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‘It’s Something You Just Have to Ignore’: Understanding and Addressing Contemporary Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Safety Beyond Hate Crime Paradigms

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Abstract

In common with the experiences of many other groups – and despite changing legal landscapes and increasing recognition within social policy of different groups’ needs – LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) people continue to face discrimination and abuse, and improving safety continues to be a key touchstone for policy makers and practitioners engaging with LGBT lives. Based on evidence from Count Me In Too, an LGBT participatory research project in Brighton & Hove, UK, the paper challenges approaches to dealing with LGBT safety that narrowly focus on reporting within a hate crime paradigm, and recognises the shift towards multi-agency approaches to LGBT safety. Our evidence shows that many LGBT people differentially recognise or do not recognise abuse, instead ‘normalising’ much of the abuse they experience in order to carry on with day-to-day life. By focusing on the effects of abuse and how it is dealt with by individuals and communities, rather than focusing on what constitutes abuse, we show the importance of addressing LGBT safety in ways that move beyond questions of criminal justice and the reporting of hate crime. We argue for a broader social policy framework that uses multi-agency approaches to community safety for those who experience abuse on the basis of their sexual and/or gender identities, which should attend to how safety services may provide more appropriate contexts of care and support, and which should build upon relevant knowledges within LGBT communities. Fostering solidarities among LGBT people may also empower them to work towards broader social transformation.

Introduction

‘Safety’ to me doesn’t just mean being safe from verbal/physical harassment. I want to feel comfortable that I’m not going to be subject to a range of annoying behaviour from ‘jokes’ and unwanted sexual advances to ‘funny’ looks and whispers. This may seem unrealistic and would require massive shifts in social attitudes but it would be my ideal to expect the treatment (or rather the invisibility and freedom) that I took for granted when I was in straight relationships. (Questionnaire 663)¹

Dramatic social changes have impacted directly and indirectly upon social policy in the UK over the past decade or so, including a series of developments in equalities agendas and legislation towards greater recognition of and protection for LGBT² (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) people. As those working in other areas of social difference have discovered, social exclusion, violence and oppression does not simply disappear through such legislative change (Lewis, 2009; Perry, 2008). Despite greater formal acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, surveys of LGBT people continue to point to high levels of reported and, moreover, unreported 'abuse'³ related to victims' gender and sexual identities (Herek *et al.*, 2002; Herek, 2009; Moran, 2002). The term 'abuse' has various and contested meanings within social policy. For some, it is always understood in terms of inequitable power relations (Kelly, 1988). For others, abuse is socio-spatial, and 'a matter of translation, debate and politics' (Reavey and Warner, 2003: 1). Following Reavey and Warner (2003), we see abuse as contextual, such that what abuse 'is' is in part determined by how it is recognised.

Increasing recognition of LGBT abuse under hate crime legislation has been accompanied by some localised initiatives, which encourage LGBT people who have experienced certain acts to report such incidents to the police. There have been moves towards dealing with LGBT safety through multi-agency partnerships and through 'community safety' approaches, both of which shift the emphasis from simply improving access to criminal justice towards situating questions of safety within a more broadly conceived network of social policy agencies and stakeholders. This is a move, then, from LGBT safety as simply a matter for the police and criminal justice system towards seeing safety within a wider welfare perspective. More broadly, given that safety is a key aspect of the contract between the state and the individual in liberal democracies, a lack of safety can indicate exclusion from citizenship rights (Moran *et al.*, 2004; Perry, 2001; Phelan, 2001). Whilst issues of LGBT safety have been addressed in sociology and criminology (for example, Moran *et al.*, 2004; Tomsen, 2006), this paper explores some of the implications for social policy that result from broader understandings of safety. In particular, we situate this paper within wider shifts in social policy discourse that re-envision welfare as concerning more than redistributive justice, instead also addressing marginalisation on the basis of collective social identities such as sexual and gender identities. This shift is not simply about the recognition of difference, but rather addresses how social policy might work to transform the basis of status (Fraser, 2000): in the context of this paper, this might direct attention towards the broader social contexts of LGBT marginalisation and the importance of empowering LGBT communities in shaping responses to abuse and discrimination.

The next section situates this paper within some of the key literatures in the areas of hate crime and recent thinking regarding privilege and diversity among LGBT people, and considers how these differences relate to experiences of abuse.

The section that follows outlines the context and methods of the participatory research project 'Count Me In Too' (CMIT). The first empirical section draws upon data from this project, using it to understand abuse in terms of its effects – what it does – and to describe how abuse becomes normalised (and invisible) in order to deal with it as an everyday experience. We suggest that alongside efforts to improve access to justice, a focus on LGBT safety should pay attention to broader issues of support, including from within LGBT communities. We conclude with recommendations that strive to address some of the issues raised by our analysis.

