

LGBT Homicides – What We Know...And What We Don't *Researching, Analyzing, and Preventing Homicide*

In December of 1978, Robert Piest went missing from a small strip mall in Des Plaines, IL. The subsequent search for this missing person led to the discovery of one of the most iconic serial homicide offenders of our time, John Wayne Gacy.

This past year, one of the lead investigators on the Gacy case presented a seminar in Janesville, Wisconsin, which CHR Researcher Dallas Drake attended. "What's really interesting about this case is that it became an archetype of what we know about serial offending in the United States – and it's a same-sex homicide," said Drake, "but experts knew virtually nothing about sexual homicide at the time, but things have changed, and now we can go back, take a fresh look, and learn something new."

Gacy, who self-identified as bi-sexual, dressed up in a clown costume to torture and killed his victims in a sex-fueled rage. People even today do not well understand the dynamics of what transpired in his darkly decorated lair. Research at the Center using the *National Database of GLBT Homicide* has shown that only 15.8% of homicides involving LGBT people as victims are hate-crimes. So, what are the rest? A large segment – 28% – are sex-related homicides according to Drake.


As the LGBT movement advances and achieves ever wider success (employment non-discrimination laws, marriage equality, hate-crimes laws, etc.), one might expect that anti-LGBT homicides would diminish in frequency. However, there is no indication that this is the case. LGBT homicides are as prevalent as ever, and

the ratio of LGBT to non-LGBT homicides is actually increasing in proportion to other types of homicide.

At the heart of the issue is the misconception that only heterosexual people commit homicide against LGBT people. Drake asserts, however, that anyone can be homophobic. In fact, some of the most homophobic people are LGBT people themselves. "Look at Senator Larry Craig, a senator from Idaho who was arrested at the airport for soliciting male sex. He was virulently anti-gay in his legislative voting."

Sam Amirante (2012) makes this argument in his new book *John Wayne Gacy: Defending a Monster*. Homosexual men project their homophobia outward, attacking and killing their sexual partners. Gacy is an early example of this. Drake describes these killings as shame attacks in his upcoming book chapter on LGBT homicide, contracted to be published in spring of next year by Taylor and Francis.

What we don't know of course is how frequent these shame attacks are. There also is no definitive strategy to prevent killings based on this sexual shame, in part because this is a fairly new finding, but also because the solution may be intra-psychic. This means that anti-homophobia training really needs to target LGBT people, as much or more than non-LGBT people.

"We need to reach people who are not in the mainstream of LGBT society, who don't read gay publications, or may not go to gay bars, but who are actively engaged in same-sex sexual activity," Drake said, "these are the Gacy's of our day." 

AURORA THEATER SHOOTING CONTAGION


Beginning in January of 2013, researchers at the Center began a project looking at the mimetic incidents occurring after the Aurora, CO Theater shooting. The goal was to look at the contagion of homicide as it related to a mass shooting incident. Contagion is the study of how homicide spreads.

Researchers Morgan Vink and Sarah Lease collected 40 cases of mimetic incidents in the aftermath of the Aurora Theater shooting. Criteria included that there must be a direct link with the original shooting. The 40 cases were then visually displayed based on their distribution over time. The chart showed that the first mimetic event was only two days after the original shooting. In conjunction, 37.5% (15) of the cases occurred in the first week after the Aurora Theater shooting. This was the peak of the mimetic activity. The majority (65%) of mimetic events occurred in the first month.

Incidents included a wide array of characteristics, and the severity level of the resulting actions was at its lowest during the first week following the original shooting. The subsequent weeks tended to bounce from less severe to more severe cases. It seemed that time was needed for offenders to cognitively construct the referential act. The two most severe incidents both occurred in the latter weeks, including week 22 and week 25. Both of these cases involved guns and actual shootings. All of this suggests that as the frequency of events decreases, their severity level can remain quite high.

Currently, Researcher, Lindsay Blahnik, is working to establish a chart of the temporal distribution of all the mass shootings in the United States for the year 2012. She is seeking to establish whether a pattern of contagion is evident between seemingly unrelated mass shootings, such as with that of the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.

