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CHAPTER 40

Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender, and the Regulation of Public Space

Viviane K. Namaste

In North America, violence against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals is escalating at an alarming rate. A survey conducted in 1986–7 by the Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force reports that violence against lesbians and gay men in that city had doubled since 1983–4 (as cited in Valentine, 1993: 409). The United States National and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) documents that incidents of violence against sexual minorities increased 127 per cent from 1988 to 1993 (NGLTF, 1994: 1).

Though scholars (Comstock, 1991; von Schultess, 1992; Valentine, 1993) and community activists (Hendricks, 1993) have increasingly addressed the issue of violence against lesbians and gay men, there remains very little reflection on the

function of gender within these acts of aggression. In this chapter, I argue that a perceived transgression of normative sex/gender relations motivates much of the violence against sexual minorities, and that an assault on these 'transgressive' bodies is fundamentally concerned with policing gender presentation through public and private space. I also consider the implications of this research for transsexual and transgendered people. Given that the perception of gender dissidence informs acts of queerbashing, we can deduce that those individuals who live outside normative sex/gender relations will be most at risk for assault. Finally, I examine some of the ways in which educational strategies on violence separate gender and sexuality, and thus prevent a political response that accounts for the function of gender in queerbashing. Specific examples are taken from briefs presented in November 1993 to the Quebec Human Rights Commission's public hearing in Montreal on violence and discrimination against lesbians and gay men (Demczuk, 1993; Hendricks, 1993; Namaste, 1993; Pepper, 1993).[1] I demonstrate the ways in which gender and sexuality are separated, and thus how the issue of gender is foreclosed by certain gay male community activists.

Limits of Tolerance: Gender Norms and Gender Transgressions

'Gender' refers to the roles and meanings assigned to men and women based on their presumed biological sex (Mackie, 1983). It is a social function, neither timeless nor historical. For example, we generally associate the colour pink with girls and femininity and the colour blue with boys and masculinity. There is nothing inherent in either of these colours that links them to a particular gender: pink, or turquoise, could just as easily designate masculinity. Gender is also about what men and women are supposed to do in the world—men wear pants, have short hair, can grow beards, and are considered more physically aggressive than women. Women can wear skirts, have longer hair, wear makeup, and are judged to be emotional. In Western societies, it is thought that there are only two genders—men and women (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981).

'Sexuality', in contrast, refers to the ways in which individuals organize their erotic and sexual lives. This is generally categorized into three separate areas: heterosexuals—individuals who have sexual relations with members of the opposite sex; homosexuals—those who have sexual relations with members of the same sex; and bisexuals—people who relate erotically to both men and women (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 1948).

In Western societies, gender and sexuality get confused. For example, when a 15-year-old boy is assaulted and called a 'faggot', he is so labelled because he has mannerisms that are considered 'effeminate'. He may or may not be gay, but he is called a 'queer' because he does not fulfill his expected gender role. A young girl can be a tomboy until the age of 11 or so, but she must then live as a more 'dainty', 'feminine' person. If she does not, she may be called a 'dyke—again, regardless of how she actually defines her sexual identity. In both examples, the presentation of gender determines how these youths are received by their peers. When people shout 'faggot' at a 15-year-old boy, they really mean that he is not a 'masculine' man. Gender and sexuality are collapsed. As Rubin points out, the merging of gender and sexuality enables some feminist theorists to write about erotic desire (Rubin, 1984: 307).

The fusion of gender and sexuality has distinct implications for the problematic of violence. The connotations of the pejorative names used against individuals who are assaulted—names like 'sissy', 'faggot', 'dyke', 'man-hater', 'queer', and 'pervert'—suggest that an attack is justified not in reaction to one's sexual identity, but to one's gender presentation. Indeed, bashers do not characteristically inquire as to the sexual identity of their potential victims, but rather make this assumption on their own. On what basis do 'queerbashers' determine who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual?

Joseph Harry's research suggests that gender should be considered an important variable in queerbashing incidents (1982, 1990). Harry found that groups of assailants involved in these crimes relied on gender cues to ascertain sexual identity.

