

**From Harm to Healing: Understanding the Physical, Psychological, and Social Impacts of
Hate Crimes on the 2SLGBTQI+ Community**

Brian Lu



Mount Royal University

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Dr. Ritesh Narayan

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From Harm to Healing: Understanding the Physical, Psychological, and Social Impacts of Hate Crimes on the 2SLGBTQI+ Community

Between 2022 and 2023, Canada recorded an alarming 69% surge in hate crimes targeting the 2SLGBTQI+ community (Statistics Canada, 2024, Table 35-10-0066-01).

According to Statistics Canada (2024), police-reported hate crimes based on sexual orientation spiked from 509 incidents in 2022 to a staggering 860 in 2023 (Table 35-10-0066-01). The 2SLGBTQI+ community “represents Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities” (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2023, “2SLGBTQI+” section).

Flores et al. (2022) found that 84.7% of 2SLGBTQI+ hate crime victims were targeted due to their sexual orientation. The United States Department of Justice (2024) says a hate crime is committed when the offender’s bias motivation targets the victim’s race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

Sexual orientation refers to how an individual classifies their “emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to people of a particular gender [identity]” (Schmidt, 2024, “What is Sexual” section). Sexuality plays a significant role in shaping an individual’s identity and self-expression. Identity labels, attraction, and sexual behaviour evolve over time because of different life experiences, making sexuality fluid (Katz-Wise, 2022, “Attraction, Identity” section).

A 2SLGBTQI+ individual’s life is more severely impacted by the trauma they suffer from a violent hate crime compared to a crime that is not motivated by hate (Flores et al., 2022). When 2SLGBTQI+ individuals are victims of violent hate crimes, they endure physical injuries that lead to long-term mental health challenges, resulting in a loss of identity. This paper will

examine the impacts of harm experienced by 2SLGBTQI+ individuals targeted in hate crimes and highlight their lived experiences of healing and recovery.

Physical Injuries Suffered by 2SLGBTQI+ Hate Crime Victims

During the commission of a violent hate crime, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals frequently suffer physical harm from the offender. Herek et al. (2002) noticed how these victimizations often occurred in public spaces, such as “streets, parking garages, or [on] public transit” (pp. 322—323).

David Gomez’s Victimization

In June 2021, two men and a woman followed 24-year-old David Gomez at Hanlan’s Point Beach in Toronto, Canada (Toronto Police Charge, 2021; Espinosa, 2021). After spewing homophobic comments, the suspects “‘knocked [Gomez] unconscious and [nearly] [beat] [him] to death’” (Espinosa, 2021, para. 4). Gomez was “‘dragged around, kicked and punched in the face’” (Espinosa, 2021, para. 4). The suspects caused injuries such as “a broken nose, cheekbone and orbital bone, [and] an injury to [Gomez’s] hip and a concussion” (Toronto Police Charge, 2021, para. 9).

Despite Gomez’s pursuit of legal action to obtain justice, the pain, suffering, and scars from his injuries will last for years, if not his entire life. Due to his injuries, such as the concussion, Gomez likely experienced headaches and fatigue (Flores et al., 2022). Every victim processes their victimization differently. In the days leading up to the apprehension of the suspects, Gomez could have had a low appetite because the suspects had not been arrested yet (Flores et al., 2022). Various poor physical health symptoms, including high blood pressure and nightmares, can impact other 2SLGBTQI+ victims’ physical health (Flores et al., 2022).

Felson and Clarke’s Ten Principles of Opportunity and Crime

Gomez's victimization can be analyzed by using the fourth and eighth principles from Felson and Clarke's Ten Principles of Opportunity and Crime. The fourth principle states that "[c]rime opportunities depend on everyday movements of activity" (Felson & Clarke, 1998, p. 16). As Hanlan's Point Beach is a popular beach and walking trail for residents in Toronto, the three suspects and Gomez likely frequented the area as part of their weekly routine.

