



**HATE CRIMES AND MASCULINITY:
NEW CRIMES, NEW RESPONSES AND SOME
FAMILIAR PATTERNS**

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*Paper presented at the
4th National Outlook Symposium on Crime in Australia,
New Crimes or New Responses
convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology
and held in Canberra 21-22 June 2001*

Abstract

In recent decades, researchers, activists and policymakers have described a wider range of criminal incidents (including assaults, harassment, vilification and attacks on property) as forms of 'hate crime'. These crimes are generally understood as motivated by perpetrators' deep hostility to the (real or presumed) social group identity of victims: most often their location within racial, ethnic, sexual or religious minorities. This development has allowed for further research and new preventive and criminal justice measures in regard to previously disregarded or downplayed forms of criminal and criminogenic activity. But 'hate crime' is a problematic label that may narrowly represent criminal motive and simplify the interpretation of victimisation and offending. Current research on anti-homosexual and race-related crime will be discussed to demonstrate the continuous positioning of working class and socially disadvantaged males in offending patterns and the interrelationship of 'hate crime' to the more general dilemmas of reducing crime rates with the successful social integration of marginalised young men.

Since the 1980s 'hate crime' has become a commonplace term in North America and Europe. Among community activists and a growing number of researchers, journalists, politicians and policymakers, the term has served as a shorthand means of referring to crimes of violence, abuse and harassment that are motivated by bias against specifically social minorities (racial, ethnic, sexual or religious). Such criminal actions are often imbued with a tone of symbolic warning that is meant to more widely intimidate the entire minority group. The term has a more recent use in Australia, owing much to an emphasis within gay and lesbian politics and the appropriation of the term within activism against racist violence and abuse. The establishment of *The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project* (Sydney) and a series of early activist surveys drew community attention towards anti-homosexual crimes. This model of organisation and the grassroots surveying of victims was soon emulated in most other Australian states. A 'hate crime' session with papers on crime and homophobia was included in the annual Australian conference in 1993 and attracted audience curiosity. In the same year, the AIC published the results of a Victorian survey on violence directed at lesbians and gay men in a form which discussed the problems of police indifference and insufficient monitoring of such 'hate crimes' (Mason, 1993). The term had a wide circulation at the 1995 *First National Conference on Violence against Gays and Lesbians* (co-organised by the AIC). Papers from that conference and a first general Australian collection (which included materials addressing issues of racism) were both published in 1997 (Mason & Tomsen, 1997; Cunneen, Fraser & Tomsen, 1997). The trickle of local material that used this specific term, has since become a steady flow. In 1999 a national conference dedicated to discussions of this field of crime in regard to matters of race, ethnicity and sexuality (in the wider context of the *One Nation* phenomenon) took place at the University of Sydney. A conference on anti-homosexual hate crimes –with a strongly international focus- is now being planned to coincide with the large influx of foreign visitors expected at the 2002 *Gay Games* in Sydney.

Journalists reporting these developments frequently ask whether activists and researchers are examining a genuinely different or much increased type of crime rather than merely applying a novel label? It is difficult to gauge whether or not racist and homophobic crimes have actually increased in number or severity in recent years. Although activists may often be tempted to argue that this is very likely, a lack of long-term monitoring and very limited victimisation studies make this impossible to judge accurately. There is solid historical evidence that would suggest that anti-homosexual violence is not a new phenomenon in Australia, although it may be the case that the recent rise of urban gay and lesbian subcultures (ironically resulting from wider societal intolerance) may mean a more ready targeting of individuals. A greater level of research bears out that racist violence has been a continuous and fundamental factor in Australia's wider history. The dispossession and extermination of many Aborigines opened this nation to extended agriculture and grazing. The anti-Asian riots and campaigns of the nineteenth century were pivotal in the formation of the nation's labor movement and the implementation of the White Australia policy. The links between these histories of racist violence and contemporary incidents have been noted regularly (*Racist Violence*, 1991).

