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Monique Noelle

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF A SEXUAL ORIENTATION HATE CRIME:
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE MURDER OF
MATTHEW SHEPARD ON NON-HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE

A Thesis Presented
by
MONIQUE NOELLE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF A SEXUAL ORIENTATION HATE CRIME:
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Approved as to style and content by:

Bonnie R. Strickland, Chair
Richard P. Halgin, Member
Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Member
David M. Todd, Member

Melinda Novak, Department Chair
Psychology Department
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ABSTRACT

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF A SEXUAL ORIENTATION HATE CRIME: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE MURDER OF MATTHEW SHEPARD ON NON-HETEROSEXUAL PEOPLE

MAY 2000

MONIQUE NOELLE, B.A., POMONA COLLEGE
M.S., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Bonnie R. Strickland

In this research, I investigated the psychological impact of a salient hate crime on some members of the targeted group. The widely-publicized murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming in October 1998 served as a case study in the ripple effect of sexual orientation hate crimes. Previous research indicates that the psychological sequelae in victims of hate crimes are more severe than in victims of ordinary, non-bias-related crimes (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). Theory suggests that through identification with the victim, individuals other than the victim might be affected vicariously by a hate crime (Burger, 1981; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Rando, 1997). However, no research has addressed the way that those other than the victim might be deeply affected in the event of a hate crime, although this is a popular assertion. Through interviews with non-heterosexual people who indicated that they were deeply affected by Shepard’s murder, I explored in what ways participants identified with Shepard and how they reacted emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. I hypothesized that participants’ assumptive worlds and coming out processes would be affected by this event, but took an exploratory approach that accommodated unexpected findings. I collected data via semi-structured interviews
of 60 to 90 minutes with 9 non-heterosexual participants. Data were analyzed
individually through qualitative methodology, including coding and use of
qualitative analysis software. As the question of interest concerned in what ways and
through what mechanisms individuals are affected, participants were screened for
significant sympathetic responses to this crime. Participants were men and women,
bisexual, gay, and lesbian, people raised in the U.S., ranging in age from 17 to 51, and
mostly Caucasian. Results are presented through brief case descriptions and also in more
depth through theme-based results and discussion chapters on the topics of identification
with Shepard, emotional reactions, behavior change, coming out processes, and trauma
and effects on worldview. Strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, as well as
implications for future research.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Hate crimes differ from other crimes by virtue of their motivation. They occur either as a function of “hostility to the victim as a member of a group” (according to Webster’s Tenth Collegiate Dictionary), or “intimidation” based specifically on race, color, religion, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation (according to Massachusetts state law). Victims of hate crimes know that they have been specifically targeted because of their identity or how they have been identified. The prevalence and severity of sexual orientation hate crimes has only been examined in the last 15 years. In 1984, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) conducted the first national study focusing on sexual orientation hate crimes. The NGLTF surveyed 1,420 gay men and 624 lesbians in eight cities and reported that 19% had experienced physical assault at least once in their lives because of their sexual orientation; 44% had been threatened with violence (Berrill, 1992). In addition, 83% believed that they might be victimized in the future; 62% indicated that they feared for their safety; and 45% said they had modified their behavior to reduce the risk of violence.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (1997) reported that 1,281 gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people had been victims of hate crimes in 1997; these crimes included 222 aggravated assaults, 287 simple assaults, and 2 murders. When considering these numbers, we must keep in mind that sexual orientation hate crimes are vastly under-reported (Herek and Berrill, 1992a); in particular, information on homicides cannot be gathered by survey methods (Berrill, 1992).
In 1999, Herek, Gillis, & Cogan reported that among a sample of 1,170 gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people living in the Sacramento, CA area, approximately one-fourth of the men and one-fifth of the women “had experienced criminal victimization as an adult at least once because of their sexual orientation” (p. 4). Of these hate crime experiences, lesbians had reported an average of 36% to police (compared to 68.4% of other non-hate-crime victimization) and gay men 45.6% (compared to 72.2%). Figures were similar for bisexual men and women. Hate crimes based on sexual orientation pose a serious threat to the physical and psychological well-being of a large number of victims.

The Ripple Effect

In addition, hate crime researchers have suggested that the effects of these crimes go beyond the scope of other types of victimization to affect the larger group of which the victim is a member (e.g., Herek et al., 1999). Herck & Berrill (1992b) asserted that every [hate crime] carries a message to the victim and the entire community of which he or she is a part. Each anti-gay attack is, in effect, a punishment for stepping outside culturally accepted norms and a warning to all gay and lesbian people to stay in ‘their place,’ the invisibility and self-hatred of the closet” (p. 3, italics added).

Although researchers have often alluded to this ripple effect, none have yet explored the ways in which members of the targeted group, other than the victim, might be affected.

Sexual orientation hate crime research to date has focused largely on mental health outcomes of the direct victims (Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997; Herek et al., 1999). In addition, researchers have faced the immediate tasks of documenting hate crimes, collecting prevalence data (Berrill, 1992), and investigating motivations for hate crimes (Herek, 1992). While much is known and written about the impact of traumas
such as crime victimization on the individual, little work has been done on the “vicarious” effects of traumatization, other than effects on therapists of trauma victims (e.g., McCann & Pearlman, 1990) and spouses of those exposed to trauma (e.g., Fullerton & Ursano, 1997).

Questions that bridge the gap between trauma research and hate crime research remain unanswered. How does victimization affect those other than the victim, especially in this age of mass media coverage of crime incidents? Specifically, how does media-covered victimization affect others who share group membership with the victim, such as bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgendered (BGLT) people in the case of a hate crime based on sexual orientation?

The highly-publicized murder of Matthew Shepard in October 1998 provided a salient and dramatic example of a crime that might be expected to create a strong ripple effect. In this research, I explored the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions of individuals who indicated that they were affected deeply by the Shepard crime, and the mechanisms through which effects occurred.

The Impact of Trauma on Fundamental Assumptions and Worldview

Janoff-Bulman (1989, 1992) suggested that people maintain fundamental assumptions that go unquestioned in the absence of traumatic life events—namely, the three assumptions of the benevolence of the world, meaningfulness of the world, and self-worth, all of which contribute to the “illusion of invulnerability.” When trauma occurs, these assumptions, along with the victim’s worldview, are challenged. Coping with a traumatic event necessarily involves examining and attempting to reconstruct fundamental assumptions. Victims must either reframe new experiences to fit old
assumptions, or revise the assumptions in a way that preserves the illusion of invulnerability. The World Assumptions Scale (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) demonstrated differences on these dimensions between victim and non-victim populations. Table 1 presents some elements of Janoff-Bulman’s assumptive model, with relevant examples provided in order to extend the theory to the area of sexual orientation hate crimes.

Trauma victims approach the task of protecting or restoring assumptions through several specific mechanisms (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Denial and recurrent (intrusive) thoughts both relate to the assimilation of new information into previous assumptions, denial by slowing that process and recurrent thoughts by storing the event in working memory. Self-blame, which can help to restore the assumptions of justice and benevolence of the world, can be divided into two types—behavioral and characterological. Behavioral self-blame supports a sense of controllability and is considered adaptive, while characterological self-blame leaves one with reduced self-esteem and increased fear. Victimization perpetrated by humans has a unique impact in its implication that evil exists, and is thought to engender a stronger need to attribute the crime to the victim’s behavior (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In addition, making some kind of larger meaning out of the traumatic event is considered one of the ingredients of coping and rebuilding assumptions after a traumatization.

This understanding of coping responses can also be utilized in relation to the reactions of non-victims to a hate crime in which they identify with the victim. Threat to survival is one defining aspect of trauma through which victims’ assumptions are challenged, and this threat can be less than literal, as when the threat of abandonment feels like a threat to survival (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). With that in mind, it can be posited
that a sexual orientation hate crime/murder, which poses a threat to the freedom and very existence of one’s identity, might also have a significant psychological impact on non-heterosexual people at large.

Defensive attribution theory also addresses issues of worldview and of blame, as they relate more directly to the reactions of non-victims to an accident or crime. Defensive attribution refers to the distortion of attributions in order to defend against the possibility that a similar traumatic event could occur to oneself. The theory posits that the more severe a crime or accident, the more likely an observer is to blame the victim. In his meta-analysis of this literature, Burger (1981) found that the effects were best accounted for when similarity variables were introduced. Specifically, observers must experience a sense of at least situational similarity to the victim (e.g., “I’ve walked down that street before”) for there to be a sense of relevance, and therefore defensiveness. In this case, observers are “motivated to deny personal similarity to the perpetrator” (p. 498). Thornton (1984) goes on to experimentally establish that when there is situational similarity, observers are likely to attribute the incident through characterological blame of the victim.¹ If, in addition, an observer perceives personal similarity to the victim (e.g., “We have similar attitudes” or “We’re both gay”), then behavioral blame will be used in order to increase sense of control and of possible avoidance of future harm. When a member of the targeted group responds to a hate crime, it is likely that because identity is involved, s/he will perceive personal similarity and therefore be likely to use behavioral blame (e.g., “He shouldn’t have (I wouldn’t have) gotten into their car”).

¹ As is the case with Thornton’s study, much of the research in this area is conducted as related to attributions specifically about rape and rape scenarios.
In a theoretical article concerning the mental health consequences of hate crime victimization, Garnets, Herek, & Levy (1992) suggest that victim-blaming may be even more likely in the instance of a sexual orientation hate crime, as other members of the BGLT community may feel the need to counteract their own increased sense of vulnerability, and this may be reinforced by the “cultural ideology of heterosexism” (p. 216).

**Research on Crime Victimization in General**

Norris & Kaniasty (1991) proposed and tested a model of psychological distress specifically associated with crime victimization. The central tenet of their model is that “distress accompanying victimization is caused, in part, by the beliefs victims acquire about themselves and their worlds” (p. 239), as outlined by Janoff-Bulman. In their review of the literature, they suggest that “fear of crime may be the most frequent, basic, and lasting consequence of criminal victimization” (p. 240).

Using structural equation modeling, Norris & Kaniasty tested whether beliefs (in the areas of safety, esteem, and trust) mediated the relationship between victimization and distress, with sampling via telephone survey. In the violent crime portion of their study, 154 victims were compared to 241 non-victims. Distress was measured using items from the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1982) related to three areas—tension, anger, and sadness. A scale of the authors’ own making measured beliefs about safety, with subscales for fear of crime and for avoidance. Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure esteem, specifically low self-worth and inferiority. Beliefs about trust were measured using adapted items from Srole’s (1956) anomia scale,

---

2 Norris & Kaniasty also studied property crime victimization.
and were broken down into cynicism and pessimism. Norris & Kaniasty found that distress was significantly mediated by these three areas of belief, but that a remaining proportion of the effect was either direct or accounted for by unmeasured variables. They suggest that additional variables might include “power or personal control” and intimacy or social relationships.

If there is indeed a ripple effect of hate crimes, it can be expected to follow a similar mediational path, with some additional factors possibly highlighted. That is, we would expect to see significant changes in beliefs associated with the salient hate crime, in turn leading to psychological distress. In the case of any type of hate crime, the role of power or personal control might be particularly relevant, due to the inherent factor of oppression. Social relationships might be expected to play a part, through community support that may or may not be available from other members of the targeted group. And finally, when sexual orientation is the “cause” or target of a hate crime, beliefs about esteem might link to the experience of internalized homophobia and to difficulties associated with identity.

Research on Sexual Orientation Hate Crime Victimization

Researchers have suggested that victimization that is associated with identity, such as sexual orientation, may have a unique impact on the direct victim. Garnets et al. (1992) state that in this case, “the victim’s homosexuality may become directly linked to the heightened sense of vulnerability” (p. 208-9), resulting in a detrimental characterological self-blame. They detailed the possible ways in which this can interface with the victim’s sense of identity, explaining that,

one’s homosexual orientation ... may be experienced as a source of pain and punishment rather than of intimacy, love, and community. Internalized
homophobia may reappear or be intensified. Attempts to make sense of the attack, coupled with the common need to perceive the world as a just place, may lead to feelings that one has been justifiably punished for being gay (p. 209).

Garnets et al. also suggested that coping interacts with the victim’s stage in the coming out process, specifically, the more out an individual, the better s/he is likely to cope. They attribute this to the coping resources that would have been discovered while coming out, to greater community resources, and to having a store of positive experiences associated with being gay. More closeted victims, on the other hand, may be less likely to report hate crime victimization for fear of exposure, and therefore less likely to obtain support and care.

Herek et al. (1999) found that victims of sexual orientation hate crimes do indeed manifest more trauma-related symptomatology than victims of other comparable crimes. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who were victims of hate crimes were compared with gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who were victims of crimes of similar severity, but not classified as hate crimes. The former showed more psychological distress on measures of depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, Radloff, 1977), traumatic stress (scale based on DSM-III PTSD symptomatology, Kilpatrick et al., 1989), anxiety, and anger (State Anxiety scale, Marteau & Bekker, 1992; and State Anger scale, Speilberger, Jacobs, Russel, & Crane, 1983), but not positive affect (Affect Balance Scale, Bradburn, 1969). In addition to clinical symptomatology, Herek et al. also made comparisons using measures of worldview (4-item Benevolence of World and Benevolence of People scales, Janoff-Bulman, 1989), personal safety (Fear of Crime scale, Norris & Kaniasty, 1991), and sense of control (Self-Mastery scale, Pearlin et al., 1981) and found significant differences between hate
crime and other crime victims. These differences were found for gay men and lesbians, but not for bisexuals, but the authors caution that this may have been due to the small number of bisexual participants.

Russell has a forthcoming book\(^3\) that addresses a similar issue, but not related to victimization per se. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, she examined the psychological impact of the campaign and vote for Colorado’s 1992 Amendment 2\(^4\) on BGL people in Colorado (G.M. Russell, personal communication, November 26, 1999). Significant increases on several measures were found in relation to this political event, namely depression, trauma symptomatology, anxiety, and indices of fear. Some respondents also noted that they became more out and had an increased sense of having sympathetic heterosexual allies.

Since this analysis was compromised by its basis in retrospective self-report data concerning a highly charged political event, Russell chose to do a full analysis of the large amount of qualitative data (n = 496, mostly three to four sentences each) obtained through an open-ended question about participants’ reactions. The codes used in this analysis (see Russell & Bohan, 1999 for complete list) indicated that salient content included feelings of anger and fear; trauma symptomatology; triggered feelings about past events of discrimination/victimization; decisions to leave Colorado because of the Amendment; becoming less out, or more frequently, becoming more out; grasping or


\(^4\) A Colorado state constitutional amendment that was passed by voters in 1992. It would have “removed any legal recourse for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people who encountered discrimination based on sexual orientation” (Russell & Bohan, 1999, p. 406), but was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996.
realizing the full scope of homophobia/heterosexism; and feeling that no one is to be trusted. Russell relied heavily on Janoff-Bulman’s trauma theory to examine and explain these reactions (G.M. Russell, personal communication, November 26, 1999), and her work provides important clues about the ways in which BGL people are affected by societal insult to their identity, i.e., heterosexism and its political manifestations.

It is also important to consider that any event that impacts non-heterosexual people by causing them to stay closeted or become more closeted negatively impacts their mental health. A review of the literature suggests that for various reasons, “psychological adjustment appears to be highest among men and women who are committed to their gay identity and do not attempt to hide their homosexuality from others” (Garnets et al., 1992, p. 211).

**Vicarious Bereavement**

The Shepard murder, like events such as the death of Princess Diana and the Oklahoma City bombing, has been remarkable for its wide-ranging emotional impact on media consumers. Analyzing the phenomena surrounding deaths of public figures and widely-publicized tragedies in a theoretical chapter, Rando (1997) suggested that individuals may experience “vicarious bereavement” in response to media-disseminated traumatic events. Specifically, the audience may feel a sense of loss stimulated by empathy or sympathy with direct mourners and by violations to their own assumptive worlds. She observed that people in the general public, who did not know the victims, responded to these events in ways typical of bereavement, e.g., with sadness, disbelief, bewilderment, preoccupation with the deceased, shock, numbness, and search for
meaning. This is a phenomenon that has only become possible in the last few decades through technological media, and Rando discussed its potentially negative impacts:

With escalating frequency, as a nation we see more of trauma survivors, hear more details of their horrifying stories, and feel more intensely their pain. All of this not only heightens our potential for creating or maintaining vicarious bereavement through intensifying our identification with the actual mourners [and, presumably, victims], but can traumatize us individually as well (p. 272).

The Shepard Murder

The beating, torture, and death of Matthew Shepard, in October of 1998, is a prime example of the type of event Rando described. Two men to whom he had revealed his sexual orientation reportedly lured Shepard, a 21-year-old University of Wyoming student, out of a local bar in Laramie. At least 18 hours later, Shepard was found comatose, tied to a ranch fence outside of town, having been beaten, pistol-whipped, burned, and robbed of his wallet and shoes (Brooke, 1998). He died in the hospital on October 12, and the perpetrators have since been found guilty and sentenced for his murder.

The Advocate, a national gay and lesbian newsmagazine, called the media coverage of this brutal crime an “unprecedented and sympathetic press response” (Bull, 1998, p. 33). Shepard’s victimization and death made the cover of Time Magazine (October 26, 1998), and the front page of The New York Times, with continuing coverage and editorials throughout the month of October. Countless websites were constructed and dedicated to Shepard; one claimed “over 1,700 e-mails and 200,000 visitor’s hits in 29 days” (www.websine.com/shepard/matt.html). MTV had a special on the hate crime. In short, it was virtually impossible to miss not only hearing of Shepard’s murder, but also hearing the brutal details and seeing images of the ranch fence to which
he was tied for 18 hours. The media coverage included gruesome details such as
Shepard’s crushed skull, his pleading for his life, the burns found on his body, and his
being mistaken for a scarecrow tied to the ranch fence where he was found by passersby,
as well as public statements made by his bereaved parents and friends. As Rando (1997)
said of other widely-publicized deaths,

Such personal confrontation with gruesomely explicit images and accounts of
violence..., with the intense reactions expressed by those who have lost them, can
arouse great anxiety, an internal sense of terror and helplessness, frightening
perceptions, and traumatic sequelae in the audience. In essence, witnessing the
trauma of others can in some sense traumatize the witnesses (Rando, 1997, p. 267).

Shepard’s death was indeed mourned across the country. Four thousand protested
in New York City (The Advocate, 1998); 5,000 gathered in Washington, DC to hear
speakers including Ellen DeGeneres, and Congresspeople Ted Kennedy and Barney
Frank (Lacayo, 1998). Here in Amherst, Massachusetts, a candlelight vigil was held on
the town common, with an estimated attendance of 300. Shepard’s family reported in
March 1999 that they had received about 10,000 letters and 70,000 e-mails related to his
death (Barrett, 1999).