Creating safety through tackling 'hate crime'?

The ways in which normative heterosexuality is sustained through symbolic and physical violence has been extensively explored; within these debates, LGBT safety has become associated with questions of abuse, violence and discrimination (Corteen, 2002; Moran, 2002; Moran *et al.*, 2004). Academic and policy discussions of LGBT safety have frequently been shaped by a focus on how to respond to violence, harassment, verbal comments and other forms of 'abuse'. Questions of safety, therefore, have thus been reduced to – and have often been framed in terms of – policing, criminality and, more recently, hate crime. The concept of 'hate crime' allows a specific claim for justice to be made (Mason, 2007; Morgan, 2002) within the limits of what is knowable and reportable as 'hate crime'. As Morgan (2002) notes, for an incident to be recognised as a 'hate crime', there has to be an identification of hate motivation on the part of a perpetrator and an identification between the victim and any particular victimised group(s) appearing on a list of groups specified in hate crime statutes. In England and Wales, the Criminal Justice Act (2003) places 'sexual orientation' onto the list of hate crimes, and offenders can receive longer sentences if they demonstrate hostility towards 'the victim' on the basis of sexual orientation, or if the offence is itself motivated by such hostility. The validity of claims is dependent on whether the incident meets these formal definitional criteria. Moreover, meeting such criteria in turn depends upon the construction of notions of culpability and victimisation, which are themselves influenced by the social, cultural and interactional contexts in which violence occurs (Mason, 2007; Richardson and May, 1999).

In the UK, safety initiatives for LGBT people have been introduced over the past decade or so in the context of legislative change and the recognition of 'sexual orientation' within equalities agendas (Moran, 2002; McGhee, 2003). Such safety initiatives tend to focus on 'hate crime', defined through discourses of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia,⁴ and to place the emphasis of redress with the state. This reflects, and is reflected in, moves beyond framing sexual minority citizenship in terms of 'tolerance' and 'homosexual privacy', and towards more inclusive policing; simultaneously, discriminatory laws have been 'de-homosexualised' (McGhee, 2004). Together with the introduction of hate

crime legislation, these moves appear to have created a policing and criminal justice system that can include LGBT people's needs. However, it is not necessarily the case that policing and criminal justice measures are the most appropriate or only response to experiences of abuse. The emergence of participatory modes of government and multi-agency partnerships that take a 'community safety' approach (McGhee, 2003) means that criminal justice is losing its 'monopoly over safety' (Moran, 2002: 9). In this context, dealing with questions of safety also involves the use of resources that are available to LGBT communities and individuals (see Moran *et al.*, 2004; also Corteen, 2002; Mason, 2001) such as homes and community spaces that offer the opportunity to create safe spaces that are not bound by heterosexual norms (Browne, 2006; Gorman-Murray, 2008; Kentlyn, 2008; Nash and Bain, 2007). Indeed, forging common spaces to deal with shared experiences of abuse can help to foster a sense of collectivity, common cause and solidarity among LGBT people. Not only might identity politics be a means through which LGBT people can make connections that help them to deal with abuse (Moran and Sharpe, 2004), but reparative practices can help to foster collective LGBT identities themselves.

In contrast to this emphasis on collectivity, recent academic investigations have sought to examine the creation of specific norms of culturally acceptable homosexuality (Bell and Binnie, 2000). This research has examined how social and political hierarchies cut across sexual and gendered differences within LGBT collectives along the lines of privilege, including class, race and gender: the normative system associated with such hierarchies has been called 'homonormativity' (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Duggan, 2002; Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Nast, 2002; Puar, 2008; Taylor, 2007). 'Homonormativity' can be used to understand LGBT safety in at least three ways. Firstly, LGBT people themselves perpetrate abuse against each other – for example, biphobia and transphobia are reported in 'gay spaces' (see Browne and Bakshi, forthcoming, Doan, 2007; Hines, 2007). Secondly, research has shown that some lesbians and gay men experience less abuse on the basis of sexual or gender identity than other LGBT people and that this can be associated with particular forms of privilege, including race, gender and class (Grossman and D'Augelli, 2006; Michaelson, 2008; Ryan and Rivers, 2003). Finally, Bryant (2008: 456) has examined how discourses and practices that challenge homophobia can enact homonormative stigmatising of other forms of 'queer expression' by producing an ideal gay subject to be defended from 'homophobia'. The concept of homophobia can thus be problematic in its deployment (O'Brien, 2008).

