



Progress Report '06

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THE MYSTERY OF MISSING VICTIMS

New Collaboration with National Foundation on Missing and Murdered Children

Early next year, the Center will begin a unique opportunity to educate detectives about missing homicide victims. The Molly Bish Foundation has invited the Center's Principal Researcher Dallas Drake to present at their national conference in Massachusetts. The training will focus on missing victim homicide, an expertise developed by the Center for Homicide Research through its efforts to identify GLBT homicide victims.

Work at the Center for Homicide Research has focused from the beginning to some extent on missing victims since GLBT victims are in a sense "missing." The Center's research strategy focuses on developing a theoretical understanding of "missingness." Drake says the Center's research strategies have been very successful at identifying previously undetected GLBT homicide cases.

"To truly understand GLBT homicides as well as other homicides, we cannot analyze only those cases that have been found. We must develop new ways to locate people and homicide cases that are still missing. We must develop a new understanding of the process of missingness, so that we can see the whole picture," says Drake. "Analyzing only cases where the victim has been found or the case is solved, would be like basing the efficacy of a medicine only on the patients who got well. There is much we still don't know."

Drake believes these victims can be found much quicker through a process of analyzing similar cases where

victims are found, and that offenders can be more easily identified as well.


The Center's ongoing missing victim research received an unexpected boost when Drake heard children's advocate John Bish, Molly's father, speak at the August meeting of the International Homicide Investigator's Association. Following Mr. Bish's presentation, Drake begged fifteen minutes with the overscheduled advocate

in which he carefully laid out the work of the Center, while highlighting the missing victim research. Bish was impressed since little work is being done in this area. He immediately recognized this as a mutually beneficial opportunity and the new partnership was underway. Drake's participation at the conference will be courtesy of the Molly Bish Foundation.

Drake's presentation will present strategies that investigators can use to more quickly identify potential homicide cases and also possible ways to speed the location of missing victims.

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Dallas Drake

The Molly Bish Foundation is a Massachusetts-based organization that is devoted to promoting child safety through education and prevention. The Foundation was created following the abduction of 16-year-old lifeguard Molly Bish in June 2000. Molly was subsequently murdered and her body concealed in a shallow grave five miles from her point of abduction. It was three long years before her remains were discovered and identified. To date, the crime remains unsolved. For more information about The Molly Bish Foundation, visit www.mollybish.org. 

INTERN PROFILE: VANESSA PELLETIER *UM Student Contemplates Larger Societal Issues in Her Research*


About mid-morning CHR intern Vanessa Pelletier quietly slips into the Center for Homicide Research office and begins her work for the day. Her unassuming nature sharply contradicts her passion for researching some of the most disturbing crime scene behaviors in the United States. Pelletier is undertaking a unique project as part of her internship: identifying and analyzing cases of missing victim homicides where the offender seeks to conceal the victim by completely consuming the body in fire. Arson and fire are all-too common tools in both GLBT and non-GLBT homicides.



Pelletier commented that it was easier to find burned body information than she thought. The errant perception of many offenders is that burning would be an effective method to both dispose of the body and to conceal their crime. However, according to Pelletier, fire was not a very effective tool in most of the cases she is reviewing. Fire conceals the victim's identity, but only for a short period of time. Student researchers from Century College and the University of Minnesota assisted Pelletier in collecting her cases.

The University of Minnesota senior is completing her internship with the Center prior to studying in South Africa during 2007. She is not here as the result of any course requirement and gets no college credit for volunteering. Instead, Pelletier is simply looking ahead to her career and thinks her work with us will help her more successfully make that transition. "You need to apply information to be able to make use of it or understand it," she said. Pelletier has come to understand more clearly the many constraints of the real world on conducting research.

Pelletier also has a strong sense of justice and a respect for human rights and says that someday she hopes to pursue human or civil rights law. "Working on homicide is very emotional," she said, "Analyzing these cases causes you to think and really contemplate the well-being of our society." She finds herself interested in genocide and structural inequalities. "I think we can have an impact on the homicide problem." Pelletier said, "Societal issues such as racial and economic factors impact homicide, and greater public understanding may help us take action against them."


Pelletier says one of the most useful aspects of the internship has been the ability to synthesize and integrate information from training and discussions, and apply them to the project. "A lot of times students are wondering what the relevance of information is when they are early in the training process. But when it starts to click and you start applying what you have learned," she said, "it's really neat." 

NEW RESOURCE GUIDE FOR HOMICIDE INVESTIGATORS BEING DEVELOPED

Two of the most critical factors in a homicide investigation are time and resources. The first 48 hours following an incident is often the narrow window of time where an investigation either yields an arrest or goes cold. Even the most seasoned detective does not have the knowledge and understanding of every possible aspect of a case. Especially in rural areas or in areas where homicides are rare, many detectives simply do not have access to informational resources that could be critical to solving a case.


The Center for Homicide Research is currently developing an "Investigator's Homicide Resource Guide" that will for the first time, bring together information, experts, and organizations in one easy-to-use desk reference. This new tool will help connect investigators, detectives and law enforcement professionals with experts and resources that can assist in homicide cases. This is a first-of-its-kind manual and includes sections on GLBT homicide.

A draft version of the guide was given high praise by a group of investigators attending the fall meeting of the International Homicide Investigators Association. Reviewers are being assembled to assist in shaping the content of the manual. Following peer-review, a publisher will be sought for the guide.

Special thanks to initial project manager Kimberley Wydeen (intern University of Minnesota) and contributors Chris Shad (intern University of Minnesota), Melanie Fowler (intern University of Minnesota Law School), and James Helstrom (intern University of Minnesota-Duluth). 

