging in the night-time economy:

> "I feel like they start abusing me to show off and make themselves look big in front of whatever girl they are trying to impress. It's like by attacking a trans

> women is their way of flexing their muscles…The whole need for men to show off and be manly is so toxic. It is so unnecessary, most women probably don't even appreciate that kind of behaviour, but men have been socialised to believe that acting like that is impressive."

Rachel clearly understands the motivations for the abuse she experienced perpetrated by men she perceived to be gender-aligned which performs a central function within their normalised, heteronormative dating politics, where men may feel expected to 'impress' gender-aligned women. Therefore, perpetrating transphobic abuse becomes the mode through which an individual's masculine identity is reinforced and affirmed. In these instances, transphobic abuse has a dual purpose. Not only does the act of verbal and physical violence function as a performance of masculinity, the targeting of trans women also serves to symbolically distance the perpetrator from effeminacy and underline the intractability of gender identity as biologically determined.

Thus, the rejection of effeminacy was understood to be a consequence of deep-rooted insecurities surrounding the perpetrator's own relationship with masculinity. Rose, a 67 year-old understands violence against trans women to be performative, particularly when perpetrated in front of friends, partners, and family. Rose understands trans women to be 'a huge slap in the face to masculinity…they see us as completely un-masculine so they have to show off just how super masculine they are, so they don't get associated with us'. This was a common narrative throughout the interviews, where participants felt that masculinity was performative and that the perpetration of transphobic hate crime, particularly against trans women was a mechanism through which gender-aligned men could perform a masculine identity and reject femininity. This was seen as key in successfully establishing and maintaining heteronormative relationships.

The concept of 'fragile masculinity', which relates to the anxiety men may feel about failing to meet culturally prescribed expectations of manhood has historically been explored in relation to violence targeting gay men (Kaufman, 2007). More recently, the literature has become more inclusive by also addressing violence against trans women (Kehrli, 2016) whereby it is suggested that they are targeted as they embody a symbolic attack on hegemonic gender-aligned, heterosexual masculinity. This was understood by Callum, 19 years-old as relating to:

> "masculinity and how men perceive themselves and how they think others will see them… If a man knows that a woman is trans, if they don't abuse them, then other men will think that they agree with it, then that somehow takes away from their status as a man… This happens a lot when they are trying to show off or impress some girl that they are trying to take home."

In this sense, if men do not visibly and tangibly reject deviation from gender-aligned normative gender expectations, they may be perceived as approving of more diverse gender identities or being in some way complicit in the rejection of traditional gender norms. This may cause some anxiety for men that perceive their masculinity to be integral to their male identity. Masculinity, therefore, is not a static, achieved state, instead it is an ongoing negotiation, maintained and accomplished through interactions with others. This performance was framed as occurring frequently in front of people who the victims perceived to be the perpetrator's partner or girlfriend. In this sense, heteronormative masculinity may be attained through the public exercise of either symbolic or physical violence against trans women, due to being targeted as their gender identity is perceived to represent a rejection of dominant Western gender norms. However, this understanding heavily relies on notions of 'stranger danger' which may be less useful in understanding the significant amount of violence that occurs within private spheres (Stotzer, 2009).

Toxic Masculinity and Fear of Perception

The violent acts and their motivations described above illustrate perpetrators' relationship with heteronormative masculinity as a central motivation for this violent behaviour. This is further illustrated in the following two cases. Firstly, violence resulted because of the victim's disclosure of their trans identity after a physical and/or emotional relationship had already been established. Secondly, violent behavior occurred when the physical and/or emotional relationship was disclosed to others, despite the perpetrator being aware of the victim's trans identity as an unspoken truth. For example, Elaine, 48 years-old described an incident below in which she disclosed her trans identity to her closest group of friends, one of whom she had previously had a consensual sexual relationship with, that the wider group of her friends were aware of.

> "All of a sudden Kian just jumped up and pushed me. He didn't hit me, but he was holding my neck. He spat in my face… Called me a dirty faggot… Now, he suddenly feels like less of a man, because I am a trans woman. He was so worried about everyone thinking he was gay."