It is important to question the social and political contexts in which normative sexual and/or gender identities are (re)produced, given that such identities are the basis for recognising 'victims' as 'undeserving' of 'homophobic' violence or abuse (Mason, 2007; Morgan, 2002; Richardson and May, 1999), and for naming and recounting incidents as 'undeserved homophobia' (Moran

et al., 2004). We propose that considerations of how discourses about homophobia can perpetuate marginalisation within LGBT groupings (Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz, 2008: 391) and of how some within LGBT collectives are more vulnerable to the effects of discrimination and abuse must take place alongside an examination of how abuse that is related to sexual and/or gender identities can cross cut – and create – LGBT groupings and collectivities. This examination needs to include those who are presumed to be ‘privileged’ in relation to forms of social difference (such as whiteness, middle-class status, living in an urban area) that might be presumed to make them ‘less vulnerable’.

Context and methods

Locating this paper in the context of Brighton & Hove – the purported ‘gay capital of the UK’ (<http://gay.brighton.co.uk/>) with a reputation for ‘tolerance’ towards sexual and gender difference – enables a particular reading of safety. It enables us to address presumed forms of urban tolerance, which can be read as enabling specific forms of privilege for some LGBT people. In the context of both recent government initiatives and local advocacy, Sussex Police have established a civilian LGBT liaison officer within the Brighton & Hove Anti-Victimisation Unit, and the local Partnership Community Safety Team has a specific remit to improve community safety for ‘the LGBT community’. In recent years, a multi-agency approach to LGBT safety has been facilitated, in part, by Spectrum, the local LGBT forum, and there have been a number of safety campaigns targeting LGBT people.

The data from this paper arises from Count Me In Too (CMIT), a participatory project where lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people shared their views and experiences, and worked with service providers and others to gather and present evidence that would promote positive changes for LGBT people (see www.countmeintoo.co.uk for further details of how the project was undertaken, findings reports and summaries of findings). The initial research design and data analysis involved local LGBT individuals and voluntary and community groups and services, as well as statutory services. We have reanalysed the data for this paper. The data were collected between January and October 2006 using a questionnaire, completed by 819 respondents, which consisted of open-ended and closed questions. The sample consisted mainly of gay men (53 per cent) and gay women/lesbians (34 per cent), with 6 per cent identifying as bisexual. Five per cent of the sample identified as trans. Sixty per cent of the sample were aged between 26–45, 94 per cent identified as white and 10 per cent earned an income of under £10,000. An LGBT steering group recognised the sampling bias of most previous LGBT questionnaire research towards white, ‘affluent’, and lesbian and gay respondents, and so identified particular groups thought to be multiply marginalised and often overlooked in questionnaire data. Twenty focus groups were undertaken with these groups. The groups included older LGBT people,

trans people, bi people, LGBT people who identified as disabled, and black and minority ethnic LGBT people. We also targeted people whose experiences of certain issues (such as mental health difficulties and hate crime) may have implications for their experiences of LGBT life. One focus group consisted of LGBT people who had experienced hate crime (this group was made up of people who had severe and prolonged experiences of hate crime). There were also two 'general focus groups' in which any LGBT person could take part. LGBT people could attend as many focus groups as they felt applied to them. In total, sixty-nine people participated in the focus groups. Each focus group was asked about experiences of abuse, discrimination, exclusion and 'fitting in'.

The questions on safety in the questionnaire began with:

Have you experienced any of the following in the last 5 years that was due to your sexual orientation or gender identity:

- verbal abuse
- physical violence
- criminal damage
- harassment
- sexual assault
- negative comments
- teasing
- bullying
- other

The questionnaire was routed such that if a respondent ticked 'yes' to any of the experiences, they were taken to a section that asked about experiences, perpetrators, places where the incident(s) took place, and about reporting. Further questions were posed to the entire sample relating to the fear of crime and perceptions of the police (for further details regarding the methodology and findings see Browne and Lim, 2008). The next section will begin the empirical analysis, offering insights into what safety is for LGBT people who live, work and/or socialise in Brighton & Hove.

Safety and abuse

In this research, the most common forms of hate crime – which the majority of respondents reported experiencing – were 'negative comments' (55 per cent, $n = 452$) and 'verbal abuse' (54 per cent, $n = 445$) (see Browne and Lim, 2008), and the most common place for such experiences was in the street. These findings concur with previous research indicating that heterosexist hassles were most likely to be verbal comments (Swim *et al.*, 2007). Over half of Herek's (2009) 662 LGB respondents in a US-based survey said they had experienced verbal harassment on the basis of their sexual identities, while Herek *et al.*'s (2002) research established

that most incidents of hate crimes on basis of sexual identity were perpetrated in public settings by one or more strangers. Moran (2007) argues that the 'stranger danger' model is used by various stakeholders to explain the distinctiveness of lesbian and gay experiences of violence. The CMIT data show that stranger danger had symbolic resonance, but also that this was not the whole story. Although the majority of people who reported hate crime said they had experienced verbal abuse and/or negative comments, only forty respondents out of the 596, who had experienced some form of hate crime, had only experienced verbal abuse and/or negative comments in the street from a stranger. This indicates that LGBT people's experience of hate crime cannot be pigeonholed as merely verbal abuse or negative comments from strangers in the street.⁵