If they judged a potential victim to be 'effeminate', for example, he was subject to attack. A related study confirms this hypothesis: 39 per cent of men surveyed who behaved in a 'feminine' manner had been physically assaulted, compared with 22 per cent of men who were 'masculine' and only 17 per cent of men who conducted themselves in a 'very masculine' fashion (Harry, 1982). According to this survey, males who are classified as 'effeminate' are more than twice as likely to experience physical violence than males whose gender presentation corresponds to social norms. A study of anti-lesbian abuse in San Francisco indicates that 12 per cent of lesbians surveyed had been punched, kicked, or otherwise physically assaulted (von Schultess, 1992). Significantly, the only justification offered related to gender:

> [F]ourteen of the women said that the only explanation for incidents they had experienced was the fact that they had short hair and were wearing trousers and in most cases were in the company of another woman (Valentine, 1993: 409).

Women and men who transgress acceptable limits of self-presentation, then, are among those most at risk for assault. Assaults against men judged to be 'effeminate' or women deemed 'masculine' reveal the ways in which gender and sexuality are intertwined. Gender is used as a cue to locate lesbians and gay men. Though the perceived transgression of gender norms motivates bashing, this affects men and women differently. The gendered construction of space—both public and private—figures centrally in these acts of aggression.

Transsexual and Transgendered People and Violence

Despite the variety of gender identities available in transgender networks, and despite the prevalence of transgendered people in other cultures, most people in Western societies assume that there are only two sexes (males and females) and two genders (men and women) (Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Devor, 1989; Bullough and Bullough, 1993; Herdt, 1994; Feinberg, 1996). For transsexual and/or transgendered people, this poses a significant problem: a person must choose the gender to which he/she belongs and behave accordingly. Because most people believe that there are only 'men' and 'women', transgendered people need to live as one or the other in order to avoid verbal and physical harassment. In transgendered communities, this is known as the need to pass. Passing is about presenting yourself as a 'real' woman or a 'real' man—that is, as an individual whose 'original' sex is never suspected.[2] Passing means hiding the fact that you are transsexual and/or transgendered. Most people go to extraordinary lengths to live undetected as transsexuals. Electrolysis, voice therapy, the binding of breasts, mastectomy, and plastic surgery are some of the more common means employed to ensure that people pass successfully.

Given the cultural coding of gender into a binary framework, a high incidence of violence directed against TS/TG people is not surprising. Although there is very little data available on transgendered people as victims of violence, a 1992 study showed that 52 per cent of MTF transsexuals and 43 per cent of FTM transsexuals surveyed in London, England, had been physically assaulted (Tully, 1992: 266). Contrast these members with data from a 1989 American telephone poll, which revealed that 7 per cent of lesbians and gay men were victims of assault in the previous year (NGLTF, 1994). Although these samples represent two different countries, the statistical difference of violent incidents against gay/ lesbian and transgender individuals is remarkable and certainly suggests that gender plays a crucial role in the attacks generally referred to as 'gaybashing'.

Although gender plays a central role in incidents of queerbashing, a collapse of gender and sexuality precludes a consideration of how this violence specifically affects transgendered people. Dorian Corey notes that contemporary gay antiviolence activists do not recognize the different ways aggression is, and has historically been, directed against transgendered people and gays:

> When the closet doors were shut [for gays, in the past], drag queens, of course, were out

> there anyways. We never had a closet. Let's face it, when you put on a dress and hit the world, you're declaring what you are. . . . These children that are supposedly straight looking, they're the ones getting bashed, so now [in the 1990s] they're protesting. The girls were always getting their asses kicked. It's just a thing of who you are and what you are. (as quoted in Enigma, 1992: 35–6)

Transsexual activists have suggested that one of the ways we can respond to the function of gender in violence is by naming it directly. As an activist button proclaims, 'transsexuals get queerbashed too'. Activists also insist that we need to speak of *genderbashing*, not gaybashing. This discourse separates gender and sexuality, since their collapse prevents an appreciation of the specificity of violence against transsexual and transgendered people.