This quote describes the material, real-life consequences of heteronormative masculinity and gender-aligned normative social structures which position trans people as legitimate targets for violence. The attraction to, and enjoyment of sexual activity with trans women may challenge deeply engrained hetero- and gender-aligned normative notions of sexuality. Thus, in attempting to attain heteronormative masculinity, the perception of homosexuality poses a significant barrier in this achievement (Connell, 1995). The use of homophobic language is powerful in de-legitimising Elaine's identity as female and speaks to Kian's concern around others' perception of his sexuality. Being perceived as homosexual may result in anxiety regarding the perpetrator's own sense of heteronormative masculinity. Thus, the use of homophobic language can distance the perpetrator from homosexuality and perceived femininity or effeminacy whilst simultaneously attempting to re-establish a heteronormative masculine identity. In this sense, language itself is a form of symbolic violence, and acts as a powerful conduit of toxic masculinity.

Kian's reaction also implies that he felt in some way deceived by Elaine. Positioning Elaine as deceptive allows her to be held accountable for her own victimisation whilst at the same time minimising the culpability of the perpetrator. This has striking parallels with the use of the so-called 'trans panic' defence in the homicide of trans people as discussed above. As Fischel (2019:99) notes, the concept of deception 'has been perhaps the most historically consistent and successful idiom through which trans rights are abrogated and trans lives are pathologized, demeaned, or 'cut short'. In holding victims accountable for their own victimisation, it serves as a means to rationalise and defend violence against trans women. This is often perpetuated by media representations of violence against trans people. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) found in the media coverage of over seven thousand news stories covering the murders of trans and gender non-conforming people, that the dominant reporting framework constructed the murder of victims as a response to the perceived deception that the perpetrator felt.

However, perpetrators do not always rely on claims of deception to perpetrate violence against trans women. This was particularly the case in which the victim's transgender identity was already known. Nevertheless, in these instances, the trigger for violence was the disclosure of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Rachel, 18 years-old, describes an incident in which a former sexual partner perpetrated violence against her.

> "We were all sitting around having drinks, and I made some jokey comment about him having a big dick. One of the girls asked how I would know, and I winked at them. The thing is, we had all been drinking, and he could so easily have played it off as a joke. We were friends, there was no need for what happened. Instead of just going along with it and having a laugh, he got really angry. He was screaming at me that I was a man and fucking tranny, and he would never fuck someone like me. He was standing over me, proper trying to intimidate me, then stormed off and went home. The thing is, it was his reaction that gave it away that I was telling the truth."

In the scenario above, the perpetrator knew that Rachel was a trans woman at the time they engaged in a sexual relationship with her. This differs to the incident described by Elaine, in which it was her transgender identity that was disclosed that triggered the abuse. As the perpetrator had repeatedly engaged in sexual activity with Rachel, it can be argued that his violent outburst was a response to his fear or insecurity around other people's perception of his sexuality. The verbal violence that includes referring to Rachel as a 'man' indicates a potential fear that people will perceive him as homosexual. Although the perpetrator eventually leaves the situation, it was pivotal they re-establish their heteronormative masculine identity first which they may have feared was in question because of the disclosure.

The perpetrator therefore engages in hyper-masculine behaviour, and using transphobic language and 'standing over' Rachel, she is both verbally and physically subordinated. In this sense, through this subordination, the perpetrator positions themselves as dominant, both physically and symbolically. Furthermore, the verbal violence Rachel experiences, i.e., the use of the term 'tranny' which is inherently transphobic in this context, is also highly gendered, and is commonly used to denigrate

trans women. The term 'tranny' is also highly associated with the dehumanising language used in pornography and the wider sex industry (LePan *et al.*, 2017), which contributes to the sexualisation and fetishisation of trans women. However, it was not only in those instances where perpetrators were concerned about other's perceptions of their masculinity that violence was used against trans women, see below.

Internalised Homophobia, Sexual Guilt and Violence against Trans Women

A number of trans women reported having experienced violence immediately after engaging in sexual activities with gender-aligned men. Whilst the accounts provided earlier resulted from the perpetrator's concern about other's perceptions of their masculinity, below violence was perpetrated in 'private'. Madee, 24 years-old, who is also a sex-worker, recounted a number of experiences of violence perpetrated by men who had paid for various forms of sexual activity. For Madee, this was primarily perpetrated by men who had either paid to perform oral sex upon her or had requested to receive penetrative anal sex. She described how she would often experience a combination of both transphobia and homophobia.

> "They call me names like 'faggot' and 'queer'. It is always the men who want to play with me. The men that come see me and just want to get themselves off are never a problem. It [is] always the men who want to touch my private parts or want me to have sex with them, and me be like the person who gives it. They finish and then they get so angry and so aggressive. Sometimes they break my stuff, sometimes they hurt me."

