Chapter 7
"I Will Fight You Like I'm Straight": Gay Gang- and Crime-Involved Men's Participation in Violence

Vanessa R. Panfil

Abstract Despite extensive criminological literature on violence and victimization, the portrait of gay men's involvement is unclear. Literature exists on gay men as victims of intimate partner violence and anti-gay bias crimes, but there is very little on gay perpetrators of violence. In this chapter, I seek to critically interrogate existing assumptions and address this lack of coverage. I utilize in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 53 gay gang- and crime-involved men to discuss their participation in violence under a variety of contexts to provide a descriptive picture of their varied uses of violence. Although their uses of violence are largely consistent with the extant literature, their experiences as gay men are often central to their justifications for violence. I also explore the links between violent victimization and violence perpetration. My data suggest that negative experiences such as neighborhood violence, homophobic bullying in schools, and anti-gay harassment all play roles in respondents' decisions to utilize violence; however, this violence did not always serve to prevent their future victimization.

Keywords Gay · Gang · Violence · Crime · Homophobic bullying · Anti-gay harassment · Agency · Masculinity · Stereotypes · Victims · Intimate partner violence · Interviews

V. R. Panfil (✉)
School of Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Center for Law and Justice, 123 Washington Street Room 579B, Newark, NJ 07102, USA
e-mail: vanessa.panfil@rutgers.edu

Introduction

"Just cuz you're straight, I'm not gonna back down."—Jeremy

"I don't know why they think gay people cain't fight."—Imani

"I will fight you like I'm straight."—Johnny

Jeremy, Imani, and Johnny are gay men who are willing to use violence to address disrespect, to "fight back" against anti-gay harassment, and to retaliate against rival gangs, among other reasons. The extant criminological literature suggests a variety of ways individuals, particularly men, utilize and justify violence. For example, violence can be used to defend the self or others from violence or the threat of violence, and to gain or maintain masculine status (e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1996; Connell 2005; Decker 1996; Matza 1964; Presser 2003). These and other criminological studies have examined the uses of and justifications for violence among a variety of groups, including inner-city Black and Latino men, gang members, incarcerated men, juvenile delinquents, and men in general. However, these studies assume a heterosexual man (Collier 1998), and therefore cannot examine the ways violence is utilized and justified by men who identify as gay. Similarly, only one study of gang members uncovered any information about gay gang members and their uses of violence (Totten 2000). Extant criminological literature focuses on gay men as *victims* of anti-gay bias crimes (Herek 2009; Herek et al. 1997; Kuehnle and Sullivan 2001) or intimate partner violence (Greenwood et al. 2002; Merrill and Wolfe 2000), but gives virtually no attention to gay men as perpetrators of violence.

This study is uniquely situated to fill these gaps in knowledge. The in-depth, semistructured interviews I analyze in this chapter are data collected as part of a study on the intersection of masculinity and sexuality in the lives of gay gang- and crime-involved men. It is the first study that explicitly seeks to explore the ways gay men who are also members of gangs or involved in criminal activity (or both) use and justify violence. Accordingly, in this chapter, I explore the following questions: Under what contexts do they engage in violence? What are their reasons for engaging in violence? In so doing, I also explore the roles prior victimization has played in their decisions to engage in violence. By shedding light on gay men's uses of violence, this chapter challenges existing criminological and popular assumptions about who engages in interpersonal (and often public) violence and why.

Violence: Answered and Unanswered Questions

What Purposes Does Violence Serve for Perpetrators?

In light of its negative social and legal consequences, why might anyone engage in violence? For men across many racial, socioeconomic, and geographic communities, aggression and physical toughness confer masculine status (Connell 2005; Mahalik et al. 2003; Messerschmidt 1993), especially when other opportunities to gain masculine status, such as employment, are blocked or absent (Anderson 1999; Gibbs and Merighi 1994; Majors and Billson 1993; Oliver 1994). Thus, violence can be enacted to address disrespect and to defend "masculine ideals" such as honor and reputation (Bandura et al. 1996; Matza 1964), especially if one's masculinity is explicitly challenged by another male (Messerschmidt 2000) through insults or intimidation. Furthermore, and especially among urban populations, violence serves as a conflict resolution strategy when formal systems of intervention, such as police and school administrators, have failed (Anderson 1999; Ferguson 2000; Rios 2011). Self-defense, both of the physical body and of the reputation, is also served through the commission of violence, as is the defense of others. Perpetrators view targets of their defensive violence as appropriate or deserving victims for initiating the conflict (Hochstetler et al. 2010; Katz 1988; Presser 2003; Sykes and Matza 1957).

For men involved in certain forms of crime, such as drug selling or gang activity, violence can provide perpetrators with both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Those involved in underground economies may use violence not only to obtain tangible goods, but to construct "badass" street personas that aid in their business dealings (Katz 1988). The lack of legal avenues for recourse produces additional motivation for them to respond violently to customers and competitors in order to collect debts, exact revenge, or give themselves an advantage (Bourgois 1996; Jacobs 2000; Wright and Decker 1997). Within the gang context, violence can be used to respond to threats, either to the safety of members or to turf and economic interests; as a vehicle to join and/or leave the gang; to gain status; and in retaliation for violence committed against group members by rival groups. Given these varied uses of violence, gang members describe violence as a central feature of their gang experience (Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Involvement in gangs and other illicit pursuits is linked not only with violence perpetration, but also violent victimization (Peterson et al. 2004; Taylor et al. 2007; Thornberry et al. 2003).

What Do We Know About Gay Men's Involvement in Violence?

The criminological literature on violence says very little about gay-identified men who perpetrate violent crimes, except for those who batter their partners (Craft and Serovich 2005; McKenry et al. 2006; Regan et al. 2002; Toro-Alfonso et al. 2004;

Waldner-Haugrud et al. 1997). However, most criminological literature on same-sex intimate partner violence (IPV) actually focuses on the *victim's* experiences, such as victims' likelihood of seeking help or resources, reasons for staying in the relationship, and their decisions to report the abuse (Greenwood et al. 2002; Kuehnle and Sullivan 2001; McClennen et al. 2002; Merrill and Wolfe 2000). While it is important to gain knowledge about gay men's victimization experiences, men who identify as batterers are rarely interviewed unless they are also victims of IPV. Cruz (2003) states that it may be more useful to the victim for us to ask, "Why does the batterer do it?" However, Cruz's research, like other existing sources, asks why gay men stay in relationships with batterers. Studies have avoided gathering narrative data on gay men who identify as perpetrators of intimate partner violence, or on any sort of violence, for that matter.