Contemporary researchers of 'hate crime' are not examining a genuinely new crime pattern. By contrast, there are some original qualities to the range of response to these crimes that has occurred in the last decade. Furthermore, if we reflect on evidence about significant levels of victimisation and a need to act, the issues of criminal uniqueness or newness appear less important to us. Most vitally, anti-hate crime initiatives have been concerned with redressing the traditionally deviant status of minority groups within the criminal law and the culture of the criminal justice system. Activist lobbying, rallies and wider education campaigns have asserted the legitimacy of victims and the illegitimate moral status of perpetrators. From within justice agencies the most important changes have been efforts to revise police education and training (tackling occupational racism and homophobia), to more accurately record and monitor incidents and to develop trust and liaison with the representatives of victim groups.

The most publicly controversial feature of the new state response to hate crimes has been the anti-vilification laws that have been enacted both nationally and in a growing number of Australian States since the 1980s. Some neo-conservative commentaries focus on such legislation with the claim that it means a new inequality in the form of privileged treatment. (1) In this way, an alleged undue state regulation of public expression and ‘free speech’ becomes the means to deny the overall significance of hate crime. The latter accounts do not admit that local grassroots activism has been most focused on pressuring complacent criminal justice officials to take bias-related victimisation more seriously. This has meant the improved recording, investigation and prosecution within the range of widely accepted notions of serious criminal offending such as property damage, direct personal threats and assaults. In a pattern that has emulated aspects of the feminist requirement for a more serious official response to such crimes as domestic violence and rape, lobby groups have been principally concerned with recasting these crimes on an equal footing with other comparable incidents of victimisation. The attainment of these basic goals of equal protection and safety seem like far less excessive demands for minority groups to make in any liberal democratic system than the alleged threat to free speech entailed in anti-vilification laws.

Strengths and Flaws of the ‘Hate’ Model

As noted by Mason, the conventional understanding of hate crime is of:

Crime, most commonly violence motivated by prejudice, bias or hatred towards a particular group of which the victim is presumed to be a member. As such, hate crime is generally directed towards a class of people; the individual victim is rarely significant to the perpetrator and is most commonly a stranger to him or her (1993, 1).

This particular mode of definition is not unchallenged. In particular the usual emphasis on ‘stranger’ relations between victims and assailants is quite problematic for the efforts of some feminists to describe the bulk of male attacks on women as hate-driven. Furthermore, this element does not ring true for the regular number of real-life situations of racist and anti-homosexual incidents in which victims are known to perpetrators (as school and work peers, neighbours, relatives, or even as friends). But it is obvious in retrospect that in the 1980s and 1990s ‘hate crime’ has had an important social movement usefulness in galvanizing awareness and the mobilization against the worst effects of bigotry. In a period characterized by an emphasis on specific and different power relations and forms of disadvantage, this issue has raised the promise of a coalitionist politics that could unite the activism of different minority groups. The new unity of gay men and lesbians in the anti-violence field and their local campaigns against racism and in solidarity with Aborigines have reflected some of this promise.

This term has also meant a fresh focus of research and policy interest with regard to previously downplayed forms of crime: crimes that have been accorded a second-order importance or even wholly ignored within the criminal justice system. Rallies, campaigns and media discussions have exerted greater pressure on politicians and criminal justice agencies to respond positively to this. Additionally, this has drawn a more serious level of attention to the activities of the extreme Right: a political development that may be downplayed as very minor in contemporary liberal democracies. In fact, an irrational ‘hatred’ appears to best fit the pattern of attacks on minority groups that have been carried out by neo-Nazis and other extreme Right groups in nations including Australia and the ideology that is invoked to justify such actions. It is the shared placement on the ‘hate lists’ of such extremists which appears to give the term its most obvious justification and coherence. An important strand of scholarship on prejudice (dating from the original Frankfurt studies of anti-Semitism and leading up to recent critical race and queer theory) has suggested the unconscious significance of elements of racism and homophobia to ideas of social hygiene and pure nationhood. Valuable insights about the wider irrationality of much ethnocentrism and hostile responses to minority groups –especially as they pattern the masculine unconscious- can be found in this (Segal, 1990).