The above excerpt demonstrates the homophobic nature of verbal abuse that Madee frequently experiences after engaging in various forms of sexual activity with gender-aligned men. In this sense, perpetrators appear to conflate gender identity and sexuality. This may be for a variety of reasons, but perhaps one of the most relevant, is the perception that trans women are not 'real' women, a stereotype regularly reinforced through popular culture (Colliver, 2020). The use of the terms 'faggot' and 'queer', which has historically been used to denigrate gay, or effeminate men, suggests there is a particular gendered perception of trans women. The continued de-legitimisation of trans women as inauthentic may contribute to the perpetrators' understanding of sex with trans women as 'homosexual'. Whilst the perpetrator in the above scenario may perceive

Madees' embodied femininity as 'inauthentic', sexual engagement with a person who identifies and presents as female may allow for cognitive dissonance, in which an individual can distance themselves from their self-perceived homosexuality. In this sense, for men who have previously identified as heterosexual and may be exploring their sexuality and thus in the process of developing a non-heterosexual sexuality; sexual engagement with trans women may be an avenue for exploration. Nonetheless, not all men who engage in sexual activity with trans women are engaging in a 'gateway' activity which will eventually lead to engagement with other men. Coleman (1982: 471) argues that homosexuals "frequently develop negative conceptions of themselves because of the negative societal attitude towards homosexuality". In some instances, these external prejudices may be internalised and may result in feelings of shame and guilt after engaging in sexual activity that may be understood as 'homosexual' (Rowen and Malcolm, 2003). This may particularly be the case when a perpetrator has been anally penetrated which is associated with femininity (Winter and King, 2011).

This complicates the understanding of violence against trans women, which has traditionally been framed and discussed in the context of transphobia. The violence experienced by Madee may not be motivated by transphobia, rather, the complex interplay of masculinities, internalised homophobia and feelings of shame and guilt. Other research has identified that trans sex workers are at a higher risk of experiencing violence than their gender-aligned counterparts (Fletcher, 2013). Thus, the violence perpetrated may be a direct response to perpetrators' inherent feelings of guilt and shame. Nevertheless, the motivations for these violent acts must also be conceptualised within the social context in which they are perpetrated. Heterosexuality is a core component of a hegemonic masculine identity thus these feelings of guilt and shame may be compounded by masculine status frustration. Therefore, the perceived depreciation in the perpetrators' masculine identity, may be alleviated using violence against the person perceived to be causing their confusion regarding their sexual identity. In this sense, feelings of internalised homophobia, shame and guilt may manifest in the externalised perpetration of violence against trans women. Violence can thus be understood as a coping mechanism used by perpetrators to assuage their own self-hatred, rather than 'hate' for trans people.

It is also important to understand how cultural configurations of femininity and masculinity operate within the context of violence against trans women. This became clear in other instances that Madee described.

> "Lots of men, they come to see me, they call me ladyboy. I think because on my advert it says I [am] from Thailand. Because I [am] from Thailand they think it okay to call me these names that they see on the internet. They always try to be really rough with me, they treat me like I'm [a] sex doll. Then they get really angry when I tell them to stop or to not be so rough. Then they try to hold me down, or hit me. They start to call me ladyboy again, but not in a nice way, or they start to call me tranny."

What becomes clear in the narrative above is a sense of entitlement to 'rough' sex. In this sense, perpetrators of violence may seek to establish a masculine identity through demonstrating sexual aggression and virility. Asian trans women may specifically be sought out for domination and 'rough sex' due to stereotypes that fetishise, eroticise and feminise them (Winter and King, 2011). For example, such stereotypes emphasise the perception that Asian trans women are more submissive, both sexually and socially. Thus, the physical aggression and verbal violence Madee experiences when resisting rough sex may be in direct response to challenging the perpetrators perceived 'right' to engage in sexual aggression to reaffirm their perceived hegemonic masculinity.

The symbolic and verbal violence discussed above and exhibited in the social media profiles of an ex-sexual partner is described by Monica in relation to how multiple identities may be managed.

> "It was shocking, like, his Twitter feed was full of naked pictures of trans women, I wasn't keen on it, because he would always comment on pictures and porn videos on Twitter and say nice things about how beautiful the women were, but he would always use disgusting language like tranny. When I came across him on Facebook, I couldn't believe how much he posted on Facebook about how disgusting trans people were, how trans people are mentally ill. Like, it was clear that he had all his friends and family on Facebook, it was like he was living a double life."

