

## 'ANY GIRL CAN CALL THE COPS, NO PROBLEM'

*The Influence of Gender on Support for the Decision to Report Criminal  
Victimization within Homeless Communities*

LAURA HUEY\* and MARIANNE QUIROUETTE\*

*In this paper, we examine the influence of the 'anti-snitching code' on attitudes towards reporting criminal victimization among the homeless. Using research data from a study of criminal victimization, we analyse how gender structures attitudes towards crime reporting, creating what we term a 'chivalry exception' to the 'anti-snitching code'. In essence, the chivalry exception is a form of benevolent sexism that embodies the belief that women are inherently vulnerable and thus in need of greater protection. This exception is rejected by many women, some of whom reject it as symbolic of female vulnerability, whereas others remain fearful of retaliatory violence. These findings have larger implications for future efforts to address failures to report crime by homeless female victims.*

Keywords: victimization, crime reporting, gender, homelessness

*Introduction*

Despite high rates of criminal victimization within homeless populations (Novac *et al.* 2007; Lee and Schreck 2005; Waccholz 2005; Evans and Forsyth 2004; Whitbeck *et al.* 2001; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1993), researchers have consistently found that victimization of the homeless is under-reported (Ballintyne 1999; Fischer 2004; Huey 2007; Novac *et al.* 2007; Roebuck 2008). Despite, also, earlier studies on the role anti-grassing codes play in shaping attitudes towards crime reporting within various street-based subcultures (Akerstrom 1988), with a few notable exceptions (Evans *et al.* 1996; Anderson 1999; Huey 2008; Rosenfeld *et al.* 2003; Mullins and Cardwell-Mullins 2006), this phenomenon and its import for reporting rates have received little sustained researcher attention, particularly in relation to reporting rates among the homeless.

In this article, we attempt to address this omission through an examination of the operation of anti-snitching codes in three homeless communities and use interview data drawn from a recent study of attitudes towards crime reporting by homeless men and women in three cities: Edinburgh, Vancouver and Toronto. One analysis of our data reveals the ways in which traditional notions of gender structure local cultural attitudes towards crime reporting. For although snitching is seen as taboo within street-based and/or criminal cultures (Akerstrom 1988), our respondents reveal that the prohibition against snitching excepts those who are viewed as unable to protect themselves and

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Western Ontario, Room 5316, Social Science Centre, London, Ontario, N6A 5C2, Canada; lhuey@uwo.ca.

\* Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, 725 Spadina Ave, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2J4, Canada; mariannequiouette@sympatico.ca.

thereby needing the protection of the state. Among the groups who are said to benefit from this exception are women.

To understand what we call the 'chivalry exception', we examine how hegemonic masculinity is performed within the local cultures studied. Employment of this concept is a means for explicating what the men interviewed mean when they say they allow exceptions to the anti-snitching code for female crime victims on the ground that women require protection because of their 'inherently' vulnerable condition (similar protections are not afforded men, who are required to enact toughness, autonomy and street smarts). Women's responses to this 'exception' are similarly explained with reference to the influence of the larger normative street code that frames both the anti-snitching code and the 'chivalry exception'. The implications of these findings for increasing rates of reporting victimization among homeless women are explored within the final section.

### *Hegemonic Masculinity and Grassing on the Street*

It is well known that victims of crime often choose not to report victimization to authorities. Prominent among explanations for such failures to report is the argument that for some victims, reporting is seen as a less preferable option when the extent of their injury is weighed against the possible costs and/or benefits associated with informing authorities (Skogan 1976; Singer 1988). Another explanation invokes the extent to which individuals or groups have confidence in their local police; not surprisingly, individuals with less confidence that 'something will be done' are less likely to report (Hagan and Albonetti 1982; Baumer 2002). In a similar vein, willingness to report crimes is also said to be linked to a victim's past positive or negative experiences with police (Davis and Henderson 2003). Still other victims are said to be motivated by the fear that reporting might lead to further victimization by the criminal justice process itself (Kidd and Chayet 1984).

In relation to homeless crime victims, three significant factors for failures to report have been identified within the research literature: distrust of the police;<sup>1</sup> the police practice of checking victims for outstanding warrants; and a normative code within street-based communities that prohibits individuals from reporting to authorities (Huey 2008; Novac *et al.* 2007; Rosenfeld *et al.* 2003; McCarthy *et al.* 2002; Anderson 1999; Ballintyne 1999). Of these, the present paper is focused on the prohibition against grassing.