Respondents to CMIT made sense of incidents of verbal abuse, negative comments and other forms of discrimination and violence in diverse ways, and they did not necessarily position themselves as 'victims':

Sometimes I think the whole LGBT world is just a little too precious in its sensitivities. We live in the real world, where people say unpleasant things. It's part of life and we need to accept that. It's a very different matter when discrimination is involved and where there's real physical and mental harm. (Questionnaire 83)

Corteen (2002: 276) argues that in addition to the effects of physical violence, there is a need to recognise the importance of ontological security and the 'interior harm that lesbians experience as a result of the everyday, localised management of their sexual identity and demeanour'. Respondent 83 constructs 'real' abuse as only that which surpasses a particular threshold: this highlights how what counts as a recognisable form of abuse or as an acceptable 'part of life' is open to cultural and individual contestation. For some LGBT people, leaving experiences of abuse unrecognised could be a way of preserving one's ability to get by on a day-to-day basis. For others, not recognising the harm done to them (and others) by experiences of abuse may involve the repetition of the kinds of invisibility, closeting and silence that make abuse and othering mundane. We discuss the normalisation of abuse in more detail in the next section. Here, however, it is important to note that victimisation paradigms may allow access to justice, but we should not generalise victimisation to all LGBT people. Respondent 83's comment constructs abuse (and whether or not it becomes recognised as such) in terms of its effects – a question of harm. Yet 'harm' is differentially experienced:

Jackie: When you think about safety, one probably thinks about physical hurt, being beaten up. But . . . even if it's a 10 year old that shouts abuse at you, it hurts a hell of a lot, and even if you don't consciously think about it, the whole week you're probably affected by that, very depressed just because of that little thing. (First generation immigrants' focus group)

Extra support for vulnerable people that may be affected by what may be a minor incident to others but that can greatly affect a vulnerable person, i.e. verbal homophobia could trigger off severe anxiety attacks in a vulnerable person. (Questionnaire 16)

These comments suggest that verbal attacks can have very different effects depending on the vulnerability of the person attacked, and can seriously affect a person's mental health and wellbeing (see also Herek *et al.*, 1997; Clements-Nolle *et al.*, 2006; Szymanski, 2005). While respondent 83 suggests that some verbal abuse should be accepted, Jackie emphasises the unconscious effects of comments that respondent 83 might not think of as 'really' harmful. Thus, the concept of 'homonormative privilege' to imply differences in the likelihood of experiencing 'homophobic' abuse on the basis of ethnicity, class, etc., (O'Brien, 2008) may also be applied to differences in the ways in which people are affected by such experiences. The effects of abuse may be 'minor' for some individuals and 'severe' for others; therefore, variations in individuals' and groups' resilience in the face of abuse need to be addressed and accounted for. Focusing on and dealing with the effects of abuse may also suggest that policy makers and service providers need to have a broader conceptualisation of abuse than those currently prevalent. The current drive to increase the reporting of hate crime, while important in itself, has concentrated attention upon operationalising, within criminal justice systems, a legal definition of what 'abuse' (including 'violence', 'attacks', 'discrimination' etc.) *is*. These definitions rest upon establishing the motivations of perpetrators and upon sexual and/or gender identities, both of which become determined by politicised communities, legal actors, assailants and the media, rather than by those who experience abuse (Moore and Rennie, 2006). Understanding how definitions of abuse are socially located (Reavey and Warner, 2003) allows an engagement with what abuse *does* within particular social and discursive contexts. Characterising abuse in terms of what it does – its effects – rather than only focusing upon what it is broadens the locus of concern regarding LGBT safety. LGBT safety not only involves improving the recognition of hate crime within the policing and criminal justice system, but also includes consideration of the broader provision of support for 'victims', how to address the effects of abuse, how to foster resilience, how LGBT people can stay safe and how to reduce the incidence of abuse. For the police and broader support services for 'victims', it also involves consideration of how people are treated:

