1 Overview

Hate crimes against LGBT people constitute a serious issue that has been researched since the 1980s. Early research focused on documenting incidents, providing psychological support for survivors of these crimes, and examining the sociological issues that led to these crimes. More recent scholarship examines hate incidents in a more intersectional framework, showing us that victims of anti-LGBT hate crimes experience these crimes differently depending on their race and class status. Many people who write about hate crimes act as activists, seeking to draw attention to this problem, and to the underlying problems of homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism, classism, ablism, and other factors.


This piece examines a stereotype that trans people are “deceivers,” and how this stereotype is used by some to justify transphobic violence, particularly the 2002 murder of Gwen Araujo.


This early pamphlet discusses self-defense techniques, advice for getting help and dealing with police, and tips for organizing against hate crimes.


Comstock, a religious scholar, offers the results of a 1986 survey of hate crime victims. The book also includes a historical overview of gay and lesbian
communities, a discussion of sociological reasons for anti-gay violence, and an essay on Leviticus and its influence on this violence.


A number of scholars write about violence against women and transgender people along the U.S.–Mexico border. Chapters contrast government inaction with grassroots organizing, explore connections between gender violence and its depictions in films and newspapers, and discuss how international law fails to protect women and transgender people along the border.


This collection of essays and studies documents trends and motivations for anti-gay hate crimes, and offers suggestions for addressing the mental health needs of survivors. Personal stories from survivors of hate crimes are interspersed throughout the scholarly text. Though none of the pieces investigate race or class dimensions of anti-gay hate crimes, this book is still valuable because it represents a valuable summary of early hate crimes research.


This piece examines how gay and lesbian people experience violence based on their sexual orientation, and how they make the decision to report incidents to the police.


*Pink Blood* is the first scholarly work to explore the issue of anti-LGBT hate crimes in Canada. Janoff’s research examines incidents from across Canada, and offers both community- and policy-based solutions to the problem.


A study of trans people that found a strong correlation between experiencing economic discrimination and experiencing violence.


Meyer expands Herek’s research on hate crime victims’ experiences. Meyer finds that it is more difficult for queer people of color to determine that they’ve experienced an anti-gay hate crime, because multiple parts of their identities are often attacked simultaneously in these incidents.

This paper examines the roles police statements and the media play in forming community understanding of hate crime acts. The paper argues that race, gender, sexuality, and the concept of “neighborhood” play a large role in how media and police shape this understanding.


This book describes how essentialist categories of sexuality and gender are enforced by harassment and violence, and examines the motivations and societal acceptance of hate violence against gay men.

2 Statistics and reports

The federal governments of Canada and the United States both maintain statistics of bias-motivated crimes. While government-kept statistics can be helpful, they only tell part of the story, as the majority of hate crimes go unreported.


The FBI compiles statistics on hate crimes reported to law enforcement agencies in the United States.


The Southern Poverty Law Center compiles a list of apparent hate crimes from media reports. The center notes that this list represents only a small portion of incidents, but it can be useful for researching specific cases.


Statistics compiled by 15 organizations throughout the United States that serve victims of anti-LGBT violence.
3 Responding to hate crimes

Some LGBT activists have advocated for the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and sometimes transgender people in hate crimes statutes. Supporters believe that sentencing enhancements included in these statutes can deter potential perpetrators from committing violent crimes against our community.

Other LGBT activists note that there is little evidence that these sentencing enhancements actually serve as a successful deterrent to hate crimes. Many, particularly in communities of color, see them as harmful, as they are disproportionately used against poor people and people of color. Others feel that these statutes pose a threat to free speech. Opponents of enhanced sentencing propose alternatives such as education programs designed to reduce anti-LGBT stigma and community-based restorative justice to respond to crimes.

Whether they are tried under hate crime statutes or not, perpetrators of anti-LGBTQ violence often appeal to homophobic and transphobic stereotypes, hoping that judges and juries will be more lenient. This strategy often takes the form of the gay panic defense or the trans panic defense.


The authors present an excellent, highly readable summary of arguments within the LGBT community against enhanced sentencing for hate crimes.


An impeccably researched history of gay street patrols in the late 1970s. Hanhardt discusses how these patrols served to define certain urban areas as “gay” and others as “not gay”.


In addition to the FBI, the Department of Justice also maintains hate crime statistics within the United States. Its statistics also include crimes that were not reported to police, and allow victims – rather than law enforcement agencies – to identify their own experiences as hate crimes.

This piece critiques narrative techniques that represent anti-trans violence as solely a gender issue without acknowledging intersecting axes of oppression, particularly race. While it uses the *Remembering our dead* website as a case study, Lamble’s warning against single-issue activism is valuable for anybody studying or working to address anti-gay hate crimes.


An examination of the growing investment of LGBT activists in hate crimes legislation, police work, and prisons.


The author discusses the gay panic defense, in which the perpetrator of a violent anti-gay crime argues for a more lenient sentence because they felt threatened by the victim’s homosexuality. Lee also mentions the trans panic defense, in which a perpetrator argues for leniency because they felt deceived by their victim’s choice not to disclose their trans status. The article discusses the history of these defenses, and the stereotypes that inform them. While other legal scholars have suggested that this defense be prohibited from courtrooms, Lee argues against such a prohibition, feeling that it would be ineffective and dangerous, because it would allow defense attorneys to use more dangerous, subconscious appeals to anti-gay stereotypes held by the jury.


This memorial for trans victims of hate violence has been online since 1999.


Two scholars acknowledge the positive impacts of hate crime activism while critiquing its shortcomings and some of its troubling consequences.


A study of law enforcement responses to anti-LGBT bias incidents in Minnesota, based on incident reports dating between 1990 and 2000. Despite a marked improvement in police responses, the study found that hate crime
victims faced negative police encounters – ones in which police response was inadequate, unprofessional, hostile, or violent – outnumbered positive police behaviors.

4 Exploring individual incidents

Statistics and analyses can only tell part of the story of hate crimes. Biographies, memoirs, and dramatizations can help to put a human face on this issue.


A Frontline documentary that examines the causes of homophobia in the context of the 1999 murder of Billy Jack Gaither.


A recent book that presents a different version of what happened in the Matthew Shepard case.


Two plays based on interviews with residents of Laramie, Wyoming. The first play was written in the wake of the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie; its companion piece was written after a second trip to Laramie to collect follow-up interviews.


A film adaptation of Moisés Kaufman’s 2000 play, dealing with the aftermath of Matthew Shepard’s murder.


A touching documentary about Fred Martinez, who was murdered in 2001 for being nádleehí.


A close friend of Matthew Shepard describes her growing activism in the wake of her friend’s murder.

An account of Matthew Shepard’s life, murder, and legacy, written by his mother.


This book commemorates 14 victims of homophobic and transphobic violence with short biographies, dignified sketched portraits, and helpful bibliographies. Sprinkle, a theology professor, analyses several of the cases through Bible quotations and a Christian framework. Sprinkle’s memorial is commendable, though the inclusion of more people of color and transgender people would have painted a richer portrait of the victims of hate violence.

5 Organizations

Many organizations work to respond to and prevent hate crimes; some of the most notable are listed here.

AVP: The Anti-Violence Project
New York, NY 10001
[http://avp.org](http://avp.org)
(212) 714-1184 / (212) 714-1141 (Hotline)

Matthew Shepard foundation
[http://www.matthewshepard.org/](http://www.matthewshepard.org/)
(303) 830-7400

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
(202) 393-5177

Sylvia Rivera Law Project
(212) 337-8550