Even to many sympathetic observers, however, ‘hate crime’ also suggests a limited and overly individualistic way of explaining motive and patterns of offending. Research indicates that most acts of racist or ‘homophobic’ harassment and violence are perpetrated by psychologically normal offenders and other ways of explaining offending –rather than by the emphasis on irrational and extremist ideology- must be found. The temptations and dangers of excessively *pathologizing* hate crimes and their perpetrators are apparent here. It has been, for example, noted how often the views of perpetrators are linked to wider ideologies of racism and homophobia and also bolstered by the past and present actions of state and criminal justice agencies (including histories of police repression and violence against minorities). To claim that racist or anti-homosexual crimes are always the result of an irrational ‘hatred’ from psychologically dangerous perpetrators, may result in pressure towards some degree of distortion and reductionism in explanations of motive. A key danger of the psychoanalytic approach is the tendency to fall into the mistaken notion that this must concern analysis of pathology rather than how racist and anti-homosexual views pattern the unconscious mind generally. Recently this has become most obvious in the discussions about whether much anti-homosexual violence is the result of a ‘homosexual panic’ by disturbed assailants. Having used the hate crime model to draw attention to previously ignored forms of offending, critical criminologists must direct inquiry about this offending away from the stress on extremism and tease apart some of the links with widespread and more ‘everyday’ forms of racism and homophobia. In so doing I believe they would have to explain the widespread nature of homophobic and racist sentiments that are embedded in group beliefs, institutional practices and prevalent media representations in liberal societies.

Furthermore, at the risk of appearing to *de-dramatise* hate crime, but in order to reduce actual levels of victimisation, it also seems necessary to acknowledge some of the similarities with other forms of personal crime and examine the potential of wider experiments in crime prevention and perpetrator reform and rehabilitation. It now appears that some of the misgivings felt about the uncertainty and use of this term are grounded in the current failure to reconcile the ‘hate’ model with wider social explanations of criminal offending, the multiple social identities of victims and the ambiguous motives and concerns of many offenders. Against the frequent emphasis on ‘irrationality’, I would like to suggest that much targeting of despised minority groups is highly abhorrent though also ‘rational’. This is so in terms of the perpetrators’ understanding of the illegitimate moral status of victims and the low chances of reporting, arrest and prosecution by authorities. The ‘hate crime’ model could be partly reconciled with the rational choice stress on offending opportunities if the structural subordination of victims (via dimensions of race, ethno-religious affiliation, sexuality etc.) were considered as a vital backdrop for understanding their ongoing selection. Irrational elements inflect the original creation of hostile attitudes to such victim groups. But rational factors also pattern many of the ongoing events of victimisation that range from the astute selection of members of minorities as soft targets for robbery, extortion and blackmail to the subjective personal or collective gratification that derives actions of abuse, harassment and assault.

Familiar Patterns in Offending: Hate Crime and the ‘Masculinity Turn’

Some criticism of the narrow construction of ‘hate crimes’ as attacks on groups perpetrated by strangers, has questioned an apparent failure to consider a ‘gender dimension’ in the sense that much anti-women violence and crime suggests misogynistic elements of motive (Gelber, 2000). Feminist crime researchers and anti-violence campaigners have often pointed to the distortions of an emphasis on dangerous male strangers that downplays the level of offending carried out by men who are known to female victims. Nevertheless, it does seem apparent that a significant amount of this violence and crime has a strong fit with the conventional understanding of hate crime. (2) Certainly the high level of fear among women and the resulting self-regulation of daily activities to avoid the possibilities of sexual attacks, suggests that these crimes have the result of group intimidation.

With this acknowledged, I want to consider the gender dimension of hate crime in yet another way. Specifically, the male pattern of the great bulk of such incidents suggests that a useful link could be made between recent discussions of hate crime and what is now referred to as the 'masculinity turn' in recent analyses of offending. The latter have begun to explore the creation and reproduction of male identities in different criminal activities and problematised the disproportionate involvement of men in crime generally (Messerschmidt, 1993; Collier, 1998).