The profound effects of this crime on certain individuals was publicly visible.
Actor Nathan Lane attributed his decision to publicly acknowledge being gay to
Shepard’s murder (Gallagher, 1999). The Advocate ran an article a year after the
incident detailing four non-heterosexual college students’ increased sense of vulnerability
(Denizet-Lewis, 1999). Psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams, who publishes research on
BGL youth, wrote an editorial for Applied Developmental Science entitled “Matthew
Shepard’s Death: A Professional Awakening” (Savin-Williams, 1998).
The media also disseminated detailed information about public antipathy for the victim, such as the picketing of the funeral led by “Reverend” Fred Phelps. Picketers stood outside the funeral, in sight of the mourners, with signs that read “God hates fags” and “Matthew in hell.” The father of one of the perpetrators publicly stated that the crime was being blown out of proportion. And a group nearby in Colorado mocked Shepard’s death with the image of a scarecrow on their homecoming float, shortly after the crime occurred. In addition to any public reaction to the crime itself, these events might be expected to elicit a kind of vicarious “secondary traumatization,” the phenomenon in which a victim is further traumatized or setback in recovery by unsympathetic or hostile responses from others.

Research Questions

In this research, I explored the reactions of non-heterosexual people to the Shepard murder in depth. The research focused on those who appeared to have a strong, sympathetic reaction to this tragedy, with the goals of identifying common themes and exploring certain hypotheses. Thus, Shepard’s murder and the ensuing media coverage served as a case study in the ripple effect of sexual orientation hate crimes.

Questions addressed included the following: Through what mechanisms did the ripple effect of this hate crime impact individuals who shared Shepard’s group identification (i.e., non-heterosexual people)? What types of negative and positive responses ensued? In what ways did these individuals indicate that they did and/or did not identify with Shepard and this situation? What were their feelings and thoughts about this crime? In what ways, if any, did they change or consider changing their behavior? How did individuals’ stages in the coming out process relate to reactions, and how did the
crime impact coming out processes or degree of outness? How did individuals who said
they were deeply affected by the crime cope with its psychological impact?

I hypothesized that these effects would in some ways mimic direct victimization
or traumatization. Participants’ descriptions of their experiences are examined in light of
assumptive world theory (Janoff-Bulman, 1989), defensive attribution theory, and data
and theory regarding the sequelae of hate crimes in direct victims. This includes ways of
coping, such as making meaning of the event and seeking community support. I also
expected that some participants might have become not only more fearful for themselves,
but more closeted.

An Individualistic Approach

Researchers have argued that an individualistic, idiographic approach is most
appropriate in trauma research. When dealing with reactions to trauma,

it is imperative to recognize that the response to any particular life event must be
understood in terms of the particular victim or victims involved. In other words,
there is always an appraisal process that occurs, and it is how an event is
understood that ultimately determines whether it will be traumatic or not.... It
always comes down to a question of interpretation and meaning (Janoff-Bulman,
1992, p. 52).

Saakvitne, Tennen & Affleck (1998), in their research on “thriving in the context of
clinical trauma theory,” also argue that the study of trauma requires a focus on
psychological processes (i.e., idiographic) rather than variables (i.e., nomothetic), and
calls for mainly descriptive inquiry. I chose such an approach to this traumatic event,
believing that the research results might be closely related to the trauma and victimization
literature.
### Table 1

Elements of Janoff-Bulman’s (1989) Assumptive World Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental Assumption</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Relevant Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benevolence of the World:</strong> Good vs. bad events/outcomes in the world.</td>
<td>• Benevolence of the impersonal world&lt;br&gt;• Benevolence of people</td>
<td>• Denial of heterosexism on a societal level&lt;br&gt;• Denial of the occurrence of hate crimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningfulness of the World:</strong> How are these outcomes distributed?</td>
<td>• Principle of justice&lt;br&gt;• Assumption of controllability</td>
<td>• Non-heterosexual people are not attacked for their identity.&lt;br&gt;• Non-heterosexual people can avoid attack by not going to straight bars, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worthiness of Self:</strong> Interacts with first two assumptions.</td>
<td>• Belief in one’s self-worth&lt;br&gt;• Self-controllability</td>
<td>• Freedom from internalized homophobia&lt;br&gt;• Feeling of safety related to being a person who doesn’t go to straight bars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These fundamental assumptions are challenged when a trauma occurs. Evidence of either their decomposition and/or of attempts to restore them might be seen.
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Design

A qualitative, discovery-oriented research design was used, which lent itself well to studying this previously uninvestigated phenomenon. Specifically, no one has investigated the effect of a highly-publicized hate crime on members of the targeted group other than the victim. More generally, no model or measures existed of such a ripple effect, or of the relevant phenomenon of vicarious traumatization through identification with a victim.

The qualitative design allowed me to achieve my aim of obtaining in-depth, descriptive and individualized information from those who stated they were affected by the crime, rather than compare those who were and were not affected, or measure the prevalence of any effect. This approach allowed for flexible exploration of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses, as well as openness to novel and unexpected findings.

Participants

Participants were recruited in two stages. Thirty-five stage-one questionnaires were disseminated (via mail or personal meeting) to respondents to the following advertisements: on a bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender e-mail distribution list of approximately 700 subscribers on campus and in the community, through the psychology department for undergraduate course points, through a local Unitarian Universalist church bulletin,\(^5\) and through announcements made in a course called Psychology of the

\(^5\) Only a few participants came from this source, and none made it to the interview stage.
Lesbian Experience. Twenty-nine non-heterosexual individuals completed and returned questionnaires. Advertisements requested “non-heterosexual people to participate in a study of reactions to Matthew Shepard’s murder in October 1998.” Advertisements described the two-stage process, and offered $10 to a small number of participants who would proceed to the stage two interview. During the recruitment process, a second announcement was made on the e-mail distribution list, specifically requesting more male participants.

Those who returned questionnaires consisted of 16 women and 13 men, who identified as homosexual (“lesbian,” “gay”) or bisexual (“bisexual,” “dyke”). All but five self-identified racially/ethnically as white or Caucasian (no forced choice). Participants at this stage ranged in age from 17 to 59. These 29 questionnaires were reviewed on a rolling basis, and nine interview participants were chosen from amongst them, for the second stage. At this point, sampling became strictly theoretical, rather than random. The sample was not intended to represent a full range of reactions to this hate crime. Instead, selection criteria included self-rating of four or above on seven-point scales of how deeply affected the participant was at the time of the murder and/or at the

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6 “Non-heterosexual” is used throughout the study as an umbrella term to include gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, and other non-heterosexual identities. For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the minimum prerequisite for identification with the victim is any marginalized sexual orientation status. It is being outside the mainstream sexual orientation that renders one vulnerable to this type of hate crime (see Herek, 1990). Therefore, homosexual and bisexual participants were studied together, despite the fact that this has been problematic in some past psychological research (MacDonald, 1981). Also, interview participants were allowed to self-label, with no forced choice, and explanations of their choices appear in subsequent footnotes. This has been found to be the most favorable way of assessing sexual orientation for research purposes (Battle & Powers, 1999).

7 The participant who identified this way did so with an understanding that “dyke” was a more flexible, inclusive term than “lesbian,” and stated that she was open to sexual relationships with women and men.

current time. Originally, I intended to exclude those with their own history of hate crime victimization in order to examine a more pure response to this crime; however, only six of the 29 had none. Accordingly, I decided to include participants with such a history, and to explore any emotional connections between their own history and Shepard’s death during the interviews. I sought to interview an equal number of women and men, both gay/lesbian and bisexual, and a wide range of ages. I attempted to sample a diversity of themes, as represented in open-ended questions about the murder. In addition, I took into consideration a simple rating system of eloquence and length of open-ended questionnaire responses, intended to facilitate selection of those participants most likely to provide rich information in an interview format.

Nine respondents were asked to participate in interviews and all agreed. They consisted of four women (one self-identified as lesbian, one as a dyke, one as bisexual, and one as queer) and five men (four self-identified as gay and one as bisexual), ranging in age from 17 to 51. Seven identified as white or Caucasian, one as Jewish, and one as white/Latina. All were raised in the U.S. One participant used a wheelchair and the other eight had no apparent physical disabilities. Of the nine, only one had never experienced any hate crime due to sexual orientation, but none had been physically assaulted. Participants fell into a range of Cass’ (1984) coming out stages from 3-4 to 6 (out of six). This represents an excellent range, as it is almost impossible to recruit those in stages one or two, which are pre-self-identification. (See below for a more thorough explanation of the measure of coming out stage.)

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9 I used a definition of hate crimes that included verbal and physical assaults, as well as threats.
Profiles of each of the nine participants are included in the next chapter, providing more detailed information about each, as well as brief overviews of the major themes of each interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection

Participants first completed and returned first-stage questionnaires. A subgroup was chosen to partake in one interview each, of an hour to an hour and a half. I conducted these interviews in a private, well-appointed office in the Psychological Services Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Interview times were arranged by e-mail or phone, sometimes several weeks in advance. I greeted participants in the clinic’s waiting room and explained that although the interviews were to be conducted in a clinical setting, they were not clinical or therapeutic in nature. Rather, my study was connected to the psychology department as a whole. Before each interview, participants signed consent forms, completed one additional questionnaire, and viewed a stimulus scrapbook.

Interviews were conducted between February 26 and April 18, 1999 (four and a half to six months after the murder). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim either by me (six of nine) or by one of two research assistants (three of nine). All but one interview were transcribed in their entirety. Six of the transcripts were proofread by me or a research assistant, while listening to the audiotape. Next, I did a

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10 Almost every interview was conducted in an office that did not have observation mirrors. When an interview was conducted with mirrors in the room, the mirrors were fully explained, and I offered to show the participant the empty observation room.

11 Many thanks to Catina Smith and Jonathan Markowski.
first reading of each transcript, in which I coded informally and completed interview summary sheets. The interview summary sheets highlighted and indexed the main themes of each interview and summarized and indexed the answers to significant research questions and specific interview questions. The summary sheets also asked whether there was anything unexpected or surprising in the interview. (See Appendix A for a complete copy of the summary sheet form.) For three of the interviews, at least one research assistant also completed an interview summary sheet. Examining the overlap between their responses and mine provided an informal reliability check, and a sense of which interpretations were more broadly supported.

Coding and Qualitative Analysis Software

Next, transcripts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, version 1.1 (Qualitative Software Research, 1999), where they were coded more thoroughly. Transcripts, responses to open-ended questions on the stage-one questionnaires, and in some cases additional information were all considered and coded as data. Many codes were generated as I went, or were transferred from the paper-and-pencil first-pass coding. Each code that was created then became available in the software’s menu of codes. The only codes that were developed in advance of the coding process were those that corresponded with specific interview questions. (See Appendix B for a complete listing of the final codes and their organization.)

The coding process was an iterative one, during which I would apply codes and then periodically return to the listing and organization of them, managed by the software. This list of codes displays their frequency (number of documents and number of text passages total), and various types of reports about the application of codes can be
generated. At those times, codes were reviewed for redundancy, and were sometimes combined and/or refined. I also organized them into tree structures, a process which assisted me in my conceptualization and interpretation of the data and how to report it.

The interpretive process, therefore, was very much driven in a bottom-up fashion, by the data. The software allows for very easy generation of “code documents” which display together all pieces of data labeled with the same code and indicate their sources. Data can be recoded or uncoded from within the original documents or the code documents. Each piece of data (defined by highlighting any amount of text) can be coded multiple times, and no two codes are necessarily mutually exclusive. Very few of my codes were considered mutually exclusive (only some that were categorical subdivisions of other codes). Coding and recoding continued through the process of writing the results, although very few codes were changed or added at that point. The main data analysis took place through this process of coding, sorting, and organizing data, and included searching for divergent information, as well as consistent themes. Software capabilities also included creating memo and journal documents that can be linked to other documents, which assisted in keeping track of the data analysis and interpretive process.

Quotations

In the reporting of data, quotations from the participants were edited for verbiage such as repeated words, and “um,” “like,” and “you know,” when those phrases didn’t significantly impact the meaning or tone of the quotation. In addition, incomplete thoughts or phrase fragments were sometimes removed from the middle of a text passage without inserting ellipses. I chose to make these alterations in order to make quotations
more readable and to avoid biased quoting frequency based on the eloquence of the participant. Italics in quotations indicate that the participant verbally emphasized the word in italics (this emphasis was preserved in transcription, when possible). Throughout the thesis, all quotations were taken from interviews unless otherwise specified.

**Instruments**

**Questionnaire**

For the first stage, a questionnaire was designed to assess the intensity and direction of responses to Shepard’s murder and to collect demographic information and information about any history of hate crime or other victimization. (See Appendix C for complete questionnaire and informed consent.) Participants were asked to rate on scales of one to seven, “how deeply did this event affect you *at the time*” and “how deeply affected do you feel *now*?” Data from these questionnaires were maintained in a spreadsheet which was used for quick reference when making decisions about which participants to interview. This questionnaire also provided background information helpful in tailoring the interview to each participant, such as the participant’s own history of hate crime and other crime victimization.

In addition, the questionnaire included two open-ended questions:

- Please write below any details you remember about Shepard’s death and surrounding events; and

- Please use the space below to say in what ways you were/are affected by this event, if any.
Coming Out Measure

Before each interview, participants were asked to complete a modified version of the Gay Identity Questionnaire (GIQ; Brady & Busse, 1994; see Appendix D), which measures coming out stage according to Vivien Cass’ (1984) six-stage model, the stages of which are displayed in Table 2. The GIQ was used in a qualitative fashion, to describe each participant’s place in his or her own coming out process, with cross-case consistency. As such, the original norms were not so important that I could not modify the questionnaire for my purposes. The GIQ was developed only for gay males, and I created a parallel questionnaire for women. In doing so, I replaced the word “homosexual” in many questions with either “gay” or “lesbian.” Cass’ model does not include bisexual people, but rather considers bisexuality an intermediary stage in the coming out process. In order to extend this model with bisexuality as a legitimate endpoint, one question was not used in the scoring, and the word “bisexual” was added with a slash after “gay” or “lesbian.” Scoring was done by counting the number of responses consistent with each stage, as specified by Brady & Busse. In cases where participants had equal number of responses for two adjacent stages, they were scored as a combination (e.g., 3-4).12

Stimulus Materials

Immediately before being interviewed, participants were left alone for approximately ten minutes to look at and read a stimulus “scrapbook” of articles on

12 Questionnaires were scored this way because there was no way of deciding between the two stages. However, there is no particular reason to believe that the difference between, for example, a 5-6 and a 6 is a significant one. No one had an equal number of responses corresponding with two stages that were not adjacent.
Shepard’s murder, for the purpose of refreshing their memories with consistent
information. The scrapbook consisted of the *Time Magazine* cover from October 26,
1998; photos of Shepard and the perpetrators; a *New York Times* article dated October 10,
1998 (“Gay Man Beaten and Left for Dead; 2 Are Charged”); and a *People Weekly* article
dated November 2, 1998 (“Death in Wyoming”).

**Interview**

A semi-structured interview guide was used for the purpose of content
consistency across interviews. (See Appendix E for complete interview guide and
interview informed consent.) The particular order of questions varied according to the
natural flow of interviews. Often, a topic listed in the interview guide would come up
before I asked the specific related question. The interview questions were designed to
explore reactions to this hate crime. Each question was open-ended, and some were
accompanied by more specific probes, when necessary. I pilot-tested the interview guide
in two interviews that were not analyzed as data. At the end of each interview, I
explained the goals and some hypotheses of my research and asked participants if they
had anything to add.

All interviews began with, “Did the articles you just read bring back any
memories or feelings?”, which served as an open-ended question. Participants were
asked questions designed to elicit information about three major areas (when these areas
didn’t come up more naturally):

- **Cognitive**: e.g., “Did you think about Shepard often following the event?”
- **Emotional**: e.g., “What sort of emotional response did you have?”
- **Behavioral**: e.g., “How, if at all, did his death affect your behavior?”
Appropriate probes followed these questions. Some questions or probes were
aimed specifically at trauma-related experiences, directly or indirectly. Several were
designed to explore issues related to the assumptive world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), e.g.:

- “How, if at all, did you make sense or meaning of Shepard’s death?”
- “What did/do you think of the circumstances under which Shepard was
  abducted?” (In order to explore attributions of blame.)
- “What do you predict will happen to the perpetrators?” and “What do you
  think should happen to them?” (In order to explore issues of justice.)

Identification with Shepard was explored explicitly (“Do you consider yourself
similar or dissimilar…”) and implicitly (through questions about how participants would
have reacted to the same crime had the targeted group been a race other than their own,
rather than sexual orientation, or if it had been “random,” i.e., non-bias-motivated).

Participants were asked how their experiences changed over time, whether others
around them reacted similarly or dissimilarly, and how they have reacted to other hate
crimes or other deaths in the media. They were each asked about their own history of
hate crime, regardless of their responses on the questionnaire, and almost all related their
coming out experiences. Participants were each given the opportunity to supply their
own pseudonyms.

Researcher Description and Stance

In a qualitative project, the researcher is interpretively close to the data
throughout collection and analysis; for this reason, it is considered important for the
researcher to reveal her orientation to and personal involvement with the research (Stiles,
1993). I was a 28-year-old Caucasian graduate student conducting the interviews. I did
not tell any participants that I identify as a bisexual woman, although it is likely that some or all assumed that I was not heterosexual, because of my interest in the topic and because of where I advertised the study. All appeared to feel safe discussing matters of sexual orientation with me.

I approached this project with ideas about the way non-heterosexual people might be affected that were based on my observation of students’ reactions written in weekly papers for an undergraduate course called Psychology of the Lesbian Experience, for which I was a teaching assistant. I was very much moved by the deeply felt experience of some students in the class. They expressed shock; horror; feelings of vulnerability, that this could have happened to them; as well as meaning-making and a strong sense of secondary traumatization. Some wrote about the way that a crime like this served to send a closeting message to all non-heterosexual people.

As someone who has participated in BGLT activism, I entered into this project with some personal awareness of the coming out process and of the challenges that non-heterosexual people face. I see this culture as inherently and institutionally heterosexist/homophobic, and I view hate crimes as a manifestation of such. I subscribe to the popular notion that hate crimes are on some level intended to terrorize not just their victims, but a whole population, and I observed just such an effect around me at the time of Shepard’s murder. However, I did not react personally to Shepard’s death to an extent that I believe would have qualified me as a participant in my own study.
Table 2

Cass’ (1984) Six-Stage Coming Out Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage No.</th>
<th>Stage Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Identity Confusion</td>
<td>First perceive that own behavior, feelings, thoughts may be defined as homosexual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identity Comparison</td>
<td>Perceive difference between self and non-homosexual others; feeling of alienation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Identity Tolerance</td>
<td>Seek out company of gay people, but frequently see this as necessary rather than desirable; limited disclosure to heterosexual people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Identity Acceptance</td>
<td>More positive view of gay identity develops with increased contact; selective disclosure to friends and relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Identity Pride</td>
<td>Feelings of pride about gay identity; anger and sometimes activism due to stigmatization; heterosexual people devalued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Identity Synthesis</td>
<td>Gay identity no longer primary or only one and no longer hidden.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3

BRIEF CASE DESCRIPTIONS

This chapter provides an overview of important characteristics of each of the nine interview participants. The case vignettes are written to give a general flavor of each person’s story. Throughout the rest of the thesis, each participant’s data will be mostly piecemeal, presented as it relates to the topic at hand. Particular attention is paid here to surprising or atypical aspects, as well as qualifying information readers may want to have in mind as they encounter data based on each individual’s experiences. Participants’ own hate crime experiences are related, and a description of their coming out or degree of outness and any political activism. Throughout the thesis, quotations are taken from the interviews, unless otherwise specified. Table 3, at the end of this chapter, provides a quick reference of relevant characteristics of each participant. Cases are presented here, and in some cases in results chapters, in alphabetical order.

