

# BOOK REVIEW

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ALAN BERMAN AND SHIRLEENE ROBINSON, *SPEAKING OUT:  
STOPPING HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND*,  
(AUSTRALIAN ACADEMIC PRESS, 2010) 260PP.

*Speaking Out* documents the outcomes of the largest ever study to examine homophobic and transphobic abuse and reporting in Queensland, Australia. It reports the results of a quantitative survey on victimisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people and how this victimisation is reported to police. Follow-up qualitative interviews and focus groups were also conducted with LGBTIQ people to examine the impact of this abuse and the reporting to police. This research is timely as we can sometimes assume LGBTIQ victimisation is a historical problem and may be settled by the idea that relations with police are in good shape. This book clearly demonstrates that we have some way to go before we can be assured these issues have been resolved.

The survey was completed by 1,094 diverse respondents aged 18-76 years and constitutes the largest ever sample to report on these issues in Queensland. These comprised 480 male, 573 female, 13 male to female transgender, 11 female to male transgender, and 17 noted 'other' categories (including gender queer, transgender, and intersex) that can be glossed over in research of this nature. Of these, 478 identified as gay, 439 as lesbian, 123 as bisexual, and 54 as 'other' (including queer, asexual, pansexual, fluid, transsexual, omnisexual, intergender). While the majority of respondents were located in South East Queensland (35%), Brisbane (30%), Gold Coast (9%), and Sunshine Coast (6%), responses were also collected from LGBTIQ people in North (5%), Central (3%), and South West Queensland (3%) too. The diversity of the sample in this study is a credit to the researchers, with respondents coming from 39 countries of birth, and included 38 Aboriginal and seven Torres Strait Islander respondents, and 119 respondents with disabilities. Higher education was being attended by 227 LGBTIQ respondents, and 870 were currently employed.

Results of the *Speaking Out* survey demonstrate victimisation of LGBTIQ is still worryingly prevalent during a person's lifetime. Verbal abuse was most prevalent, experienced by 796 respondents, and this was followed closely by harassment (eg, spitting, offensive gestures), experienced by 510 respondents. Threats of physical violence were the third most prevalent form of abuse, with 452 respondents noting experiences of this, and 287 respondents stated this happened in a written form (eg, graffiti, email). Physical abuse (without a weapon) was experienced by 250 respondents – that's 23 percent of LGBTIQ people in comparison with 7.6 percent of the broader Queensland population in the same period. This is significantly higher than victimisation in the general

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population and flies in the face of suggestions we have done all we can to overcome victimisation in LGBTIQ communities. Even more worrying is how 141 LGBTIQ respondents experienced sexual assault (without a weapon) according to the survey. Other victimisation included: deliberate damage to cars and houses, theft of money, house break-ins, physical assault with weapon, property theft, damage to work property, car theft, and sexual assault with a weapon. All forms of victimisation produced different forms of physical and psychological trauma in the victims depending upon the nature and severity of the abuse. A common outcome was concealment of sexual orientation, where they would not demonstrate affection towards a partner in public, would avoid discussions about their personal lives, and avoiding disclosing their sexual orientation. Respondents noted they did this: with family; in public places; at social/community events and work; and when accessing services, attending religious events, and attending educational institutions. While we may be comfortable in the knowledge that LGBTIQ people are no longer expected to conceal this as it is no longer criminalised,<sup>1</sup> it is clear that potential victimisation is causing LGBTIQ people to change their behaviour to stay safe in a range of different spaces that others perhaps take for granted as 'safe' spaces.

Some important findings are reported by *Speaking Out*. Males outnumbered females in all forms of victimisation in the survey, a trend reflected in past surveys of this type. More importantly, male to female transgender people were more likely to experience abuse, and reported significantly higher levels of sexual assault than other respondents. Abuse was more likely to happen alone than when in a group or as a couple, but people who were associated with LGBTIQ respondents did experience abuse. Racism (on the basis of Indigenous status for instance) also intersected with experiences of LGBTIQ victimisation as did other conceptions of appearance (such as wearing a World AIDS Day t-shirt). Probably one of the most concerning findings reported was homophobia and transphobia being perpetrated by members of LGBTIQ communities against LGBTIQ people. For instance, transgender people sometimes felt they were not fully accepted into LGBTIQ communities. All these issues raise concerns given that most research focuses on victimisation emerging from sources external to LGBTIQ communities, and it suggests the need for further work in this area of concern.