In a manner similar to the intimate partner violence literature, much research exists on gay men's victimization by perpetrators of anti-gay bias crimes and has likewise focused on patterns of reporting to the police, the characteristics of the crimes, and the damaging psychological symptoms experienced after the attacks (Herek et al. 1997; Kuehnle and Sullivan 2001), but not on responses to the violence as it is occurring. That is, the literature includes no information on whether or not gay men "fight back" against their attackers. This remains true despite evidence that some groups of young lesbian women do fight back, with violence, against anti-lesbian bullying, street harassment, and violent victimization (Johnson 2008; Logan 2011). Fighting back has even been encouraged by radical LGBT rights groups, such as the early-1990s Queer Nation. They protested sharp increases in anti-LGBT violence with banners that read "Dykes and Fags Bash Back!" (Carriles 2011). In their literature, they explicitly *encouraged* queer persons to "Bash Back" (Queer Nation 1990). These sources would suggest that at least some men who are under attack because of their sexuality are willing to fight back, but research has not explored male victims' physical resistance strategies or responses to the attacker during anti-gay bias crimes.

This issue of whether or not LGBT people actively resist their victimization also plagues the large literature on LGBT youths' experiences with homophobic bullying, by focusing on consequences such as negative school outcomes and increased depression, suicidality, and substance use (e.g., Birkett et al. 2009; Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002; Espelage et al. 2008). While an interdisciplinary literature, it is located largely in disciplines other than criminology and criminal justice, such as sexuality, psychology, or public health journals. A similar argument can be made for the aforementioned studies on gay victims of intimate partner violence and bias crimes. Although victims' experiences are worthy avenues for exploration, these limited foci do not provide a complete picture of gay individuals' experiences with violence. This, coupled with the lack of cross-disciplinary research, means that theoretically significant connections are not being made. For example, we know very little about the links (if any) between homophobic bullying victimization and delinquent outcomes, despite evidence in the criminological literature that school bullying victimization is associated with delinquent behavior, gang membership, and violence (Carbone-Lopez et al. 2010; Cullen et al. 2008; McGee et al. 2011; Ttofi et al. 2012).

Furthermore, and perhaps related to homophobic bullying victimization, research suggests sexual minority youth are more likely to engage in fighting and weapons carrying than their peers (Button et al. 2012; CDCP, 2011; Russell et al. 2001); however, the extent to which these acts are defensive in nature is unclear. Only a "handful" of the thousands of students represented in Kosciw and colleagues' (2010, p. 37) study of LGBT youth in schools mentioned "resorting to physical retaliation to deal with victimization" (which the authors describe as "disturbing"), but small samples of queer youth also produce a number of respondents who report doing so (see, for example, Grossman et al. 2009). This calls into question the alleged rarity of such responses.

However, despite what seems like a logical connection between homophobic bullying and gang membership, there is virtually no scholarly research on gay gang-involved men; the only source that can shed any light on gay-identified gang members suggests they participate in gay-bashing incidents to construct masculine personas and conceal their sexual orientations from their gangs (Totten 2000). While insightful, this study uncovered information about only a few gay gang members, none of whom were 'out' to their gangs. It is unclear how else their non-normative sexual identity factored into their violence perpetration. Miller (2002) argues that an investigation into responses to structural or situational exclusion, as well as attention to intersections, such of those of gender and sexuality, are necessary to provide a more dynamic portrait of agency.

If, in fact, there is so much more to know, why don't we know it? As I discuss elsewhere (Panfil 2014a), depictions of gay men are absent from our discipline's enormous body of research on violence perpetration (despite being such an obvious home for this sort of work) for several interrelated reasons. These include: prevailing popular cultural stereotypes that represent gay men as effeminate, nonthreatening pacifists; sociopolitical concerns regarding progress towards LGBT equality; and assumptions of active offenders' heterosexuality by criminologists. Regarding this last point, violence, gang membership, and certain crimes have been gendered as masculine. For example, the violence literature reviewed herein has included many examples of how men enact violence to perform traditional scripts of masculinity (see also Collier 1998); gangs are regarded as hypermasculine groups (Peterson and Panfil 2014); and illegal pursuits such as street robbery are regarded, by criminologists and by perpetrators themselves, as essentially "masculine games" (e.g. Katz 1988; Miller 1998). Because of prevailing popular stereotypes, gay men are not seen as normatively gendered and thus have been excluded from inquiry. Even the title of this chapter, a quote from a respondent, suggests that only straight (heterosexual) men are seen to possess the capacity for violence or fighting dexterity. Because they are represented solely as passive victims of bias crimes, intimate partner violence, or homophobic bullying without any attention to their roles as perpetrators, gay men are regarded as lacking agency. That is, they are seen to lack both *choice* and *power*, and to possess little ability to control the situation (also see Panfil 2014a; and for related discussions in this volume, Dennis; Woods). Based on the extant literature, it seems likely that their experiences with previous victimization or discrimination are integrally related to their decisions to enact violence.

Current Study

Utilizing in-depth interviews from a sample of 53 gay gang- and crime-involved men, this study seeks to explicitly address the dearth of empirical evidence on gay men's involvement in violence. To do so, I will discuss their uses of violence under a variety of circumstances and their motivations for engaging in such violence. I explicitly engage with and challenge existing literature by discussing respondents' violence within several scenarios: for self-defense or the defense of others; in the context of romantic relationships; to address disrespect; as a regular part of gang life; and to combat anti-gay harassment on the streets and in schools. My data show that gay men do engage in violence, often for reasons they feel very strongly about, and refuse to be the passive victims the literature or cultural stereotypes might suggest. In fact, prior victimization plays roles in their decisions to enact violence. It is to my study's methods that I now turn.