Anthony

Anthony was a 17-year-old white, gay\textsuperscript{13} high school senior living in a northeastern suburb. He co-coordinated his high school’s gay-straight alliance. With his initial questionnaire, he sent me a school newspaper editorial he had written about Shepard’s death. The article detailed his emotional and cognitive responses following the murder and is considered as data along with his interview. Anthony began coming out to friends in the eighth grade, and his parents found out he was gay toward the end of his ninth-grade year. His GIQ score was 5-6.

\textsuperscript{13} All racial/ethnic and sexual orientation information was self-reported with no forced choice.
When Shepard was killed, Anthony said, he “started to, for the first time in a few years, hate being gay, for a little while.” He described a two- or three-week period of depression and low self-esteem after the murder, when he “started caring whether complete strangers would really like who [he] was” and “stopped being so perky and happy.” He attributed this to “the parallels that I had drawn between [Shepard] and myself…. I projected him onto myself and thought that ‘oh no, this, like, might happen to me.’”

Anthony changed some of his behavior during this time. For example, he explained, “I stopped being so vocal about [my sexual orientation] and took some pins off my backpack.” He also questioned whether it was safe to be as active and visible as he was, but in the end he decided that

because there’s a risk that doesn’t mean that I should stop what I’m doing. It took a little while, but … I pretty quickly got back to the level of well, now I’m going to take this anger and this frustration that I’ve had and just turn them into something constructive, and start writing letters asking for hate crimes bills, and going out and speaking and marching, and writing articles for my school newspaper about it and trying to do something positive with the feelings.

Anthony had suffered some verbal harassment related to his sexual orientation at his high school. He said that this had decreased since the administration cracked down, but there were still some people periodically driving by his house in the evening, honking and yelling slurs.
Cecelia was a 21-year-old white senior at a northeastern university who identified as queer.\textsuperscript{14} She grew up in a suburb of a large northeastern city. Cecelia began to come out to others her first year of college, and she is out to both of her parents, although contentiously to her mother. It seemed at the time of the interview that most of Cecelia’s friends were also queer. She scored 5-6 on the GIQ and was very active in the BGLT organization on her campus. In fact, Cecelia said that Shepard’s murder initially caused her to shift her career goals from psychology to activism, and she cited this as its most significant impact on her. Cecelia indicated that she and her friends became more politically active at the time of the murder, and that this reaction helped them to cope. She also said that the murder “gave [her] more opportunities to out [her]self.”

Cecelia said she became worried about the safety of her friends after the murder, rather than her own safety; she stated, “I just feel guilty because I don’t really look queer.” She therefore did not consider herself as vulnerable as others. She said that she experienced the need to baby sit other people. Like I wouldn’t let my girlfriend go anywhere by herself, because she just looks so queer. I know it was pissing her off, … but it made me feel better to know she that she was okay.

She also accompanied a gay male friend of hers, whom she described as very effeminate, to all his sporting events for the rest of the season, as she worried that he was too trusting and could be victimized.

\textsuperscript{14} Cecelia originally identified as bisexual on her questionnaire, but indicated during our interview that she preferred the more inclusive label “queer.”
Trust was a significant theme in Cecelia’s interview; she was particularly disturbed by the “wolf in sheep’s clothing” aspect of Shepard’s murder. She compared this crime to hate crimes that occurred where she lived and said that while the latter made her feel particularly angry and defensive of her home territory, they weren’t “as incredibly crazy” or “terrifying.” Of Shepard’s murder, she said “it really alters your sense of trust, I think, to not really know who you can trust, especially people you’ve just met.”

In the aftermath of this event, Cecelia questioned the benevolence of those around her: “I remember the day after, walking around campus and ... being like, ‘any of these people could appear really nice and do [a crime like] that.’” Of the crime’s brutality, she asked herself, “how someone could do something like that to another human being.” Cecelia said she had recovered some sense of normalcy by telling herself that such a brutal hate crime would not happen in the state in which she lived, but she also questioned that assertion throughout the interview.

Cecelia had quite a few friends and acquaintances who had experienced hate crimes ranging from name-calling and vandalism to physical assault. In high school, she said, she had often put herself between a friend and other students who threatened her physically “because she was a dyke.” Cecelia also knew someone whose pet rabbit was killed, with a note left, saying something like “faggots shouldn’t have pets.” Cecelia herself had experienced a confusing incident during college in which she heard someone yell “fucking dyke” and then she either fell down accidentally or was pushed.

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15 The perpetrators are said to have lured Shepard out of the bar by saying that they too were gay.
Charles

Charles was a 29-year-old white, gay graduate student at a northeastern university. He grew up in a major metropolitan area in the northeast. He was a member of several national BGLT organizations, and conducted research on BGL issues. His GIQ score was a 6; he was out to his family and within his graduate department. Charles wrote and submitted for publication an editorial about Shepard’s death.

Charles was the only participant who had somewhat negative feelings toward Shepard (others tended to have more positive feelings and even idealization). When describing Shepard, Charles said, “I know the type... probably very flighty, narcissistic, probably not the kind of person I would personally like very much.” He added, “That doesn’t mean he deserved to die or anything.” Despite these feelings, Charles felt that he identified with Shepard. He explained,

It’s not whether I was similar to Shepard.... The fact is, they were attacking him because of his sexual identity, because he identified as a gay man, and so do I. That’s the critical similarity. It wasn’t because he was thin, or artistic, or bubbly, or flighty, or any of that.

Charles did not present feelings of grief or sadness. Rather, his initial and strongest reaction was one of anger. In particular, he was angry about the closeting, terrorizing aspect of the crime: “that somebody might actually try to re-push me back into that shell. I wasn’t going to go there.” Charles had always been a very shy person, and had related his extremely cautious approach to coming out of his “shell”—the closet—in the first place. He spoke of these feelings as if addressing the perpetrators:

[This crime] reminded me what I always feared was going to happen. ‘What you did to [Shepard] is what I always feared was going to happen to me, and don’t
you dare tell me that that was a reality. I’ve come a long way after convincing myself that that was *not* a valid fear.’

As is hinted above, Charles actively resisted this pressure. Rather than becoming more closeted, he did “quite the opposite. It’s almost like reactance—wanting to now say to the world, ‘Look, you’ve fucked me over enough, and I’m not standing for this!’”

Charles said that he initially reacted strongly to the crime, that it was “foremost on [his] mind for a few days.” He said, “The issue just [took] over my thoughts—really being angered about it and being sort of mini-obsessed by it.” However, his reaction faded significantly over time. He explained,

just like I don’t care much about the Challenger disaster anymore. Time had a way of putting that on the back burner. But when [Shepard’s murder] does bubble back to the surface, for example what’s-his-name’s allocution [the first perpetrator to be sentenced], I get upset about it again, sure.

Deborah

Deborah was a 44-year-old Caucasian lesbian woman who worked in a research laboratory and lived in a medium-sized northeastern city. She was highly active in local BGLT politics and organizations and helped to organize a vigil for Shepard. Her GIQ score was a 5-6, and she talked about being very out to her family and at work. Although she first came out as bisexual about 20 years ago, she had had social connections to the BGLT community for even longer.

Deborah described her initial and main reaction to Shepard’s death as “not again.” She told many stories about different friends who had been victims of various levels of hate crimes and homophobia. Her second reaction was “what are we going to do about it?” She felt that publicized crimes like Shepard’s brought up BGLT people’s “war stories,” stimulating a sense of community and political activism. She said she
"saw ... a lot of positive come out of [Shepard’s murder] in terms of communication, in terms of organizational networking, in terms of bringing inactive people back into active organizations.” This theme of channeling feelings and energy into positive activism was a strong one, and Deborah denied any sense of increased vulnerability. Deborah herself was once verbally harassed by a drunken man who was pounding on her car as she was dropping off a date at home.

Deborah said that after Shepard’s murder, she became “determined more than ever to be out,” in order to combat stereotypes. She said that she had added more gay-themed bumper stickers to her car since Shepard’s death. She had also written a performance piece “about going to too many vigils,” and she had decided to allow her name to be publicized in conjunction with that.

Kim

Kim was a 22-year-old white/Latina dyke who was a senior psychology major at a small northeastern college. She grew up in the South and returned there frequently. Kim’s GIQ score was a 5-6. She had come out to some members of her family during college and was quite publicly out at school.

Kim described Shepard’s death as a “wake-up call,” which well-characterized the reactions of several others as well. She said that the strongest way the event affected her was to move her awareness of heterosexism and its dangers to a deeper level:

The way that [my awareness] changed is that before, it’s something that I knew but not anything that I really thought about…. I think it just has been a powerful

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16 Kim self-described this way and said it was different from lesbian or bisexual. She stated that she could be open to sexual relationships with women and men, although she had a long-term girlfriend at the time of the interview.
effect on me, thinking about my own personal safety and all the terrible things that could happen because of what I do.

Later in the interview, she added, “now I realize that I’m less invincible…. [I] realize that stuff can get out of hand, whereas before I thought it was just passing comments, not something that would escalate” to violence.

In accordance with this increased sense of vulnerability, Kim described feeling and acting generally more cautious and vigilant. She said she had become “quicker to remove [her]self from situations” in which she felt unsafe or when there were potentially threatening people around, particularly when she is in the South. She had started removing BGLT-related buttons from her belongings when she traveled in the South. She explained the connection to Shepard: “I always think about safety things, but I think sometimes the Shepard thing like flashes back, or it’s just in my subconscious. Like, I know it happened, and it’s just recent, and I know it could happen any time.”

Kim related several incidents of being verbally harassed due to her sexual orientation, and also one incident where a bullet hit her car in a parking lot. At the time, she was not sure what was going on, but there was a rainbow sticker17 on the car, and she feared that the shooting might have been related to that.

Michael

Michael was an 18-year-old white, bisexual first-year student at a northeastern university. He grew up in a medium-sized northeastern city. On the seven-point scales of how deeply affected he was at the time of Shepard’s murder and the time of responding, Michael responded 3 and 5, respectively. He was one of two respondents

17 A symbol of gay pride.
whose ratings increased, rather than decreased or stayed the same. I chose to interview him in part because he indicated on his first-stage questionnaire that he was very early in the coming-out process at the time of Shepard’s death, and that the event had significantly impacted his process, both negatively and positively.

Indeed, his GIQ score was one of the two lowest of any participant’s, at 3-4. At the time of Shepard’s death, Michael had just broken up with his high school girlfriend. At the time of our interview, he was in his first relationship with a man. Michael arrived at the interview wearing a rainbow necklace, but indicated that he was at the time “experimenting” with it, making it visible only in places where he felt safe to identify himself as non-heterosexual, or where he wanted to test the waters for safety. He described himself as “selectively out”; he had only explicitly come out to close friends and some acquaintances at college, and not to any members of his family.

Rather than experiencing any particular strong emotions directly about Shepard or the crime, Michael had used the event to bring up and discuss sexual orientation issues, without having to “make [them] personal.” Several times, he referred to the incident as providing a “safety net” or a “safety zone” in which to discuss the general topic of sexual orientation. This happened with friends and in classes, but especially with his family. He described feeling that through family discussions around the nightly news at the time, he was able to argue strongly and create a change in attitudes in his family, for example his “conservative,” religious grandmother’s:

Pretty much her views were changed, where she almost was stating things that I stated to her several months ago. And so I could see that I was slowly opening up

[18] The other was Deborah, from 5 to 6.
their eyes.... So, I mean, it definitely made it a lot easier to just discuss [sexual orientation].

Michael also spoke frequently of using events around Shepard as a “crystal ball” to foresee his own potential future; he said, for example, that it “became more of an informative thing. It became more of an eye-opener to let me know how my family reacts.” In particular, he said he realized the potential severity of discrimination and homophobia, which he had previously thought of only as harassment. Michael described feeling sadness, not for Shepard, but for what he reflected onto his own life. He said,

There was never a time when I turned to it as a grief for his personal story. I mean, there were times where I cried about who I was and stuff like that, and what I’m going to have to face, but it was never about him and his life.

Because he was coming out at the time of the crime, Michael’s coming out story was woven throughout the interview. He named both positive and negative ways that his coming out process was affected. For example,

It almost set me back in the coming out process, where I kind of took a few steps back. And at that time, instead of questioning whether or not I was homosexual, I started saying ‘okay, you know, what makes me not heterosexual?’

At the same time, it helped him to “know that [being gay] is not such an abnormal thing, because it is being dealt with elsewhere in the United States... and a lot of people are talking about this now.” Michael observed mainly positive societal reactions to the crime, for example in media coverage, and this also helped him to normalize his identity.

Robert

Robert was an 18-year-old white, gay first-year student at a northeastern university, and he grew up in a nearby suburb. He scored a 3-4 on the GIQ, was a founding member of a high school BGLT organization, and participated in the BGLT organization at his university. He first came out to friends in high school, and then to his
parents, not entirely by choice, but because he had a boyfriend. During high school, Robert was verbally harassed and his car was severely vandalized, including the word “fag” etched into the paint, while he was at a school event with his boyfriend. Robert said that Shepard’s murder brought back feelings from that event, and that he thought, “Thank God that it was just my car,” you know. I would never even have thought that maybe I would have gotten beaten up, or my date.”

Visibility and neutrality were prominent themes in Robert’s interview. In high school, he dressed in a prominent style for a period of time, and he attributed this to “trying to tell the crowd, you know, I’m different, without saying ‘I’m gay.’” In college, he said, he was “the first person” that people in his circle of friends thought of when “they hear[d] the word gay or homosexual.” Because of this, when news of the Shepard crime broke, he felt “like I was just back at high school again, like the spotlight was on me. And I kind of don’t like that.” Robert subsequently made an effort to become less visible, thereby becoming more closeted:

I don’t know if I was just doing this subconsciously, but after [the murder], for about a week, every day more and more [gay-themed] stickers, I would take down, until finally my room just looked neutral, like anyone could live there. There was no signs of heterosexual or homosexual person living there.... Pretty much [the murder] caused me, you know, just to feel, maybe this isn’t something I should flaunt, because you don’t know, if someone sees it, how they’re going to react to it.

Robert said that before the incidents in high school, he had the “can’t happen to me” attitude, but since then, he has adopted the “watch-my-back” attitude. He said that after Shepard’s murder he “felt more strongly about it.” He felt that he had to “buckle down and be careful how I act and what I say to people.” He said that he thought, “If
something like this happened to a kid I kind of can relate to a lot, I wouldn’t want that to happen to me, so I just kind of neutralized myself by making me look like just part of the norm.”

Simon

Simon was a 51-year-old gay graduate student at a northeastern university. He grew up in major U.S. cities and lived in a college town in the northeast at the time of the interview. He identified his race/ethnicity as Jewish, and this identification wove its way closely into the interview. Simon’s GIQ score was 5-6. He was involved in academic work on BGLT issues, and anti-homophobia education workshops. With his initial questionnaire, Simon provided the text of a speech about Shepard. The speech is considered as data along with Simon’s interview. Simon was very forthcoming and psychologically-minded during his interview, and it was the longest and in some ways the most complex one.

Simon identified strongly and in several ways with Shepard. Very early in the interview, when describing his initial emotional reaction to the murder, Simon said,

Well, I was the little queer boy growing up, so the easy answer is, ‘That was me. That could be me.’ I was always the effeminate one… and I was constantly attacked and ridiculed. It’s like, ‘okay, that is me. Only for the grace of God go I.’

On another level, Simon felt that his Jewish identity informed his reaction. His grandfather, a German Holocaust survivor, lived with Simon when he was a child, and Simon described growing up hearing Holocaust stories about members of his family. Of Shepard’s murder, he said, “It was like me and school, yes, but also that fence [on which Shepard was hung] is kind of reminiscent of the barbed wire around the concentration camps.” He described the interplay between these two identities, saying, “It was like a
double pull, in the sense that [Shepard] was an effeminate young man, plus it was like Nazi style, and they did this to Jews all the time. So it was a double pulling for me."

In addition, Simon implicated Shepard’s sexual attractiveness as a further pull for grief and emotion. He described feeling Shepard’s loss, among other ways, as the loss of a “potential partner.” Finally, Simon’s own father, described as a “psychologically brutal man,” had died a short period before Shepard. Simon reported feeling little grief for his father, and subsequently being overwhelmed with grief for Shepard, and he speculated for the first time during the interview about unconscious connections between the two, saying, “Maybe in some ways I used Matthew’s death in order to grieve my father.” Consciously, however, he felt that he had been grieving Shepard, whom he described as “this victim, this gentle spirit, who was cut down because of his gentle spiritness,” and who “was the antithesis of [his] father.”

In some ways, Simon appeared to be affected the most profoundly of the nine participants interviewed. His reaction had not seemed to fade much over time. For example, he said, “I feel like the murder is still part of my everyday life,” and, “Six months later, it’s still hard to see [Shepard’s] picture.” In addition to the kinds of behavior change exhibited by other participants, Simon reported avoidant experiences such as the latter, and intrusive experiences,\(^19\) such as intrusive thoughts, a few violent nightmares he associated with vulnerability related to Shepard’s murder, and a few instances of inability to control crying in public or embarrassing situations. Simon also talked about feelings of guilt and personal responsibility. Although he could see this as

\(^{19}\) Intrusive and avoidant are two of the three categories of DSM-IV Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms.
irrational and as part of a pattern of self-thought for him, he felt that this crime indicated that he had somehow failed in his activism work and homophobia education.

Wendy

Wendy was a 21-year-old white, bisexual woman who was a senior arts major at a northeastern university. She grew up in a suburb of New York City. Her GIQ score was 4, but only her boyfriend and a few close friends knew that she identified as bisexual. At the time of the murder, she had recently stopped “wandering” in her sexual identity and decided that she was bisexual and that “[wasn’t] going to change.”

Wendy had never been the victim of any type of hate crime, but she said that since Shepard was killed, she had experienced feeling unsafe; for example:

I’ll be sitting downtown [in a town where she used to feel comfortable] reading a book on homosexuality, … and then like, the thought will occur, ‘well, what if somebody sees me and they think, you know, whatever they want to think, and they decide, well, I don’t like this person because she’s reading a homosexual book.’

That somebody, she feared, might say something negative to her, or, less likely, might try to hurt her. Wendy had trouble judging the reality of these fears—whether she had previously been “lulled into a false security” or whether “this [incident] just overly scared” her. She experienced the incident as “a reality check” and said, “It makes you a little more wary about who you’re going to come out to, to protect yourself.”

Wendy was very concerned with the reactions of society and those around her, and she felt that the voices of those who reacted negatively to Shepard’s death were louder than those who reacted positively. She said “it was like, that the homophobic people were just coming out, and then felt like they could now be more open about it,” referring to the failure of the Wyoming legislature to pass a hate crimes bill, the protests
at Shepard’s funeral, and the homecoming float in Colorado that mocked Shepard with a scarecrow image. She was heartened that the mother of a congressman had spoken at a vigil in her hometown; at the same time, she believed that the killers might get lighter sentences due to anti-gay protesting, and that they would be punished more harshly had Shepard been straight. She sometimes seemed to be generally pessimistic in her attitudes about these topics.
Table 3

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation*</th>
<th>GIQ</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time of Crime</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Own History of Hate Crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>4/10/99</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>gay</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>verbal; drive-by’s shouting at his house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecelia</td>
<td>4/2/99</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>queer</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>at least verbal; frequently defended others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>4/18/99</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>gay</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>verbal, as an adult and “chronically” in early school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>4/18/99</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>lesbian</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>verbal; threatening man pounding on car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>4/7/99</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>dyke</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>White/Latina</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>verbal; car possibly shot at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>3/24/99</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>bisexual</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>verbal, including threat of harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>2/26/99</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>gay</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>car severely vandalized; “fag” keyed into paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>3/31/99</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>gay</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>harassment as a child; death threats on answering machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>3/26/99</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>bisexual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Self-designated, no forced choice.