Perpetrators were overwhelmingly male, according to *Speaking Out*, with 404 respondents noting male perpetrators, 88 noting male and female perpetrators, and 55 noting female perpetrators. Men more likely to be perpetrators of homophobic and transphobic abuse aligns with studies of violent murders of homosexual men in Australia<sup>2</sup> and also reflects studies of homophobia finding men are less likely to be supportive of homosexuality in Australia.<sup>3</sup> In fact, perpetrators in *Speaking Out* were mostly heterosexual men who, according to participants, felt threatened by LGBTIQ people and victimised them in groups with other males. Respondents reported they most frequently did not have a previous relationship with the perpetrator and that perpetrators were unknown and commonly under the

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<sup>1</sup> Gail Mason, 'Body maps: envisaging homophobia, violence and safety' (2001) 10 *Social & Legal Studies*, 23-44.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Tomsen, *Violence, prejudice and sexuality* (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Flood and Clive Hamilton, 'Mapping homophobia in Australia' in Shirleene Robinson (ed) *Homophobia: an Australian history* (Federation Press, 2008), 16-38.

influence of alcohol. *Speaking Out* has enabled a detailed understanding of LGBTIQ victimisation in Queensland, information which to date has not been available.

By far one of the most concerning issues highlighted by this book is the apparent lack of assistance sought by LGBTIQ victims. Of the 583 respondents who were victimised in the two years prior to the publication of *Speaking Out*, only 143 sought help. Various forms of professional support were sought by victims, including: police or GLBTI police liaison officer, telephone counselling lines, anti-discrimination commissions, community support and health organisations, and sexual assault services. These forms of assistance were mostly found to be supportive in addition to some negative experiences. Only rarely did respondents report further victimisation from support services, including police. Even so, it is clearly a concern that 75 percent of LGBTIQ respondents to the *Speaking Out* survey did not report to police or even community support services. Respondents noted a number of barriers to reporting including: minor incident; past negative reporting experiences; concern about further exacerbating victimisation; lack of knowledge about how to report; fear of being outed; and fear of homophobia/transphobia from support organisations. Respondents also noted factors they suggested would improve reporting including: if they thought the incident would be taken seriously; if the incident actually was more serious; greater service accessibility; more anti-homophobia/transphobia campaigns to educate the public; better workplace support; and if more non-homophobic/transphobic support was available, including more GLBTI police liaison officers. *Speaking Out* highlights these as key factors in why LGBTIQ victims do not report, and these issues should all be the focus of further research considering the trauma that can be the product of victimisation.

Some of the most important issues highlighted by *Speaking Out* are issues pertaining to GLBTI police liaison services and the judiciary. In the first instance, the research documented in this book demonstrates clearly how LGBTIQ people are more likely to go to the mainstream police for support than GLBTI police liaison officers. This research highlights a striking gap between how many LGBTIQ people are *aware* of these services, yet so few people actually *accessed* this service in this research. Only 12 percent of the 53 percent victimised sought assistance from police and of these only 4 percent sought assistance from GLBTI police liaison officers. This is ironic considering almost all those who accessed the service as a victim reported feeling very supported in the process. These figures are remarkable considering 52 percent of respondents were aware of liaison officer's availability for support. GLBTI communities expressed problems with GLBTI police liaison services, including: high turnover and lack of availability of liaison officers; unrealistically large territories allocated to liaison officers; officers willing to take on liaison role but uninterested in advancing the program; and lack of effective training. The Queensland Police Service has taken action to ameliorate these issues, but there is more we need to know, particularly about the role of perceptions of police in LGBTIQ communities and how this influences this process. In terms of the judiciary, the picture was not so clear. There was an apparent lack of agreement about whether or not the judicial process had been supportive or unsupportive. However, the overarching message from those that recounted their dealings with the judicial process was 'the need to be

vigilant, persistent, and exceptionally resilient to overcome the actual and perceived barriers to accessing justice.’<sup>4</sup> Overall, *Speaking Out* highlights some core issues with the criminal justice process if this is to ultimately be a process that supports LGBTIQ victims.

The comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data discussed in *Speaking Out* produces an equally comprehensive set of recommendations for government, police, and support services. Many recommendations relate to reform of existing legislation (to expunge the ability to introduce evidence of gay panic and non-violent homosexual advance) and development of new legislation (to enable prosecution of hate crime victimisation in Queensland). Many recommendations focus on educational initiatives including: educating about the outcomes of homophobia and transphobia in schools (such as implementing the *Pride and Prejudice* educational kit), schooling based on the UNESCO *Guidelines on Sexuality Education*, providing sexual education related to sexual diversity in secondary schools, developing queer and sexuality studies courses and scholarships in tertiary institutions, adoption of enforceable equity policies at universities to prohibit homophobic/transphobic conduct, and comprehensive training to pre-service teachers prior to entry to the education workplace. Other recommendations target the improvement of policing including: sexual diversity training for all new cadets and specialised sexual diversity training for GLBTI police liaison officers and the state coordinator of the police liaison program, greater publicity of the GLBTI police liaison service and evaluation of police liaison officers based on their performance in their role. Finally, at the broader level of government, recommendations included: more funding for anti-violence campaigns particularly in remote communities, more public awareness campaigns through the media to teach about the impact of homophobia/transphobia, and a full-time policy advisor position in the Queensland Government Department of Justice and Attorney General to advise the government on LGBTIQ issues. The detailed data lends itself well to making a strong case for the implementation of all these recommendations.

This book provides a vital snapshot of what point we are at with LGBTIQ victimisation and issues involved with reporting to police. It makes information available to police and practitioners on victimisation, perpetrators, and reporting which previously was unavailable in Queensland. In doing so, it highlights a range of important issues for LGBTIQ people in Queensland, issues which would undoubtedly equally influence the lives of LGBTIQ people across Australia and internationally. The book contributes a much needed understanding of issues around transphobia, something which has been systematically overlooked in past research. While it is clear things have improved since times where police have themselves perpetrated victimisation against LGBTIQ people,<sup>5</sup> *Speaking Out* pertinently notes we have some way to go. From the fact that 583 LGBTIQ respondents experienced victimisation in the past two years, the book also shows how this is a problem *now* that needs to be addressed. The sheer number of participants demonstrates they still want to be heard and they still have so much to

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<sup>4</sup> Alan Berman and Shirleene Robinson, *Speaking Out: Stopping Homophobic and Transphobic Abuse in Queensland* (Australian Academic Press, 2010) 180.

<sup>5</sup> Garry Wotherspoon, *‘City of the plain’: history of a gay sub-culture* (Hale and Iremonger, 1991).

say at a time where we can sometimes take it for granted that things are good. The detailed survey and interview data, and the extensive recommendations outlined in *Speaking Out* suggests there is still more to know and much work to be done to overcome these issues and improve the lives of LGBTIQ people for the better. Indeed, if the recommendations were to be implemented in the form the authors suggest, it would certainly go some way to improving lives as well as improving the understanding and awareness of these issues amongst the general public, the media, schools, police, and government authorities. This book is a vital resource for police and practitioners needing to understand better the context of LGBTIQ victimisation in Queensland, as well as the broader issues surrounding reporting. It is an equally important resource for any student or academic researching issues about hate crime victimisation perpetrated against LGBTIQ communities. It would be an excellent textbook for postgraduate courses on sexuality and policing, and will make equally useful reading material for undergraduate courses on diversity and policing.