Sex Work and Transsexual/ Transgendered Public Space

'Transsexual and transgendered public space' refers to urban areas known for their transsexuals and transvestites, such as the Meat District on the border of New York's Greenwich Village, Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, or the Tenderloin in San Francisco. While gay male public space is defined through the presence of gay businesses and bars, transsexual public space reflects the areas of the city frequented by transsexual and transvestite sex workers.

Since gender and sexuality are not the same, it is not surprising that most cities have separate geographic areas known for transgendered people and lesbians/gays. Pat Califia articulates the differences between gay ghettoes and sex worker areas:

> Gay ghettos operate differently than other types of sex zones. They are more likely to be residential districts for gay men as well as places where they can find entertainment. Although johns still enter gay ghettos in quest of pleasurable activities not available within the nuclear family, they have better luck scoring if they camouflage themselves as residents of the area (1991: 14).

Because transgender areas are not tied to a notion of a resident (as in the case of gay ghettos), the ways in which the space can be defined varies. Although certain sections of the city are known for their transsexuals and transvestites, these people are usually only visible at night. New York's Meat Market District is so named because of its many meat-packaging warehouses. When these businesses close at the end of the day, transgendered sex workers come out to earn their livelihoods, and thus transform the meaning of the term 'meat' into one with explicit sexual connotations. Time of day and geographic space converge to establish a public transgender identity. For example, a Toronto sex worker interviewed in David Adkin's film *Out: Stories of Lesbian and Gay Youth* refers to the area where transgender prostitutes solicit clients as 'trannie town' (Adkin, 1993).

As Califia demonstrates, the recent emergence of gay ghettos has separated sexual minorities from transsexual prostitutes. Although bars catering to transgendered people are extremely rare, they are usually located in sex worker districts rather than in gay villages. In Montreal, for example, the transsexual/transvestite bar Café Cléopâtra is situated near the corner of Sainte-Catherine and Saint-Laurent streets, in the heart of the red-light district.[3] The bar is widely known for its prostitutes—it is a space not only where transgendered people can socialize, but where they can also earn their livings. Montreal police observe the establishment regularly. While recent years have not witnessed any official raids on the bar, it is common of officers to walk in, 'do the rounds', and inspect bar patrons, sex workers, and their prospective clients.[4]

This police harassment of transgendered people relates to the laws against prostitution. In Canada, prostitution is entirely legal, but soliciting clients is not (*Pocket Criminal Code of Canada*, 1987: 118–19). Individual officers have enormous scrutiny in the interpretation of what constitutes 'solicitation': it may be a verbal agreement about sexual acts in exchange for financial compensation, or it may be a smile or glance directed at an undercover officer.

While the latter instance would probably not be considered 'solicitation' in a court of law, officers still have the power to charge individuals with the crime and place them in custody at night (Scott, 1987). It is the communication of sexual desire that is criminalized in Canada, not sexual desire or its enactment per se. Not surprisingly, this legislation does not affect all sex workers equally. Cathy, the operator of an escort service, remarks that street prostitutes—those most visible in the public eye—are most affected by this law: 'escort services . . . have enjoyed . . . tolerance as we go tiptoeing around in the night, not bothering communities because we're not standing in people's front yards' (1987: 88–91). Research indicates that police use the soliciting law to harass prostitutes, following them down the street in a patrol car or stopping to talk with them during their work (Hankins and Gendron, n.d.).