Methods and Sample

Sampling Strategy

I recruited 53 respondents by utilizing a snowball sampling design, in which willing participants refer additional participants to the researcher. Snowball sampling is a common methodology to access underground populations (Lofland et al. 2006). I sampled in Columbus, Ohio, which is the only city where I had connections to gay gang- and crime-involved men. I obtained the initial group of eligible participants by contacting men previously known to me when I lived in Columbus, during which time I volunteered for and utilized services of several LGBT advocacy organizations. I also approached noneligible (gay, but not gang/crime-involved) individuals who had connections to eligible participants and asked them to speak to their friends on my behalf in the same manner in which I asked eligible participants to refer friends. I even accessed social networking websites such as MySpace to view user profiles and then contact men whose profiles suggested gang membership or involvement in criminal activity. These varied recruitment strategies allowed me to tap into different friendship networks (and gangs) and interview a diverse group of respondents. This sample includes men in gangs with a variety of structures, including all-gay gangs.

Interviews

I asked a series of screening questions to confirm eligibility before beginning each interview. Gay identity[1] and either gang membership or involvement in criminal activity, determined through self-nomination, made a man eligible to participate. Participants also had to be at least 18 years of age, primarily for reasons related to human research subjects protections.

I conducted in-depth interviews, which allow respondents to speak for themselves without researchers imposing artificial concepts or categories on them (Becker 1967; Wright and Bennett 1990). I asked each participant about his background, his relationships and sexual identity, his gang and/or criminal experiences, his experience with the criminal justice system, and what it meant for him to 'be a man,' among other topics. The interview instrument is unique to this study, but includes some questions used in prior research that have been adapted or borrowed verbatim for use in this study (Copes and Hochstetler 2006; Edin and Kefalas 2005; Esbensen 2003; Miller 2001, 2008). I also drew inspiration from my own lived experience as a queer person and the many conversations I have had over the past decade with other self-identified LGB individuals. My indigenous knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) of gay culture, gang/criminal justice system argot, and Columbus's geography helped me to ask follow-up questions that tapped concepts or experiences to which other researchers might not be attuned and to gain rapport with my respondents. Because my sex, race, or education level could have discouraged them from sharing certain details of their lives with me, our shared experience helped respondents to feel the social differences between us were not so great because I, in a way, spoke their language. As a result, interviews were very conversational in nature.

I conducted the interviews between November 2009 and January 2012.[2] Respondents chose to be interviewed in such locations as their homes, a private meeting room at a public library, a park, and my car. Respondents were paid 15 dollars for the interview and reimbursed for gas, bus, or parking expenses, if they had to travel for the interview. Interviews lasted between approximately 45 min and 2 h and 45 min, were audio recorded with consent, and were then transcribed verbatim. Names contained herein are pseudonyms; each respondent came up with

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[1] Although some men told me during the interview that they occasionally date or have sex with women and would identify as bisexual, they were still eligible for the study if they self-identified as gay at the outset of the interview, regardless of whether they identified as gay, bisexual, or as some other term that suggested sexual minority status. For parsimony, I refer to my respondents as "gay" men, but understand the arguments against collapsing the fluidity of sexual identification into tidy categories for researchers' or readers' convenience (see in this volume, for example, Ball; Johnson; Levy; Woods).

[2] I also spent additional time with participants to better understand their lives. As this chapter does not utilize data from fieldnotes, I do not discuss my fieldwork; however, over 225 h of fieldwork were completed.

a "code name" that was not an existing nickname or street name. Many chose common first names, but others chose stylized names such as M6, Batman, and Hurricane.[3]

Method of Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, I then analyzed the data using an inductive approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which allows themes to emerge from the data. Because I conducted all of the interviews, I had an idea of some of the major themes before I began coding. I used a basic word processing program to code the data. I coded transcripts in their entirety for every mention of violence, but will only present several of the main themes here.

The majority of the examples presented in this chapter originated from several separate, nonconsecutive questions on the interview instrument. These include: (1) What was school like for you? (2) Can you tell me a little bit about your past relationships? (3) Have you ever physically fought because someone called you a fag or a faggot? and (4) What kinds of things do you [and your gang] do together? Because interviews were transcribed and coded on an ongoing basis that was concurrent with data collection, I kept emerging themes in mind while in the field and attempted to delve deeper into those topics during subsequent interviews. For example, the question regarding fighting due to being called a fag or faggot was not on the original interview instrument, but I began to regularly ask it after this theme was present in many of my early interviews. Similarly, no questions on the interview instrument were intended to explicitly tap intimate partner violence or homophobic bullying/harassment in schools; these themes simply arose in respondents' narratives and I asked follow-up questions to gain detail. This is further evidence of the inductive quality not only of qualitative coding, but of qualitative research more generally.

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[3] Several pseudonyms were changed after the interviews when I realized the respondent had given me an existing nickname, part of his real name, or a name extremely close to his real name. If I could not contact the respondent to select a new name, I attempted to capture the 'feel' of the original code name. Because I was granted a waiver of signed informed consent, the code name is the only name attached to any of their responses. I also obtained a Confidentiality Certificate from the U.S. National Institute of Health. This Certificate protects my respondents from being prosecuted for anything they tell me, and protects me from being forced to turn over notes and transcripts or from being subpoenaed to testify against them in any court proceeding. At the start of the interview, I also gave participants a list of referrals for various LGBT-centered services, including counseling, suicide prevention, alcohol/drug treatment, and HIV/STI testing.

Sample Characteristics

At the time of the interview, 52 participants lived within Columbus's metropolitan statistical area (MSA), and one lived directly north of Columbus's MSA in a very small town. They ranged in age from 18 to 28, with an average age of 21.5. The majority (89 %) were men of color. Forty-eight respondents identified as a member or an affiliate of a gang, crew, clique, set, posse, or organization at some point in their lives. The remaining five men had also engaged in repeated criminal activity as part of a group, but denied their groups were gangs. Table 7.1 presents additional information regarding the sample characteristics.

Table 7.1 Descriptive characteristics of sample ($n = 53$)

Mean age (Range: 18–28)	21.5
Race	
Black/African-American	77 %
White	11 %
Latino	2 %
Biracial	9 %
Country/state of origin other than Ohio	42 %
Parents are immigrants	9 %
Immigrated to the USA with parents	4 %
Employment status	
Employed (legally or off-books)	45 %
Unemployed	49 %
Receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits	6 %
Education	
High school/High school equivalency or some college	75 %
In high school at time of interview	17 %
Less than high school; not enrolled	8 %
Fathered children	19 %
HIV status	
HIV positive	11 %
HIV negative	87 %
Unsure	2 %
Gang membership	91 %
Gang-involved at time of interview—mean age	21.4
Gang joining—mean age	16.2
Average length of time in gang, in years	4.0
History of CJ contact	
Arrested	77 %
Incarcerated (Range: 2 days–8 years)	55 %
Foster care (Range: 3 months–13 years)	28 %

Findings

When "You've Gotta Knock Somebody Out": Circumstances for Justifiable Violence

Regardless of the scenario, many of the incidents of violence mentioned by respondents were accompanied with justifications or rationalizations for the violence. Justifications included self-defense or the defense of others, infidelity, dishonesty, disrespect, and retaliation. Even the respondents who reported little involvement in violence appreciated these justifications. Kevin acknowledged that sometimes, "lines are crossed, and you've gotta knock somebody out." In this section, I discuss some of the major themes to which respondents attributed their violence.