** On a scale of one to seven; self-rated.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: IDENTIFICATION WITH SHEPARD

Framework for Results Chapters

Results and discussion will be presented together in the next three chapters, which are organized by prominent themes that emerged from the data. These chapters also map on to the categories of emotion, behavior, and cognition, with some overlap throughout. Much of the time, participants' quotations are presented in isolation, as they support a particular theme. At other times, I return to more of a focus on cases, under the rubric of a given theme, in order to tell more cohesive, individualized stories when appropriate.

Results are presented primarily in the form of raw data, i.e., quotations from the participants. I interpreted the data largely through coding and organizing it, and through the writing process itself. The quotations are discussed in terms of their context, their relationships to other data, and their importance in terms of the research questions, often section by section. In some chapters, organization followed neatly from the code structure that was developed during the initial coding phase. In others, the process of writing the results and discussion included going back and refining, reorganizing, and/or subdividing existing codes.

In each chapter, I try to provide the reader with a glimpse of the analysis process in addition to presenting content and themes, mainly by indicating what codes were applied to the text passages presented. Code frequencies are sometimes reported in text or tables, by number of participants with material coded with a given code and/or by number of text passages coded. Codes can be applied to any length of text, so that one
passage might be a sentence or less, and another several paragraphs. Therefore, the frequency data do not represent volume of material. More often, it simply represents the number of times the theme came up. Additionally, these frequencies do not reflect where in the sequence of text the passages were located, so that for example, in a total of four codes for one participant, three could be from neighboring (but not adjacent) paragraphs and one from elsewhere in the transcript. Nonetheless, these frequencies are provided when they seem to offer information about or a quick overview of the whole sense of the coding pattern. They should not be directly interpreted to indicate “strength” or “quantity” of a finding. I did not consider the importance or “weight” of any particular section or piece of data to be necessarily related to the frequency or prevalence of the code, theme, or experience, either within interviews or across them. Rather, participants’ individual experiences are explored, and a unique experience might be given equal weight as a more common one. Theory was key to these considerations, including research hypotheses, findings of other authors, and theory-generating information.

**Overview of Identification Results**

Given that this study presents an examination of the ripple effect of hate crimes on those who share group membership with the victim, its framework suggests that a minimum amount of identification with the victim is necessary to the phenomenon examined here. Defensive attribution theory supports this notion through findings that situational and/or personal similarity to the victim play important roles in attributions made about crimes (Burger, 1981; Thornton, 1984). Accordingly, the interviews were designed to explore to what degree and in what ways participants reported identifying with Shepard, and how this related to any feelings of personal vulnerability.
The topic area of identification with Shepard emerged very strongly in the interviews. It frequently came up during general discussions of how participants were affected. For example, very early in his interview, while answering general questions about what he remembered about his initial reaction, Simon replied, “The easy answer is, ‘That was me. That could be me.’” He explained that he had been a child who “was always the effeminate one,” and because of that, he identified with Shepard. The topic also emerged through specific interview questions about whether and how participants might have felt different had this brutal murder been based on race (not their own), or been a non-bias-motivated crime.20 (These questions were designed to elicit responses related to identification.) For example, Anthony responded that had the murder been based on race,

my reaction would have been much different. It shouldn’t be, but it would have been, because the whole reason that I reacted in the way that I did is because of the reason why he was killed…. My not being black, I wouldn’t have reacted in the same way, because I wouldn’t have felt the same personal threat.

These questions also tended to raise specific discussion of the Gaither21 and Byrd22 hate crimes.

The code “identification/self” was applied to text passages like these, which related to participants’ senses of how they personally were similar to Shepard. It was the

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20 In these cases, material may have been coded under one of two subcodes of “interview questions”—“race hate crime” and “non-bias crime.”

21 The highly-publicized hate crime murder of a 39-year-old gay man in Alabama in February 1999. Billy Jack Gaither was beaten to death by two men who knew him previously.

22 The highly-publicized hate crime murder of an African-American man in Texas in June 1998. James Byrd, Jr. was dragged to death behind a car by a member of a hate group.
most frequently applied code (38 text passages). This code was applied in every interview at least once and sometimes up to eight times. (See Table 4 at the end of this chapter for a frequency distribution of identification codes, by participant.) A similarly relevant code was “identification/other,” which was applied when participants identified someone other than themselves with Shepard (e.g., for Cecelia, a gay male friend). Two additional codes were used to divide up identification-related material, by basis of identification. “Identification/SO” was applied when participants identified with Shepard through their sexual orientation, and “identification/other ways” was applied when they identified on some other basis. These codes outline the way that participants’ identification with Shepard occurred along two notable dimensions—who was identified (self or other), and basis of identification (sexual orientation and other ways).

Woven throughout the material presented here on identification is the sense that the connections participants made between themselves or others and Shepard led to feelings of vulnerability, and a sense that something similar could happen to them or to someone they cared about.

**Who Was Identified**

Identification with Shepard forms the basis for much of the remaining examination in this thesis. Although causality cannot be determined through this methodology, identification would seem logically, and based on theory, to be a necessary precursor to further reactions. Indeed, all of these individuals, who were screened for being deeply affected by Shepard’s murder (through self-report), displayed readily apparent identification with Shepard, in one form or several. Both identification of self
and of others might be expected to lead to further emotional reactions, changes in worldview, and behavioral changes.

As mentioned, all nine participants indicated in some way that they directly identified themselves with Shepard. In addition, five of them referred to others in their lives whom they saw as similar to Shepard or as vulnerable after this crime, or whom they recalled in relation to Shepard.

Identification of Self with Shepard

Participants spoke clearly about how they related what happened to Shepard to their own lives. Anthony, for example, stated simply, “I guess I projected [Shepard] onto myself and thought that ‘oh no, this might happen to me.’” Michael, who was very early in considering coming out as bisexual at the time when Shepard was killed, described being interested in the murder because of what it might have to tell him about his own future: “I wanted to read all the different [news] stories about [the murder]…. In that way that it was a personal story, that maybe I could have related to, or almost this crystal ball of maybe what my life could become.” Michael said that he related Shepard’s behavior to his own—that

he was openly gay, and not that he deserved it or anything, but I was kind of like, maybe he should have known that society isn’t really accepting…. Maybe he should have been more careful. And so I looked at myself and said, ‘well how careful should I be?’ and ‘how should I approach this?’

Michael had a sense that his identification with Shepard had increased as his coming out process progressed. If he were further along in the process of identifying or labeling himself, he said, “It would have hit me a lot more of an impact, because I would have said, ‘This is my life, too.’ This is what I’m living.”
In response to the hypothetical question about an identical race-based hate crime, Deborah said that she would have “been just as outraged,” but that she would not have had the same reactions:

I wouldn’t have done some of the things I’ve done, because I wouldn’t have identified as strongly with the victim. So I wouldn’t have made some of the changes in my life that I’ve made. I wouldn’t have made the changes toward more political activism.

Answering the same question, Robert said he would not have been as drawn in by the events: “If they had not said he was gay, and said someone was just beaten and killed, it would have been just another news story. It would have been just like, ‘in Wyoming, blah blah blah’ you know, next story.”

Identification of Others with Shepard

In addition, some of the participants identified other people to whom they were close with Shepard, and in some cases they feared for those people’s safety, as well as or instead of their own. Perhaps the best example was Cecelia, who felt that she was not particularly endangered, because she “passed” well for heterosexual in appearance. Instead of feeling vulnerable herself, she reported that she worried excessively about non-heterosexual loved ones. She said that in response to the crime, she “experienced the need to baby sit other people,” in particular her girlfriend, whom she described as “dykey” in appearance, and her friend Jack, whom she described as “emaciated effeminate.” She speculated that like Shepard, Jack would have been very trusting and

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23 Names of people other than the participants have also been changed.
would have gotten into the car with the perpetrators; she felt that “that could have been him so easily.”

In his high school newspaper editorial, Anthony drew parallels between Shepard and close friends of his and extended them to his emotional reaction:

Matthew reminds me in many ways of some of my best friends. He was a gay college student in his early 20’s. He had a small physical build. He apparently made friends with almost everyone he met. He was well-liked and very well respected on campus. I have many good friends who fit this same description. To think of anything even remotely like this brutal murder happening to them causes me great emotional pain.

In his interview, Anthony said that Shepard particularly reminded him of one friend who was a college student in the Midwest. Similarly, Simon described feeling much as if Shepard had been one of his own students that he has taught in a college setting.

Basis of Identification

All participants seemed to feel that their sexual orientation gave the Shepard crime its personal emotional charge. In addition, some identified themselves and others with Shepard through other means such as age, status as a student, or simply through oppression experienced due to other aspects of their identity (i.e., ethnic/religious). The codes for these types of identification were not mutually exclusive to any piece of text or to any one participant. That is, one participant might at different times have indicated both types of identification, and might even have said one thing that fit both categories. For example, Simon identified with Shepard on the basis of his gender identity; i.e., considering himself and Shepard both as “effeminate.” While this can be considered as related to sexual orientation, it can also be considered to encompass an independent part of identity.
Sexual Orientation

In referring to identification through sexual orientation, all nine participants touched upon the heart of the idea of a ripple effect—that of shared group membership. References in this area were mostly made to identifying themselves (as opposed to others) with Shepard. Cecelia summed up this connection simply, by saying that Shepard’s murder “just hits really close to home. I mean, I think it does for all queers.” Anthony recognized his sexual orientation as central in his reaction: “The whole reason that I reacted in the way that I did is because of the reason why he was killed.... It’s something that I can relate to very easily, because it’s something that I could easily be attacked for.”

Charles, who specified that he was not very much like Shepard personally, nonetheless highlighted that sexual orientation was “the critical similarity”:

It’s not whether I was similar to Shepard.... If Shepard were a woman, a lesbian woman, it wouldn’t have [changed my feelings] at all. The fact is, they were attacking him because of his sexual identity, because he identified as a gay man. And so do I. That’s the critical similarity.

Michael, who also didn’t react with a great deal of emotion felt for Shepard himself, described that the sexual orientation aspect of the crime served as a red flag that caught his attention. He said,

any time I saw something mentioning the words ‘Matthew Shepard,’ or ‘war on gays’ or ‘hate crimes on gays,’ I’d try to read up on it. And so in that way I definitely was more interested in it than any other type of hate crime that maybe could have occurred, that I maybe couldn’t have related to.

For Wendy, her sexual orientation was what made this crime impact her more powerfully than the equally brutal Byrd murder. She said,
I feel like I relate more to [Shepard], because I have some sense of what he went through in his coming out…. And I understand what kind of fears he had, about being homosexual. So, I think that’s the only reason why it affected me more.

For Charles, the “imagery of [Shepard] being lashed” to the fence was reminiscent of crucifixion. He explained that had the crime been targeted racially, this imagery would have been just as horrible, but that his identification through sexual orientation enhanced its effect on him; he said, “I took it as a personal attack. I took it as somebody had nailed me to a cross.”

These thoughts and feelings, engendered by shared group membership with the victim, support the idea that hate crimes send a message to more than only their victims, especially in this media age. Although other non-heterosexual people (non-participants) might have reacted differently or might have previously developed protections against this ripple effect, it is safe to say that a single hate crime has the power to impact a number of “non-victims.”

Other Bases of Identification

For Simon, the imagery of the fence had a different connotation, through his Jewish identity. He described that many members of his family two generations back “were lined up by advancing Nazi troops … and some of them were shot and some of them were not shot, but they were all put into the middle of town and set on fire.” So, with regard to Shepard, “that fence [where Shepard was hung] is kind of reminiscent of the barbed wire around the concentration camps…. So, in some ways, I—this picture, I see barbed wire around a concentration camp or around a ghetto.” Simon asserted that, “my Jewish identity really informs my reaction to [Shepard’s murder] in a really
dynamic sense,” and that “it was like a double pull, in the sense that it was an effeminate young man, plus it was like Nazi style, and they did this to Jews all the time.”

Had the sample for this study been more ethnically/racially diverse, it might have been possible to further examine the relevance of this concept of a “double pull.” Simon’s reactions appeared to be the most persisting of any participant, but it is not possible to say whether or how directly this was related to his religious/ethnic identity.

Anthony also related himself to Shepard in additional ways. He explained two connections he saw, and they seemed to contribute to his sense of vulnerability. He stated,

[Shepard] was a political science major, and that’s what I’m going to be majoring in. And he was not a big huge buff man; lord knows neither am I. So I started to draw all these parallels in my mind between us, and then it started to really sink in that this could happen to me too.

Other participants also identified with Shepard as a college student. Cecelia said that even if the crime had been a random (non-bias-motivated) one, it would have been significant to her: “a college student being lured, yeah, I’d still be pretty worried. I mean, I’m a college student, and things on this campus—this campus is weird, like things just happen.” Robert stated, “He was at a college setting. I’m at a college setting. You know, [it’s] just mortifying.”

Gaither’s Murder

Five participants talked about not reacting to Gaither’s death as strongly as to Shepard’s. They speculated about various reasons for this, such as the fact that Shepard was killed first (Charles); Shepard’s being younger (Anthony, Kim); Shepard’s attractiveness (Kim, Simon); less media attention to Gaither (Deborah, Simon); and class
issues, with Shepard being of higher socio-economic status (Simon). Anthony said that Gaither’s murder

kind of reminded me of [Shepard’s murder], but I didn’t relate to him as well because he was in his 40’s. So it was still kind of—it hurt, but it was also, it was in Alabama or somewhere down in that general area, and it was somebody who was much older than I was, so I didn’t feel like I could relate as well.

Kim expressed several different thoughts about the case of Gaither:

I thought a lot about the article about the man from Alabama, because I think it was a similar type of Matt Shepard thing.... Like I think he was murdered, and I think it was because he was gay. But mainly what I thought about was that he was older, maybe in his 30’s or 40’s. He wasn’t like—I mean to me, I didn’t find him that attractive. And I was really struck by how this seemed to be the same type of incident, but it wasn’t all over the media.

In general, participants didn’t seem to have as much information about Gaither as they did about Shepard, and some only made passing, non-specific references to him.

Others’ Concern for the Participants

Three participants also reported on ways that others identified them with Shepard and expressed concern for the participants’ safety and well-being. This appeared to have an influence in their personal relationships, as well as on their own coming to terms with the event. Anthony, for example, said,

Other people were really concerned about me, both because of my own feelings concerning it and because they started to worry about me as a result of being so out. I had a friend who would come up and hug me every time she saw me, because she was worried about me now. And that didn’t help my own process, that somebody was so concerned about me that they felt the need to hug me every time they saw me.
Anthony also felt that his parents “were visibly more uncomfortable,” and that they made a point to bring to his attention news items related to Shepard. Similarly, Kim said that she hesitated to discuss the event with family members, for fear that she would cause them to worry more than usual about her.

Simon, who was publicly out through his anti-homophobia education, related that some of his friends tried to dissuade him from those activities. Friends would say things such as, “I don’t want you to go to the small town that you’re supposed to go to…. Or a few people actually said ‘now is the time to take your phone number out of the phone book.’” One friend called him and said “I don’t want you to do this anymore.’ He [said] ‘I don’t know what I would do if I lost you, and I don’t want you going out there anymore, it really scares me.’”

These responses give some indication of the ways that this hate crime might have affected participants within a broader context, and they suggest yet another ripple in the pool.
Table 4

Frequency of Interview Text Passages Coded with Identification Subcodes, by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Who Was Identified</th>
<th>Basis of Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecelia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These subcodes are not mutually exclusive (e.g., one text passage could be coded under "self" and also either "SO" or "other ways").
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

This chapter explores participants’ inner experiences related to this hate crime, as they reported them. Interviewees openly discussed their emotions about Shepard, the events surrounding his death, and public reactions to it. As would be expected, the emotional content found in the data is not affectively positive. Participants felt sadness and cried; they talked about grieving Shepard. They felt fearful and talked about how this affected their lives. Some got angry about living in a society where this could happen. Two described not being able to believe the news when they first heard it. For others, the event triggered guilt in different ways. The passages related to emotion were coded exactly as they are categorized here, and these codes were developed as the transcripts were read. See Table 5 for a listing of the frequency of each emotion code, by number of participants and number of text passages.

Emotional content was prevalent, demonstrating one way in which these participants experienced the impact of this event. In addition, more concrete ways that their lives were affected—through their behavior and their changed views of the world—begin to become apparent through their affective experiences.

Initial Reactions

Participants’ reactions upon first hearing about the Shepard crime convey the range of emotions they felt and provide some context to this chapter. The brief stories describe participants’ initial gut reactions and illustrate the individualized way in which they experienced this event. Interviewees’ feelings and thoughts did, of course, change over time, and this developmental view is provided in more detail at the end of this
During their interviews, seven participants recalled how they found out about this hate crime and talked about the first feelings and thoughts they had about it. Often, this material came toward the beginning of interviews, when participants had just viewed and read the stimulus materials which were taken from media coverage closer to the time of the event.

Anthony said that his initial reaction to hearing about this hate crime differed from the subsequent feelings he had upon hearing more details. At first he dismissed the event; he said he thought, “oh, another one.” Once he realized the severity and heard that Shepard had died, he said, then it “really, really got to [him],” and his first strong emotional reaction was anger. Similarly, Deborah said that her first thought was “not again” and that she felt “horror-struck.”

Cecelia heard “something about a scarecrow tied to a fence, and it was a person” on the radio early in the morning, but didn’t make sense of it until later that day when she entered the office of the campus BGLT organization, where others were discussing it. When she came to understand that it was a sexual orientation hate crime, she said, “I was just really shocked, and I didn’t really believe people when they told me. I didn’t really believe it until I saw it in print and I heard it on the radio [again].” She also described feeling fearful, “thanking god that I’m not in Wyoming,” and worrying about her girlfriend who had been called a “fucking dyke” a few days before. She said that the people around her almost immediately began discussing organizing a rally or some other type of activism on campus.

Charles, who was a graduate student, first found out about Shepard while on the internet, and he experienced an interruption in his daily life that lasted a few days. He
recalled, “I vaguely remember I was just browsing the Web for a few minutes in between projects for school and stuff [when I found out about the crime], and work went right out the window. I couldn’t deal with it anymore.”

Kim first read about the incident in a college newspaper article. She said, “I think that was my very first reaction, was like grief and sadness and wanting to cry.” She also felt “horrified” by the brutality in general, and “really insecure about my personal safety and the safety of other people I know, who don’t consider themselves straight.” She recalled that she “had no idea it was going to be such a big deal,” and was surprised when the event attracted national attention.

Michael had a less dramatic reaction than some others. He said he “read it more as a general news story than anything more” and “never had a serious emotional attachment to any of the stories.” The story caught his attention because he was considering coming out at the time, and although it seemed coincidental, it was just part of his larger effort to educate himself about BGLT issues at that time.