For instance, Gomez's favourite sunset observation area could have been the beach. The suspects also could have lived near this beach and used it as a frequent walking trail. Depending on their routines, Gomez and the suspects may have crossed paths at the beach at any time of day. When both of their routines intersected, so did the opportunity for the suspects to terrorize Gomez. Given that it was after sunset and the park had lots of forestry, the suspects took advantage of the opportunity to victimize Gomez. A public park having minimal street lamps after sunset, little to no security cameras, and lots of trees increases the chances of a hate crime victimization occurring.

Felson and Clarke's (1998) eighth principle of opportunity and crime emphasizes how "crime can be prevented by reducing opportunities" (p. 23). More street lamps should be installed by the City of Toronto along the park's pathways, especially in areas where people still walk despite the lack of adequate lighting. If opportunist criminals take advantage of the lack of lighting along these pathways to target their victims, brighter and more street lamps will prevent victimization to some extent (Hilborn, 2009, p. 26). The use of a help button with a speaker system connected to these street lamps is beneficial (Hilborn, 2009, p. 31). During a victimization, the victim can run for help and press the button to alert authorities. Hilborn (2009) also proposed the idea of cities hiring more security guards to patrol the park during hours of operation (p. 30).

The 2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting

The Pulse nightclub mass shooting is a well-known hate crime against the 2SLGBTQI+ community. On the morning of June 12, 2016, 29-year-old Omar Mateen entered the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and opened fire on innocent people (Ray, 2024). Pulse had a reputation for fostering an inclusive environment for the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Molina et al. (2019) reported that 97% of the Pulse shooting victims were Latinx. This is because Latin Night was being hosted, which attracted many Latinx clubgoers (Ray, 2024).

The influx of wounded victims arriving at the emergency after the shooting did not stop, prompting trauma surgeon Dr. Chadwick Smith to urgently call his off-duty colleagues to rush to the hospital to assist (Pilkington & Smith, 2016). Smith et al. (2018) concluded that 90% of injured patients were shot (Results section). Of these clubgoers, 39% suffered gunshot wounds to the head and 78% to the chest (Smith et al., 2018).

Kaliesha Andino's Survivor Story

Kaliesha Andino, a queer survivor of the Pulse nightclub shooting, endured gunshot wounds to her back and arm (Alter, 2017, para. 2). The injuries from the shooting impeded her ability to physically function. Andino says in addition to receiving medical surgery three times, she also had to engage in physiotherapy three times a week (Alter, 2017, para. 3). She was unable to move her fingers and could not perform everyday duties, such as picking up a pan to cook or doing her hair (Alter, 2017, para. 3).

Despite her injuries, Andino is determined to attend college and start her own business (Alter, 2017, para. 5). While some survivors are alive today to share their story and embody 2SLGBTQI+ resilience, the other 49 victims sadly passed away from their wounds (Stapleton et al., 2016). Rest in peace to the 49 victims and countless other 2SLGBTQI+ victims worldwide;

your stories will never be forgotten. Although 2SLGBTQI+ survivors of hate crimes live to share their story, the physical violence they suffered triggers psychological responses that harm their mental health.

Psychological Impacts of Hate Crimes on 2SLGBTQI+ Victims

Although 2SLGBTQI+ hate crime victims may heal physically over time, the psychological impacts on their mental health remain long-term, affecting their ability to function. As a result of victimization, trauma can present itself in various ways, such as victims developing major depressive disorder.

Defining Trauma

The American Psychological Association (n.d.) defined trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event” (para. 1). Distressing events include being a victim of a car accident, mass shooting, sexual assault, tsunami, or experiencing the death of a loved one. Survivors of traumatic events often experience shock and denial (American Psychological Association, n.d.). They may unpredictably develop mental disorders based on their coping strategies (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Psychologists can determine an individual’s exposure to trauma by examining their proximity to the traumatic event they experienced (May & Wisco, 2016).

Trauma Among Pulse Nightclub Survivors

When Omar Mateen trapped the survivors of the Pulse nightclub shooting in the club, some were a few feet away from him when he shot them (May & Wisco, 2016). Gavulic and Gonzales (2020) discussed how, after the Orlando shooting in June 2016, younger 2SLGBTQI+ men recorded the “highest levels of severe psychological distress” (p. 260).