Snitching, ratting and grassing are terms used to refer to the practice of informing to police or other authorities concerning illegal or other activities within the informant's community. Communities and/or groups enact such prohibitions in order to protect members from the consequences of authorities discovering their activities. Evans *et al.* (1996) suggest that the term 'grassing' arose in the UK underworld of the 1920s from cockney slang.<sup>2</sup> Akerstrom (1988) traces the roots of such terms as 'snitch' and 'rat' to prison subcultures in the United States. The normative prohibition against informing is presently found within and across a variety of street-based cultures—from juvenile gangs

<sup>1</sup> Distrust of the police encompasses the belief that a victim's report will not be taken seriously by the police, or that a report will not lead to a satisfactory conclusion (Ballintyne 1999; McCarthy *et al.* 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Grass is the short form of 'grasshopper', defined as someone who is too close to a copper (Evans *et al.* 1996: 365).

on housing estates to street criminals in US inner-cities to homeless youth and adults in the United Kingdom and elsewhere (Yates 2000; Anderson 1999; Evans *et al.* 1996; Jacobs and Wright 2006; Huey 2008). It is actively enforced through the use of shaming practices, threats, harassment and physical violence. In their study of the workings of the anti-grassing rule in Oldtown, Evans *et al.* (1996) found that grasses were publicly identified, and thus shamed, through the strategic placement of graffiti in a central space shared by all in the community. In many instances, though, threats and physical violence to suspected grasses are the norm. For example, a participant in Carlen's (1996: 134) study of youth homelessness stated that 'someone grassed me up for selling dope . . . so me and my mate steamed round to his house, kicked the door in, and just beat the crap out of him with a baseball bat'. A grass can expect to receive such treatment not only from the individual(s) snitched upon, but also from members of the larger community who have a similar stake in affirming this rule (Fyfe and MacKay 2000).

To understand the importance of the no-grassing rule for structuring behaviour within local street-based communities, we turn to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. It has become well accepted within the criminological literature that 'men dominate urban street crime and that masculine concerns structure most interactions' (Mullins *et al.* 2004: 912). It is not simply that men dominate street-based society, but that particular forms of masculinity (and ascribed masculine traits) come to be privileged within local cultures. In their review of the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 832) state that 'hegemonic masculinity [is] not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it [is] certainly normative. It embod[ies] the currently most honored way of being a man, it require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men'.

The definition of what constitutes privileged masculinity in a given society is not simply relational, but also context-specific. Whereas Western mainstream societies tend to define hegemonic masculinity as 'heterosexual, independent, and [getting] much of its identity from workplace success' [insert ref], various subcultures emphasize different sets of traits or behaviours as being the masculine ideal. We can see this most clearly with respect to the form of masculinity portrayed within Elijah Anderson's (1999) ethnography, *The Code of the Street*. While the larger society might view Anderson's black inner-city residents as holding a subordinate social position because of their socio-economic status, within the community studied, different normative values are prescribed, along with a hegemonic masculinity that privileges violence as a means of acquiring social capital (respect) (see also Messerschmidt 1993; 1997; 2000; Anderson 1999; Mullins *et al.* 2004). This point is similarly noted by Mullins and Cardwell-Mullins (2006: 14) in their study of male street youth: '. . . in response to concentrated disadvantage that denies access to more broadly enacted masculinity, these men have constructed a series of gendered positions based upon the mainstream forms of capital they have available to them: independence, toughness and violence, status enhancing items and the domination of women.'

Independence, toughness and violence are not only embodied within the larger code of the street that structures street-based interactions, but also underlie the anti-grassing rule itself. As we discuss in further detail shortly, reporting victimization to the police is not merely seen as a form of betrayal within street-based communities, but also as a sign of weakness. The socially prescribed response to criminal victimization is retaliation

through violence or other means (Huey 2007). A grass is therefore seen as one who lacks sufficient physical or emotional toughness to 'just deal' with their victimization, relying instead on the police or other authorities for needed support (Huey 2007).

Gender also plays a significant role with respect to the norms around street violence and victimization. Mullins and Cardwell-Mullins (2006) are only two of several researchers who have noted that the performance of hegemonic masculinity in 'street space' is also frequently based on the overt domination of women and that gender inequality remains a salient aspect of street life (Miller 1998; 2001; Maher *et al.* 1996; Maher and Daly 1997; Anderson 1999; Huey and Berndt 2008). However, overt domination would seem to be only part of the equation. Research into the use of violence in street cultures has revealed an apparent contradiction within the normative beliefs that structure social interactions in these milieus—that is within the code of the street (Miller 2008; Jacobs and Wright 2006). As Jacobs and Wright (2006: 82) explain in their study of retaliation within the criminal underworld, 'men are expected to maintain dominance over women while simultaneously avoiding the use of excessive violence and protecting them from the violent advances of others'. Similarly, Miller (2008) finds that young African-American males living in disadvantaged urban communities reference chivalric attitudes in discussing the use of violence against women. As one of her respondents states, 'ain't no real straight up fighting with the girls' (Miller 2008: 960). In relation to attitudes towards grassing in particular, Evans *et al.* (1996) note the existence of a gendered exception that generally allows female informants to escape physical retaliation on the ground that women should be immune from violence (although they are not exempt from receiving verbal and other forms of harassment).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, to date, the insight offered by Evans *et al.* that gender may influence attitudes towards reporting of criminal victimization among subcultures that observe the no-grassing rule has informed little of the subsequent research literature in this area.

In short, it would appear that contrary to the general view of street masculinity as instrumentally violent towards and/or exploitive of women, male power in this milieu is only partly based on hostile sexist attitudes. And yet, as has been well documented in the literature, the presence of benevolent sexist attitudes does not inhibit violence against women in street-based communities. In the pages that follow, we explore this apparent paradox through the use of interviews that provide insights into how gendered normative beliefs structure attitudes towards the reporting of criminal victimization by focusing on an apparent exception to the anti-grassing prohibition.