Simon first heard about Shepard through watching CNN, and he said that one of his first thoughts was “this is amazing how much airplay this is getting.” He described waiting for each half-hourly segment of Headline News in order to get more information. On the emotional side, he described his immediate feelings of identification with Shepard, and the “double pull” he experienced through his Jewish and sexual orientation/gender identity.

Wendy said that at the interview when she read the stimulus materials, she recalled “all the things that angered me about [the crime]” the first time she heard about
it. She thought that her very first reaction had been sadness “that he died in such a horrible way,” and then she became angry.

Sadness, Depression, and Grief

Sadness

Five participants talked about being moved to tears over Shepard’s murder, and crying is the hallmark of those text passages coded with “sadness.” The vision of participants crying alone in their rooms, on the phone with friends, or at candlelight vigils—over this news event that happened in another part of the country—underscores the deeply personal impact of Shepard’s murder.

Wendy said that it was when she began to discuss the event with others that she cried. She explained that her feelings of sadness were in part directly related to heterosexism:

I think it was almost a sadness that people can’t just live their lives with who they want to…. I just think it’s sad that, that people can’t just accept that people are going to love who they love and it’s not a bad thing.

Simon described crying with a few close friends, and also crying uncontrollably in public at times, i.e., in front of someone and while riding public transportation.

Robert talked about the intensity of the candlelight vigil he attended, and the emotion it fostered. He described,

when we first got there it was pretty light, but then it got dark and people were speaking, and some people were shouting into this megaphone…. And, you know, the more they were shouting, the more I noticed I was beginning to cry.

Before the vigil, he had never cried about Shepard’s death.
Michael speculated that his emotion was somewhat stifled by his isolation, or lack of connection to the BGLT community, and that he might have felt more sadness had he chosen to attend a candlelight vigil for Shepard. Had he attended, he said,

I would have been experiencing it around me, and just seeing the sadness, like the common sadness with everyone. So maybe I would have been able to understand a little more, but since it was such a hidden thing for me, such a closeted thing, I kind of looked at it as, I’m doing this within myself. And I really, maybe sometimes didn’t allow myself to want to feel emotion.

Nonetheless, he said, “there were times where I cried about who I was and stuff like that, and what I’m going to have to face, but it was never about [Shepard] and his life type of thing.” These times of sadness would come, for example, after discussing the Shepard incident with his family.

Anthony also felt somewhat isolated with his feelings, because “I didn’t feel like anybody else around me at the time felt as strongly as I did about it.” He recalled “several times just breaking down in tears just sitting alone in my room.” At those times, he said, he was thinking about “the feeling that could happen to me, and just trying to think like ‘could that really?’ and then thinking ‘what if it did?’”

**Depression**

Anthony experienced not only these feelings of sadness, but a broader change in mood and outlook. He described himself at that time as “the little depressed boy walking through the halls of school not really saying much. At least for two or three weeks afterward, it really hit me hard.” He said he became less outgoing than usual and that he “started caring [again] whether complete strangers would really like who I was as a result of my being open about my sexual orientation.” People around Anthony noticed a change, he said, and he was actually feeling much less “happy” and “optimistic” than he
thought he was allowing to show. He described this period as having a profound and pervasive effect: “It was affecting my entire self-esteem, not just the part about being gay.... It started to make me really start to dislike myself a little bit more.”

Three Types of Grief

In this age of media, it is not uncommon for the whole country to go into a kind of mourning state over the death of a public figure such as Princess Diana or John F. Kennedy, Jr. The Shepard incident did not involve a public figure, but rather, as examined in this study, had more to do with personal identification with the deceased. Nonetheless, in both types of cases, the question arises of how one can feel grief for, or loss of, a person one has never met and with whom one has never interacted. The Shepard incident allowed for a close-up examination of that phenomenon, as many participants described experiences of “grief” or “grieving” in reference to their feelings about Shepard’s death.24 Where sadness was marked by tears, passages coded with “grief” can be distinguished by feelings of loss. Grief manifested in more specific thoughts and feelings about Shepard himself, or in some cases another person, whereas sadness was a more general emotion.

Participants’ grief experiences are categorized into three types that I observed and named. The first is direct grief, which refers to feelings that seem to be for Shepard as an individual. Some participants expressed either feeling the loss of Shepard himself—perhaps feeling somehow as if they had known him—or the loss of a potential that was represented by Shepard. I have described the second type as projective grief, in which

24 Six people had material coded with “grief.” (Of the remaining three, Charles and Cecelia never mentioned grief or loss, and Michael explicitly stated that he never felt grief.)
participants appeared to project Shepard’s loss onto either themselves or someone else they knew, and then to grieve that projected loss. The third type of grief I identified was vicarious grief, much in line with Rando’s (1997) definition. In this category, one participant expressed profound sympathy for the grief of those who did know Shepard personally; i.e., his family and friends. An individual person’s grieving was not necessarily limited to one of these three types; some participants described different experiences that fit into different categories (Simon and Anthony).

Direct Grief. Simon described Shepard as “a potential friend that I never met and never got to know” and said, “In some ways I feel his loss. I never met him, I never heard about him before he was killed, but I feel a palpable loss, and I can’t even explain that.” He also spoke of deep feelings about Shepard’s thwarted potential social contributions:

What a loss to the world, a brilliant man, who could have had this brilliant career. He wanted to go into international diplomacy, to bring people together. That we might have had this brilliant negotiator, possibly trying to end wars in Kosovo, and we will never have that now…. A potential was killed.

Simon also introduced Shepard’s attractiveness to this issue, saying that although he didn’t approve of the feelings, he also felt “the loss of a potential partner.”

Wendy compared Shepard’s death to those of public figures, but said she felt a much more direct connection. Shepard, she said, “could have been my best friend,” compared to, “The other kinds of people you hear about are kind of just figures. You don’t know them. You know about them, and you’re sad that they died, but for him it was like somebody I could have known.” Wendy echoed Simon’s sentiments about Shepard’s potential social contributions:
It just seems like the world has lost somebody so special. And it’s not just like his family’s loss. I feel like it’s everybody’s loss, because I think he could have taught people a lot.... and [articles] said that he wanted to be a diplomat, and in public relations, and I think he could have done so much good.

This type of grief seemed to be associated, in these cases, with a degree of idealization of Shepard. For example, Wendy stated, “I wish I did know somebody like him, because he seemed like a really great person. And he was very down-to-earth, and somebody that... could just be anybody’s friend.” Similarly, Anthony described Shepard as “somebody... who seemed like he was going to do something really positive with his life, and try and make a big difference in the world.” He went on to express the scope of the loss as he perceived it: “I felt like I lost something, and I felt like the gay community lost something. I felt like the whole country and world kind of lost something in [Shepard].”

**Projective Grief.** In addition, Anthony qualified his feelings of grief with the statement, “I didn’t know [Shepard], so I couldn’t really feel ‘oh, I lost a friend.’” On the other hand, he said, “I kind of felt like I lost a friend because it was you know, he seemed so similar to people that I knew.” In this category of grief, the effects of identification (see previous chapter) are apparent. Some interviewees made a direct transfer of feelings of loss from the person who died (Shepard) to the person or people they identified with him.

Simon projected the death onto himself, via the gender identity through which he identified with Shepard. He explained that he had a “feminine alter ego” whose drag name was Eleanor and said, “they killed Eleanor, when they killed Matthew. I just [now] kind of put those two together. They killed my feminine side, when they killed
Matthew.” Along with this, Simon said he changed his behavior after the murder, specifically his feminine mannerisms. When talking about feelings of loss, Simon brought up the identification of others with Shepard: “I have had students who have been in serious car accidents, and luckily, I’ve never physically lost one of my students, but I saw him as one of my students who was killed.” While not strongly present in the data, this type of grief seems to occupy a unique category.

**Vicarious Grief.** Robert was the only participant whose experience matched the narrow scope of Rando’s (1997) concept. He described that his sadness was in sympathy for the feelings of loss that those close to Shepard must have felt: “I was crying... because I was trying to comprehend the anguish that not only his parents felt, but his friends.” He also said he thought about how Shepard himself must have felt during the incident. His sympathies for Shepard’s parents was expressed specifically around the picketers at the funeral and the loss of such a young person:

They were holding up flags and protesting, and saying how [Shepard is] going to hell.... It was just absolutely horrible, because the parents were walking by in tears. I mean, it doesn’t matter if—the fact he was gay or not. It was just more the fact that their son died, you know. Their son, at a young age. It’s not like he was 50, or 60, or 70.

**Fearfulness**

In the same way that participants identified either themselves and/or others with Shepard, they expressed fear for the safety of themselves and of others. This fearfulness in some ways lays the foundation for much of the behavior changed reported in the next chapter. Participants explained the ways in which they felt their own safety, or that of people they cared about, was threatened. The passages presented here were coded under two subcodes of “fear”— “for self” and “for others.”
Fear for Own Safety

Interviewees talked about heightened fears in particular situations and at particular times, and in some instances they detailed their inner dialogues concerning this emotion. Some seriously considered whether their own lives were in danger, or simply acknowledged a feeling that something like this could happen to them.

Wendy said that she used to feel comfortable in certain towns reading a BGLT-themed book in public, but that “after this [hate crime], I totally second-guessed all of that.” She had thoughts about “what if somebody sees me and they think, you know, whatever they want to think. And they decide, ‘well, I don’t like that person because she’s reading a homosexual book, so she must be homosexual.’” Her fears, in that hypothetical instance, were primarily of being shunned or verbally harassed, but she also thought, “it’s possible that they would physically harm me for it.”

Kim told stories about a few instances in which she had felt in danger since hearing about Shepard, and her fears were mostly location-specific to the South. In general, she stated, “I think it just has been a powerful effect on me thinking about my own personal safety and all the terrible things that could happen because of what I do.” Cecelia, in keeping with her mainly identifying others with Shepard, indicated that she only feared for herself when she was with friends who didn’t pass for heterosexual in appearance.

Simon indicated a kind of regression in his feelings of vulnerability: “it was the first time in a long time that I thought I could be killed for [doing anti-homophobia education].” Similarly, Anthony considered his fears in the context of his coming out process:
I had been out and proud for a year and a half, two years, at that point and for the first time I actually didn’t feel safe anymore. I [had] felt safe for a very long time, thinking that nothing could really hurt me, and then I read articles about this and saw that it was in a relatively small town, but it could happen anywhere, even in my own town. And so I started to really despise the way that I would potentially be treated just because of who I was, and really start to fear the treatment that I might get as a result of who I am.

While he related this to how he had felt at an earlier stage, he indicated that the fearfulness was more intense after this “specific event” than it had been in the past.

Anthony also described his inner thoughts on this front. Despite putting on an optimistic front for others, wherein he rationally considered the likelihood of something like this happening to him, he said, “what I was really thinking was ‘oh my god, this is going to happen to me.’”

Michael, who actually was at an earlier stage in his coming out process when the death occurred, looked toward the future with his fears; he wondered,

What am I going to be facing down the road from now, considering the stage I’m already in? What am I going to be facing like six months from now when I’m a little more open, and more involved in maybe the relationship, and what will people be saying to me? And so, it kind of invoked this fear, when the killing first happened.

He felt that he would have reacted differently if something like this crime had happened later (at the time of the interview), when he was further along in his coming out process (able to identify more personally with the victim) and had experienced some harassment himself. He commented, “It would have invoked a lot more fear.”
Fear for Others’ Safety

Cecelia feared primarily for the safety of friends, rather than herself. She said she “experienced the need to baby sit other people,” particularly her girlfriend and her friend Jack, whose vulnerability she speculated about in specific ways. She worried because of the people Jack encountered in his athletic activities, and because she considered him to be overly trusting.

Kim worried about friends of hers when she traveled with them in the South, because she felt they were more naïve to the homophobia and related dangers there than she was. She described being in a bar with non-heterosexual friends who were being loud and calling attention to themselves and feeling that there were threatening men in the bar who could possibly have guns. She ended up insisting that they all leave, without having finished their drinks, because “I just didn’t want my friends in that situation, or me in that situation.”

Views about Safety²⁵

Some participants described changes in the way they thought about their safety. When asked whether she used to be less fearful, Wendy talked about changes that might be associated with coming out,

I think I was. I think that also, some of it is that I was kind of coming to terms with my sexuality, so I was kind of being really open about everything, because I didn’t know what I was feeling or thinking. But now that I have a more concrete idea, now I’m thinking more of the reality, safety kind of issues.

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²⁵ These passages were coded under “safety” and “vulnerability,” rather than under strict emotion codes.
Michael said that after Shepard’s death, he “realized the different things that do go on in this world, and saw TV specials on teenage hate crimes… It’s kind of opened my eyes a little more, and like ‘wait, it’s not that safe to be that open about this.’” Kim said, “now I realize that I’m less invincible…. [I] realize that stuff can get out of hand, whereas before I thought it was just passing comments, not something that would escalate.” Anthony also mentioned losing his illusion of invulnerability; he said the crime “reminded me of my own vulnerability, and I didn’t feel so invincible.”

Those Who Didn’t Describe Fearfulness

All those except Charles and Deborah had material that was coded as fearfulness. These two participants were also notable as most strongly indicating a kind of “reactance” effect to the murder (see Chapter 6), wherein it led them to consciously decide to be more out and vocal. Charles went so far as to say,

What [the perpetrators] did to this guy is what I always feared was going to happen to me, and don’t [they] dare tell me that that was a reality. I’ve come a long way after convincing myself that that was not a valid fear.

Anger

In a more outward display of emotion, some interviewees expressed anger about this event. Four talked explicitly about experiencing anger. Only one expressed anger at the perpetrators themselves, although another wondered why he didn’t. More commonly, this emotion was somewhat diffusely aimed at society and its heterosexism in some general form. While both the perpetrators and society in general are rather unattainable targets, the former would be more likely to eventually lead to some sense of satisfaction, or sense that justice had been served, as the perpetrators both stood trial and were sentenced. This more general anger might suggest a vulnerability of worldview—i.e.,
that these participants looked to the larger societal net that is expected to protect individuals, and found there to be holes, possibly large enough for them to fall through.

Charles’ main emotional reaction was one of anger, and his questionnaire and interview had angry tones throughout, even in material that was not coded as such. On his questionnaire, he listed some of the specific elements that made him angry:

The man [Shepard] was literally crucified. I was angry that anyone could suggest it wasn’t a hate crime. I was angry that the media couldn’t get the story straight. I was angry that Wyoming had no hate crime laws, and that the asshole church group from Kansas planned to picket Shepard’s funeral.

Simon, at various times during his interview, mentioned being angry at the perpetrators’ girlfriends (considered accomplices after the fact), at Fred Phelps (the “Reverend” who led the picketing of the funeral), the religious right in general, the defense team for trying to “de-gay the trial,” and at one point Shepard’s parents because he felt they had implied blame of Shepard. He considered it strange that, “I haven’t gotten outraged at the actual murderers. I’m more outraged at Fred Phelps, and Trent Lott, and Pat Robertson, than I am at the two of them.” Kim similarly reported feeling angry at “the way that the political system is now,” and “the lack of hate crime legislation.”

As mentioned above, Wendy described anger as one of her primary and initial reactions, and she was also angry about general heterosexism. Like Simon, she felt that “it wasn’t just these two guys that did it.” In her questionnaire response, she detailed these feelings:

When I first heard about this I was very angry. Matthew was a well adjusted college student who was comfortable with his sexuality. These men felt they had the right to take his life just because he chose to love someone of a different
gender. How is it a right to kill someone because they’re different? And what right do some conservative bigots have to tell the family at their son’s funeral that this was his punishment and he deserved to die? I feel that people are too worried about what is going on in other people’s bedrooms and lives. It angers me that heterosexuals have the freedom to walk down the street hand in hand while I have to fear holding hands with another woman.

Of the funeral picketers and other negative responses to the crime, she said, “It just seemed like, all of a sudden everybody was just being totally homophobic. Or it was like, that the homophobic people were just coming out, and then felt like they could now be more open about it.”

Anthony, on the other hand, was angry at the perpetrators themselves. He said, “I’m totally against the death penalty, but at the time that I heard about [the crime], I was like, ‘oh, kill those guys.’ And I’d like to be the one to do it.” Anthony linked his different emotions together; he felt that “the anger kind of got transferred into the depression,” described above.

Frustration

Deborah had sentiments like those above about how the crime was treated or presented, but she labeled her feelings as “frustration” and used some form of the word eight times during her interview. She felt frustrated that this incident seemed to be viewed as an isolated one, that “the news services were going to be focusing on the token victim, and not letting the coverage show that this is a continual pattern of victimization and violence, rather than a one-shot deal of horrible dimensions.” Although this at first appears very similar to the anger reactions, Deborah distinguished the two. She stated

26 Deborah was the only participant with material coded under “frustration.”
that she felt, "not all that much anger, but definitely frustration." She described it as a feeling of not knowing, or trying to figure out, "what do we do, with the enormity that this has happened right now?" Deborah was one of the least affected in terms of negative behavior change, and it is possible that this sense of frustrated action reflects less vulnerability than the even more helpless sense of anger.

Other Emotional Reactions

Disbelief

As described in Cecelia's initial reaction, she reported feeling disbelief at first hearing the news. This initial denial suggests that worldview schemas were challenged; denial can be considered in this case to control the dosage of schema-threatening material (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). More simply, this reaction speaks loudly in its similarity to the reaction to news of death of a loved one. Charles offered an explanation for his disbelief:

At first I couldn't believe it, because sometimes there's phony news stories put out, sensationalistic news stories. I thought it might have been that. So I was rather surprised to see that it was in fact true. I remember that feeling.

Guilt

The last notable theme in this emotional panoply is that of guilt, which was conveyed by two participants. Cecelia, whose identification and fear were attached to other non-heterosexual people, said,

I just feel guilty because I don't really look queer, and so I don't really get any of it. Sometimes I do, but only if I'm doing something really blatant or people know me. But in general I don't really get the hate stuff the way other people do.

Simon acknowledged that guilt is a "modus operandi" for him, and a common theme in many areas of his life. In this case, he experienced thoughts that he "didn't do enough" or wasn't "good enough"—that somehow if he had been a better anti-
homophobia educator, things like this wouldn’t still be happening. He asked himself, what have I been doing for the last [X] years when something like this still happens in 1998?”

**Changes Over Time**

In addition to this accounting of specific emotions and instances of emotional reactions, a larger picture was painted of how participants dealt with these feelings over the time between the death and the interviews (four to six months). This retrospective on the course of reactions provides a gauge of the temporal scope of the ripple effect of this hate crime. It also allows a return to the participants’ individual stories, as a final view of the affective aspects of their reactions.

In seven of the interviews, participants described how their feelings changed over time, either in response to a specific question or spontaneously. Some participants explained that their previous feelings could be or had been retriggered by new information in the media or by renewed media coverage.

Anthony, for example, said that he briefly became somewhat depressed again when in January 1999 it was revealed that Shepard had been HIV positive. He added that “if something else came up right now, I don’t know if that would affect me in the same way. It’s possible that it would.” He gave an overview of the course of his reaction:

At the time that [Shepard] died, I [felt] really depressed, projecting it like on myself, and kind of seeing him in me, and relating everything back to me, me. And then, trying to deal with that whole issue, and then that kind of went away by

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27 The passages here were coded either as “over time” or “present reaction” or both.