The 'maleness' of hate crime operates at several levels that are often indistinct in particular actions. This reflects the higher levels of overall male involvement as perpetrators in criminal incidents, especially those involving serious violence. The great bulk of 'stranger attacks' comprise male-perpetrated incidents occurring in public space. It is also the case the higher levels of the achievement and protection of male identity is invested in much inter-personal crime. Most commonly this link is seen in sexual attacks on women. But it underlies most physical conflicts between men (Archer, 1994). Similarly, it has a real significance in many incidents of 'hate crime'. The latter can range from attacks launched against gay/homosexual men, lesbians and transsexuals who are disciplined for their gender non-conformity, to racist crimes which are partly shaped by elements of sexual desire, jealousy or rivalry and reflect colonialist constructions of masculine sexual privilege. Researchers of anti-gay/lesbian violence have often noted the high level of involvement by male offenders and links to the masculinity of perpetrators (Comstock 1991; Ehrlich 1992; Harry 1992; Tomsen & Mason, 2001). Such male involvement and masculine links with racist violence are often implied but only occasionally researched in such detail as a recent British study of public violence between ethnically different groups of young men (Goodey, 1997). Despite this lack of direct focus, the particular significance of male involvement in racist crime and harassment sits behind many research findings. The major Australian national inquiry that received 1,447 reports of racist incidents noted that 'the perpetrators of racist violence against people of non-English speaking background are generally young, male Anglo-Australians' *Racist Violence*, 1991 P. 388). (3)

To illustrate this point about gender, I would like to refer briefly to my own study of 74 homicides with anti-homosexual motives occurring in New South Wales since 1980 (Tomsen & George 1997; Tomsen 1998). This uncovered killings in which the real or assumed homosexuality of the victim could be reasonably judged as having an important relation to the killer's motive. This excluded fatal domestic violence within homosexual couples, cases where homosexuality was unrelated to victimisation and fatal conflicts between men in which terms such as 'poofter' or 'faggot' were traded as simple insults. Media and police documents and court records for 32 criminal trials were summarised and analysed for information regarding the offences and characteristics of the parties involved and the relative importance of anti-homosexual sentiment and different notions of male identity in the motives of perpetrators. (4)

I want to emphasise here that there is a striking involvement of disadvantaged young men in these crimes that suggests the fundamental relevance of wider structural factors (social class, family poverty and youth disadvantage) in issues of criminal offending. Information on 55 solved homicides suggests involvement by 92 perpetrators or co-perpetrators. 88 of these were male. 11 were more than 30 years old, 38 were aged in their 20s, and 43 were teenagers at the time of the crime. Most were either unemployed or in unskilled manual jobs. Records with full detail suggest a common pattern of childhood poverty, school failure, petty delinquency, substance abuse and ongoing marginality in the job market and housing. A small proportion of killers could be described as hateful psychopaths, and the biographical detail regarding perpetrators indicates that most of these are psychically ordinary young men. It is therefore erroneous to view most of this violence as the result of an exceptional bigotry or phobia denoting a serious mental condition, and to disregard the impact of constructions of gender identity and marginalised forms of masculinity generated within the dominant social order.

What theoretical understanding of masculinity can help to explain the motives and crimes of these young men? In *Masculinities*, Connell defines a whole complex of evolving and varied social practices in societies that either legitimate, or attempt to guarantee, the shoring up of patriarchy and male domination of women (1995). Attainment of the 'hegemonic' form is highly contingent on the levels of social power in different men's lives. For a recent clarification and defence of the term see Connell (1998). Dynamic relationships and tensions exist between the hegemonic and 'subordinated' and 'marginalized' forms, and a recognition of diversity leads to questions of power and a gender politics within masculinity (1995, P.37). The major example of a subordinated masculinity is male homosexuality which often meets with violence when expressed openly (1995, P.83). The practice of direct intimidation and violence is mostly explained by the contradictions of 'protest masculinity'. This is a form that is characteristic of men in a marginal location of social class, with the masculine claim on power undermined by economic and social weakness (1995, P.116). The life histories of a group of young men with little education, minor criminal histories and bare survival through labouring, are characterised by aggressive display and misogyny. An exaggerated (though highly conformist) homophobia may reflect the extent to which male same-sex activity is understood as a symbolic threat to the gender differences which -in the circumstances of social marginalisation- are not clearly marked by much else than heterosexual practice (1995, P.109). There is a remarkable and suggestive likeness between the histories, characteristics and attitudes of these young Australian men and most of the perpetrators who feature in this homicide study.