In the account given by Monica, there is a clear negotiation of identity that occurs. This may be easier to facilitate using social media, in which multiple profiles can be created and managed, with varying levels of anonymity. Whilst the perpetrator uses Twitter as a platform to contact trans women and to share pornographic content depicting trans women. He thus continues to perpetrate symbolic violence against trans women using derogatory language. Furthermore, the sharing of pornographic content, coupled with derogatory language contributes to the fetishisation of trans women (Bartholomaeus and Riggs, 2017) whilst simultaneously dehumanising and 'othering' them. This derogatory content shared on the perpetrator's Facebook profile is more explicitly transphobic and draws upon recurrent motifs that are routinely invoked to delegitimise trans people (Colliver *et al.*, 2019). In other words, through public displays of transphobia, symbolic violence is enacted based on unequal power relations inherent within heteronormative hegemonic society where a gender-aligned perpetrator can reinforce harmful narratives about an oppressed gender minority group. In these public displays of transphobia, the perpetrator distances themselves from perceived gender deviancies, this conscious denigration of gender diversity serves to reinforce a dominant position within gender hierarchies. In this sense, verbal abuse is a powerful conduit for the manifestation of toxic masculinity which contributes to a social climate in which trans women are subordinated and objectified resulting in their legitimacy as targets for violence. Although levels of victimisation exist within hate crime literature (Colliver, 2020) it is important not to underestimate the significance of symbolic and verbal violence in their potential to traumatise victims and their additional consequence of creating a hostile environment for oppressed communities.

Conclusion

It is emphasised here that trans women's experiences of victimisation within the context of romantic and sexual relationships has not garnered significant attention within hate crime scholarship. Rather, scholarship has focused on those incidents of 'hate' that occur in public, commonly perpetrated by strangers. As a result, understandings of transphobia, and transphobic violence have traditionally been understood in relation to the perceived 'difference' and 'vulnerability' of the victim (Perry, 2001; Chakraborti and Garland, 2012). In this chapter, we have aimed to reorient the analytical focus on the actions of the

perpetrators and what is achieved through the perpetration of violence against trans women. In acknowledging the performative, rather than biological nature of masculinity, we can understand physical, verbal and symbolic violence as a pervasive conduit for toxic masculinity. These forms of violence are perpetrated in response to an internal struggle between aspirations to conform to the ideals of hegemonic heteronormative masculinity and a sexual and/or romantic attraction to trans women. Indeed, existing research has shown that men display higher levels of anxiety than women when their gender role is questioned (Vandello *et al,* 2008). Thus, as described above the potential threat to an individual's masculine identity may be an underlying motivator of violence enacted against trans women.

Here, we have offered an alternative framework for understanding violence against trans women that differs from dominant hate crime frameworks. It is therefore emphasised that public displays of transphobia in an effort to reaffirm the heterosexual hegemonic masculine identity may be perceived as central to succeed in a heteronormative dating culture. These public performances of transphobia serve to distance the perpetrator from feminisation consequently reinforcing the perpetrators' masculinity both through the symbolic expanse, and manifestation of masculine-oriented behaviours such as aggression and dominance. It is also demonstrated that there is often a conflation between gender identity and sexuality, and this may result in issues of internalised homophobia, shame and guilt manifesting in the perpetration of physical, verbal and symbolic violence against trans women. Finally, we also considered the ways in which cultural stereotypes regarding femininity and subordination impact upon trans women's experience of violence and aggression. Thus, the very act of engaging in a dominant role in rough sex may be an attempt to bolster the gender-aligned male's masculine identity. Therefore, aggressive sex informed by transphobia seeks to subordinate trans women. Once this subordination has been achieved then the perpetrators' own sense of internal masculinity is rebalanced and re-established.

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to encourage further research into the complexities of the motivations underlying the perpetration of transphobic violence. Particularly, in relation to the potential toxicity of conservative or traditional forms of heteronormative hegemonic masculine identities that constrain such males from accepting diverse and non-

binary gender identities which are perceived to destabilise their gendered perceptions of people and may even cause them to question the immutableness of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, the importance of considering the social context within which these actions occurred is pivotal as outlined above. Finally, the aim of this chapter is to emphasise the potential traumatisation that can be experienced by victims as a result of the aforementioned verbal violence which may often be dismissed as insignificant by those to whom the victims turn to for support which can exacerbate their experience. It is hoped that this chapter encourages further scholarship in this area as this form of transphobic violence is frequently overlooked within the available literature.

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