28 Based on the interview guide question: “How, if at all, do your feelings and/or thoughts about the crime differ today from previously?”
the time I filled out the questionnaire, and I just saw him as being another person
who this had happened to, who just happened to be somewhat similar in a few
ways to me.

At the time of the interview, he said, “I really generally rarely think about it unless I read
an article about the trial or something, and then I just read it and go on with my life.”
Anthony’s ratings of how deeply he was affected at the time of the crime and at the time
of filling out the questionnaire had gone from seven to four (both out of seven).

Cecelia also described a sense that things had returned to normal for her, but at
the same time, that there were lasting effects:

I think I’m much more rational about it, and I think I’ve sort of gone back to the
way I was…. But I mean, I guess my perception of it hasn’t changed that much.
I’m still shocked…. but the effect lessened over time, but I still can’t believe that
happened.

About her feelings of protectiveness for non-heterosexual friends, she said, “I feel like
now I’m not going to follow anybody around unless they really wanted me to.” Her
ratings of how deeply affected she was had changed from a six to a five.

Charles’ ratings went from seven to three, in the largest change of any participant.

He talked about the simple passage of time making the difference, but also said that his
feelings could possibly resurface:

Just like I don’t care much about the Challenger disaster anymore. Time had a
way of putting that on the back burner. But when it does bubble back to the
surface, for example what’s-his-name’s allocution [the first perpetrator to be
tried], I get upset about it again, sure. Or reading the articles you just gave to me
[the stimulus materials].

Robert, whose ratings went from seven to five, focused on the lasting behavioral,
rather than emotional, effects. Although he said “a lot of things I feel, they have faded,”
changes he experienced in his way of being had persisted, for example in his way of “just
holding myself in public, or holding myself with people I don’t know.” Specifically, he had begun and continued to feel that, “I’m like neutralizing, just kind of making myself just want to blend in,” until he felt safe in a given situation.

Two participants indicated in their ratings that their reactions had not diminished. Kim and Simon both responded with the maximum, seven, for the time of the crime and the time of filling out the questionnaire. In her interview, though, Kim said,

I think now I’m more desensitized about it, because I’ve heard about it so much, thought about it so much. I’m not going to get upset. No, I mean, I am going to get upset, but I’m not going to cry.

Simon, on the other hand, at the time of the interview felt “like the murder is still part of my everyday life.” He said that six months later, it was still difficult for him to see Shepard’s picture. However, he indicated that his stance toward the crime changed over time in that he at first wanted lots of information about it, then got overloaded and had to step back from the media coverage. At that time, he said, “I felt like I just need to grieve in private right now.”

In keeping with his sense that he would react more strongly now that he is more out, Michael’s ratings of the time of the crime to the time of the questionnaire actually increased, from three to five. He explained, “it was more of a remote feeling, where now it’s definitely more personal. I can relate to it a lot more.” If it had happened at the time of the interview, he thought, “I would feel more grief, knowing what I’ve experienced now, and knowing what I’m going to have to face, because I’m more informed.”

As they indicated in their screening questionnaires, this event had a significant impact on these participants, as judged by their range and depth of emotions. It seems
that for most, although distress was alleviated with time, the material was still raw and meaningful for them at the time of the interviews.
Table 5

Frequency of Emotion Codes, by Number of Participants and Number of Text Passages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion Code</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>No. of Text Passages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disbelief</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: BEHAVIOR CHANGE

After recounting participants’ inner, emotional experiences, it is also useful to take note of their more outward, behavioral ones. Interviewees recalled the ways that their interactions with the world around them were altered along with their thoughts and feelings. These behavior changes, similarly to the emotional responses, portray the way that a hate crime such as this one can intrude into the lives of non-victims. We expect assault survivors themselves to become more wary of certain situations, to attempt to regain their sense of control by altering their own behavior, and possibly to take positive steps to overcome the trauma. That these participants essentially did the same and closely link these behavior changes to Shepard’s murder speaks of its power to impact people vicariously.

While none of the emotional reactions catalogued in the previous chapter could be characterized as positive, behavioral change took place in both negative and positive directions. Some participants either decreased or considered decreasing their visibility as non-heterosexual people (three), while others increased their visibility (two). Some considered curtailing their political activism (two), but no one did, and some augmented it (four). Some of these changes overlap with the interplay the effects have with coming out processes, which is presented in detail at the end of this chapter. The course and duration of behavior changes are included wherever possible.

The passages representing change in behavior were coded as either “negative” or “positive” and either “actual” or “considered.” I coded as negative those changes related to fearfulness, and those where someone gave up a previous healthy or positive behavior.
Positive changes were those in which participants’ behavior changed or increased in a way that was helpful and/or useful to themselves or others. Sometimes interviewees talked about changes they had actually made (coded as “actual”), and other times they described what had gone through their minds, i.e., changes they considered making but didn’t (coded as “considered”).

**Negative Behavior Changes**

**Neutralizing for Safety**

Some interviewees tried to alter their level of visibility; they described things they did to hide or downplay their sexual orientation, or “neutralize” themselves (Anthony, Robert, and Kim). More specifically, two of the gay men talked about “toning down” mannerisms or behavior that might be seen as stereotypical of non-heterosexual people (Anthony and Simon).

**Visibility.** Anthony said that he “just [tried] to basically zip through unnoticed for a while.” He took particular steps in order to do this:

I stopped being so vocal about [sexual orientation], took some pins off my backpack, and started to walk around a little less—discussing things a little less openly, confronting people less about things they might say that might offend me. This diminished assertiveness could easily be linked to the self-esteem effects that Anthony described, and his sense that he cared too much what others thought of him for a while.

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29 The material under this headed was coded as “actual” and “negative.”
Visibility was a prominent theme in Robert’s interview, and he characterized behavior similar to Anthony’s as an attempt to “neutralize,” a word he used several times.

In terms of concrete change, he said,

I don’t know if I was just doing this subconsciously, but after this situation [the crime], for about a week, every day more and more stickers, I would take down, until finally my room just looked neutral, like anyone could live there. There was no signs of heterosexual or homosexual person living there…. This situation caused me, you know, just to feel, maybe this isn’t something I should flaunt. Because you don’t know, if someone sees it, like I said, how they’re going to react to it.

He also got rid of some gay-themed t-shirts; he said he didn’t even want them in his room where someone might see them. Robert had discussed more general issues of visibility related to being gay and to his car being vandalized in high school. However, he said that Shepard’s death bolstered his pre-existing concerns: “I felt more strongly about it. I felt like I really have to buckle down and be careful how I act, and what I say to people, and how much I tell people about my personal lifestyle.”

Kim again indicated that her fears were specific to the South. When she was travelling there, she said, she removed a “queer”-themed button and a pink triangle from the bag she carried. She explained,

I did take off those things when I went out sometimes, because I felt like they could be dangerous in places where I went, … especially if I was with somebody else. I didn’t want to bring attention or danger to them, so I would take them off.

Stereotypical Behavior. Anthony said he tried to reduce his visibility by suppressing behavior that might be perceived as stereotypical:

I don’t have the most, you know, butch persona in the world, and I tried to kind of hide anything that I would do that might be classified as like stereotypically gay
for a little while. I found out that that wasn’t as easy as I thought it might be, but for a while I tried to just keep it low. I tried to like keep myself just... going unnoticed.

Similarly, Simon described “toning down some of my mannerisms for a while,” and being aware of the potentially detrimental effects of such a change. He said he began to wear

drab colors... no pinks or reds, no purples. You wear the brown ones; you wear the neutral tones. I was conscious of that and I said, ‘this is probably internalized homophobia. I don’t care. This is the way I’m feeling right now. I’m not going to be out there for a while, as much.’

**Considering Level of Activism**

Some interviewees also talked, or talked instead, about changes they considered making in their level of activism (and in some cases, therefore visibility) but didn’t make. Anthony described an “overpowering” feeling that he would be more safe if he stopped being so active, as the leader of a BGLT organization. He said that the murder’s greatest short term effect on him was “just rethinking whether or not I should be as open and as active as I have been.” He said he was “ready to” give up his activism, “and that’s not something that I would ever really normally think about doing.” For him, “being careful,” or achieving a sense of safety
didn’t involve so much, you know, not going out of a bar with two strangers who say they’re gay. It had to deal with not being so involved with the [school BLGT organization] anymore. It had to do with not, being so involved with [local and regional Pride organizations].

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30 The material under this heading was coded as “considered” and “negative.”
Anthony said he didn’t cut back on his activism “because that was a really good support network for me at the time,” and “because I figured that I had put two and half years of effort into this club that I was running, and that I kind of had an obligation to help other people through it.”

As mentioned previously, Simon also considered whether his activism was dangerous, potentially lethal, to him. He said, “it was the first time in a long time that I thought I could be killed for doing this, but I didn’t act on it.” More specifically, he said he “had these thoughts, ‘maybe I shouldn’t go to this town’ [to do anti-homophobia education] because it’s this little town in the [midwest]—I had the thoughts but I didn’t act on them.”

Increased Caution

A few text passages were coded specifically under “increased caution,” when participants talked about being more vigilant and sometimes censoring their public behavior because of a perceived, but not concrete, threat.

Cecelia said she had always been aware that “something bad could happen, but now since this really bad thing [happened],... it was at the forefront of my mind to always be watching.” She added that while she thought she had always been cautious, she wasn’t usually very worried, “but right around then I was. I mean that [caution] was the first thing in my head.”

Kim, who had related the story about leaving the Southern bar with her friends because she felt threatened, said that her tolerance for situations that might be risky had decreased since Shepard’s murder: “I think in the past I might have just stuck it out longer, or just like brushed it off more, but I think I have been quicker to remove myself
from [potentially threatening] situations.” This made her feel angry, she said, because she believed that it shouldn’t be her, or non-heterosexual people, who have to change their behavior.

Michael talked about times when he felt he had to monitor himself in potentially dangerous situations: “There have been points when I’ve been in public with my boyfriend, and I’ll joke around saying something, and he’ll almost like stop me, saying, ‘look at where we are, we don’t exactly, you know, want to be doing this.’”

Positive Behavior Changes

Renewed Sense of Purpose\(^{31}\)

While Anthony at first considered reducing his political activism so that he would feel safer, in fact he became more empowered, particularly around the time he attended a vigil for Shepard in a large city. He explained that just after the vigil, where a gay actor spoke, his fear began to subside:

[The actor] had this big huge speech about how you need to be out and you need to be active, because that’s the only way we’re ever going to stop things like this from ever happening again. It really rang true with me.

Anthony began to feel, “there is a reason why I’m doing this, and because there’s a risk that doesn’t mean that I should stop…. It took a little while, but it wasn’t too lengthy of a process.” “Pretty quickly,” he said, he decided to “take this anger and this frustration that I’ve had and just turn them into something constructive.” At that point, he became very active again, “writing letters asking for hate crimes bills, and going out and speaking, and marching and writing articles for my school newspaper about it, and trying to do

\(^{31}\) The material under this heading was coded as “actual” and “positive.”
something positive with the feelings that I'd had.” He identified this “renewed sense of purpose” as one of the murder’s greatest long-term effects on him, but said, “that’s kind of worn off by now too.”

Reactance

Charles talked about his response to the murder as “reactance,” and he knew that some others reacted the opposite way: “I’m aware that some people reported that they got scared a bit by that, and started not... letting their identity be known quite as much,... If anything, I did the opposite.” He explained this more positive tendency by saying, “I would attribute that to reactance to any kind of suggestion that I should be pushed back into the closet.” He said that he actually put up more posters, and flyers outside his office door about Shepard. He felt “the need to write out what I felt and broadcast it to people” by e-mail and by submitting it for publication in various places. Writing, he said, really shifted his feelings of anger, by the process of “venting my spleen, if you will.” He also wrote to the campus BGLT center, advocating for a vigil to be organized, and sent money to some BGLT organizations in response to the crime. He said he wanted “to now say to the world, ‘look, you’ve fucked me over enough, and I’m not standing for this.”

Deborah was the other participant who illustrated this kind of reactance effect, wanting to be more out and more politically active. She helped to organize vigils, became involved in a new activism project related to media coverage of BGLT issues, and increased her activism in some groups to which she already belonged. She “wrote [and performed] a performance piece about going to too many vigils.” In talking about the strongest effect this event had on her, she talked about being more visible, by having

32 The material under this heading also was coded as “actual” and “positive.”
"more bumper stickers" on her car. She also said she was following hate crimes legislation more closely and reading more about lesbian philosophy and history. Finally, she noted, "that's quite a lot, actually."

Other Considered Changes

In one example, the murder generated a similar strong desire to increase activism but that outstretched practicality. Cecelia and her friends initially came up with some ideas that were never enacted, because they were either being done by or more appropriate for other organizations. They even considered flying to Wyoming for Shepard's funeral, in response to a group in Colorado who called for assistance in trying to block the hate-picketers from the mourners’ sight.

Cecelia also considered changing her career goals, in response to the murder, and she said this was its strongest impact on her. She thought about pursuing activism professionally instead of the field of her academic major, as previously planned. At the time of the interview, though, she said, "right now I'm just looking for a job and I really think that job will determine where I go."

Interaction with Coming Out Processes

In this section, some participants' experiences related to the Shepard crime and outness are presented with contextual information, again returning to a case study format. For others, material related to this topic has already been presented in this chapter and is briefly referenced.

One reason that I asked participants to complete the GIQ was to explore whether coping interacted with stage in the coming out process, as suggested by Garnets et al.

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33 The material under this heading was coded as "considered" and "negative."
(1992) in relation to direct victims of hate crimes. More specifically, were individuals earlier in the coming out process more vulnerable to being pushed back into the closet? These nine participants can be divided into high and low levels of outness according to their GIQ scores. Six were scored as either 5-6 or 6 (high), and three as either 3-4 or 4 (low). At the same time, five participants overall appeared to become more closeted, with text passages coded as “CO-negative.” Three reported becoming more out after the crime, with text passages coded as “CO-positive.” One participant, Michael, fell into both groups. It is possible, however, that individuals had additional positive or negative experiences related to outness that they did not reveal during the interviews. See Table 6 for a listing of each interviewee’s GIQ score and the positive or negative impact on their coming out or level of outness.

Discounting the participant who fell into both groups, equal numbers of those in the high GIQ range reported becoming more out (three) and more closeted (three). All the participants with low GIQ scores experienced either negative (closeting) effects or mixed effects. That is, no one in the low range reported positive effects on their coming out processes or level of outness, except Michael, who also reported negative effects. However, those in the high range were not uniformly protected against closeting effects, as half of them were negatively impacted.

**Closeting Effect**

Wendy indicated that Shepard’s death “kind of coincided with the time when I was thinking about coming out more.” She said that part of her hesitation in being more out was “the fear of a hate crime or any kind of aggression towards me. I mean, if I was

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34 The material under this heading was coded as “CO-negative.”
assured that there would be none, then I would be a lot more open about it.” She added, “I think that in the future I’d like to be more open about it. But if something like this were to happen again, I would second guess it again.” Her final sentiments on the matter were, “It’s sad that you have to think that way, that you can’t just be out to everybody. But we don’t live in that kind of society, and I’d like to think that we will, but I don’t know if we ever will.”

Anthony’s feeling that he in some ways temporarily regressed in his coming out process have already been described. He said that he “started to, for the first time in a few years, hate being gay for a little while.” He saw his fear as taking him back to the way he felt at an earlier stage, but as more intense through its relation to a specific event. The similarities he outlined were “the same fear of different treatment, and the same fear of public reactions.”

Simon did not talk explicitly about this crime impacting his coming out process, and he stated toward the end of our meeting that he “didn’t really relate to” the GIQ questionnaire, which contains many questions about early coming out stages, because he had been out for over 30 years. However, for the purposes here, his temporary behavior changes in visibility and mannerisms described above can be considered as closeting effects. At the same time, Simon remained very much out through his activism, anti-homophobia education, and academic activities. Robert’s behavior changes, also in the area of visibility, can also be considered as closeting him somewhat.

Michael, who described himself at the time of the interview as “selectively out,” attributed his selectivity in part to Shepard’s murder. He said it made him “kind of…

35 Michael had text coded under both “CO-negative” and “CO-positive.”
realize how hated gays could be” and think “wait, it’s not that safe to be that open about this.” He explained, “It almost set me back in the coming out process…. I took a few steps back. And at that time, instead of questioning whether or not I was homosexual, I started saying ‘okay, you know, what makes me not heterosexual?’” Specifically, Michael recalled,

It sent me back from even saying anything to my friends, which I almost was ready to say something to my friends about ‘oh, I’m interested in dating a guy,’ … and instead I held that back for several more weeks before I said anything.

Called Out of the Closet

Paradoxically, Michael also had indicated on his initial questionnaire that “after realizing my bisexuality, this event helped me,” in that he was able to discuss the topic without “leading anyone to suspicions about me.” He pointed out that “this allowed me to get my family’s sentiments towards homosexuality to understand what I might face when I come out to them.” So, he said in his interview, “at the same time as setting me back in the whole process, it put me forward.” Simultaneously, he thought, this “safety net” may have slowed down his process. He said,

If this [crime] didn’t happen, I probably would have had to face it more as a personal challenge [and]… I think the personal stuff would have come out maybe a little quicker, because I wouldn’t have had any safety net to fall back on.

Several other interviewees reported becoming more out because of this hate crime. Deborah said that she was “determined more than ever to be out to my friends, my colleagues, my coworkers,” and she described specific efforts to be more out at work, including bringing her partner to a holiday function. She also allowed her name to be

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36 The material under this heading was coded under “CO-positive.”
publicized in association with BGLT events. She said that she made these efforts because of “the sense that the more that straight people know about those of us who are not straight, whatever persuasion, ... and the more people that meet us as people, the more you’re going to break down the stereotypes and barriers.”

Charles attributed his anger and reactance to “any kind of suggestion that I should be pushed back into the closet.” Cecelia described herself as “already very well out.” When asked whether this event affected her coming out process, she replied, “It gave more opportunities to out myself. When people were saying stupid things about it, I would definitely out myself.”

A Message Rejected

Two participants spontaneously offered their agreement with the assertion that “every [hate crime] carries a message to the victim and the entire community of which he or she is a part... to stay in ‘their place,’ the invisibility and self-hatred of the closet” (Herek & Berrill, 1992b, p.3). As Simon put it,

This whole thing about tying someone to a fence—tying the coyote to the fence—is their way of saying ‘stay in your closet.’ And in some ways it was very effective, in terms of some people fearing to be as visible, but actually it had that opposite effect, that more people came out at more memorials, and more heterosexuals came out in support. It had the opposite effect of what the perpetrators had intended.

Wendy was especially angry at the unfairness that “Matthew was really well-adjusted. He seemed really sure of his sexuality, and he was open about it, and then it was like he was punished for it.” She explained,

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37 The material under this heading was coded under “coming out/message.”
I think it’s bad because I think it does keep people from coming out. And there are people who come out and they never have anything bad happen as a result. Or people might make comments, but they would never be physically harmed for it. So, I think in that way it’s bad. But I also think that it’s good because it makes you aware of what could happen, so you’re more careful about what you do.
Table 6

Participants’ Coming Out Stages as Measured by the GIQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>GIQ Score*</th>
<th>Coming Out Impact**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecelia</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Out of six stages.
**Positive, negative, or mixed.
CHAPTER 7

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: TRAUMA & EFFECTS ON WORLDVIEW

Thus far, participants’ reactions to this hate crime have been fleshed out through descriptions of the mechanisms, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors through which they were deeply affected by Shepard’s murder. The data demonstrate all these aspects of the ripple effect, but a question remains as to whether the effect can or does mimic direct traumatization.