Against the backdrop of the dynamic relation between 'protest' and other masculinities, it is evident that the links with masculinity takes a different form for each of the major types of these homicides. Gang attacks in public space by groups of young men are more readily viewed as 'homophobic' hate crimes, especially in light of the anti-homosexual statements that they most often generate. Additionally -within varying degrees of prior planning- they suggest a real awareness of the legal vulnerability of assaulted or robbed homosexuals, and the patterns and motives for these crimes suggest that they were linked to the group policing and production of masculine identities. Assaults take the outward form of a type of rebellion against dominant social values and partly attract marginalised boys and men for this reason. But a continuous backdrop to the motives of perpetrators is the deviant positioning of male homosexuality in the practices and discourses that reproduce social understandings of masculinity. These crimes serve a dual purpose of constructing a masculine and heterosexual identity through a simultaneous involvement with violence and by establishing homosexuals as social outsiders. The fatal gang attacks which are often seen by activists as typical 'hate crimes', can also be read as masculine crimes characterised by a group production of masculine identities. Numerous perpetrators convicted of murder in cases of gang killing and men and boys questioned in regard to unsolved deaths, had a strong declared interest in fighting and years of formal training in boxing and martial arts. Furthermore, the male status of some key figures in these gangs was built on a reputation for street violence and their successful efforts to initiate and train novices in the skills of 'poofter-bashing'.

In one incident an Asian-Australian man was viciously bashed and killed at a homosexual cruising area near Bondi Beach in Sydney. This crime suggests elements of 'homophobia', an awareness of the vulnerability of victims in such locations and the significant effect of group masculinity in the motives. He was attacked by a group of three youths armed with a claw hammer and baton, and died after he fell or was chased over a high cliff. The key assailant in this killing could not resist bragging about his violence to numerous friends, and had even expected to make a positive impression about his manliness on an ex-girlfriend by writing to her a few days before the killing of his intention to bash gay men. His other alleged statements included a boast made to a witness who noticed bloodstains on his jogging shoes and was told they were from:

some faggot Chinaman's head. We beat up some guy in this park last night. You should have seen this mate of mine, he is an excellent fighter. You should have seen the way he kicks.

A second victim who survived this incident overcame his fears of the police and gave evidence a few days after the killing. With the key perpetrator's subsequent arrest and conviction for murder, his many alleged boasts look to be idiotic. But they also reflect the limited material and cultural resources available for the achievement of a masculine status among the groups of young men who carry out these attacks. Whereas all three perpetrators were described in court as being from materially disadvantaged backgrounds and 'broken homes' and were involved in behaviour which fits neatly with a common pattern of petty delinquency, it is difficult to describe any of them as experienced criminals, or as carrying a serious psychological imbalance. The two brothers involved had no criminal records or previous dealings with the police: a psychiatrist described both as portraying average intelligence and no real signs of psychopathology, though susceptible to adolescent peer pressures (**R v S & D NSWSC 7/8/92** Wood, J.). The key perpetrator had previous minor convictions for stealing, drug possession, assault and resisting arrest. He had an evident disrespect for the law, and was described as having 'an immature and rebellious personality, although falling short of being decidedly anti-social' (Wood, J. P. 12: **R v D NSWSC 10/7/92**).

By contrast with such public attacks, more private fatal disputes with 'homosexual advance' allegations also arise regularly in these homicides. These are also often built on an awareness of victim vulnerability concerning robbery and assault. In some cases killers who accompany victims to private homes and flirt with them to create the prior excuse for a violent reaction appear to have a deeper insight into the socially-scripted 'legitimate' male response than either the judges or jurors who later view such actions sympathetically. Even more commonly, such 'homosexual advance' cases suggest the significance of a killer's preoccupation with issues of male honour and bodily integrity in a form that (though psychoanalytically intriguing) is widespread among heterosexual men rather than reflecting a true minority disturbance of the mind. The evident parallel with the place of masculine honour in other studies of interactive violence between men must be admitted here (Polk 1993; Archer, 1994; Tomsen, 1998).