Due to prolonged trauma, the young Latinx men who survived became extremely terrified and avoided leaving their houses after the shooting (Molina et al., 2019). They preferred

to receive social services from the comfort of their homes (Molina et al., 2019), surrounded by family members, friends, or their partners.

Patience Murray's Experience Living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Survivors of 2SLGBTQI+ hate crimes are more likely to exhibit depression, aggression, and post-traumatic stress disorder following their victimization (Rose & Mechanic, 2002, p. 15). Patience Murray, now in her late twenties, survived the Pulse nightclub shooting. Murray now suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (McLellan, 2023). Miao et al. (2018) explained how post-traumatic stress disorder develops after experiencing a distressing event (p. 1). PTSD impairs an individual's ability to function emotionally and mentally and can include symptoms of psychological distress, such as anxiety or a panic attack (Miao et al., 2018, p. 1).

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2022) and its diagnosis criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder can be used to examine Murray's PTSD symptoms and the psychological effects the shooting had on her. Murray meets Criterion A because she was exposed to the possibility of death and serious injury (APA, 2022, Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders section). Murray could have died from the gunshot wounds in her femur and both legs if first responders had not rushed her to the hospital in a timely manner (McLellan, 2023).

Additionally, Murray "recalls waking up from nightmares about being in the bathroom stall at Pulse" (McLellan, 2023, How Pulse Changed Her section). She also experienced a fight-and-flight response when she "walked into a public bathroom that...looked similar to where the [shooting] happened" (Murray, 2021, as cited in McLellan, 2023, How Pulse Changed Her section). Both situations demonstrate criterion B because Murray recalls the

traumatic event and experiences distressing dreams (APA, 2022, Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders section).

During her recovery from the injuries sustained during the shooting, Murray dealt with feelings of immense survivor's guilt and suicidality. Flores et al. (2022) emphasized how 2SLGBTQI+ victims of hate crimes were at increased risk of having suicidal thoughts. Murray's survivor guilt was extremely severe, to the extent that she believed she did not ““deserve to exist”” (Murray, 2021, as cited in McLellan, 2023, The Weight of Survival section).

Murray's injuries led her to feel as though she was falling behind in life. When she checked social media and saw her friends dancing without her, she felt extremely disconnected from her social circle (McLellan, 2023, How Pulse Changed Her section). Murray no longer viewed her life as normal. Instead, she viewed herself as a victim who got shot and is now unable to do anything productive with her life. Murray's mindset of blaming herself reflects criterion D2, D3, D4, D6, and D7 (APA, 2022, Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders section), where she blames the downfall of her life on deciding to go to Pulse that night and getting shot.

The Spectrum of Healing

As Murray moved forward, she found that “[h]aving a support system and finding community...helped her [heal] [from] the trauma and grief” (McLellan, 2023, Learning to Live with Pain section) of surviving the Pulse nightclub shooting. As a path to healing, Murray channeled her painful emotions into writing a book about her experience during the shooting. Murray titled her book *Survive Then Live*.

Murray's healing journey serves as an inspiration for other victims of 2SLGBTQI+ hate crimes, conveying a powerful message: true healing begins when an individual no longer views the world and everyone in it through a lens of anger. They redirect their anger and guilt towards

their recovery through actions such as seeking therapy, embracing vulnerability, and surrounding themselves with people who support them. Healing begins when an individual reflects on their emotions and asks themselves — how can I transform what I am feeling into strength to grow and become more empowered?

2SLGBTQI+ victims may engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms to heal, such as abusing substances or withdrawing from their friends, family, and partner (Flores et al., 2022). This shines a light on 2SLGBTQI+ victims of hate crimes who lack access to adequate resources or support systems. Without external support, they lack internal self-confidence. As a result, 2SLGBTQI+ victims internalize the homophobia directed at them, leading them to believe their queer identity is unacceptable in society.

