



## Minnesota Gay Homicide Study

Dallas Drake Knows More About GLBT Murder Than Anyone Else

BY MICHAEL WEINBECK

As a part-time photojournalist in the 1990s for *Equal Time Newspaper*, Dallas Drake was called upon to take photos at the crime scenes of a string of gay murders. One day, he observed homicide investigators combing Loring Park in Minneapolis, looking for evidence after a murder. They went so far as to drain a fountain and search for a bullet in its basin.

As Drake watched, a concept began to gel in his mind. "I had this burning question: How many gay murders are there?" he recalls. "And nobody could tell me. Nobody knew."

Drake began looking into cases of GLBT-related homicides. For several years, he tracked the data, learning how to define which cases he should consider and how to interpret the trends he was noticing. The more he uncovered, the more he realized he was looking at the tip of an enormous iceberg.

More than 10 years later, Drake still ponders the same burning question he considered in Loring Park, except that now, it's on a highly refined and complex level.

### A Passion Pursued

As he examined his data, Drake began to discover trends, some of them unexpected. And some of them unsettling. "The more I got into it," he says, "the more I realized I had to do something with the information I had."

In 1999, he attended the summer meeting of the Homicide Research Working Group in Quantico, Virginia. There, he learned how unique the nature of his work was. No one in the country and, as far as he can tell, in the world is conducting research like his.

Drake's colleagues at the meeting were excited by his methods and by what he was learning. His work, they told him, could have far-reaching implications in the world of homicide investigation.

At about that same time, Drake established the Minnesota Gay Homicide Study. Today, he seems amazed by the size and scope of what he's learned. His work and the information he is uncovering have implications so broad that he quickly is becoming the nation's foremost expert on homicide in the GLBT community.

### Unexpected Results

Drake's data is taking him in some unexpected directions.

"We know a couple of things right off the bat. One is that we know gay homicide is not the same as heterosexual homicide," he notes, "and we know that we don't have all the cases, even with the most accurate method of computing cases in the United States today."

As Drake points out, it's important to remember that his results are preliminary. But they are far enough along to suggest some startling things.

## Knives are more common in GLBT murders.

In the heterosexual community, most murders of white males occur when the victims are in their early and mid 20s. In the gay population, on the other hand, white males are most at risk in their mid 40s and 50s.

Straight murders seldom are motivated by robbery. GLBT homicides often are reported to have an element of robbery, although the ability of investigators accurately to identify it as the motivating factor is in question.

Heterosexual murders often involve guns. Knives are more common in GLBT murders.

In heterosexual murders involving prostitution, the prostitute is typically the victim. The exact opposite is true in the gay community.

These revelations can have widespread implications. They can impact the way law enforcement communicates with the GLBT community on how to prevent these crimes. And they can lead police investigators and prosecutors to approach some homicide investigations differently, ultimately leading to faster incarceration of perpetrators.

### Reporting the Crime

No formal system exists for identifying GLBT homicides. Police reports do not express this information regularly. Prosecutors and investigators often overlook evidence of a GLBT dimension simply because they aren't aware of its possibility.

This makes Drake's work especially dif-

icult. While most other minority groups are identified on a police report, GLBT homicides remain uncategorized.

"That's why when the Minneapolis Police Department says they need money for training, we should give it to them," Drake declares. "We look at it and see how they need training for guns, and they need training for investigations, and they need training for how to write reports."

"You know what I'd vote for? How to write reports."

The shortage of easily quantifiable data has left Drake in the position of creating his own calculus for defining which homicide cases have a GLBT element.

### Identifying the Cases

Hate crimes play a relatively small role in Drake's area of concern. He is emphatic about expanding the scope of our understanding of the gay homicide arena.

For Drake, GLBT homicide is about the offender as much as it is about the victim. And the motive for the crime hardly comes into play at all.

"All of the data that we use in the United States to look at a crime is based on the assumptions of a police officer who writes a report," Drake explains. "And they try to guess at what the motivation [behind the crime] is."

But Drake points out that a gaping chasm often emerges between the investigator's assumptions about the motive and the actual circumstances of a crime. Instead, Drake limits his initial examination of police reports to two highly objective considerations: the behaviors and the sexual identity of those involved in the crime.

Drake feels his approach frees him from the presumptions and agendas that other investigators may labor under. In Drake's work, GLBT homicides are not limited to just victims. Perpetrators may be gay. And, in some cases, neither party is gay. What's involved is the belief that perceptions of homosexuality helped motivate the crime.

His impartial approach to investigation has elevated Drake's credibility. He has access to some of the best researchers in the field, and his *curriculum vitae* places him in a research league with some of the finest homicide study organizations in the world. Police investigators regularly consult him, and he brings his research to conferences across the nation.

Nonetheless, Drake is still unassuming about the depth of his knowledge of GLBT homicides.

"There's a lot of things I've figured out, and there's a lot of things I don't understand yet. And I don't pretend to understand it," Drake ruminates. "I do know that the way I conceptualize this is far beyond what anyone else has done." ■