### *Method of Inquiry*

This paper is informed by analysis of data drawn from a larger study conducted in 2008 of policing responses to the criminal victimization of the homeless in Edinburgh, Vancouver and Toronto. In particular, we were interested in exploring the possibility of whether a policing program for the homeless in Edinburgh could be implemented in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>In such situations, physical violence is instead visited upon male family members (Evans *et al.* 1996).

<sup>4</sup>This program, Take Control, attempts to provide homeless victims of crime with access to policing services through participating service providers, who take initial reports of victimization, relay these reports to the police on behalf of clients and act as advocates for the homeless with the police (Huey 2008).

In Edinburgh, we interviewed representatives of participating service organizations and homeless service users. We also developed a non-probability sample of service organizations that were not currently participating in the program, and representatives from some of these organizations were also interviewed. In relation to exploring the possibility of whether similar programs might be implemented in Canada, we selected two major urban centres—Toronto and Vancouver—and developed a non-probability sample consisting of the maximum number of service providers who work with homeless populations in these cities. Eighteen agencies agreed to participate, and staff members at these sites facilitated contact with their clients. In total, we interviewed 90 ( $n = 90$ ) respondents.

Of homeless service users, data drawn from 51 ( $n = 51$ ) interviews is represented here. In Toronto and Vancouver, our homeless respondents were primarily of European or Aboriginal descent, except for one woman of Middle-Eastern origin, who self-identified as a ‘Muslim woman’. All interviewees in the Edinburgh sample were white and self-identified as either Scottish or English (with a notable exception being one recent immigrant from France). The age range for homeless participants in this study was 20–60 years of age, with an average age of 30. Although some individuals were new to homelessness, the majority of our respondents had been without stable accommodation for over a year and several were well versed in ‘street life’. Various reasons for homelessness were cited; some respondents noted their addictions as a causal factor, others had been recently released from prison, some (female respondents) were escaping abusive situations.

Community service providers ( $n = 40$ ) were included in our sample so that we could gain the views of those who work most closely with the homeless and who are often uniquely placed to observe and understand the nature of patterns of crime and victimization over time.

To address our research questions, open-ended semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted using an interview guide.<sup>5</sup> The average interview length was one hour. All interviews were held in private spaces and interviewees were advised that their identities would remain confidential. Each interview was recorded with the knowledge and consent of informants and interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim. To analyse the data, we printed and read the interview transcripts and then manually coded

TABLE 1 *Interview participants*

Respondent category	Edinburgh	Toronto	Vancouver	n
Homeless males	16	17	5	38
Homeless females	1	5	7	13
Community service providers	12	14	14	40
Totals per city	29	36	26	91

<sup>5</sup>Our interview guide consisted of four main areas of interest:

- (1) stakeholders’ views as to the nature of victimization within the target community and/or their own experiences of victimization;
- (2) stakeholders’ willingness to report victimization and/or their views as to barriers that contribute to the low rates of reporting incidents of victimization by homeless individuals to police (if any);
- (3) stakeholder attitudes and opinions concerning the concept of a Homeless Remote Reporting project; and
- (4) stakeholders’ potential interest and willingness to participate in such a project.

them according to the major themes identified. To ensure reliability, as well as to identify emergent sub-themes, we re-read the transcripts and independently and manually re-coded them two further times.

A final note on method: despite our attempts at drawing a proportional share of both male and female participants, we were not able to secure a sizeable sample of female respondents. Although our sample of male respondents permits us to offer some insights into the relationship between gender and attitudes towards victim reporting, homeless women's views are clearly under-represented. We have tried to compensate for this deficit by including the views of service providers who work with homeless females; however, there remains a limitation of the present study—one that we anticipate will be corrected in future research.

### *Victimization within the Communities Studied*

In order to provide some context for understanding respondents' attitudes towards both criminal victimization and reporting it to the police, in this section, we provide a brief overview of our findings with respect to the nature of victimization experienced by participants.

Given that the most common form of victimization cited by homeless respondents in other studies is theft of personal property (Lee and Schreck 2005; Evans and Forsyth 2004), it is of little surprise that respondents frequently cited experiences of theft. Indeed, despite security measures to reduce crime within service facilities, interviewees stated that shelters were a frequent site for the commission of petty thefts. 'If you leave a CD player on your mattress out here, and go to the washroom,' explained one male shelter client, 'when you come back, nine times out of ten it's gone. And, it's a guy who is sleeping on the mattress beside you that took it.' A homeless male service user noted 'I see a lot of theft, even in this area here. People come in with stuff and they make friends, and then they're looking around for their stuff the next day'. Harassment and intimidation were also frequently reported. 'People are getting harassed and they are getting bullied into parting with money,' an elderly homeless male advised in Edinburgh, 'they're intimidated for all sorts of stuff.'