Conclusion

I have suggested here that prejudice towards racial and sexual minorities is only irrational ('hateful') in a qualified way as these sentiments are often linked to the attainment of social forms of desired masculine identity. In so doing, I have tried to balance arguments that such prejudice is socially unexceptional (and sometimes officially condoned) with a discussion of some of the particular sorts of men whose criminal acts are in various ways motivated and shaped by such prejudice. The analysis of these collective constructions and enactments of masculinity must address the situation of such young and disempowered men (who often serve as 'gender police'). Furthermore, it signals the potential relevance of political efforts that are directed towards changing men beyond the middle class focus of much men's movement activism (Connell, 2000). Despite the conceptual utility of talking about 'hate crime' and the specific forms of social encouragement that such attacks against minority groups receive, these incidents cannot be wholly bracketed off from wider discussions about criminal offending and prevention. The social characteristics of offenders and circumstances of offending, signal that minorities have a real share in the effectiveness of wider community strategies in crime prevention. Such strategies might include anti-poverty and family support measures, initiatives in disadvantaged boys' schooling or employment and diversion programs for young men that challenge destructive manifestations of masculinity (Cunneen & White, 1996).

Notes

- (1) The contentious nature of the debate about hate crime in North America has mostly concerned the alleged infringement upon the liberal right to free speech which is inscribed in the United States constitution (Jacobs & Potter, 1998). The argument that 'hate crime' is an invasive development that threatens civil liberty is a reason why some liberal American intellectuals have broken with minority movements which advocate the punishment of vilification or the imposition of additional criminal penalties against pernicious hate-motivated deeds and words. Public Australian controversies have tended to emulate this pattern; they mostly concern debates about whether anti-vilification laws undermine free expression and bestow a special protected status on the sensitivities of minority groups and then do not move far into a discussion of other forms of victimisation.
- (2) The editors' introduction to *Faces of Hate* argued that violence against women should be seen as a distinctive area and therefore logically apart from other conventionally defined 'hate crimes'. Some feminists argue for this analytical distinctiveness. Minority-group activists also have misgivings about the potential results of any questioning about whether 'hate crime' describes a truly coherent phenomenon. Nevertheless, I am here suggesting that the contingent nature of the category can open up to incorporate some of this anti-women violence. *Faces of Hate* focused attention on less known Australian research findings and activism regarding race, ethnicity, religious affiliation and sexuality. It did not include chapters or discussions on such other significant areas as targeting due to disabilities (physical and mental) and transsexualism/transgenderism.
- (3) Numerous reports of police harassment and attacks on Aborigines and Torres Straight Islanders (P. 387) also suggest questions about the links between the institutional masculinity and traditional racism of this occupation. The racism and homophobia that is inscribed in the institutional masculinity of the criminal justice system is often indistinct from that expressed within the 'protest' masculinity of young and working class offenders.
- (4) 45 % (33 of all the 74 killings and 26 of 55 solved matters) were events marked by actual robbery or the evident intention to rob as a motive. This cannot be dismissed as a significant element though it has a very uneven relation to the motives of perpetrators. In many instances the theft of property has an incidental relation to the anti-homosexual assault: property of little value is stolen as an afterthought or a further means of victim degradation. In a minority of killings it appears to be a principal motive, but this operates in the social context of perpetrator awareness of the homosexuality of the victim: they are 'soft targets' with an expected vulnerability to attack and robbery or reluctance to report the crime. In a few such cases, unexpected victim resistance appears to result in the escalation of violence to a fatal level. But the larger number of attacks in which the fatal violence well exceeds the level needed to overpower the victim and steal property suggests that anti-homosexual sentiment had an important role in these cases. Like the gang bashing or sudden violent response to homosexual touching or suggestiveness, these 'muggings' are mostly not preplanned as killings, but the perpetrators' fury or contempt for the victim outweighs any sense of restraint with a fatal result.

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