Limits of Antiviolence Activism: Opposing Gender and Sexuality

Much of the activist response to violence against sexual and gender minorities has centered on the gay village of a particular city (see Hendricks, 1993). As most gay men are assaulted in areas demarcated as 'gay': this focus is useful. Yet such a strategy forecloses an investigation of gender and ignores the different experiences of lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered people with respect to public space and violence. By emphasizing sexual identity, this discourse establishes an antiviolence agenda that is, at best, only somewhat useful. Consider the text of an educational poster produced by Montreal's police department (Service de police de la communauté urbaine de Montreal, or SPCUM): 'Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual is not a crime. Bashing is.' The slogan—which also appears on buttons produced by antiviolence activists in Toronto—addresses the perpetrators of violence directly, and in that, it is to be commended. Despite this direct address, however, the poster does not engage the cognitive processes at work that perpetrators use to determine who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In this discourse, identity is mobilized as the ground upon which acts of violence are established. People are bashed because they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. But we have already seen that bashing occurs due to the perception of potential victims, and that compulsory sex/gender relations figure centrally in these acts of interpretation. In this light, educational materials that address the perpetrators of violence should focus on the interpretive processes these people use to locate queerbashing victims. Because gender is the primary mechanism through which this takes place, there is a desperate need for posters, pamphlets, and presentations that outline the ways in which a binary gender system is upheld, as well as the power relations concealed within it. Through a stress on being, rather than on the perception of doing, the SPCUM poster reifies sexual identity and prevents a proper investigation of gender in the problematic of violence.

Implicitly, gender and sexuality are juxtaposed. This opposition can be witnessed in the brief presented by the SPCUM to the Quebec Human Rights Commission in association with its public hearings on violence and discrimination against lesbians and gay men (November 1993). In their brief to the commission, the SPCUM presented data on the prevalence of crime in District 33—the geographic area that includes (but is not limited to) the gay village. The borders of the village (René-Lévesque and Ontario, Amherst, and Papineau) were compared to a similar section of the city—that demarcated by the streets René-Lévesque and Ontario (north/south axis) and Amherst and Saint-Laurent (east/west). The SPCUM was interested in comparing these two sections of District 33 in order to evaluate the frequency of violent incidents (thefts, sexual assault, harassment). The areas are proportional in size, each comprising about 20 per cent of the district. Moreover, they share certain similarities in terms of the businesses, bars, and people present:

> Tous deux sont dans l'axe de la rue Ste-Catherine, rue très fréquentée de jour comme de nuit et où l'on retrouve divers commerces, restaurants, bars et salles d'amusement. On y retrouve également des activités reliées à la vente et la consommation de stupéfiants, à la

> prostitution masculine et féminine contrôlée, en partie, par deux groupes des motards criminels. [Both include Sainte-Catherine Street, which is busy both day and night, and where one can find a variety of businesses, restaurants, bars, and amusement halls. One can also find activities related to the sale and consumption of drugs, as well as male and female prostitution, which is controlled, in part, by two groups of criminal bikers.] (SPCUM, 1993).

The SPCUM data indicates that between November 1991 and October 1993, a total of 1,454 crimes were recorded for the gay village—approximately 18 per cent of the total number of reported crimes in District 33 (1993: 10–11). Given that the gay village comprises 20 per cent of the district, the study implies that incidents of violence and crime correspond proportionately to geography. (However, the brief does not address the population of the gay village in relation to that of the entire district, thus associating violence with city space rather than demographics.)

The SPCUM offers comparative data to legitimate this figure. The section of District 33 to which the gay village is compared indicates 2,774 incidents of violence over the same time period, a statistic that amounts to 34 per cent of the violence in the total district (1993: 11). Since the comparison territory is relatively equal in size to that of the gay village, it is suggested that violence and crime occur more frequently in this area than in the section of the city known to be populated by gay men. By demonstrating the ways in which crime in the gay village is statistically below the proportional incidents of violence in District 33, the SPCUM attempts to dismiss activists who point to increased instances of bashing in Montreal's gay village. (The results of the SPCUM study are presented in Figure 40.1.)

There are, of course, tremendous differences in the data on violence collected by police departments and that collected by lesbian and gay community groups (Comstock, 1991; NGLTF, 1994). What is perhaps even more remarkable about the research presented by the SPCUM, however, is the way in which it forces a separation between sexuality and gender in terms of public space. The comparative section of District 33—that area bordered by Saint-Laurent, Amherst, Ontario, and Réne-Lévesque—is well known as the city's sex worker district. The city's only transsexual/ transvestite bar