A number of respondents reported being the victim of a violent crime. Such crimes typically ranged from assaults to robberies. Robberies are particularly common, as a service provider in Toronto noted: '. . . often we hear consistent stories about one day, they go to the bank, a guy might know their pattern, and they end up getting robbed.' One homeless Toronto man advised that he had been 'held up by a knife once', while another reported having been 'attacked with a two-by-four' in another robbery. A service user explained 'There's a lot of stupidity, people trying to beat each other up for a lousy stinking few cents'. A homeless male shelter user in Toronto related a story involving the murder of an elderly homeless man: 'There was an old man that got the fuck kicked out of him by those guys across the street, they killed him. Four guys kicked the fuck out of some old man on the bench.'

Violence is often seen as having strategic value when it comes to the settling of debts or other scores. When asked about criminal victimization, a homeless service user advised that what he sees is 'mostly violence . . . it's usually over money or debts'. Similarly, a male service user in Vancouver told us the following story. 'A friend came to me and tried to muscle me for some money for some drugs . . . I didn't respond to him, so he

sent somebody down to try to burn me out of my place. I came out of my place and I got piped down with two foot pipes and the compound fracture in my arm in two places because I wouldn't, basically, give them what they wanted.' Unpaid drug debts to local dealers are also a source of much violence. One woman in Vancouver reported to us that because of drug debts within the community, 'I see people beating on other people all the time and threatening them and stabbing them'.

Gender also plays a significant role in increasing vulnerability to criminal predation on the streets. Researchers have found, for example, relatively high rates of sexual exploitation, harassment and sexual violence experienced by homeless women (Huey and Berndt 2008; Evans and Forsyth 2004; Wenzel *et al.* 2001; Maher *et al.* 1996; D'Ercole and Struening 1990). In relation to the present study, each of the women interviewed spoke of having been victimized, the crimes against them ranging from petty thefts to violent sexual assaults. Physical assaults were particularly common. In some instances, women reported having been assaulted by another female; however, the majority of cases cited involved a male offender. For example, a woman we interviewed in a shelter in Vancouver described having been held hostage by an acquaintance who wanted her boyfriend to buy drugs for him: 'He sucker punched Joe<sup>6</sup> in the face . . . I'm scared of this guy. He tells Joe to leave . . . and don't come back without twenty dollars for crack/cocaine .... He held me hostage. He said, "If Joe calls the police, I know where you work".' We also heard several stories concerning incidents of domestic abuse. Another woman in Vancouver described the following attack by an ex-partner: 'I was victimized just last week. My ex tried to break my neck . . . he grabbed me by the jaw, crushed it in here.' A woman in Toronto stated that living in a women's shelter, 'you're always hearing about abusive boyfriends and spouses'.

Sexual violence was another recurring theme in discussions of victimization experienced by homeless female service users. A woman we interviewed in Edinburgh described her experience of having been sexually assaulted: 'I got raped and left for dead.' A service provider who works with both male and female clients in Vancouver advised that such experiences are not uncommon among her clientele: '. . . women are particularly vulnerable, and if they are sucked into the sex trades, or . . . the drugs . . . it's more and more that they are assaulted. And, very rarely do they report it.' A service provider in Toronto described a particularly horrific case involving a woman who was found after a 'john slit her throat and left her to die'.

### *Failure to Report and the Anti-Snitching Code*

I don't want to be a rat. (Homeless Toronto male)

During the course of conducting interviews, homeless service users were asked whether they themselves had ever reported an experience of criminal victimization to a police officer. We also asked, if victimized, whether they would consider doing so in the future. As the Table 2 demonstrates, in response to the second question, a number of respondents stated that they might do so in the future. However, a sizeable portion of our sample stated that they would not report to the police under any circumstances, the reasons including

<sup>6</sup>A pseudonym.

TABLE 2 *Crime-reporting response rates among homeless interviewees*

Homeless respondent categories	Edinburgh	Toronto	Vancouver	n
<i>Would not report to police</i>				
Males	9	10	4	23
Females	1	1	5	7
<i>Would report to police</i>				
Males	7	5	1	13
Females	0	2	2	4
<i>Unsure or did not answer</i>				
Males	0	2	0	2
Females	0	2	0	2
Totals per city	17	22	12	51

TABLE 3 *Invoked the snitching code for failures to report*

Homeless respondent category by gender	Edinburgh	Toronto	Vancouver	n
Males	8	9	4	21
Females	1	2	4	7
Totals per city	9	11	8	28

fear or distrust of police, the belief that nothing would be done, the inability to recall details of the crime because of intoxication and concerns by victims over outstanding warrants.

The most frequently occurring reason offered for not wishing to report victimization to the police was, however, the operation of the anti-snitching code. Of the 51 homeless individuals interviewed, just over half (n = 28) cited the possibility of being branded a snitch within the local community as a reason why they themselves and/or their friends and acquaintances would not report criminal victimization to the police. Indeed, concerns over receiving such a label were repeatedly heard from respondents within our sample. 'I don't grass,' a homeless male in Edinburgh stated, 'I'd just give myself a bad name.' Similarly, another man in Edinburgh advised 'We have a code of silence. Nobody likes to go to the police because you'll get branded a grass, know what I mean?'