I was sexually assaulted in December 2005. The police I reported the crime to were reluctant to take me seriously unless I had been anally raped (which I had). Their priority was gathering evidence – not my mental or physical health. They did not know what PEP (post exposure prophylaxis) was and I had not been able to advocate for myself I would not have received this treatment. This is a *scandal!* I was put in touch with the [name] team who knew nothing about gay male identity and were very, very insensitive. On reporting to the police station, I had to tell them why I was there – in front of a queue of people reporting lost mobile phones etc., I had to say 'I am here because I was raped'. I was made to feel like the perpetrator, not the victim. I then had to endure the indignity of a medical examiner who said 'it was risky of you to walk home on your own'. I was assaulted after leaving (names a club in Brighton) because I felt ill. This happened on the seafront in Hove. My physical injuries have healed, but the PEP was excruciating (the NHS staff were amazing). The police re-traumatised me at every turn – they

did nothing on time, they had no procedures, they depersonalised me. The man who came to my home to produce an identikit picture (three months later!) said 'he (the rapist) looks like a nice guy you wouldn't expect him to do something like that'. It's a scandal. (Questionnaire 185)

For some, the traumatic experience of an LGBT hate crime is compounded by poor police services and other services for the victims of hate crime. Respondent 185's comment illustrates that these services can perpetuate experiences of abuse, thus aggravating experiences such as rape. Dealing with LGBT people who experience such forms of violent crime requires more than physical care and criminal justice (see also the Stern review, Stern, 2010). Engaging with what abuse does – rather than what it is – has personal as well as contextual importance. It has long been argued that abuse and the threat of abuse have the effect of creating and maintaining heteronormativity (see Browne, 2006; Mason, 2001; Valentine, 1996). Addressing LGBT safety within a broader scope, beyond paradigms that seek to define what abuse is and how it can be punished (see also Moran *et al.*, 2004), directs attention towards how service providers, communities and other stakeholders might work to create safety – especially by creating services, environments and contexts for care and caring. In turn, this requires an account of the differential effects of abuse and the ways in which abuse is 'dealt' with.

Dealing with (normalised) abuse

It has been noted that violence is a part of everyday life for lesbians and gay men (Moran *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, in quantitative research that has addressed such questions, the majority of LGBT people surveyed have experienced abuse (Moran, 2007). Whilst some individuals may benefit from the 'homonormative' privileges of greater recognition from the police and the possession of the cultural capital to be able to construct themselves as 'undeserving victims', should they be subject to abuse, the normalisation of abuse is a practice that cuts across all sections of LGBT populations.

There's a casualness that affects people's responses to the issue based on the regularity of experiencing some form of homophobic insult, comment or abuse. It is so common and expected that you learn to live with it, and then there's the avoidance of conflict: not wanting to get into a fight or altercation. (Questionnaire 432)

Focusing on the reactions to abuse widens a concern for LGBT safety. Corteen (2002), for instance, notes how groups of lesbians have collectively and individually developed ways of dealing with violence outside of policing and criminal justice systems. Evidence from CMIT demonstrates the diverse ways in which LGBT people deal with and normalise the abuse that they experience. This raises questions about a narrow policy focus upon improving policing and access to criminal justice: much of the abuse experienced by LGBT people will never enter the ambit of the police and criminal justice system. Efforts to encourage LGBT people to report every kind of incident of abuse may be harmful, given that

'ignoring' abuse can be an important self-preservation tactic for dealing with its persistent and everyday nature:

Natasha: It's like, you know, if you took on board everything, you'd go mad, you would, you know. So you do learn to sort of cast it out from your mind. (Trans focus group 1)

There's no point. People make comments all the time whether it's about how you look or whether you shouldn't be in the ladies toilets as they think you're a boy. Who are you to report it to? You end up with a chip on your shoulder but that's life. People are ignorant. (Questionnaire 677)

Not defining or naming abuse can be used as a strategy for self-preservation in the face of daily experiences that negate your identity or overtly ridicule your sexual and/or gender identities. In the focus group, Natasha discussed how she is resigned to daily experiences of abuse and the deliberate mis-recognition of her gender identity. Both she and respondent 677 speak of the consequences of paying attention to discriminatory experiences. For Natasha, 'casting it out from your mind' is an important survival tactic that prevents her from going 'mad'. Respondent 677 says that she experiences negative comments 'all the time', yet such comments may not fit within conventional definitions of homophobia, biphobia or transphobia (see Browne, 2006). The question she then poses – 'who are you to report it to?' – may suggest a dissonance between what she as an individual might experience as abuse based on her gender identity and what is recognised as 'abuse' or as a 'hate crime' by the police or other safety services. As a frequent part of life, it seems she feels forced to accept that these experiences and her reactions to them have personal consequences ('you end up with a chip on your shoulder').

Browne (2006) discussed how particular relations can be taken for granted, such that they are not nameable or understood as exclusionary. During the CMIT focus groups, direct questions regarding discrimination did not necessarily result in the identification of instances of abuse. Yet, in some focus groups, incidents were later recounted that could be interpreted as 'homophobic abuse':

Researcher: So any experiences of discrimination or being made to feel like you don't fit?