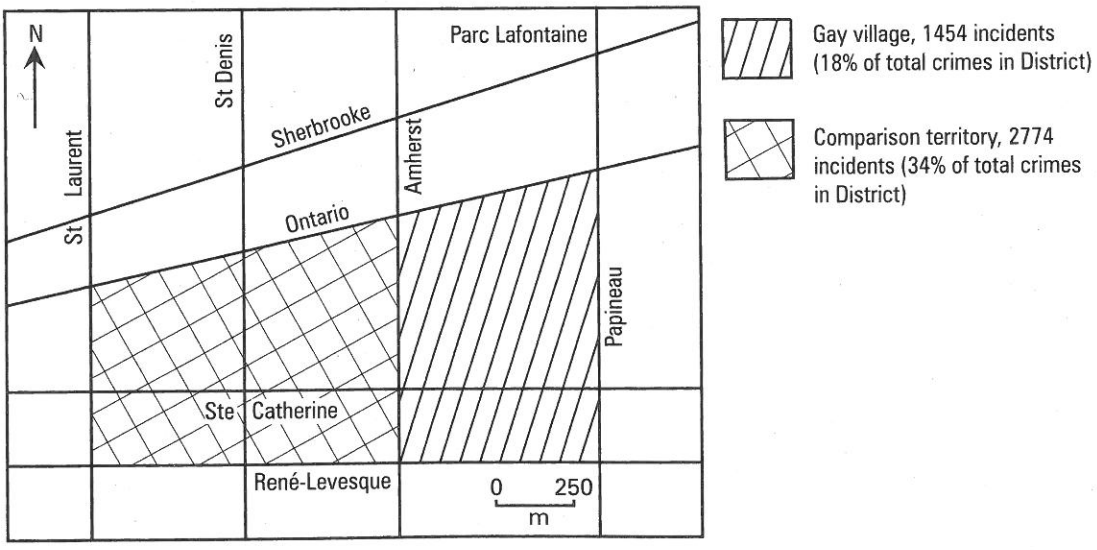

Figure 40.1 Incidents of violent crimes in two sections of Police District 33, Montreal, November 1991–October 1993 (SOURCE: SPCUM 1993, 10–11.)

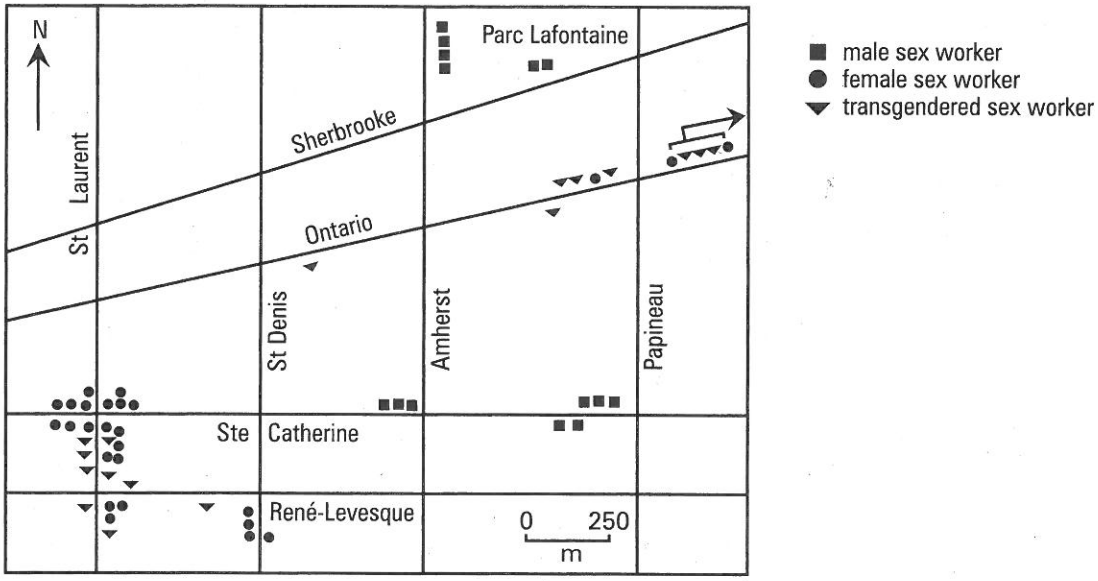

Figure 40.2 Sex-worker presence according to gender in Police District 33, Montreal, November 1991–October 1993 Note: more sex workers can be found further east on Ontario. (SOURCE: field research.)

is located here, and streets in this region are also frequented by TS/TG prostitutes.