Self-defense and the defense of others. Violence in order to defend self or others was overwhelmingly supported by respondents. Being threatened, hit, or shot at first was always an acceptable reason to respond with equal force. To this effect, a common refrain I heard regarding when a respondent would fight back was, "If you put your hands on me." Fighting back in self-defense has long been a legally- and socially-recognized justification for violence, but persons involved in delinquency and crime may define "self-defense" broadly to suit their own interests (Sykes and Matza 1957). Indeed, respondents sought to defend against attacks not only to their physical bodies, but to their identities and reputations. Specifically, anti-gay harassment and threats of violence were seen as assaults on a man's masculinity and sexual identity, and were deemed worthy of a violent response. Several men explicitly used the phrase "defending my honor" to refer to the actions they took. In these scenarios, defense of masculine honor and reputation were also linked to perceived disrespect. It is to these instances of "fighting back" against anti-gay harassment that I will return to later in the chapter.

Also theoretically important to the study of gay men's violence is the fact that several respondents formed identities around their willingness to defend individuals who were unable or unwilling to properly defend themselves. Brian told me that he initially started fighting while in a juvenile facility in order to defend his "projects," by which he meant: "the mentally challenged," "younger gays," and anyone who was otherwise "vulnerable" or "weak." He said that because he had been bullied his entire life, he "just can't stand to see someone getting picked on." He suggested, "I didn't like to fight, but whenever I got angry, and someone pissed me off, I didn't hold back, and I would definitely fight to defend what was right or what was mines." Brian's willingness to intervene in order to defend others resulted not only in several years added on to his time in a juvenile facility, but also in an incarceration as an adult. On his way home from work one night, he saw someone being seriously beaten by a large group of men. He drew a legally registered gun, took aim from inside his car, and shot two of the assailants. Despite committing two aggravated assaults, he served only 30 days in jail on these charges and attributes the leniency to what were, in essence, mitigating circumstances. Specifically, he defended someone who was outnumbered and at risk of

serious or fatal injury. The use of the handgun shows the extremes to which Brian is willing to go to in order to defend what is "right."

Brian was not the only one to have these inclinations. Max also said he will fight for those who would not or could not defend themselves, and against those who pick on "the downtrodden." As an adult, he often defended his gay friends from anti-gay harassment. His protective behaviors started early:

> Like, when I was younger younger, like in elementary [school], I've gotten in trouble before, for… Kickin' this boy in the head, and he hit his head on a rock, but they was jumpin' this little boy, this little white boy, just because he was a little white boy. We was in [my neighborhood], and it was a couple of black dudes that just moved in, and they were doin', like, beatin' him up on the mulch and all that stuff at the bus stop, and I pushed him down and I kicked him in his head! […] Like, [the boy getting beaten up] was really, like, a crybaby, and it made me feel so bad, because they were really over there, he was screamin', turnin', he was red, like, it's snow outside and everything, like… "Why do y'all got him on the ground like that?" It just enraged me, and I got upset, and it just happened. They don't have to be gay, but I don't like for people to fuck with the downtrodden. […] If they're already down, why keep putting them further down, you know?

The "rage" described by Max was echoed by other respondents, who used similar terms to denote the anger or explosive episodes they experienced just prior to engaging in violence they saw as righteous. M6 reported that he had "moral anger like a son of a bitch" for men who chose to pick on others substantially smaller than themselves. Fighting smaller men was not "fair" and furthermore, he mentioned that it carried no honor. Despite being a member of a prison gang, he was disgusted by inmate politics, wherein "50" members of a racial group might attack one member of another group. He called this practice "lame" and "soft."

In light of the existing literature regarding gay men's status as victims, the willingness to defend the self from violence is illuminating; the willingness to defend others violently when no real threat is posed to the 'defender' is even more surprising. Furthermore, the desire to defend others is paradoxical considering the fact that my respondents are gang- and crime-involved. That is, one might wonder why men who have committed crimes against members of the public would want to defend anyone from violence. Although respondents' prohibitions against bullying and fighting dirty were inconsistent and often very context-specific, no one took any pride in "bullying" another person and thus all felt the need to justify their behavior, so as not to be counted among the bullies of the world. Masculine norms such as those of physical toughness (Connell 2005; Mahalik et al. 2003; Messerschmidt 1993) would not be served by fighting smaller, weaker, or outnumbered persons, but by besting the person who does.

Intimate matters. The vast majority of criminological research on gay perpetrators of violence has focused on those men who commit intimate partner violence (IPV); explanations for why men batter their partners include aggressive conflict resolution styles, experiencing domestic violence in their families of origin, and perpetrators' concerns regarding challenges to their control of their intimate partners (McKenry et al. 2006; Toro-Alfonso et al. 2004). However, because the majority of research on same-sex IPV has focused on victims instead

of offenders, these motivations are not well-understood and receive inconsistent support in the literature. My study's data also fail to provide a coherent picture of the nature of same-sex IPV, as the majority of violent incidents discussed at length in the interviews were *not* among intimate partners.

With these caveats in mind, there were instances of serious intimate partner violence reported to me, which were often provided as one example of a larger pattern of violence. For example, Silas claimed he ran over his "abusive" boyfriend with a car; Eric attempted to strangle his boyfriend with a cell phone charger and "beat him up pretty badly" when he discovered him at a local motel with another man; Reese bit and took "a chunk" out of his boyfriend's chest during a fight. Silas, Eric, and Reese all reported that they experienced ongoing, often mutual IPV in these long-term relationships. Although the specific motives for each incident varied, these three men and others suggested their relationship violence stemmed from infidelity, dishonesty, and/or jealousy.