Reporting to the police is considered not simply as a violation of the normative order, but as a 'crime' within the three communities studied. As one homeless male in Vancouver explained, 'There are some crimes that are not tolerated. Even the criminals themselves frowned upon [them]. You don't want to be labelled as a snitch'. The strength of the normative prohibition against reporting to the police is such that even in situations in which one might expect some leeway or flexibility—that is where the informant is reporting their own victimization—the individual is still seen as ratting. For instance, in response to why he might not report victimization to the police, one male interviewee in Vancouver baldly stated 'I think it's being a snitch', as did a female resident of this same city: 'I think it's being a snitch.' Similarly we were told in Toronto 'We don't want to be labelled as rats'. Indeed, for some, reporting to the police is viewed as a worse 'crime' than any offence committed against them.

One of the potential repercussions of being labelled a snitch, grass or narc on the street is social isolation. 'People don't like grasses' and avoid them, we were told by various sources in Edinburgh. In Toronto, a homeless man offered the following advice: 'You don't want to get known as someone who is ratting out their friends. Usually, if you

do, you end up in worse trouble afterwards, like, repercussions. You get ostracized and victimized by other friends because you ratted.’ As respondents noted, daily survival on the streets is often predicated on the ability to rely on others within a peer group—that is to have someone ‘watching your back’. Other interviewees noted that snitches lose access to goods and services within the community. ‘There are a lot of alcoholics and drug addicts,’ we were told by a homeless man in Toronto, who stated ‘people will cut them off. If you go to the police about something, the next time you need drugs, it won’t happen’. In Vancouver, we heard a similar rationale: ‘You don’t want to give up the hand that feeds you, basically, in addiction.’

As noted earlier, for those living within street communities, being labelled a snitch is also potentially dangerous because the prohibition against informing is supported within the community through the use of fear, intimidation tactics and physical violence (Evans *et al.* 1996). In a previous study of policing of the homeless, a homeless male in Edinburgh advised that harsh retaliation for snitching was a given: ‘Basically, if you grass, your life’ (Huey 2008). Similarly, we were told by our more recent group of respondents in Edinburgh that fear of retaliatory violence intimidates victims and witnesses from coming forward to the police. ‘As a general [rule],’ one man advised, ‘people are afraid of that consequence and they are not going to take any chances under any circumstances.’ Some respondents suggested that those consequences might include being ‘roughed up’ or having one’s property destroyed; others offered variations on the following scenario provided by a homeless male in Toronto: ‘. . . you’re in an alley somewhere bleeding to death.’ Once labelled a snitch within your community, punishment is certain because ‘you can’t escape the repercussions of being a rat’.

In order to exemplify the masculine values of toughness and independence underlying the anti-grassing rule, crime victims are expected to respond to their victimization through the prescribed method of ‘just dealing with it’. Indeed, we were repeatedly told that the best means of responding to criminal victimization was to ‘deal with it yourself’. This was particularly the case for male respondents, some of whom explicitly linked their views on snitching to their sense of what are appropriate expressions of masculinity. ‘Oh, if I am a victim, then I have to find a resolution,’ a homeless individual in an Edinburgh shelter stated, ‘that’s what makes me a man.’ Similarly, a male shelter resident in Vancouver stated ‘If you’re healthy and you’re not three bricks short of a load, then I think the man makes his bed, he should lie in it’. He then added the comment that if a man’s ‘bed is messy’, then it is up to him to fix it—in other words, that part of what it means to be a man, as defined within his community, is the ability to deal with a situation on one’s own terms.

‘You go to the cops, you’re a rat,’ a man in Toronto explained, ‘I’ve never been a rat. I’ve done penitentiary time and everything else, and I know how to deal with things on my own.’ ‘Dealing with things’ means to retaliate in kind or through escalated violence. It is this ability to ‘deal’ that marks one as a man worthy of respect (Anderson 1999; Wallace *et al.* 2008). This attitude is exemplified in the following remarks offered by a homeless man in Vancouver, who stated that taking care of one’s own problems is about:

Honour. I want you to respect me. Number one, we’ll take care of our own problems. Basically, you hurt my family, you disrespect me or my family or my friends then you’re not welcome in our neighbourhood. You disrespect me, let’s say you’re part of my friendship or who I hang with. Somebody

hurts you and you bring it to my attention, I'm going to do everything to deal with it right then and there or by tonight, so it won't happen to you, and you're going to have closure ten times quicker, a result ten times quicker, or the payback of whatever he took because he can't go down and hurt somebody or let's say victimize them when they shouldn't be put in that situation.

One of our interviewees, a male shelter resident in Toronto, explained the prohibition against ratting as follows: '... society has this so-called thing where you are this or that because you express how you feel. It's like how a lot of guys don't cry when they are growing up. Girls cry, guys don't. Y'know? Everyone wants to have their male ego intact.' According to this man, having one's 'male ego intact' is not simply an internal process, but also a social one: we were told that those who are unable to find ways of 'dealing with it' are 'labelled and shunned'. One of the methods of 'dealing with it' available to those who lack the ability to exact revenge on their own is to enlist support from within the community. As one fellow in Edinburgh explained, it is a common practice to respond to victimization by getting 'two or three of your friends, and catch [the victimizer] when they are inebriated. You just walk by and step on their fingers'.