MINNESOTA HOMICIDE CRIME MAPPING TO MOVE ONLINE

One of the most compelling ways to present homicide information is through the use of computer-generated maps. For over a year the Center has been finalizing GLBT and non-GLBT homicide data in Minnesota as part of an effort to map homicide incidents. Preliminary work in 2006 yielded several interesting projects, including a research paper and presentation by Macalester College student Laura Stewart at the Sociologists of Minnesota conference.

The mapping software, however, did not provide an interactive element and generated only static maps. In the fall, CHR researcher Joe Shulka began using Google Maps™ API to generate interactive homicide maps. This process will enable the Center to post on the Web complex Minnesota homicide information in an easy-to-use, visual format. Users will be able to zoom into specific locations and learn about GLBT and other homicides in Minnesota. This will be the first time this information will be available online. 

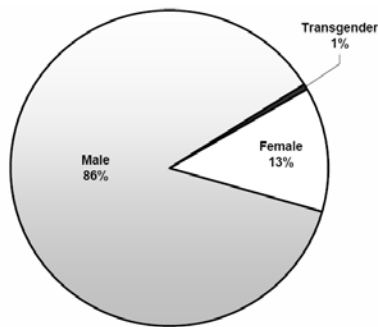
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF CENTER'S GLBT HOMICIDE DATABASE YIELDING INTERESTING TRENDS

With over 3,000 homicides identified and undergoing analysis by the Center involving GLBT victims and offenders, or incidents where there was a GLBT element was involved, some interesting trends are beginning to emerge from the data. The Center's researchers are beginning to be able to demonstrate what has been widely suspected in the GLBT and criminology communities: GLBT-related homicides have dramatically different characteristics than non-GLBT homicides.

Victim Gender in GLBT Related Homicides

Female GLBT Homicide Higher Than Previously Reported

The Center's analysis of 2,700 homicides where gender of the victim is known indicates that females make up 13% of GLBT-related homicides, while males account for 86%.



This gender finding is very different from prior analyses of homicide data. According to the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report, 75% of all homicide victims are male, 24% are female. The 1994 National Coalition of Antiviolence Project's report of GLBT homicides showed a more striking breakdown: 95% of GLBT homicide victims were male, 5% were female. The Center's research shows a more significant involvement of women in GLBT-related homicides than previously reported, though not all women were lesbian.

While these findings seem to indicate that victimization of females is relatively low, it is also important to keep in mind that population studies have consistently shown that rates of homosexuality varies between males and females. Across all population studies, whether undertaken by pro- or anti-gay researchers, the ratio between homosexual males and females is 2:1. This means that to understand homicide victimization of women, comparison should not be made between men and women, but instead within GLBT and non-GLBT women. Thus, homicide victimization of lesbians may be higher than it first appears.

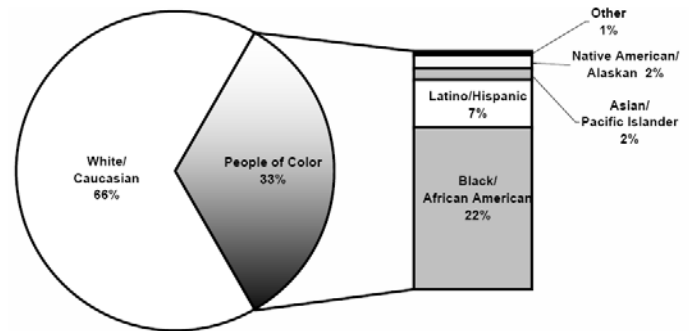
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Victim Race in GLBT Related Homicides

One-Third of Victims in GLBT-Related Homicides are People of Color

People of Color are overrepresented among victims of homicide. According to the FBI, nearly half of all homicide victims in the U.S. are People of Color even though People of Color represent only 29% of the total U.S. population.

A similar over-representation of People of Color involved in GLBT-related homicides is presenting itself among the Center's data as well.



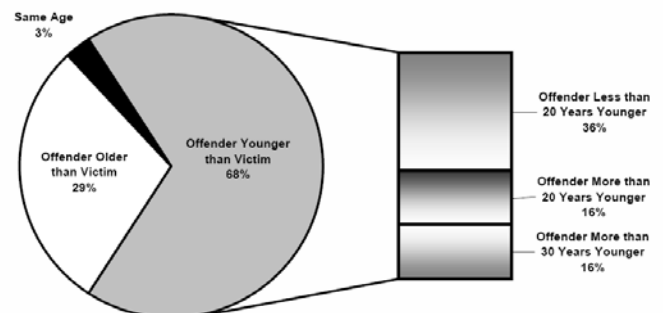
Race and ethnicity data, however, is limited in the CHR database. Because this determination is made using the death certificate, only about 15% of our cases have this information at this time. Acquiring death records can be expensive. Complete acquisition of death records is projected to cost approximately \$30,000.

Age of the Offender in GLBT Related Homicides

The Offender is Twice as Likely to be Younger than the Victim and Nearly Half of those Offenders are More than 20 Years Younger than their Victims

In general, most U.S. homicide offenders are younger people in their late teens or early twenties. However, most U.S. homicide victims are also about the same age. Homicide is all-too-often a young person's crime.

Analysis of GLBT homicide data, however, shows a significant age difference between victims and offenders. Most offenders in GLBT-related homicide incidents are significantly younger than their victims. This finding could be significant in developing education and prevention strategies among both older GLBT people who could be at risk of becoming homicide victims, as well as young people who may be at risk of offending.



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ABOUT THE CENTER

The Center for Homicide Research is an independent, volunteer-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the capacity of the GLBT community, criminal justice professionals, and law enforcement to become more effective in identifying, solving and preventing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender homicides.

Research began in 1992 and incorporated in 1999 as a nonprofit organization called the Minnesota Gay Homicide Study. In 2004, the name was changed to the Center for Homicide Research.

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