Identity Loss Among 2SLGBTQI+ Hate Crime Victims

The physical and psychological trauma from hate crime victimization leads 2SLGBTQI+ victims to adopt a more masculine facade. 2SLGBTQI+ victims project this facade to protect themselves from revictimization and gain social acceptance, mistakenly believing it boosts their confidence. However, they end up sabotaging their true, queer identity.

This causes individuals to lose their identity as they conform to harmful societal standards that reinforce toxic stereotypes about feminine-passing men. Kutateladze (2021) found that 34.5% of 2SLGBTQI+ victims purposely adopted a stereotypical masculine persona after being a victim of a hate crime.

Harmful Effects of Homophobia and Femmephobia

During a hate crime, the offender spews homophobic hate speech that the victim internalizes (Klinger & Stein, 1996, as cited in Cheng, 2004).

In eighth grade, while walking with my friends for lunch, I briefly made eye contact with a male adolescent whom I had never seen before at Peter Lougheed School. He was walking alongside a group of grade nine students I knew, but I had never observed him interacting with them previously. After my friends and I settled in a secluded outdoor corner on the south side of the school to eat, the male adolescent suddenly appeared around the corner and yelled the derogatory slur “faggot” at me.

I argue that the male adolescent targeted me because, at the time, I presented as feminine-passing, characterized by my ponytail hairstyle, my choice of neon-coloured clothing—which he interpreted as flamboyant—and I was the only male in my friend group, which consisted of girls. This adolescent’s behaviour reinforces toxic masculine beliefs, adhering to the belief that a male who does not conform to traditional, aggressive masculine norms is deviating from what is considered normal. This attitude is known as femmephobia — the belief that masculine traits should dominate over feminine traits in men, and that any deviation from this norm should be met with hostility (Hoskin et al., 2023, p. 127).

As a result, I became afraid to spend lunch outside of my Humanities teacher’s classroom, where I felt safe. I no longer felt comfortable talking much; I put my head down while walking through hallways, and only wanted to wear darker-coloured clothing. I internalized the homophobia and femmephobia I experienced, trying to dress more masculine and act stereotypically straight to avoid being revictimized (Kutateladze, 2021, p. 1050). I lowered my voice pitch to sound more masculine and less feminine. My attempt to conform to the ignorant beliefs of homophobic and femmephobic individuals limited my ability to express myself comfortably.

Homophobic and femmephobic attitudes reinforce the belief that society should publicly shame 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, especially gay, feminine-passing men, into acting more traditionally masculine.

Schafer's Typology of Victims

Schafer's Typology of Victims apply to 2SLGBTQI+ victims of hate crimes who are vulnerable to victim-blaming attitudes. His third category of victims argues that precipitative victims bear some blame for their victimization, but not because their behaviour harms the offender; rather, their behaviour provokes a response that motivates the offender to commit a crime (Fisher et al., 2015).

Schafer's third category of victims helps argue that the male adolescent was provoked by my flamboyant appearance and saw this as an invitation to wrongfully call me a "faggot." Hurtful beliefs regarding the appearance and mannerisms of gay, feminine men contribute to the social marginalization of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

Conclusion

Overall, hate crimes against the 2SLGBTQI+ community inflict not only bodily injuries, but also harm victims' psychological well-being, making them feel unsafe to express themselves.

Experiencing violence because of one's 2SLGBTQI+ identity causes long-term wounds and scars that permanently change how an individual physically and mentally functions. Following victimization, deteriorating mental health and the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder can challenge a victim's resilience and ability to heal using healthy coping mechanisms. To avoid revictimization, 2SLGBTQI+ victims conform to homophobic and femmephobic societal standards, resulting in a loss of queer individuality and authentic self-expression.

Despite the upsurge in anti-2SLGBTQI+ rhetoric and violence, the community heals by transforming hate into strength, which fuels their resilience and drive to continue advocating for societal reform. To every 2SLGBTQI+ survivor of hate: only you have the power to define who you are or who you should be. Your identity is a vibrant sunset, radiating with beautiful, distinct colours that reflect each aspect of your unique self — let those colours freely shine.

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