If 'dealing' with victimization through retaliatory or other measures marks one as a 'man' within masculinist street culture, what is the accepted or expected response of the homeless woman who is victimized?

### *The 'Chivalry Exception'*

Guys are just more of the provider. Girls are more like the sacred person. (Homeless female in Vancouver explaining her view of local gender-based norms)

When our male respondents were asked under what circumstances it would be acceptable for a homeless person to report criminal victimization to the police, we were repeatedly told that such reports would be acceptable within the participant's community only if the victim was a member of one of the 'weaker' social groups, who are seen as requiring protection. Male respondents advised that among those categorized as weak are children, the mentally ill, senior citizens and women.

To explain why it is that female victims constitute an exception to the anti-snitching code, a number of interviewees stated that it is because women are among those more frequently victimized on the street. As one man in Vancouver informed us, 'Women have the short end of the stick in this city. I've noticed them being victimized way more than men'. In Toronto, a male resident claimed 'I know a lot of women that have been victimized'. Respondents were also frank about what they saw as the root cause of female victimization on the streets: the relative power of men within a highly masculinized subculture. A male shelter resident in Vancouver explained this difference in the following terms: 'It seems men have the power when it comes to it.' In contrast, women were repeatedly portrayed as 'the weaker sex'. For instance, a male interviewed in Toronto offered the following illustrative comments:

Q: Earlier you said that [reporting to the police] might be better for some people than others. Who is it better for?

A: For women, let's say.

Q: Why?

A: I'm not trying to be sexist or anything, but women are the weaker sex and they ....

Q: They're victimized more?

A: A lot more often. Exactly. They're weaker. What I mean by weaker is in a sense of defending themselves from violence.

Aside from issues of physical strength, the supposed naivety of women was cited as a cause of female vulnerability. 'Some of the girls,' a fellow in Vancouver stated, 'can come in and sit in pretty naive.' Women were also depicted by male interviewees as being more vulnerable to the seduction of drugs and thus to exploitation. 'In this situation,' a Toronto male shelter resident advised, 'there are a lot of drugs. Women get used for drugs. Big time. But, they allow themselves to get used.' We also heard of women's increased vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation from both service providers and the women we interviewed. For example, a service provider related the story of a lonely, mentally ill woman who was routinely plied with alcohol by a local male in order to sexually assault her after she passed out.

The weakness attributed to women serves to reinforce traditional notions of masculinity within homeless communities. Men are not only stronger and mentally tougher (and thus more suited to street life), but also capable of serving as protectors for vulnerable females. Several men in our study noted that they have in the past served as protectors by stepping into fights, taking retaliatory action on behalf of female victims. This chivalrous attitude was most explicitly put forward in the words of a man in Toronto, who stated that 'If a girl's getting beat up, stabbed, I'm coming to help regardless'. That the men in our sample would view the women of their community as inherently weaker is not entirely surprising. This finding accords with Jacobs and Wright's (2006: 83) study of retaliatory violence among street criminals in which they similarly noted that some of the men in their study saw their female cohorts as 'helpless and weak' and the use of violence against women by males as not only unacceptable, but as behaviour that undermines one's status as a man worthy of respect.

In relation to the anti-snitching code, we were repeatedly told that an exception to this prohibition is made for women. 'Any girl can call the cops,' a homeless man in Toronto advised, 'no problem.' Similarly, men in Edinburgh, Vancouver and Toronto stated that they would themselves be willing to report an offence to the police on behalf of a victim who is a woman or a child. As a man in Vancouver explained, 'When it comes to kids or women, or pervs or whatever you want to say, I'll talk to whoever. That's the exception'. 'A woman or a child, yes, then I would call the police,' a fellow in Edinburgh stated. However, he was also keen to let us know that that he himself would never report his own victimization. To do so would be seen as unmanly. 'If I get beat myself, then I don't report.' A recently paroled offender in Edinburgh living within a homeless shelter explained 'As a criminal, I don't just pick up the phone and phone the police.' He then added the following exception: 'Unless I know someone is doing wrong to a woman or a child.' As explanation for this apparent double-standard, he simply stated 'it's my belief as a man'. For this interviewee and similar others, reporting victimization of women to the police is seen as an acceptable exception to the rules against snitching because such

actions cohere with the masculinist values they adhere to. It is their duty as men to provide assistance to those who are viewed as weaker, including facilitating police protection.

In explaining to us how the anti-snitching code and its 'chivalry exception' work, several respondents offered sexual assault (rape) as an example of an offence that should be reported to the police. For instance, a male in Vancouver stated that he agreed 'one hundred percent' with the police being notified 'when it comes to a woman being raped'. In the following exchange with a female shelter resident in Vancouver, we were informed that instances of rape and child molesting are seen as constituting permissible exceptions that can be reported to the police within her community:

Q: It is interesting that you said there are exceptions [to the 'anti-snitching' code].

A: Yes. Rape, it's a dirty thing. Or being a skinner, a child molesterer [sic.]. You don't do things like that. It's a no-no.