In previous chapters, results showed that interviewees were made fearful by this crime, and took steps to overcome that fear. Some initially reacted in ways they might have been expected to react had they known Shepard, or felt somehow as if they had known him. Several of them were angry about the world or society they live in, and shocked by the brutality and severity of the crime. Participants attempted to reduce the risk of future harm to themselves, or at least their fearfulness, by modifying their behavior. These are all reactions that might be expected from people who had themselves experienced a traumatic event. This final results and discussion chapter completes the picture with a focus on cognitive features, which are the most directly related to trauma and to the assumptive world.

Specific interview questions were asked in order to get at participants’ thoughts about justice in this case, any defensive or distancing cognitions, and their attributions about the events leading up to the murder. Participants also talked about experiencing realizations about potential dangers, impacts on their trusting attitudes, and about the meaning they made of this event.
Trauma Symptomatology

I expected, based on collection of pilot data more immediately after the crime, to find that non-heterosexual people who were deeply affected by this event might exhibit trauma symptomatology similar to that in the diagnostic criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (DSM-IV), perhaps at a sub-clinical level. Results in this area were very limited in this group. It is possible that results would have been different had four to six months not elapsed since the event. Three participants’ experiences mapped on to two of the three symptom areas (intrusive and avoidant, but not arousal.)

Intrusive Thoughts

When asked whether he found himself thinking a lot about what happened to Shepard, Anthony replied that he did, usually in his room “alone with [his] own thoughts,” up until the time when he attended a vigil, or a few days afterward. He said, “I would try to block it out of my mind during the day, and then it would all come back when I was sitting by myself, not really interacting with anybody else.” These were the times when he would “break down in tears.” The thoughts, he said, where about whether something like this could happen to him.

Charles said that Shepard’s death was “foremost on my mind for a few days, so that’s why I say I was affected so strongly by it.” Indeed, he described feeling preoccupied and somewhat consumed with the issue:

I remember the issue just taking over my thoughts, really being angered about it and being sort of mini-obsessed by it. Just in the sense that it lasted a couple days, and I was seeking out news stories, and writing about it, and looking for more information, and trying to suggest that people should get together and have a vigil, and probably [posting] stuff outside my office and stuff like that.
When asked if he thought about it when he didn’t want to be, Simon answered that for “two or three months it was constant, it was really constant.” Specifically, he was referring to his feelings of guilt. Simon also had “some violent dreams... about physical attacks [and]... being raped.” These occurred “pretty immediately” after the murder, and he felt that they were associated with it.

Avoidant

Anthony and Simon both talked about wanting to avoid material associated with Shepard, at the time of the interviews. Anthony said, “At this point, if I was getting daily updates about trials... I would probably be like, ‘Stop it. I don’t want to see it anymore. Just tell me what happens in the end, because that’s all that really matters.’” Simon said that it was still difficult to see Shepard’s picture, including the one in the stimulus materials.

Benevolence and Meaningfulness of the World\textsuperscript{38}

A “Wake-Up Call”

Five participants talked about this crime profoundly and suddenly shifting their awareness and belief about the severity of homophobia in this society. Anthony said, “I knew things like that had happened, but nothing so grotesque had been so highly publicized before.” Other hate crimes, he explained, “didn’t ring as really like a personal story to me. But then when I saw that this actually happened to somebody, then it just kind of made me believe it. It made it like, sink in, for me.”

Cecelia described the change in this way: “It made me snap out of the complacency queers are often lulled into” when they live in areas that are perceived as

\textsuperscript{38} This material was coded under “could happen to me” and “happen here,” an interview question.
tolerant of non-heterosexual people. Kim said, "it was just kind of like a wake-up call that made me realize that this could happen anywhere."

Wendy indicated that hearing about Shepard had changed her awareness and her attitude toward her sexual orientation:

I guess it just made me more aware of what could happen. Before that I was just kind of like 'oh, I'm discovering all these new things, and I'm so happy about it.' And then I was kind of like, 'well, wait a minute.' Kind of like a reality check.

Simon said that despite being out for over 30 years and knowing of many other hate crimes, this particular one had a stronger effect on him. At the time of the interview, he said,

I'm still surprised by the level of reaction I had to it. I have been a member of the community for a long time. I read a lot. I know lots of people. I see stories of gay bashing all the time, and none of them have ever affected me the way this one has.

Deborah described a similar type of change in awareness occurring three or four years previously, in relation to a hate crime in which a transsexual or transgendered person in Boston was "bludgeoned to death" in her bed. Deborah said that at that time, "it really struck me deeply for the first time, just how horribly violent homophobia could be."

Benevolence of the World

The text passages here were culled from a much larger body of material that provided a sense that participants' views of the world were challenged, that they had difficulty cognitively assimilating this event and its implications. Some of this material

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39 The material in this section was coded under "worldview."
overlaps with emotional reactions, but was reserved for this section because it so well portrays this phenomenon.

Cecelia talked a great deal about the way this event caused her to view the world around her. She was shocked by the inhumanity of it:

I was just really upset about how someone could—I mean they treated him like a scarecrow—how someone could do something like that to another human being, be they Black, White, Asian, Latino, anything in between. It was just crazy. It was just really scary.... just the thought that a human being could be killed because of their not being White, straight, male and Christian... because they’re somehow less than [human].

She also discussed the ways that Shepard’s murder just didn’t make sense to her. She described a local sexual orientation hate crime in which two men were beaten up, and said, “it was more about anger and getting mad and having a fight, and it’s something where you can understand an actual end to it, even though you don’t agree with it.” In contrast, she found what happened to Shepard incomprehensible. The local crime, she said,

makes more sense than luring a kid from a bar under the guise of being his friends, beating him in a car and them tying him to a rail and leaving him for dead. I mean, there’s definitely a line there, so I don’t think I was as upset [about the local beating].

She found the deceptive nature of the Shepard crime to be particularly distressing; the local incident was more straightforward and immediately identifiable to the victims as a hate crime, as opposed to Shepard’s case, in which the perpetrators acted as if

‘hey, I’m your friend. We’re gay too, or whatever, why don’t you come out with us?’ I mean that’s just terrifying. It really alters your sense of trust, I think, to not really know who you can trust, especially people you’ve just met.
Robert detailed a similar inability to understand the crime. He described, “just the astonishment, or just like incapable of understanding why someone would be doing this.” He conveyed a deeply felt sense of unfairness: “It just hurt…. He was just leading his own life, and someone stepped in and ended it because they don’t like his orientation.”

Robert and Simon reacted with disbelief and horror specifically to the funeral picketers. Robert said,

I was mortified, seeing the protesters, absolutely mortified. I couldn’t ever believe that there would be so much hate in the world, to actually celebrate a funeral. I mean, a funeral’s probably one of the saddest things in life, and people were out there like cheering, and the signs and stuff, absolutely horrible.

Simon identified the picketers as perhaps worse in some way than the perpetrators; he said that “to me was just evil, pure, unadulterated evil. It’s almost like the holocaust revisionists saying that the holocaust didn’t happen, which to me I feel is extremely hateful, and hurtful.”

Wendy generalized this event to make a judgment about the state of the world: “when things like this happen, it just makes me realize that we are so far away from being totally open and equal.”

**Benevolence of People**

Participants sometimes more directly conveyed a damaged sense of trust in others, which generalized into fear about whether people in the immediate environment might be capable of such a crime. Again, other data that fit with this phenomenon have been reported elsewhere, but these quotations are particularly effective here. The material here was coded as “trusting,” a heading that always had to do with how participants felt about other people, and feelings of an inability to discern who was dangerous.
Anthony described the “vulnerability” he felt as a sense “that somebody who was sitting next to me could be somebody who would you know, possibly do that to me, and I would never know until it happened.” Cecelia also had the feeling that people like the perpetrators could be close by. She said, “[I] remember the day after [hearing about Shepard], walking around campus and looking—well of course since I’m sexist, looking at men—and being like, ‘any of these people could do that. Any of these people could appear really nice and do that.’” Robert also wondered about others on campus. He stated,

it made me realize, here at [this university], with like [thousands of] students, there must be at least one person who is anti-gay. And, I’m scared that if I actually run into this person, they’d begin to think twice about it and start—it scares me.

Because the perpetrators pretended to be gay, Michael said that for him, “it just invoked this whole fear of, ‘okay, trust no one’ type of thing.” On his questionnaire, he reported, “I also have had the thought when I met a new gay male in a similar situation, that could I be the next Matthew and could this guy be a complete act?”

Principle of Justice

Participants were each asked “what do you predict will happen to the perpetrators?” and “what do you think should happen to them?” Their two answers, and the discrepancies between them, were telling of their beliefs about whether justice would be served in this case. Most interviewees clearly wanted to see a more harsh punishment than they predicted would happen in reality. For several, the location of the crime in Wyoming played a key role in this discrepancy. The material here was coded under two subcodes of “interview questions”—“predict perps” and “should perps.”
Cecelia said “they’ll probably just get time in jail,” and not the death penalty. She said she was afraid that they would be in jail for many years and then be let out, because then “they’d be scarier people than when they walked in” due to hardening of character in prison. Accordingly, she felt that they should get life without parole.

Charles talked about the second perpetrator to be tried, as the first had already been sentenced. He predicted that a so-called gay defense would be used; i.e., defense lawyers would say that Shepard provoked the attack by coming on to them. But Charles thought that the second perpetrator would get the same as the first, two consecutive life sentences. He felt that these two should get the death penalty, even though he himself was ordinarily against it. He said,

I think that [the death penalty is] atrocious, and barbaric, and that we shouldn’t be executing people, but I look at those two and think, ‘what a waste of oxygen.’ And I think that if they were to be executed, I would feel no sorrow over that.

He then added that they were, however, probably victims of their own upbringing and culture. He concluded, “So, if you’re going to execute them, you need to execute their church leaders [and etcetera] who probably told them that [being gay] is a sin and [gay people] are evil people, they’re not people, they’re less than human.”

Deborah predicted that there would be plea-bargaining, possibly “down to manslaughter” and presumably reduced sentences. She said, “if they’re convicted of anything at all, it’s likely to be a very, very light sentence.” She thought that they should be sentenced to life in prison, and she added,

\[40\] The death penalty was mentioned by seven participants.
What I would really like to see is the two of them be made aware of just how heinous the crime was. I’d like to see some sort of awareness training, on homophobia, made available to them as part of their sentence.

Kim related that she was relieved when she heard that the first perpetrator was sentenced because she had thought that “maybe nothing would even happen,” because “most of the politicians [and laws] in the U.S. just aren’t very gay-friendly at all.” She said she didn’t know much about legal sentencing, but that, “I would want it to be treated like any other murder.”

Robert thought that “given that Wyoming is not too gay-friendly of a state,” the sentence would be less there than in states where, for example, there might be BGLT activists to demonstrate outside the courthouse. He predicted “minimal punishment,” but he thought that the sentence should be “life in prison, make them think about what they did,” especially because “it seems like these two kids really don’t feel any guilt.”

Simon was concerned that homophobia would be “deleted from the trial,” as if it were not a hate crime. He said,

I predict that because of all the media visibility that they can’t let them go, and they can’t keep them in there for just a short amount of time, but the hate crime nature of it, the gay nature of it, will be de-emphasized unjustly.

He thought that they should be sentenced to at least 20 years without parole.

Wendy figured that because the trial was in Wyoming, where there was no hate crime law, the punishment would not be “very harsh.” In the state where she lived, she thought, “they’d be executed, or they’d get a very harsh punishment,” which was what she thought should happen. She felt that the funeral picketers might have influenced the course of justice, and said, “I think if [Shepard] was straight, they would get a harsher
sentence.” Wendy said she didn’t “really like the death penalty that much,” but that “if they still don’t feel bad about what they did..., then they should get the death penalty.”

Anthony thought that the perpetrators should get life in prison, and he added that he hoped they would suffer there, but he did not say what he predicted. Michael, conversely, predicted that they would be punished “to the fullest extent” because the odds would be stacked against them due to public sentiment about hate crimes, but he did not say what should happen.

**Could Have Happened to You?**

Participants’ efforts and failures to cognitively defend themselves against the possibility of similar danger to themselves were demonstrated in their thoughts about whether this could have happened to them or could have happened here. Many came to believe, at least temporarily, not only that negative events occur in the world, but that they were subject to them. I have also reported participants’ feeling fearful and expressing that something like what happened to Shepard could happen to them in other chapters.

As mentioned previously, Anthony felt that what he should logically be thinking after the crime occurred was “‘oh, well, this isn’t the first time that it’s happened and it probably won’t happen to me.’ I mean, the likelihood is really low and it’s just I have to be careful.’” However, what he “was really thinking was ‘oh my god, this is going to happen to me. I got to like stop being so open about who I am and everything that I’m doing and just start to pull back a little bit.’” In the editorial he wrote, he laid out his fears in graphic detail:

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41 The material here was coded under the worldview subcode “could happen to me.”
This could very well have happened to me instead of Matthew Shepard. I could rather easily have been kidnapped, pistol whipped, burned, lashed to a fence, and left to die alone in freezing temperatures. I still could be, as nothing is stopping someone from doing it. That thought scares me more than anything else I could possibly imagine. This could happen [where I live]. This could happen to me.

Kim stated, “I know it happened, and it’s just recent, and I know it could happen like any time.” She also worried about a copycat crime, that “people who might be prone to doing the same kind of action might have even seen it happen and gotten more ideas.”

Simon, as reported earlier, felt that “only for the grace of God go I.”

*Could Have Happened Here?*

Four participants responded clearly affirmatively to the question of whether a crime like this could have happened here. Anthony responded, “Absolutely. I mean it could happen anywhere.” Even though “this is generally a more liberal area than probably Wyoming is... there are always people who are very, very far from liberal in every area of the country, so you never know.” Kim answered, “Oh yes, definitely, anywhere.” Robert felt that while there are liberal pockets in this area, the mix of diverse people made for potential clashes. Simon described similar types of events that had occurred in his town, which was considered one of the more liberal pockets. In combination with some local political events, he was left feeling that “I’m not safe in my own safe town.”

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42 Two other participants, Michael and Cecelia, also mentioned the possibility of a copycat crime.

43 The material in this section was coded under the interview question subcode “could happen here?”
Three were more ambivalent about whether such a crime could have happened here, and one felt that it could not have. Cecelia said she “sort of” felt like it was safer here, because there are more non-heterosexual people and therefore more tolerance. At the same time, she was aware that “it only takes one weirdo,” and that she and friends had been harassed in this area. She also described a friend who “always worries about the complacency... here, and I guess this sort of shook that up, like if that could happen there, it could really happen anywhere.”

Michael acknowledged that parts of the state he lived in were more tolerant than others, but nonetheless he felt that

where I live, you know, still has those type of people here, and still people that have hate within them. That’s why I kind of stepped back and said ‘okay, if something this violent can happen there, something this violent can happen anywhere. And the same people with the same wavelength of thought probably can be living anywhere.’

Wendy, who had been sensitive to public reactions to Shepard’s death, said, “I think it could happen here, but I also think that people would react more strongly against it if it did happen here,” partially because there were more openly non-heterosexual people here.

Finally, Charles attributed the incident to “a climate of fear and hatred [in Wyoming], a climate of people with low socio-economic status, people who feel disempowered,” and he didn’t think it would happen here where more people are out and tolerant. He also felt safer living in “in this more urban locale,” because Shepard had been taken to an unpopulated area. He added, “But does that mean that you’re safe here? No, I don’t think that. I just think that the kind of brutalness doesn’t—I can’t think of any instance where it has occurred here.”
Making Meaning

Making meaning out of a traumatic event is considered an attempt to restore fundamental assumptions that have been violated, and participants demonstrated that they went through this process. Seven had text passages coded under “meaning.” These responses came about spontaneously, during other discussions (i.e., not in response to a question about making meaning). Some participants successfully made meaning of the event, and others expressed disappointment that Shepard’s death did not make as much of a difference as they thought it should.

There is hardly a better example of meaning-making than saying that someone died for the cause, or was a war hero. Anthony wrote about Shepard in these terms in his editorial; he said that when he died,

no longer was Matthew Shepard simply another victim of an anti-gay beating. Those happen every day in this country. Now he was a casualty in... the political and moral war in which I have been fighting for just a few years now, and which has been going on in this country for decades.

He went on to list his hopes “that this country can learn a lesson” from what happened to Shepard, that people would recognize anti-gay violence as a problem, develop more sympathy toward gay people, and that hate crime laws would be passed as a result. Simon also used a war metaphor; he said in his speech about Shepard that “we are fighting a war, a war against ignorance, which is literally killing our people.” Four participants referred to Shepard as a “martyr” for the BGLT cause.

Deborah said she “saw some positive” come out of the hate crime. Specifically, it “brought a lot of people together,” at the vigil she helped organize: “probably 250 people, a lot of people speaking out, a lot of the religious community, people that I didn’t really
expect would show up.” Within the BGLT community, she saw “a lot of positive come out of it in terms of communication, in terms of organizational networking, in terms of bringing inactive people back into active organizations.” Michael was convinced that there would be positive political results, that “it will start a lot more movements in the congress and the government will try to pass legislation against [hate crimes].”

Overall, Simon felt “that [Shepard] didn’t die in vain, that maybe his purpose in life was to educate people through his death.” In his speech, Simon said,

Though his attackers may have succeeded in devastating [Shepard’s] body, they did not and will never succeed in destroying his gentle spirit, or in extinguishing the heart of a community and a movement for social justice, for Matthew’s spirit continues, inspiring a people, a nation, a world.

Charles, on the other hand, wanted to see more of an impact. He said,

I wished that it had become more of a topic than it was... like the whole nation had been unified by the Challenger explosion disaster,... or by the assassination of a president. I had hoped that it would reach that level.... That was a little disappointing, that... it wasn’t on everybody’s lips.

Kim agreed with Charles, on her questionnaire, that

the incident did not get the attention it deserved. The media remained shallow and sensationalistic in the coverage. I feel like the event should have raised the importance of gay rights and the necessity of gay rights as a step in following the constitution and guaranteeing all liberty and equal rights.

Wendy said, “it would have made me feel better if they had used it as something to promote change, because I feel like something good needs to come out of it,” such as a hate crime law or increased tolerance. She added, “I think I would have felt better about it, that at least something was coming out of it.”
A Note on Attributions

I attempted to examine participants’ attributions about Shepard’s actions the night of the crime, by asking them what they thought of the circumstances of the crime. This data is quite complex and not uniform across participants in a way that would allow examination of questions about attribution and its relationship to other worldview issues. Rather, it would take a case study approach exploring many of the factors that have been presented throughout this thesis in order to begin to draw a larger picture of how these individuals’ assumptive worlds were affected.