Tracey: I don't think anybody has been like that to me.

[later in the interview]

Tracey: I was only sitting on the bus this afternoon and there was quite a lot of school kids going on about 'fucking lesbians' and all that and I don't tolerate that situation so I could have told them to shut up but I didn't. I just sat there and just listened to them and, you know, that's really bad abuse at me because I'm a lesbian.

...

getting shouted out you know like on the balcony as you are walking down the road, 'oh you fucking poof' and all that and 'go back to Lesbos land' and you know it was getting . . . it went on for about six years and it was just having all these hassles and that – they were writing dirty letters to me and everything. (Mental Health focus group)

Tracey's account, alongside those of other respondents who did not recognise what had happened to them as 'discriminatory' or a 'hate crime', suggests that there may be methodological limits to direct (particularly quantitative) questions that seek to uncover instances and the prevalence of homophobic, biphobic and/or transphobic abuse. Accounts such as Tracey's problematise discourses, definitions and policies that rely on the social, emotional and cultural recognition of abuse (see Mason, 2007). Given that tackling hate crime depends upon the recognition of incidents of abuse *as* hate crimes both within legislative definitions and on the part of those who experience it, and given that such recognition is problematic, it seems likely that many, if not most, incidents of abuse on the basis of sexual and/or gender identities will not end up being reported to the police, either directly or indirectly. Efforts to increase LGBT communities' trust in police services within a broader framework of multi-agency approaches to community safety (McGhee, 2003) do not avoid these problems of recognition. In terms of broadening policies for addressing LGBT safety, these discussions raise further questions such as: Should interventions be focused on education to make abuse more easily recognisable and nameable? What effects would such increased recognition have for individuals and collectives when *not* naming or recognising abuse is asserted to help prevent individuals from 'going mad'?

Similar to other research in the field (Herek *et al.*, 2002; Moran, 2002), when asked why they did not report an incident, the main reason given by CMIT respondents ($n = 122$) was that the incident was not serious enough or that it was 'minor'. A further forty-four respondents said that they 'weren't bothered' by the incident. In addition, understanding these incidents as 'part of LGBT lives' was reiterated twenty-nine times.

One or two comments from people in the street in passing is not going to be taken as serious homophobic abuse and there is no chance of the perpetrators being 'caught'. I normally just say something to challenge the taunt and leave it at that. This happens to LGBT people every day, the number of homophobic abuse incidents reported really is just the tip of the iceberg. (Questionnaire 724)

Respondent 724's comment again problematises the criminality paradigm when dealing with abuse on the basis of sexual and/or gender identity. If an incident is not considered 'serious' by those who experience it and is considered to be just part of the fabric of everyday life, reporting and recourse to legal intervention may be seen as not worth the effort (see also Perry, 2001). Normalisation, then, might discourage tackling abuse through formal

institutional means and instead prompt resignation and tolerance of abuse. Behind the belief that ‘there is no chance of the perpetrators being “caught”’ may also lie an unspoken calculation about whether it would be realistic (and perhaps even desirable) for police and criminal justice services to devote resources and time to incidents of harassment and verbal abuse. In this context, the strategies and resources of individuals and communities who have to deal with these incidents are important: respondent 724, for instance, says that they ‘challenge the taunt and leave it at that’.

LGBT respondents also spoke of dealing with questions of safety by avoiding situations where they may experience abuse. Where abuse occurs in the workplace, this can mean leaving a job. Avoidance of conflict through the self-policing of behaviours has been well documented in the sexualities literature and can be seen as assuming a personal responsibility for safety (Browne, 2006; Moran, 2002; Moran *et al.*, 2004; Valentine, 1996). However, leaving or avoiding abusive situations may not always be possible. In this context, dealing with abuse might require recourse to intervention by the state:

Dan: Just recently there was two kiddies from across the road, they were standing there for well over an hour and half, throwing stones at the car . . . they weren’t happy until they had smashed a window. What can police do? ‘Oh, they’re children.’ So do the adults not take responsibility for them? I go up to the Council and I say to them, ‘Well, that is homophobic attack.’ The man knew his kids were doing it; he even threw one and it hit a bus. The police came round, saw the evidence, they were satisfied, they went over. I mean at the end of the day, what do we still get? We get the intimidation now, do you know what I mean? I didn’t want this. It’s intimidation. I’ve had damage done to my vehicle. They take my disabled parking bay, half in and half out and block me in so I can’t get out. But why? What have I done? I hardly go out the house. You know we go to maybe the local shop [at night], because it’s the only time that he can go out. He won’t go out like in the daytime. (Disability focus group)

Ignoring the abuse from their neighbours was impossible for Dan and his partner because the abuse affected their daily lives, use of space, and health and wellbeing. Dan reported the incident in line with contemporary initiatives that encourage ‘victims’ to report, yet in response to his reporting it, the intimidation he has faced has escalated. His experience draws attention to the limited effectiveness of a ‘hate crime’ model that encourages the reporting of abuse (see Moran *et al.*, 2004). It also suggests that deploying state interventions on a single incident basis does not address ongoing situations, relations and contexts of abuse.