Although the SPCUM maintains that both the gay village and this comparative section are homes to prostitutes, they do not account for the gendered breakdown of this activity. Field research conducted in the summer of 1993 indicates that most male prostitutes work in the gay village, toward Papineau; directly on its borders (Parc Lafontaine, located just above Amherst and Ontario); or in an adult cinema at the corner of Sainte-Catherine and Amherst. In contrast, most female prostitutes work on the corner of Saint-Laurent and Sainte-Catherine, on Saint-Denis, or on side streets in the vicinity. Transgendered prostitutes can also be found in this area. (The geographic location of sex workers in District 33 is depicted in Figure 40.2).

Regarding incidents of violence, most TS/TG prostitutes work in an area with a much higher frequency of criminal acts than the gay village (34 per cent versus 18 per cent). Although these statistics do not necessarily indicate that more transgendered people (proportionally) are victims of violence than gay men, it is certainly fair to stipulate that they work in an area known for criminal activities. To present this region as a comparative sample against the gay village is, then, to juxtapose gender and sexuality. While the SPCUM attempts to dispel fears about the high incidence of violence in gay space, it offers no examination of the role gender plays either in this site or its comparative territory. Because gender is not signalled as a factor in the discussion of District 33—along with other variables including poverty and homelessness—the SPCUM assumes that crime does not vary according to the gendered dimension of public space. The focus accorded to sexuality and the gay ghetto makes it impossible to address the violence that is directed against TS/TG people—whether they are in the gay village, a sex worker zone, or elsewhere.

Conclusion

The theoretical issues presented here, especially the relations between gender and sexuality, raise additional questions as to the collection and interpretation of evidence on gendered violence. What

implications does the presence of TS/TG people in public space hold in terms of violence? Do bashers drive into these areas, looking to assault a transsexual woman or a transvestite prostitute, as they often drive into gay villages in search of queerbashing victims (Comstock, 1991: 49)? Are transgendered people of colour assaulted more frequently than those who are white? What happens when transgender prostitutes enter areas demarcated as 'gay'? Are these people subject to assault because of an association between prostitution and aids, and if so, how does this relate to increased violence against those perceived to be HIV-positive (NGLTF, 1994)? Since much of the data on queerbashing indicates that it is often perpetrated by young males, usually in groups (Comstock, 1991: 65), are transgendered youth most at risk for assault? What are the specific methodological difficulties involved in collecting data on violence against transgendered people? Will these people be reluctant to report the assaults they experience to the police, as are many lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals? Given that transsexuals are incarcerated according to their 'original', biological sex (e.g., an MTF person is placed in an all-male jail), can we expect transsexuals to consider police and law enforcement officials in a favourable light?[5] Do transgendered people even inform gaybashing hotlines when they are assaulted, or do they not consider themselves part of these communities? How can we record incidents of genderbashing for the collection of hate crime statistics?[6] These are only a few of the questions that a more detailed, empirical study of violence against transgendered people would address.

In recent years, the issue of violence has received increased attention in the communities of the sexually marginalized, as well as within the academy. Although some of the research emphasizes the role of gender in violence (Harry, 1990; von Schultess, 1992; Valentine, 1993), it has yet to explore the implications of this issue for transgendered individuals and communities. The definition of public space is intimately linked to culturally sanctioned gender identities. This has profound implications for people who live outside normative sex/gender relations: 'ordinary' public space as well as regions known as gay ghettoes are sites where the gender potential of being verbally abused, and/or physically assaulted, is remarkably high. Furthermore, although gender and sexuality are conventionally confused, such that 'effeminate' men and 'masculine' women are 'gaybashed' irrespective of their sexual identities, the variables of gender and sexuality can also be juxtaposed. Such an opposition can be quite explicit, as when middle-class gay men struggled to evict transgendered prostitutes from Vancouver's West End (Arrington, 1987). A separation of gender and sexuality can also be more subtle, as in the discourse on violence proposed by many gay male activists that privileges sexuality over gender, and hence develops a political response that is only valid for urban, middle-class gay men.