In similar fashion, a homeless male in Toronto offered the following comments: 'Well, if a girl gets raped, that's obviously wrong .... So, we'll call the police on the guy who raped the girl. No doubt. Get it dealt with.' This same interviewee also stated 'But, if a guy gets beat up, that might not be wrong. He could've asked for it. The guy who got beat up, well, we'll excuse that'.

Although none of the men we interviewed stated that physical violence against a woman was acceptable—and some stated that they would jump into a situation to protect a woman from physical violence—as we reveal in the next section, this view is neither universally held nor universally applied.

### *Women's Attitudes towards Snitching*

I never say anything to anyone. (Homeless woman in Vancouver)

Research on female participation in street gangs and in other street-based communities reveals the extent to which there are notable differences in relation to male and female attitudes towards the use of violence, as well as important areas of overlap (Jones 2008; Miller 1998; 2001; Mullins *et al.* 2004). In her own work on the use of violence by adolescent females in inner-cities, Jones (2008: 76) argues that 'gender does not protect young women from much of the violence young men experience in distressed inner-city neighbourhoods, and that given these shared circumstances, it becomes equally important for women and men to work "the code of the street"'.

Our research highlights two ways in which homeless women 'work the code' in order to try to increase their personal safety on the streets, both of which entail an explicit rejection of the 'chivalry exception'. The first is to present one's self as tough, strong, autonomous and as equally capable as male peers of self-protection. The second is to adhere to the anti-grassing code by remaining silent about one's victimization. Women who fit in the former category reject the notion that they require special protections, believing that it is better to rely on themselves for protection than on male peers or on the police. Women in the latter category are rightly suspicious that such protections are meaningless and do little to reduce their risk of retaliatory and other violence.

Given the need for respect on the street, it is not surprising that we found that some female interviewees in our sample challenged the paternalistic assumptions underlying

the ‘chivalry exception’, seeing such treatment as a trap that calls into question their ability to exercise agency, and thus be worthy of respect within the local community. Rather than accepting the view that women are inherently weaker and therefore in greater need of protection, some of our female interviewees portrayed women as being equally capable of ‘dealing with it’—that is retaliating and/or protecting themselves through physical responses. In response to a line of query about the ‘chivalry exception’, a female respondent in Vancouver stated that she was a bad example of the vulnerable female because of her ability to defend herself: ‘I was beaten up on the street. But I have self defence, so [the man who attacked her] actually was the one with the broken nose laying bleeding in the street. So, I’m a bad woman example of that, you know. I can handle.’ This woman went on to state that ‘the girls down here, we can handle our own’. Other women similarly spoke candidly about cultivating tough, autonomous, street-smart, public personas not only in order to protect themselves from would-be predators, but also to secure respect within a community that privileges these traits as masculine ideals. A woman in Vancouver demonstrated her street persona for us: ‘Think I’m a newcomer? Do I know you? Don’t look at me like that. Who do you think you are?’ Another woman in Vancouver offered the following comment in response to a question as to whether homeless women are more vulnerable to victimization than homeless males and thus more in need of policing services:

Q: So, is it different for women?

A: No, I wouldn’t think so. Women are just as tough.

These women may appear as female outliers given research that tends to suggest a view of female toughness as being directed exclusively at other females (Ness 2004); however, we note that other studies of women and girls in inner-city milieus demonstrate that it is not uncommon for females to employ various tactics, including physical aggression against males, to build tough reputations intended to protect them from predation by both males and other females (Jones 2008; Miller 2001). With respect to homeless women more specifically, in a previous study of homeless female victims of crime, several interviewees similarly stated that they deliberately act ‘as nasty as the guys’ in order to deter victimization by both men and women (Huey 2007: 77).

While it is the case that some of the women interviewed reject the ‘chivalry exception’ on the ground that it is a means by which they remain trapped in the dangerous stereotype of the weak, vulnerable female, others reject it due to fears of retaliatory violence if they contact the police. In other words, the latter group of women disbelieve that the ‘exception’—and the chivalrous attitudes underlying it—insulates them from violence. Previous research on the relationship between gender and violence within street-based communities suggests that these women are wise to be sceptical. In Miller’s (2008) study of gendered violence among urban African-American youth, she found that despite the fact that her male interviewees claimed to have adopted chivalrous attitudes towards females, some of her research participants did engage in violence against women, carving out exceptions or redefining a situation or act in order to justify their actions. In interviews for this study, we found a similar redefining of what constitutes ‘acceptable violence’ against women—and thus the limits of the ‘chivalry exception’—illustrated in the words of

a young woman in Vancouver: 'You don't go to the cops and say I've been beat up. It's just not acceptable in the group I hang out with, or in any group, I think. If you go to the cop and say "I was raped", that's a lot different.' Studies on retaliatory violence within street communities also suggest that women are correct to be afraid; a motivated offender can simply find a way to work around the 'chivalry exception' by, for example, employing female proxies to enact revenge (Jacobs and Wright 2006). We can see fear of the latter scenario in the words of an older shelter resident interviewed in Vancouver: 'If I had no fear of retaliation, I would go as far as taking them to court . . . [but] I have a fear in me, for when they get out. Or, they may get someone else to do me in.' Another woman in Vancouver stated 'I'm not gonna rat on anyone. I'm scared of the consequences'. For similar reasons, a woman in Edinburgh said of the police 'even if I was raped, and I've been raped, and I wouldn't go to them'. Service providers who work with female populations also spoke about their clients' vulnerability to retaliatory violence:

Q: When your clients have been victimized, do they go to the police?