These issues also caused fights between respondents and those whom they either suspected of or knew were cheating with their partners. Lying to someone, especially when confronted about a particular transgression, was taken as a sign of disrespect to the partner and to the relationship. This exchange with Reese is illustrative:

Reese: Okay, the first time [I was arrested as an adult] was because this little chump was in my [ex-]boyfriend's face. [...] He was in his face constantly, you know, like flirting or whatever, and he was so-called straight. So one day I pulled up, and no one expected me to pull up, everyone thought I was out with my friends, and they was in the parking lot, and I saw the boy reach over and kiss my boyfriend, so then I confronted both of them right after it happened, and they both denied it, so [the boyfriend] owned a bar at the time, so I went downstairs and I started drinking. It was just like, irritating me even more and more thinking about it, and I just called the boy outside, and I was like, "Look dude," I was like, "Be truthful with me, or me and you are gonna fight," and he was like, "Dude, I don't know what the hell you're talking about, I'm not gay." "Okay, why'd you reach in and kiss my boyfriend then if you're not gay?" Well, then he continued to lie to me and I had a beer bottle in my hand, and it made me so mad that I just cracked [him] in the forehead with it, and he ran and called the cops like a little bitch.

VP: Okay, so why is he a bitch for calling the cops on you after that?

Reese: Because he shouldn't have kissed my boyfriend!

VP: Okay, so was it more that he kissed your boyfriend or that he lied to you?

Reese: Both!

VP: If he had come out there and said, "I kissed your boyfriend, I'm sorry…"

Reese: No, no, I would've went in there and tried to fight him!

VP: Oh, your boyfriend?

Reese: Yeah! So, either way I was gonna fight that night.

Presumably because the other man would not come clean and admit his mistake(s), Reese continues to mark him as less than a man by first introducing him as a "little chump," referring to him repeatedly as a "boy," and then as a "little bitch." He reported instances of fighting other men whom he suspected of flirting or sleeping with his boyfriend in an attempt to encourage his partner's fidelity. Brian also shared this desire to keep what was 'his':

> The majority of [my fights during my 7 years in a juvenile facility] were over people that I was dating in there, you know, a lot of people like to try to come in and steal that person from you, and I'm the kind of person, I don't fight for show, I fight to protect what's my mine, and I am very territorial, very protective, and a very jealous person, so when I'm dating someone, I will not stand, I will not allow someone to stand in my way.

Although these examples suggest that complex influences such as infidelity, dishonesty, alcohol, and episodic anger contribute to respondents' enactment of violence regarding intimate matters, motives for these incidents certainly speak to concerns regarding the control of an intimate partner. Interestingly, Oz suggested that these concerns were inherent in same-sex relationships:

> I know, to me, it feels like in homosexual relationships, feelings are way stronger, like… Feelings are way stronger, it's really intense, you tend to fight more, than I think in a straight relationship. You know, it's… Cuz you know, you don't wanna lose that person. Two males bein' together, they're gonna fight, you know?

Consistent with this assumption, several other men went so far as to say they enjoyed the ability of male same-sex couples to get "rough" with each other. These sentiments suggest support for normative conceptions of masculinity, which may actually contribute to IPV perpetration (McKenry et al. 2006; though see Messinger, this volume).

Disrespect as recurrent theme. An underlying motivation for many of the fights described by respondents was the desire to address perceived disrespect. Especially in the urban context where respect is the currency of the street, much status is to be lost when one is "dissed" (Anderson 1999). As has been illustrated by these examples, disrespect is perhaps an amorphous concept that applies to many forms of poor social behavior. These include challenging someone's honor or reputation, calling someone a fag/faggot, being unfaithful to a romantic partner, and lying. Relatedly, gossip was another motivation for fights. For example, Bob described the origin of many of the ongoing conflicts at a popular gay club:

> Boys. […] He said she said umm, just drama. […] [J]ust about really their boyfriends talkin' to somebody else, and it was a lot of unfaithfulness, and just, that was in like, the gay relationships. Umm, and they wanted to fight that person or this person said somethin' about me, or lied on me, or, uhh what else? Really like, petty stuff, where […] they be talkin' about each other, and they'll then get mad of course, and argue, you know, start fightin' or something.

Jealousy, gossip, and immaturity even caused members of some gangs to fight with each other, but they usually "got over it." Tony said members of his clique would fight with each other or with rival cliques over "lil stuff that get us aggravated and annoyed." While in the moment, respondents felt that these encounters required

action, but they also admitted afterwards that these fights were unimportant by using terms like "petty" or "little stuff." Respondents described many other fights with disrespect at the core of the problem, some which started as fairly innocuous events, such as accidentally bumping into another person or being asked about a prior romantic partner. Although these were not judged to be nearly as serious as anti-gay harassment, threats to personal safety, or the potential loss of an intimate partner, they still necessitated a response, which could then escalate to physical violence.

The explainable, but not justifiable. Although I have focused primarily on physical fights and/or assaults, other categories of violent crimes exist. These include homicides, rapes, and robberies. I did not ask any respondent if he had ever committed a homicide or a rape, and no one freely offered that he had. However, many had engaged in robberies, often in connection to other delinquent or illegal pursuits, such as gang membership or selling drugs or sex. With very few exceptions, respondents did not typically try to argue that this violence was justifiable. Rather, they focused on the immediate reasons for committing these crimes, such as wanting money, goods, or drugs. When they did argue it was justifiable, they suggested these items were owed to them for goods or services rendered. Secondary motivations also included revenge for other wrongs committed. However, for many respondents, their involvement in these offenses was virtually indistinguishable from their histories of gang involvement, as these activities were often engaged in with their gangs. It is to the larger topic of gang violence to which I now turn.

Gang Violence

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Decker 1996), respondents' narratives suggested that violence is a defining feature of gang membership. For some, their knowledge of neighborhood violence or gang activity was precisely the reason they joined. However, a chance of encountering gang violence became a guarantee upon joining for almost all of the gang-involved men in the sample.