Creating safety and solidarity

There has been much important discussion of how differences of privilege and power create schisms among LGBT people. Indeed, CMIT was initially created to explore multiple marginalisations within LGBT communities. Yet,

the process itself created spaces in which experiences could be shared and understandings of abuse explored in ways that enable 'collective and social forms of recovery' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 31), similar to spaces created by other LGBT organisations in the city. CMIT focused on those who were identified in some way as multiply marginalised, addressing power relations in 'gay Brighton' (see for example Browne and Lim, 2010). This included steering group meetings where LGBT people who identified as marginalised worked together to design the questionnaire and focus groups for the research, holding the power to make decisions. In this way, LGBT people from a wide range of backgrounds and identities came together to work *collectively* to create the research and to create safe space. During the themed analyses, LGBT people and organisations once again came together to work with service providers and academics to generate findings and recommendations for action (see www.countmeintoo.co.uk; Browne *et al.*, forthcoming for further details on this process). Throughout the research process, participants noted that sharing experiences of hate crime (as well as other issues) can be an empowering and uplifting experience, particularly where voices are not usually heard:

Sue: Today it's lovely. If women sit together and exchange their stories and actually help support each other that for me would be a place I'd go, it really would. (Pilot focus group)

Although this respondent seeks a place for women, a range of spaces with varying criteria for participation might offer the opportunity to discuss and share similar experiences (both within and outside of therapeutic settings), and, in doing so, could have a positive effect in bringing LGBT communities together. The sharing of similar experiences may also influence the reporting of and (perhaps more importantly) the dealing with experiences of abuse.

During a CMIT consultation event, 'With Us, By Us, For Us', LGBT people came together to share their experiences of CMIT at a 'speakers' corner'. Many spoke of discrimination and marginalisation, and the collective voice was powerful and moving. An ethos of mutual and collective listening to each other's experiences meant that participants in this open and 'public' space found comfort in recognising commonalities of experience with other people from different sections of the broader LGBT community. Many times, individuals found that their stories were reflected in those told by others; similar tales were repeated in different words, forming a collective voice. Creating spaces to collectively address the hurt, anger, injury, shame and so on of abuse may engender solidarities through producing common discourses and experiences of dealing with the effects of abuse. Additionally, rather than seeking individualised diagnosis or cure (Cvetkovich, 2003), attention can be paid to social structures more broadly.

It is important to note that in dealing with issues of safety, LGBT communities and organisations may seek not *only* to 'work in partnership' with statutory bodies and state sponsored initiatives, but also to work with other LGBT people (in

potentially transformative ways). There is a wealth of often untapped knowledge and resources within these communities on how to cope and deal with experiences of abuse. Often, such knowledge, resources and spaces for coming together are offered by LGBT organisations, some of which, such as the local LGBT mental health organisation Mind Out, were praised by CMIT participants for their work within LGBT communities. Community-driven frameworks for safety not only build on LGBT people's long experience of supporting each other through experiences of marginalisation and abuse, but are also important where there is a history of mistrust of the police, social services and other services because of the marginalisation and abuse experienced at their hands. By creating solidarities and working across schisms within LGBT communities, such frameworks also refute the potentially disempowering consequences of policies that solely frame support as being delivered from the outside. Of course, community-driven frameworks bring issues around who becomes advantaged and who becomes disadvantaged, who becomes excluded and who becomes othered – perhaps *because* of the effects of abuse (see Kapoor, 2005) – which require caution. However, we follow those who argue that community participation can have empowering effects (see Kesby, 2007), not least in enabling communities to hold safety services to account and, indeed, to contest dominant social structures.

Conclusion

This paper builds on the recognition that a criminal justice paradigm that focuses on the reporting and prosecution of single incidents is insufficient to address ongoing situations, relations and the broader societal contexts of abuse and victimisation (see Corteen, 2002; Cvetkovich, 2003; Moran *et al.*, 2004). A focus on reporting 'hate crime' is also at odds with the way in which many LGBT people ignore abuse for their own self-preservation. Our evidence suggests the importance of a focus on the differential effects of abuse and violence, and thus also on the broader provision of support for those who experience abuse. We have shown that dealing with the effects of abuse can take place in collective LGBT spaces of support, where the sharing of experiences is undertaken in (formal and informal) safe spaces. Knowledge of how to 'deal with' abuse exists within LGBT communities, and many LGBT organisations are skilled at recognising the complexities of LGBT lives and so are able to provide services and contexts of care attuned to the differential effects of abuse. For example, Mind Out has developed specific knowledge and experience regarding the creation of safe spaces for attending to the effects of abuse in ways that are appropriate for their users – LGBT people with a range of mental health difficulties. Thus, alongside and in addition to the criminal justice paradigm and an emphasis on reporting, we use the remainder of these conclusions to offer recommendations that seek to address the issues raised in this paper.