Taking up the issue of violence against sexual and gender minorities, this chapter has attempted to illustrate how some of the responses to violence preclude an adequate conceptualization of gendered aggression. Through a literature review on gender and violence, as well as a preliminary analysis on the geographic location of Montreal prostitutes in 1992, I have argued that the discourse of violence against sexual minorities excludes transsexual women. Further more, the briefs presented to the Quebec Human Rights Commission offer an engaging case study of how the social relations of gender are textually coordinated in one institution, such that transsexuals are beyond consideration.

Notes

1. Copies of these briefs are available from the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse, 360 Saint-Jacques, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1P5, Canada.
2. The issue of 'passing' has been examined from an ethnomethodological perspective within sociology. See Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ:

Prentice-Hall, 1967); and Kessler and McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978).

3. For more on the geographic area of Montreal's red-light district, see Daniel Proulx, Le Red Light de Montreal, 1945–1970 (Montreal: Boreal, 1994); and Thérèse, Limonges, *La Prostitution à Montreal: Comment, pourquoi certaines fen deviennent des prostituées: Étude sociologique et criminologique*. (Montreal: Édit de l'homme, 1967).
4. Montreal police entered Café Cleopatra with a video camera, for instance, on 13 November 1997. See Viviane Namaste, 'Évaluation des besoins: Les travesty(e)s et les transsexuel(le)s au Quebec à l'égard du vih/Sida'. Report submitted to the Centre Québécois de Coordination sur le SIDA, Montreal, May 1998. (A copy of this report is available through ASST(e)Q in care of CACTUS, 1626 rue Saint-Hubert, Montreal, QC, H2L 3Z3.)
5. For more on transgendered people in prison, see James Tee, *Health Issues of the HIV + MTF Transgendered Prison Population* (Toronto: PASAN—Prisoners' AIDS Support Action Network [489 College St, Suite 405, Toronto, ON, M6G 1A5, 416-920-9567], 1997); Maxine Petersen, Judith Stephens, Robert Dickey, and Wendy Lewis, 'Transsexuals within the Prison System: An International Survey of Correctional Services Policies', *Behavioral Sciences and the Law* 14 (1996): 219–29; and Ann Scott, 'A Brief on HIV/AIDS in the Transgendered Prison Population'. Presentation at the International Foundation for Gender Education conference, Toronto, 27 March 1998. Also see Ann Scott and Rick Lines, 'HIV/AIDS in the Male-to-Female Transsexual and Transgendered Prison Population: A Comprehensive Strategy. A Brief from PASAN. (Toronto: May 1999).
6. Documenting hate crimes against gays and lesbians is difficult because the violence must be clearly accompanied by anti-gay epithets. For instance, if a man is stabbed in the gay village and his wallet stolen, he will be considered the victim of a robbery unless the assailants called him derogatory insults relating to his perceived sexuality (see SPCUM, 'Mémoire sur la discrimination et la violence envers les gais et les lesbiennes'. Brief presented to the Quebec Human Rights Commission, November 1993. [Copy available for consultation at the Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse, 360 Stain-Jacque, Montreal, QC, H2Y 1P5.]). In the case of violence against transgendered people, this criterion for documentation is questionable, since many MTF transsexuals are called 'faggot'. Programmatically, we should not have to wait until bashers decry transgendered people with the proper vocabulary before we have an adequate manner of recording such genderbashing incidents.

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CHAPTER 41

The White Ribbon Campaign: Involving Men and Boys in Ending Global Violence against Women

Michael Kaufman

The need to address men, to challenge them to end the violence, should be apparent. After all, it is men, or at least some men, who are committing the violence, and meanwhile the vast majority of men have remained silent about it. Through this silence, men—as the half of humanity who have controlled social discourse, law-making, religious ideas, the police and courts, and so forth—have allowed the violence to continue.

Although the need for public education campaigns that challenge men to stop the violence seems unarguable, in most parts of the world, efforts of this sort have been infrequent or non-existent.