Just over half of the men in primarily heterosexual gangs reported an initiation ritual for at least one of their crews, all of which included violence. Thus, their initiation into gang violence began immediately with their initiation into gang membership. One such ritual was being "jumped in," wherein existing gang members hit the recruit for a designated period of time. Sometimes, recruits were allowed to fight back. Another violent initiation ritual involved assaulting and/or robbing someone, especially someone who the OGs (Original Gangsters) or other higher-ups in the gang wanted to retaliate against. Boog likened this to military rank: as a "foot soldier," a new recruit serves the interests of the gang by robbing the "adversary" of the OG. Brad echoed this language when describing how he joined and moved up in his gang:

> Uhh, just bein' a soldier. Uhh, crashin' out on people. They'd be like, "Hey, dude owes money and he ain't paid, go get 'em," so I'd go beat 'em up, or fight 'em. […] Whatever they wanted me to do, I just kept doin' it, and as the years went on, I just got to my spot.

In addition to solidifying gang members' ties to each other and meting out fear and retaliation to other crews, these rituals helped to prove that the new recruit was tough and allowed existing gang members to gauge whether he possessed useful skills. For example, Jayden "earned his stripes" (another military reference) by fighting with members of other crews; Brandon "went around fightin' random people" to show he could fight and be "down" with his gang; Spiderman suggested that he was allowed to fight back during his gang's violent initiation ritual because the other members wanted "to see where your skills is, to see if you're really down for the clique."

Although much of gang members' time was spent in law-abiding activity, fighting other crews was also of concern. For men in primarily heterosexual gangs, much of this violence was to defend their neighborhood ("hood" or "turf") or their group membership:

> Jayden: Might fight with other gangs, there is another gang out there that they fight with. […] I guess just bein' in the same neighborhood and claimin' this [gang], and they claimin' that [gang], and they just be fightin', like, they'll throw up they hood, and then somebody else throw up [their hood], and then they just wanna fight, yeah. It be like that. […] Like, hoods, cuz that's what it's by now, ain't nobody like, "Oh, Bloods, Crips," no, it goes by hoods, you feel what I'm sayin'?

> DJ: [We would fight with] other neighborhoods, if we didn't like how you was comin' at us. Or, if we ain't like you period, we would fight you.

This defense of the neighborhood group extended even beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood:

> Rocc: It's called reppin', you know? We were out, like, if we were out at [a festival], or whatever, like, everybody was together, everybody wore they color, and we were goin' out lookin' for fights, brawls, you know? Hit somebody in red, dodge out [leave], like, everything before the police came. It was kinda like a game, you know?

It also transcended beyond rival crews; nongang affiliated ("random") people were sometimes targets of violence:

> Toby: [We'd] play Knockout. […] Knockout, basically, is like goin' to another neighborhood, and randomly walkin' around the neighborhood, whoever you see, just punch 'em. And then run, and just keep doin' it. Over and over and over again, no matter who it is.

> Elijah: [My brother and I] had to do the dirty work. Like the beatin' somebody up if they know they don't belong in the [neighborhood], or just beatin' a random person up as they walkin' down the street.

Perhaps especially telling regarding the ubiquity of violence in gang life is gang members' transformations of violence into a source of entertainment; as "play" or a "game."

Men in primarily gay gangs also had physical confrontations with rival crews and other members of the public, especially those who harassed them for being gay. However, these fights (and the gay gangs) were not often centered around neighborhoods. They more often involved issues of reputation and respect; jealousy, gossip, and "drama" were the undertones of many of these fights. As was previously mentioned, although respondents tended to describe the reasons for these fights as "petty," the fights often still resulted in serious injuries, legal ramifications, and ongoing retaliatory violence.

"Tit for tat": Boog's experience with gang violence. The cycle of violence and violence's entrenched status within gangs can be further exemplified with an extended example. At the time of his interview, Boog had been seriously gang-involved for over 10 years and had spent a combined total of 8 years in prison for violent offenses. He reported seeing gangs and violence in the neighborhood as a child, and even being attracted to that aspect of gang life as an adolescent:

> I was excited with the more violence, the more people, the better off, I just wanted to make trouble. I feel like, my feelings, I wasn't getting love [from my family], so I didn't want nobody to be happy in my life, you know, nobody. […] I mean, my friends, my brothers, the gangs, they showed love. Whether it's the wrong kind of love, it's the love you need at that time.

Boog had an idea of the violence that awaited him in the gang: His older brother "didn't live to see 18" because he had been murdered, shot twice in the head. Regarding gang involvement in violence, he suggested, "If you gon' live by it, you gon' die by it, that's the rule."

Boog had to commit a violent (retaliatory) offense to join the gang and then continued engaging in violence with the gang in order to respond to threats. In his narrative, he made efforts to convey that the targets of this violence were "particular" individuals who were somehow deserving. He described jumping, shooting, and/or robbing individuals who came into his project "repping" (representing) another project, who were enemies of his gang's OG as part of his initiation, who had harmed a fellow gang member, who had shot at him first, or who were also involved in the drug trade. He noted that because these people were also in "the game," they were acceptable targets. Beyond that, the risk of being formally punished was low because they had no legal recourse, and the potential payoffs were considerable:

> [Because] you knew they had money, you knew they had dope, and all the other stuff was bonus. So they, they always gonna give you something. You know, my thing in robbing, why rob somebody that's only gonna have $100 or $200, and they too many consequences after the fact if you get caught. […] Yeah, go for drug dealers, who they gonna call? The police and tell them? "Oh, I just got robbed for my drugs and…" Okay.

Of his estimated ten arrests, Boog stated that "most of them was [for] violent crimes." He received a five-year prison sentence for shooting his accomplice (his best friend and a fellow gang member) when a post-crime money distribution went wrong. What started out as a hand fight escalated to trading gunfire. In a telling turn of phrase, Boog says he shot this man in "self-defense" because, as he put it, "I felt like it was either him or me."

Boog explained that the gang afforded him some level of protection on the street, in reform school, and in prison, but in order to maintain the protection that the gang offered him, he had to engage in violence. Sometimes this was at the behest of the OG, but usually it was to protect his fellow gang members. In return, he was the victim of violence, but he alleged that he would have been hurt more if he did not claim membership. When asked if he was able to avoid being victimized in prison, he replied:

> I mean, as far as assaulted, no. As far as jumped on, no. As far as being raped and things, yes. Yes, just because of what I claim. And that's what most people get into the game for, is protection anyway, you know what I mean? Because if you do something to me, it gonna always be a response, if you did something to my brother, there gonna be a response, you know, tit for tat. […] Yes, it afforded me a lot of, a lot of protection. You know, I can say more, do a little bit more, because it's basically about power, you know?