One might wonder the motivations for using this particular event, rather than say, the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting, which took place within the six months time frame of this study. CHR student Kara Davis was interning with the Center, distanced-learning (via Skype), during the period when the theater shooting occurred. In fact, Kara was in the theater the night before the shooting. As a result, much discussion occurred among our students. This developed into a strong theoretical interest in the contagious nature of homicidal events.

Certain types of LGBT homicides (hate-crimes) do appear to be contagious. This leads to a concentration of violent behavior that sometimes clusters in or around the areas of the community where LGBT people tend to live. The study of Aurora will help us understand this, as yet unstudied, linking mechanism. 

TEACHERS WITH GUNS: HOMICIDE PREVENTION INTERVENTION


After the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, the NRA began promoting a strategy of arming school teachers in classrooms. Because of this recent media attention, policy makers too have been examining the potential of arming school-teachers to protect students. Due to this legislative focus on teachers, research is needed on the potential outcomes of arming teachers. Since there are no other studies specifically discussing firearms use by teachers, this study uses news reports from online databases to examine incidents of teachers using or misusing firearms. By taking into account victims, motive, and location of each shooting, this study attempts to describe these various incidents to create a baseline of knowledge on this topic.

Already, 18 states allow people on school campuses to carry firearms. In most of these states, there are strict rules about who can carry firearms; most of them require the carrier to be a security guard or police officer. These security guards often need special permission to carry their weapon. However, 10 states are attempting to make laws specifically allowing teachers to carry firearms on campuses. Since the issue of teachers carrying firearms is such a big topic in public policy currently, it is important for it to be studied.

To examine firearm use by teachers, this CHR study used U.S. cases that occurred after 1980, in which a teacher accidentally or intentionally shot someone (either oneself or another person), but not out of self-defense. In addition, the teacher must have been using a firearm shooting actual bullets, not blanks or BB's. Finally, the teacher's main occupation must be that of a teacher, though they need not currently be working as a teacher.

The study identified 31 cases, including 35 victims, which excludes the number of shooters who shot themselves. None of these cases were teachers fending off an attack of a student or other aggressor.

Shootings were deadly. Of the victims, 74.3% (26/35) died in the shooting incident, showing that a majority of the victims were involved in fatal interactions. Also, in 61.3% (19/31) of the cases, the shooter died by suicide. Furthermore, almost all of the cases were intentional, with only 6.5% (2/31) of cases being accidental.

Another interesting finding was that the most common location of the shootings was school grounds, with 32.3% (10/31) occurring there. It is interesting that so many of the cases occurred on school grounds, since in only one case, was the shooter legally allowed to carry their weapon on school grounds. 

INTERN PROFILE: AARON CARLSON


Aaron Carlson was chosen by the Center to participate in the Center's Summer Internship Institute in the summer of 2012. Carlson was born and raised in the Greater Chicago Area. He graduated from Illinois State University where he majored in criminal justice.



Carlson's interest in homicide was bolstered by his mother who also majored in criminal justice. Before coming to the Center, he already had enrolled in University courses in criminal behavioral analysis and in research methods. Dallas Drake, Principal Researcher for the Center and Carlson's direct supervisor, comments that, "whenever a student comes from another state, and you don't have the chance to interview him or her in person, you're really not sure what to expect."


At the time of his arrival, students were involved in research on the temporal distribution of homicidal events, a project which continues to this day. Carlson took it a different direction however by choosing to focus on a topic he knew well, the murders of Robert Piest and 32 other victims who were killed by John Wayne Gacy. Carlson studied the Gacy case previously, and he used that to his advantage as he analyzed these predatory offender patterns.

Carlson identified several comparable cases to conduct similar analysis with. While searching for Gacy victims, he came across several surviving victims and added them to his data. It was during this search that Carlson identified rare reports and files at the prestigious Chicago History Museum. The Museum wouldn't assist him directly in copying and shipping the files. Instead Carlson successfully enlisted his younger brother to step in and help.

Carlson completed his 470 hours with the Center, rising to the position of Homicide Researcher, the most advanced level possible. He was subsequently accepted into Tiffin University's Masters Program in Criminal Justice. 

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First founded in 1999 as a nonprofit organization to research LGBT homicide, the name was changed in 2004 to the Center for Homicide Research, and its mission expanded in 2007 to include all types of homicide, with a strong focus on marginalized communities and underrepresented areas of homicide. The Center specializes in LGBT homicide.

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