A: No.

Q: Ok. Why?

A: It will get worse.

Q: Like, you mean, they'll pay for it later?

A: Yeah. Ten minutes later.

For some women, previous experiences of abusive male partners have conditioned them to be fearful of reporting to police. 'If I did,' one woman stated, 'he would come after me.' A women's shelter worker in Toronto advised that such responses were common in her experience: '. . . in some communities, you're looked down upon if you go to the police. Also, some women are abused more after they report an incident of abuse. I would say about ninety percent of my clients don't report it.'

Two of the women interviewed who said that they would report to the police acknowledged the possibility that, in doing so, they risked retaliation. Both of these women were older (in their 50s), and felt that they had no other resources to draw upon other than the police. One woman had arthritis and felt that her condition made her especially vulnerable, thereby justifying the risk of reporting. To be clear, though, she also let us know that under different circumstances, she would choose to affirm the anti-grassing code by 'dealing with it' herself: 'A few years ago, I would have taken care of it myself,' she advised, 'Now I have arthritis and just can't.'

In essence, whether because of a woman's desire to appear as tough and autonomous as her male peers, or because she did not think she would be protected from future violence, women rejected the 'chivalry exception'—and thus the opportunity to report victimization to police—feeling safer instead in relying on alternative means of self-protection (from silence to retaliation). Underlying these rejections is recognition of a fact of street life: despite men saying that women need to be protected in these environments, chivalrous statements are belied by the reality of women's experience of

high rates of sexual and physical violence (Miller 2008; 2001; Evans and Forsyth 2004; Wenzel *et al.* 2001; D'Ercole and Struening 1990).

*What Does This Tell Us about the Possibility of Increasing Crime Reporting Rates among Homeless Female Victims of Crime?*

As noted in the introduction, previous research suggests that while criminal victimization is a huge problem within homeless communities (Whitbeck *et al.* 2001; Hagan and McCarthy 1997; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1993), such victimization is frequently underreported to authorities (Huey 2008; Ballintyne 1999). The participants in the present study are no exception. The majority of the homeless respondents in our sample stated that they would not report victimization to the police, a primary reason being the operation of the anti-snitching code in their community. Failures to report within this population need to be addressed as a serious social concern. In effect, lack of reporting perpetuates cycles of violence and abuse within already marginalized communities (Huey 2008). Individuals who prey on others are often able to do so with impunity, facing only the risk of retaliatory violence should they cross the wrong victim. Victims, including those who have been traumatized by serious violence, are often forced to 'deal with' their victimization with minimal, if any, medical, psychological or other assistance because of fears that the police may be contacted. Should police involvement happen and become known in the community, a traumatized victim faces the very real possibility of retaliation or exclusion from her peer group for snitching.

The goal of the larger study from which this paper is drawn was to evaluate a means of increasing access to formal justice for homeless crime victims. During the course of that study, we also collected data on possible ways of expanding access beyond the program evaluated, as well as alternative means of addressing victimization within the community. Our hope was to identify ways of transcending the barriers that inhibit reporting. A significant barrier is the normative rules embodied in the code of the street, particularly the anti-grassing prohibition. We knew from previous studies that the privileged form of masculinity that we find in the code operates to prohibit crime reporting by male victims (Anderson 1999; Mullins and Cardwell-Mullins 2006); however, significantly less attention has been paid within the research literature to the impact of this normative barrier on reporting of victimization by homeless women. Thus, we examined the 'chivalry exception' in order to explore the possibility that it might represent a means of expanding women's access to both justice and the resources frequently needed to properly address one's victimization.

Although our sample of homeless female respondents is small—a clear limitation of the present study—the interview data presented here suggest that anti-grassing code structures both male and female responses to crime. In relation to female reporting, what this study reveals is that reliance on the 'chivalry exception' does not appear to be a viable avenue through which women can gain access to police and other services. Whether women in these communities directly affirm the anti-grassing rule in order to appear tough (a strategy of self-protection) or remain silent about victimization for fear of retaliation, they remain caught in a gendered bind.

In short, although preliminary in nature, the present study does highlight some potential areas for further exploration into the influence of gender on crime reporting among homeless victims, including: how homeless women negotiate the masculinist

norms embodied in the code of the street and to what extent their role performance operates as a barrier to reporting; the potential of programs to specifically overcome issues related to homeless women's concerns about reporting; and the possibility that reporting rates may be influenced by both gender and other demographic variables such as age or cultural background. This study also offers an important insight: to the extent that both genders operate under an overarching normative code that structures interactions within the community—the code of the street—any attempt at expanding policing services to homeless women must be sensitive to the fact that not only are women affected by powerful cultural barriers to engaging with the justice system, but that these barriers are tied to issues of power and inequality within local communities.

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