He also noted that he still cannot visit his home state and old neighborhood without fearing for his safety, or without actually being victimized. Although he was still peripherally involved with a Blood set in Columbus at the time of the interview, he reported that he not only did not engage in violence anymore, but that he viewed himself as more guarded and less social as a result of his continued viewing of and engagement in violence over the course of his lifetime.

Boog's narrative illustrates the complex cycle of victimization and violence many men in gangs experience. Paradoxically, he joined his first gang in reform school for protection before ever being victimized, but became a victim of violence as a result of his involvement. Rios (2011, p. 55) refers to this as the "gang double bind": Inner-city boys of color fight to prevent their future victimization, but their involvement in violence only leads to more potential for victimization. Similarly, Darius suggested that because his family "wasn't there" for him, he had to join a gang to preserve his safety: "I didn't have nobody, so it was like, if I did get into it wit somebody, I was gettin' jumped on." Although he joined to protect himself from fights, his gang membership initiated him into deadly violence. In his sophomore year of high school, Darius sustained serious head injuries after being pistol-whipped in a gang fight, during which one of his fellow gang members was killed. Toby also joined a gang to prevent neighborhood trials:

> Because, we was new to the neighborhood, and basically, that's the only way they was gonna basically accept us livin' there. I didn't wanna have to every day get up and fight everybody in the neighborhood. I just decided to join.

His "jumping in" ritual consisted of being "beat up" by his gang's members for about ten minutes, during which he was able to fight back. He then also became involved in serious violence with his crew, and sustained his own stabbing injuries, also resulting in visible scars. On this note, several other men including Darius mentioned or showed me scars they had obtained in gang fights.

Consistent with prior research, many respondents described violence as an integral part of their gang experience, especially as a way to deal with threats, either to their personal safety, or to their group membership. Accordingly, they justified much of their violence as a necessary part of gang life, both on the streets

and while incarcerated. The willingness to engage in violence on behalf of the gang or its members is both a sign of loyalty and a way to secure protection for himself when trouble comes his way. Respondents were also willing to engage in violence in order to defend themselves and others against a different kind of trouble: anti-gay harassment. I will now discuss their responses to this harassment.

Responding to Anti-gay Harassment with Violence

While the criminological literature focuses on gay men as victims of bias crimes and an analogous body of literature focuses on LGBT youths' experiences with homophobic bullying in schools, an unexplored area is their active responses to victimization. Although research suggests some LGBT youth do fight back against their harassers in school (Grossman et al. 2009; Johnson 2008; Kosciw et al. 2010), these instances remain largely unexplored. The present study is uniquely situated to explore the circumstances under which respondents chose to fight back against anti-gay harassment, and why.

Over two-thirds of the men in my study physically fought with another person due to anti-gay harassment, threats of violence, and/or actual violence. Fights occurred in schools and school yards; public places, such as clubs or community festivals; and even in juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Most men who had fought back had done so several times, sometimes well over ten times: Derrick estimated over 20 such fights; Brandon, over 30.

Respondents asserted that being called "punk," "bitch," or "sissy" did not bother them nearly as much being called "fag" or "faggot." An assault on one's masculinity implied in the use of *bitch* or *punk* was offensive, but an assault on one's masculinity *and* sexual orientation implied in the use of *faggot* could rarely be ignored. Because of its explicit attack on identity, the use of *fag* as an insult was considered to be "derogatory," "offensive," "hurtful," and a "low blow"; Casper suggested that only "low-lifes" use it. Jeremiah explained:

> So, you could call me a bitch, you can call me out my name, duh duh duh, I don't care, but when you call me a faggot, I know wut chu mean by that, and that's just as bad as calling me a nigger, or, that's the lowest you could go. That's you resortin' to your bottom pit, so I feel like once you call me that, I'ma resort to my bottom, and my bottom is wit my hands.

Fag/faggot was most often described as "disrespectful." Thus, responses to anti-gay harassment were deemed necessary to reclaim the masculine status that has been challenged when a man is disrespected and harassed for being gay. Messerschmidt (2000, p. 13) notes that normative masculine resources such as fighting can be marshaled to "correct" scenarios wherein a man has been subordinated by another.

Despite these visceral reactions to the words fag/faggot, an anti-gay insult alone was typically insufficient to spark a physical altercation. Usually there was some form of escalation, such as coupling the slur with another wrong or an aggressive

delivery, but more often there was a series of successive, escalatory steps. The most common response to a harasser was first a verbal one, such as asking the individual to repeat the comment, clarify it, or to say it "to my face." All of these strategies were intended to cause the aggressor to capitulate and essentially withdraw the insult, which would end the conflict. When this happened, it served to reinforce respondents' self-perceptions of respectable masculinity, and suggested that the aggressor himself was lacking in that department:

> Max: Once they see that you're not a punk, that you're gonna say somethin' back, they back off, they do. People do. It happens that way a lot. […] Because most people when you say something to 'em, they back down. […] I'm gonna stay and defend myself until it's over. Because I'm not a fag, your dad is! Like, that's how I am!

> Elijah: I'd be like, "You just got punked by a fag. So who's the fag?" And I'll leave it there, and then they'll feel stupid, because you just called me so many fags, look at chu now! You just got punked by the fag.

However, if the harasser continued to be disrespectful or aggressive, respondents said they would "take it to the next level" by invading the harasser's space or throwing the first punch. In these scenarios, fighting only at "the next level" (after escalation) allowed respondents to maintain that they were *defending* their gay identities instead of stirring up unnecessary trouble. For example, Batman denied he was a "bully"; Johnny denied he was "an initial fight-starter"; Hurricane denied he was "the type to pick the fight"; and Bird denied he was "a violent person."

Respondents engaged in these fights for various reasons, as evidenced herein. In defending themselves and others from anti-gay harassment, they proved the masculine status that was assumed to be lacking. Respondents were well aware of cultural stereotypes regarding gay men; namely, that they were weak, passive, and would not defend themselves. They were pleased to defy these negative stereotypes:

> Derrick: I'm not scared of no straight person, if you gon' come at me, I'm still a boy at the end of the day. It don't matter like, how gay I am, how gay I might be, I can still fight a straight dude.

> Marcus: [T]hey wouldn't expect it, cuz they'd be like, "Oh, he's gay." Forget, underestimatin' me, forgettin' that I *am* still a boy. And then they're like, shocked, like, "Oh!"