Firstly, there needs to be broader and more appropriate support to address the effects of abuse. Appropriate support means incorporating nuanced understandings of the variety of ways in which different LGBT people are differently affected by abuse and of the ways in which LGBT people can experience abuse from other LGBT people. The provision of such support may include formal spaces of support and the sharing of experiences, and professional care and therapy; however, it should also recognise informal spaces and the need to withdraw to safe spaces for healing and recovery that LGBT people have created and own. Secondly, as LGBT communities' expertise of providing appropriate support for LGBT people who have experienced abuse mainly resides within voluntary and community sector organisations, proper resourcing and support is needed for them to contribute to the agenda we are proposing. This expertise should not simply be co-opted by statutory services: a key aspect of the importance of many LGBT organisations is that their ownership lies with LGBT people. Thirdly, given the importance of the knowledge within LGBT communities and organisations about responding to the effects of abuse, the formulation of safety policy needs to involve a broad range of LGBT actors and organisations – not just 'mainstream' LGBT groups, but also those that work with people with specific issues and needs, such as those experiencing mental health issues, trans people and so on.

It is apparent from this and other contemporary discussions (see Cvetkovich, 2003, Moran, *et al.*, 2004) that promoting LGBT safety needs to address ongoing situations and the wider contexts and relations of abuse. There are numerous ways in which the cultural roots of abuse and violence might be contested. Concrete suggestions could include: supporting projects that challenge homo/bi/transphobia, which could and should dovetail with anti-bullying initiatives and community-based anti-violence projects. That such measures are targeted at the ongoing and wider social contexts and situations of abuse must be set against the privatisation of responsibility that marks what have been characterised as 'neoliberal' changes to social policy (Beresford, 2010), of which community-driven frameworks for safety have been a part. Indeed, our recommendations regarding the involvement of LGBT actors and organisations in the formulation and delivery of LGBT safety policy are not intended to add to the ongoing agenda of the individualisation of risks, responsibilities and activity. Rather, they are intended to stress the importance of the contribution of LGBT communities to collectively address both the diverse effects of abuse and the social contexts of care and safety. Moreover, we would argue that the burden of addressing a society-wide problem should not only be shouldered by LGBT communities, and that more work is needed to explore how LGBT safety can be owned by the wider communities and institutions that impact on the everyday lives of people, such as schools, workplaces, residents associations and so on. In this way, whilst it is clear that LGBT communities and organisations need to be supported to deal

with the effects of abuse, we would argue that the next step is to explore LGBT safety as the responsibility of broader society, and not simply a ‘criminal’ issue to be responded to, and dealt with, only by the police or by individual LGBT people.

Notes

- 1 Respondents’ written answers to the Count Me In Too questionnaire are quoted verbatim, including their spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- 2 We use this term recognising the slippery and contested nature of the category, and conscious not to connote homogeneity, or aspatial or ahistorical coherency among its component terms. For further discussion of identity politics and safety issues, see Moran *et al.* (2004).
- 3 Moran *et al.* (2004: 398) use the term discrimination as their data suggests this ‘relates to a wide range of acts of violence including abuse, harassment and physical violence’. In this paper, we tentatively use the term abuse and explore how such abuse might be understood using the empirical data. We would argue that ‘othering’ is another concept that is key to understanding LGBT lives and issues of abuse, but exploring it in detail is beyond the scope of the paper.
- 4 Homophobia can be associated with specific experiences that range from verbal comments to physical violence (Browne, 2006; Bryant and Vidal-Ortiz, 2008; Moran, 2002; Swim *et al.*, 2007; Valentine, 1996) with the terms biphobia and transphobia emerging to conceptualise the ways in which discrimination, prejudice and abuse operate differently for bi and trans people (Namaste, 1996; Hemmings, 2002). However, although ‘homophobia’ is commonly defined as fear and hatred of ‘homosexuality’, in practice it cannot be so easily defined by the identity of its object nor the motivation of its subject. Thus, the term ‘homophobia’ is problematic in its analytical usefulness (O’Brien, 2008).
- 5 See also Herek *et al.* (2002) and Mason (2005) for a discussion of relationships between victims and perpetrators of abuse.

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