

Protecting Yourself from Homophobic Violence

- ◆ Stay alert. Awareness is your best defense.
- ◆ Trust your feelings. If you think something is wrong, you're probably right.
- ◆ Project confidence. Don't look like an easy target.
- ◆ Be aware of your surroundings.
- ◆ Don't walk alone, especially if you are upset or intoxicated.
- ◆ Choose busy, well-lit streets.
- ◆ Walk near the curb. After dark, avoid doorways, alleys, construction sites and parks.
- ◆ If you feel threatened, cross the street, change direction, or run to a safe place.
- ◆ Have keys in hand when you reach home or car.
- ◆ Conceal money and jewelry.
- ◆ Carry a whistle or "screamer," or shout to attract attention.
- ◆ If you bring someone home, introduce that person to a friend or acquaintance so someone knows who you're with.
- ◆ Harassment often precedes assault. Use your best judgment in responding.

Reporting Hate Crimes

Call police and report details of the assault. Try to remember sex, age, race, height, weight, build, clothes and other characteristics. If an officer responds at the time, make sure she or he files an incident report. In most cases, the incident report must be filed within 24 hours in order to qualify for victim's compensation. If a police report is not made at the time of the assault, go to your local police station and file one. Always ask for a copy of this report.

Local Resources



This pamphlet was prepared by Priscilla Putzman, Nellie Mann, and Ruling King and inspired by North Carolinians Against Racism and Religious Violence, using excerpts from Priscilla's article "Bias-related Incidents, Hate Crimes, and Conflict Resolution" in *Education and Urban Society*, Nov. 1994. Thanks to all the people who have thought about, talked about, and written about hate crimes and homophobic violence.

Produced by the Campaign to End Homophobia, a network of people working to end homophobia and heterosexism through education. We believe that education about homophobia and heterosexism is most effective when done in connection with other oppressions, and realize that other forms of oppression are always present in our work. Therefore, in the context of our work to end homophobia and heterosexism, we are committed to recognizing and exploring alternatives to oppression based on race/ethnicity, physical or mental ability, class, age, sex, and religious or spiritual beliefs.

Membership in the Campaign is open to any individual or organization which supports our goals. Members receive reduced fees on educational materials; a subscription to *Empathy*, an occasional journal for persons working to end oppression based on sexual identities; and the satisfaction of supporting this important work. For information about the Campaign, or for copies of this pamphlet, write us at PO Box 38316, Chicago, IL 60638-8316.

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Hate Crimes and Homophobic Violence

In Arkansas in 1993, a gay man was beaten to death. In 1996, two lesbians were murdered on the Appalachian Trail. Several gay men were murdered along the Eastern seaboard possibly by a serial killer. Two lesbians were shot and killed in Oregon in 1995. The murders of several gay men in Texas prompted the videotaping of a gay bashing. What's the connection between violence, hate crimes, and homophobia?

This pamphlet gives information about homophobic violence as a form of hate crime and offers suggestions as to what lesbians and gay people as well as heterosexual allies can do in the face of homophobic violence.

THE CAMPAIGN TO END

HOMOPHOBIA

Understanding and Combating Homophobic Violence

Homophobic Violence, the hate crime directed against lesbians and gay men, is often referred to as "gay bashing." According to a Los Angeles County Commission study, homophobic violence most often occurs in residences. Over 60% of cases involve assault, and 93% of the gay bashing is directed at gay men. The gay basher is often a young male who does not know the victim and who often acts with other young men.

Violence Against Lesbians is often difficult to separate from violence against all women. Crimes against women such as murder, rape, battering, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence are often not considered hate crimes. Sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia are closely interrelated. Also, since lesbians are less visible than gay men, violence against lesbians remains hidden.

Hate crimes have been on the rise since 1980. A hate crime can be defined as "any act or attempted act to cause physical injury, emotional suffering, or property damage through intimidation, harassment, racial, ethnic slurs and bigoted epithets, vandalism, force or the threat of force motivated all or in part by hostility to the victim's real or perceived race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation." (*Hate Crime: Sourcebook for Schools*) Hate crimes and bias-related incidents both share the fact

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that the incident arises out of bias or prejudice due to difference or perceived difference between individuals. Even though there are many positive aspects of increased lesbian and gay visibility, researchers speculate that increased visibility may lead to increased violence towards lesbians and gay men.

Examples of hate crimes against lesbians and gay men include: murders; attacks; spray painting homophobic symbols or words; defacing pink triangles or other gay and lesbian symbols; posting or circulating demeaning jokes based on caricatures or stereotypes; defacing, removing, or destroying posted materials, meeting places, or memorials related to lesbians and gay men; vandalism of lesbian and gay places of worship; acts following events such as Gay Pride Marches or lesbian/gay political rallies; presence of hate group literature; and sexual, emotional, physical, and verbal attacks and intimidation.

Underreporting Hate Crimes makes it difficult to know how many are actually occurring. Some of the responses of the justice system are violent in themselves because they revictimize the lesbian or gay person. In states where hate crimes legislation does not exist, there is no way for lesbians and gay men to report hate crimes. Without protection or recourse for the victims, these crimes will go unreported. Violence against lesbians by their former male partners is often reported as violence against women rather than a homophobic hate crime.

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What can I do as a heterosexual ally?

Speak out against hate crimes and homophobia.

◆ Encourage people to tell their stories of hate crime experiences.

◆ Support the victims of hate crimes by listening.

◆ Encourage the media to report accurately.

◆ Educate young people to not tolerate violence and hate crimes against anyone.

◆ Recognize that gays and lesbians are special targets of violence.

◆ Walk your lesbian and gay friends home!