In essence, respondents utilized normative markers of masculinity such as physical toughness and fighting dexterity to defend a non-normative (and thus stigmatized) sexual identity.

With these fights, respondents also sought to curtail future harassment. They supposed that losing a fight to a "faggot" would prevent aggressors from harassing other gay people. Jeremy suggested, "[I]f you get yo ass whooped, now you gon' be lookin' like, 'Okay. I just got my ass whooped by a fag, so maybe I should think about it!'" Steve's choice to severely beat his harasser was motivated by one goal: "[I] made sure he never called one of us a faggot again." ATL asserted that only after gay people defied existing stereotypes and fought back would they be taken

seriously: straight classmates will learn that "faggots fight too, they'll defend theyself too." Drawing from his own experience with homophobic bullying in schools, Darius summed it up concisely: "[T]hey don't respect gay people, cuz they think gay people are not gonna take up for theirself, but when you take up for yourself and do stuff for yourself, then you see the respect." These assertions are consistent with Anderson's (1999, p. 10) claims regarding inner-city violence management strategies: "repeated displays of 'nerve' and 'heart' build or reinforce a credible reputation for vengeance that works to deter aggression and disrespect" (though see Stewart et al. (2006), for empirical evidence to the contrary).

This notion of "building a reputation" to curtail future anti-gay harassment was especially critical for gay youth like ATL and Darius who sought to prevent future homophobic victimization in their schools. LGBT youth report high levels of verbal and physical homophobic harassment in schools, as well as low levels of teacher intervention in these incidents (Kosciw et al. 2012). The men in my study reported a general dislike of school not because of the work, but because of classmates who constantly teased them. Concerns about being a target of homophobic bullying were amplified when respondents moved schools or moved up in grade. For example, when Jeremiah was asked how many times he thought he had fought over someone calling him a fag, he suggested seven times, which directly corresponded to the number of schools he had attended. He added:

> But once you fight one person at the school over it, they don't do it no more. Like, not wit me, anyway, they didn't. They left me alone. So it always takes, like, it depends, like, every time I switched schools, it took for me to fight at least one person.

In contrast, Hurricane did not fight initially, but was able to build a reputation over time:

> After I started getting taunted enough, I opened up my mouth and started speakin' up for myself, like, "No, you got me fucked up!" (laughs) But, it didn't get better until I got into high school, because by the time I had got into high school, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, I had built my reputation, so everybody that I was in middle school with transferred to the high school that I went to or whatnot.

In a telling comment regarding his own fights with students who called him a faggot, Nate asserted that he felt like he "had to get them back" for using a "rude and disrespectful" word. Nate's comments succinctly represent the shared sentiment that actively responding to anti-gay harassment was *necessary* to address disrespect and curtail future harassment. Repeated homophobic bullying, which attacks an individual's masculinity and sexuality, coupled with a lack of teacher intervention and low social support, produces additional, direct motivation for gay youth to fight back. For additional information regarding how school-based homophobic bullying and harassment contributed to respondents' decisions to fight back in school and/or join gangs, see Panfil (2014b).

One additional note is necessary. These findings are in direct contrast to the only other study that uncovered the violent behavior of a handful of gay gang members. The gay gang members in Totten's (2000) study engaged in gay-bashing incidents to construct masculine identity and conceal their sexual orientation,

whereas my respondents protect themselves and others from anti-gay harassment and bullying *in order to* construct masculine identity and proudly assert their sexual identity. In fact, the harassment of other members of LGBT communities was regarded, on some level, as a personal attack.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have detailed many circumstances under which a sample of 53 gay gang- and crime-involved men engage in violence, and for what reasons. Some motivations, such as self-defense, seeking to control an intimate partner, or as a necessary part of gang life, were consistent with extant literature. Others, such as "fighting back" to combat anti-gay harassment on the streets and in schools, have been largely unexplored in the literature. Consistent with extant literature's suppositions regarding the relationships between victimization and offending, respondents' prior victimization or fear of victimization contributed to their willingness to engage in violence. Their narratives indicate they refuse to be the passive victims the literature or cultural stereotypes might suggest.

Furthermore, evidence that gay men are active members of gangs or that they violently defend themselves in general may alone be surprising to some scholars, considering the relative lack of attention to queer populations in criminological research. My findings contribute to further revelations. For example, respondents have referred to violence as a behavior they have engaged in many times; as something they "had" to do; as escalating from mere verbal provocation; as punishment for other nonviolent infractions such as infidelity; as a regular part of gang life; and even as entertainment or a "game." In light of potential sociopolitical gains towards LGBT equality, some might argue that gay men's violence is better left unsaid; I, however, am not one of them (Panfil 2014a). To deny that LGBT persons engage in violence and crime is to ignore their lived experiences, to deny that they have agency, and to lose opportunities for analyses that could inform prevention and intervention efforts (Panfil 2014a; though, for a critique of this last claim, see in this volume Ball; Johnson).

The characteristics of my sample also permit some qualifications regarding "gay men's violence." My respondents are a fairly high-risk group of men with long histories of violence, crime, and gang involvement. That is, my sample is of gay men who are, by definition, involved in these behaviors. Their decisions to join gangs and/or engage in violence were also made against a backdrop of prior victimization, such as neighborhood violence or familial neglect. Both violence and gang membership arise from nearly identical risk factors (Esbensen et al. 2009; Peterson and Morgan 2014); thus, it is unclear whether individuals who do not possess these risk factors and are otherwise uninvolved in gangs/violence would be willing to actively defend themselves from an anti-gay physical attack, let alone justify a violent response to broader attacks on their masculinity or sexuality. The requisite questions simply have not been asked. My respondents'

behaviors were also heavily influenced by the fact that they were 'out,' or open about their sexuality. This likely explains the stark contrast between my findings and Totten's (2000) findings regarding gay gang members' engagement in gay-bashing scenarios, partially to conceal their own sexual interests. I cannot speak to the experiences of men who are not out. Finally, the vast majority of my respondents are young men of color in an urban area, so these findings may not be applicable to all gang- and/or crime-involved men, especially if such men are demographically different than the sample studied herein (such as white, middle-aged men who live in rural areas).

This research has helped shed light on a previously understudied area, that of gay men's participation in violence. I encourage all scholars, but especially criminologists, to critically interrogate existing assumptions regarding LGBT persons and their (non)involvement in crime, violence, and gangs. Only then will we gain insight on how to better understand and serve queer populations.

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