In brief, however, I will say that these participants were highly sensitive to issues of victim-blaming, and they frequently qualified their statements by pointing out that Shepard was not to blame and that whatever happened that night, he didn’t deserve what happened to him. Anthony, for example, said,

As far as him hitting on them, and even if he did, you don’t do that, you know. Women deal with men hitting on them all the time and they don’t take out a gun and whip them over the head multiple times and leave them to die.

Some participants compared their thoughts to those on rape. Wendy explained how she felt: “He shouldn’t have gone with them. But it doesn’t make up for the fact of what they did. I mean, that’s like saying that it’s a woman’s fault if she’s raped.”

A number of interviewees used what appeared to be characterological blame; three indicated that Shepard got into trouble because he was somehow too trusting or too optimistic. Three others implied or said that leaving the bar with the perpetrators was a “stupid” thing for him to do. A couple of people talked about how “grungy” or “scummy” the perpetrators looked, and wondered why Shepard would have been friendly with them. This could be related to the assumption of controllability, in that it implies
that there was a sign that participants themselves might have detected. Four participants explicitly stated that they would not have left the bar with the perpetrators, although Deborah, for example, said it was “something that could have happened to any of us.” Kim was the only participant who was “positive” that she would have gone with them, because she has been in similar situations travelling in other countries where she went with people who said they were non-heterosexual.
Hate crimes are unarguably a critical social problem in the impact they have on their victims. In addition, they are thought to create a ripple effect which was amply demonstrated and described in this group of nine non-heterosexual people, through their reactions to the murder of Matthew Shepard, a hate crime based on sexual orientation. This research was not intended to show the prevalence of such a ripple effect, nor the range of possible reactions, nor any risk factors for vicarious effects. Rather, it portrayed what the ripple effect looked like in a group of people who said that they were deeply affected by this particular event. Shepard’s murder was perhaps the best example ever of a hate crime that might have such a wide-reaching impact (e.g., on people in another region of the country), as it was so brutal, so widely-publicized in such gruesome detail, and because the positive and negative reactions (vigils and protests) of people all over the country were widely known.

Literature on hate crime victimization and on trauma and crime victimization in general provided hints as to how the vicarious effects of this crime might manifest.44 Hate crime victims are known to suffer more distress than comparable victims of non-bias-related crimes (Herek et al., 1999), and psychological sequelae of crime victimization in general are known to be mediated by alterations in the victim’s assumptive world (Norris & Kaniasty, 1991). Janoff-Bulman’s (1989, 1992) Assumptive World Theory was most useful in understanding the data presented here. Throughout the

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44 However, this literature was strictly quantitative, and it is difficult to make comparisons between participants’ aggregated scores on measures of psychological distress in one study and the kind of in-depth, experiential information conveyed in this study.
presentation of participants' emotional and behavioral reactions, it could be seen that their ideas about benevolence of the world, benevolence of people, and worthiness of self had been shaken. (However, the latter was more weakly represented in this data than the two former, and might have been elaborated more had an interview question focused on internalized homophobia and self-esteem.) Their more cognitive reactions, presented in the final chapter, mapped on to these assumptions and their sub-categories easily and well. There, it was shown specifically that some interviewees' awareness about dangers and threats related to their sexual orientations were shifted by this event; that some at least briefly experienced reduced feelings of safety and trust; that they did not believe that justice would be served; and that many made significant meaning out of Shepard's death.

While participants did not appear at the time of the interviews to be clinically traumatized or to manifest significant DSM symptomatology, this crime invaded their lives and left them psychologically changed, at least temporarily. This effect might be labeled sub-clinical, vicarious traumatization. Yet it is not entirely clear that the effects on worldview are as lasting or as profound as that of other traumatic events that have been studied (e.g., crime victimization, or accidents resulting in paralysis). To be definitive, this would require a follow-up study, if not pre-event data. Perhaps this phenomenon calls for a new term, something more specific than "ripple effect," but that conveys the impact that can be observed.

I presented some preliminary thoughts about participants' attributional styles in relation to this event. Having here laid out a comprehensive framework of interviewees' reactions in the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive areas, I believe that this data also
will support further analysis, case-by-case, of attributional patterns and their relationship to other reactions and to fundamental assumptions.

In order to understand the mechanism by which vicarious effects take place, participants’ identification with Shepard was examined. Many said they identified themselves with Shepard, by way of their being, like him, non-heterosexual. In addition, some identified other people (whom they knew and cared about) with Shepard. Finally, some people’s identification with Shepard occurred through things in common with him other than sexual orientation. This identification led to fearfulness and other emotional reactions, as well as changes in behavior. It appears that identification was the catalyst for further impact. In addition to fearfulness, other emotional reactions included sadness, depression, grief, and anger. Participants talked about ways that their thoughts and feelings changed over time, providing some sense of the scope of effects such as these.

Interviewees described taking behavioral steps to protect themselves, if not from a real threat, then from their perception of one and the associated anxiety. There were also positive behavior changes in this group, including a renewed sense of purpose in activism, and increased coming out. There appeared to be a great deal of interaction with coming out or outness, on a very individualized level, depending on where the participants were in their processes. Those who were earlier on described ways that it affected their processes, in some cases setting them back. Those who had been out for longer sometimes mentioned a substantial doubt in their behavior and its safety. This area of investigation is important because theory and research suggest that being closeted negatively impacts mental health (Garnets et al., 1992).
Some Strengths and Limitations

The small sample and qualitative methodology I employed yielded rich, in-depth, individualistic information, in keeping with the idea that trauma is best studied in an idiographic fashion (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Saakvitne et al., 1998). It also lends a high level of internal validity, but little generalizability. The data collected here were not intended for quantitative analysis, because of the small sample and because data collection, done in a semi-structured interview format, was not standardized but rather conformed to individuals’ stories. In evaluating the impact of an event on individuals, it is of course ideal to have some indication of pre-event functioning, in order to begin to establish causality. That such information, or such a measure, is difficult to obtain pre-event is a problem “endemic to the field of traumatic stress research” (Norris & Kaniasty, 1991, p. 258). What is presented here is a thorough understanding of how participants felt that changes occurred after the event. While this data is self-reported and retrospective, I refer again to arguments about trauma and the individualistic approach. That is to say, it most likely is people’s own construction of what happened that influences them most, and I had access to that information through these interviews.

When I received feedback from participants about the interview (from two interviewees) after explaining the purposes and hypotheses of the research, I was told that my questions were not leading or revealing. It is my hope and my feeling that there was not a strong researcher demand effect on this data.

This sample was not very ethnically/racially diverse. A more diverse sample might have revealed another strain of findings and relevant questions. For example, it might be expected that status as a member of more than one oppressed group would
create unique and/or stronger effects. Even in this sample, one participant indicated that his ethnic/religious identification played a substantial role in his reaction.

I suspect that my results would have been more extreme, especially in terms of vicarious traumatization effects, if I had been able to conduct interviews sooner than four to six months after the hate crime occurred, when participants still might have been experiencing some of the things they recalled. However, it could also be argued that they might not have been as capable of reflective self-report in the midst of their distress.

**Implications and Future Research**

I believe that the ripple effect of Shepard’s murder, demonstrated in this group of participants, underscores the importance of increased hate crime activism and legislation. In some way, hate crime perpetrators are successful in their supposed aim to harm or send a message to an entire group of people. This conclusion is quite relevant to the sometimes debated question of whether hate crimes should carry greater punishment than other crimes. At the same time, there appears to be a possibility of outcomes counter to the perpetrators’ aims, e.g., greater rallying of the BGLT community, increased related activism, and more people coming out of the closet. Nonetheless, participants in this project stated clearly that they were disappointed in the current level of legislation and public support.

Among these results, there are many questions that could be explored further, in the event of another such widely-publicized hate crime, or perhaps in a local area where a hate crime is committed and has an impact on the immediate community. The psychological sequelae revealed here could be investigated quantitatively, or more specific questions could be asked qualitatively. Correlational research might be helpful
in constructing a picture of specific effects on worldview and their relatedness to initial reactions or coping styles. It would also be valuable to pursue further research regarding racial, religious, or other types of hate crimes, and their effects on people with the corresponding identities.

Results presented here are broadly descriptive of these participants' experiences in a number of areas. As mentioned previously, I feel there is more specific analysis to be done using these data, related to Assumptive World Theory. Also, I did not analyze the questionnaire data of the 29 participants who were screened for interviews, and doing so might provide a valuable broader range of responses to the crime, in less depth than the interviews did. Finally, there were some data regarding coping and social support that remain unanalyzed.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Pseudonym:______________  Interview Date:_________  P#:___

Completed by:______________  Today’s Date:_________

1. What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this interview?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue or Theme</th>
<th>page(s), location (t,m,b)</th>
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☐ more attached

2. Anything unexpected or surprising in this interview?

3. Which of the following target questions are addressed in this interview? How?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Y/N</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>page(s)-t.m.b</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior change following (due to?) Shepard’s death?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence on coming out process?</td>
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<td>Trauma symptoms/reactions?</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self similar or dissimilar / identify with Shepard?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue to think about / follow the news story? How long?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describe emotional reaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How interacted with others about the death?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the participant make “meaning” of the death?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feelings/thoughts changed over time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feelings about media coverage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could have happened to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could have happened here?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Predict will happen to perps?</td>
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<td>Should happen to perps?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What if not gay hate crime?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reactions to picketing, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own hate crime experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Possible codes and subcodes:
APPENDIX B

FINAL LIST OF CODES APPLIED

COMING OUT
none
CO-negative
CO-positive
message

EMOTION
anger
fear
   (for self)
   (for others)
sadness
grief
   (projective)
   (direct)
   (doesn’t fit)
   (vicarious)
depression
guilt
frustration
disbelief-shock

BEHAVIOR CHANGE
considered
   (positive)
   (negative)
increased caution
actual
   (positive)
   (negative)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
abduction circumstances
happen here
hate crime here
race hate crime
should perps
talking to others
strongest reaction
other crimes
   (Gaither)
   (Byrd)
on-bias crime
own hate crime
friends’ hate crime
interview feedback
predict perps
coming out story

IDENTIFICATION
other
self
other ways
SO

OTHERS’ REACTIONS
negative societal reaction
positive societal reaction
hate crime laws
others concerned
reactions of others
straight ppl
media
2ndary trauma
community support
vigil
talking to others
phelps
MS parents
TIMELINE
initial reaction
present reaction
over time
before Shepard

TRAUMA
intrusive
avoidant

UNIQUE CODES

Michael:  bisexuality discussion
          brought into light
crystal ball
testing waters
coincident with CO

Simon:  grief for father
         Jewish identity

Cecelia:  passing

Robert:  spotlight

Wendy:  unsure reality

Charles:  stereotyping

Anthony:  self-esteem

Deborah:  positive effects

WORLDVIEW
realization-wake up call
victim blaming
attributions
trusting
control
worldview
could happen to me
martyr
meaning
MS character
just world

FREE CODES (not in tree structures)
activism
copycat
death penalty
desensitization
didn’t know Shep
feelings about perps
gender confound
happens all the time
heterosexist society
HIV-AIDS
isolation
location
martyr
not again
other deaths in news
physical threat
safety
scarecrow
severity
vulnerability
women-safety
writing about

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45 These were organized under “unique codes” because they were each applied to only one participant.
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INFORMED CONSENT

This questionnaire designed to explore some feelings and reactions you may have, relevant to the study in progress. It includes questions of a personal nature, and I appreciate your taking the time to consider them thoughtfully. If there are any questions you prefer not to answer, feel free to leave them blank. Please answer the questions in the order they are presented. You may be asked to participate in the next stage of this research, which would involve an interview of up to two hours. Thank you for your time!

1. Demographic Information:
   a) Age ______
   b) □ Male □ Female □ Other
   c) Sexual Orientation ______________
   d) Race/Ethnicity ______________
   e) Where did you grow up? ____________________________________________
   f) If you are a student, what is your year and major? ______________________

2. a) Do you have a partner/girlfriend/boyfriend? □ yes □ no
   b) Is your partner □ Male □ Female □ Other
   c) How long have you been involved with your partner? ___ yrs. and/or ___ mos.
   d) Do you live with your partner? □ yes □ no

3. Please name any GLBT organizations/clubs/activities in which you are involved:


5. From what source did you first hear about this event?
   □ newspaper □ □ television □ □ Web/Internet
   □ radio □ □ another person □ □ in class
   □ other ____________________________ □ don’t remember

46 Space originally left for open-ended answers has been removed. Contact information for researcher was provided at the end of the questionnaire.
6. Did you attend the Candlelight Vigil held for Matthew Shepard on the Amherst Common?

☐ yes  ☐ no  Or another similar event? ____________________________

7. Please write below any details you remember about Shepard’s death and surrounding events.47

8. On a scale of 1 to 7, how deeply did this event affect you at the time? (Please circle a number.)

not at all   moderately   very deeply
I------------------I------------------I
1  2  3  4  5  6  7

9. On a scale of 1 to 7, how deeply affected do you feel now? (Please circle a number.)

not at all   moderately   very deeply
I------------------I------------------I
1  2  3  4  5  6  7

10. Please use the space below to say in what ways you were/are affected by this event, if any.48

11. This research concerns participants’ reactions to the murder of Matthew Shepard. It would be helpful to know your own experience, if any, of victimization. The following questions ask about your personal history in this area. If you are not comfortable answering these questions for any reason, feel free to leave them blank or to contact me (see below).

a) Have you ever been the victim of a hate crime (that is, any kind of attack or intimidation motivated by your sexual orientation or membership in any other group such as race or religion)?

☐ yes (when? ____________________)  ☐ no

Please describe briefly:

b) Have you ever been threatened with violence because of your sexual orientation?

☐ yes (when? ____________________)  ☐ no

47 About half a page was left for writing response.

48 A whole page was left for writing response.
c) Have you ever been _verbally_ assaulted because of your sexual orientation?
   - yes (when? ______________________)  - no

d) On a scale of 1 to 7, how fearful are you that you will be a victim of a hate crime in the future? (Please circle a number.)

   not fearful  | moderately | very fearful
   1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7

e) Have you been a victim of any other crime(s)?
   - yes, please describe briefly:  - no

12. Are you willing to be contacted to participate in the second stage of this research, consisting of an interview to be conducted at UMass, Amherst?
   - yes  - no
INFORMED CONSENT FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

This is the first stage of a study exploring reactions to the murder of Matthew Shepard in October 1998.

My participation in this stage will consist of completing the following questionnaire and returning it to the investigator, Monique Noelle, a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I understand that I will be asked to describe some thoughts and feelings and to answer some personal questions. This may involve thinking about some painful feelings and personal experiences.

I understand that I may ask questions of the investigator, Monique Noelle, at any point, and that I may refuse to answer any portion of the questionnaire. I may also withdraw from the study at any time. I will not be penalized in any way.

I understand that I may be contacted to participate in the second stage of this study, an interview of up to two hours. Should this occur, additional consent will be obtained.

I understand that all of the information provided on this questionnaire will be kept confidential.

I have read the above and understand the nature of my participation in this stage of the project and what is required of me. I am willing to participate in this stage.

Signature

Date
APPENDIX D

MODIFIED GAY IDENTITY QUESTIONNAIRE, MEN’S VERSION

1. I am sexually attracted to both men and women. ..................................................T  F
2. I live a gay/bisexual lifestyle at home, while at work/school I do not want others to know about my lifestyle. ..................................................T  F
3. Being gay/bisexual is a valid private identity that I do not want made public. ....................T  F
4. I have feelings I would label as homosexual or bisexual. .........................................T  F
5. I have little desire to be around most heterosexual people. ......................................T  F
6. I doubt that I am gay or bisexual, but still am confused about who I am sexually. ..................................................T  F
7. I do not want most heterosexual people to know that I am definitely gay/bisexual. ..................................................T  F
8. I am very proud to be gay or bisexual and make it known to everyone around me. ..................................................T  F
9. I don’t have much contact with heterosexual people and can’t say that I miss it. ............T  F
10. I generally feel comfortable being the only gay or bisexual person in a group of heterosexual people. ..................................................T  F
11. I’m probably gay/bisexual, even though I maintain a heterosexual image in both my personal and public life. ..................................................T  F
12. I have disclosed to 1 or 2 people (very few) that I have homosexual feelings, although I’m not sure I’m gay or bisexual. ..................................................T  F
13. I am not as angry about society’s treatment of gay/bisexual people because even though I’ve told everyone about my being gay /bisexual, they have responded well. ..................................................T  F
14. I am definitely gay/bisexual but I do not share that knowledge with most people. ..................................................T  F
15. I don’t mind if gay/bisexual people know that I have homosexual thoughts and feelings, but I don’t want others to know. ..................................................T  F
16. More than likely I’m gay/bisexual, although I’m not positive about it yet. ....................T  F
17. I don’t act like most gay or bisexual people do, so I doubt that I’m gay or bisexual. ..................................................T  F
18. I’m probably gay or bisexual, but I’m not sure yet. ..................................................T  F
19. I am openly gay/bisexual and fully integrated into heterosexual society. ....................T  F
20. I don’t think that I’m gay or bisexual. ..................................................T F
22. I have thoughts I would label as homosexual. ...........................................T F
23. I don’t want people to know that I may be gay/bisexual, although I’m not sure if I am or not. .................................................................T F
24. I may be gay or bisexual, and I am upset at the thought of it. ..................T F
25. The topics of homosexuality or bisexuality do not relate to me personally. ......T F
26. I frequently confront people about their irrational, homophobic (fear of homosexuality) feelings. .................................................................T F
27. Getting in touch with gay and/or bisexual people is something I feel I need to do, even though I’m not sure I want to. ........................................T F
28. I have homosexual thoughts and feelings, but I doubt that I’m gay/bisexual. .....T F
29. I dread having to deal with the fact that I may be gay/bisexual. ..................T F
30. I am proud and open with everyone about being gay, but it isn’t the major focus of my life. .................................................................T F
31. I probably am heterosexual or non-sexual. ..................................................T F
32. I am experimenting with my same sex, because I don’t know what my sexual preference is. .................................................................T F
33. I feel accepted by gay and/or bisexual friends and acquaintances, even though I’m not sure I’m gay or bisexual. ........................................T F
34. I frequently express to others anger over heterosexual people’s oppression of me and other gay and/or bisexual people. ........................................T F
35. I have not told most of the people at work that I am definitely gay/bisexual. .....T F
36. I accept but would not say I am proud of the fact that I am definitely gay/bisexual. T .................................................................F
37. I cannot imagine sharing my homosexual feelings with anyone. ...............T F
38. Most heterosexual people are not credible sources of help for me. ............T F
39. I am openly gay/bisexual around gay and bisexual people, and heterosexual people. .................................................................T F
40. I engage in sexual behavior I would label as homosexual. ............................T F
41. I am not about to stay hidden as gay/bisexual for anyone. ............................T F
42. I tolerate rather than accept my homosexual thoughts and feelings. ............T F
43. My heterosexual friends, family, and associates think of me as a person who happens to be gay/bisexual, rather than as a gay/bisexual person. ....................T F
44. Even though I am definitely gay/bisexual, I have not told my family. ............T F
45. I am openly gay/bisexual with everyone, but it doesn’t make me feel all that different from heterosexual people. T F

MODIFIED GAY IDENTITY QUESTIONNAIRE, WOMEN’S VERSION
1. I am sexually attracted to both men and women. T F
2. I live a lesbian/bisexual lifestyle at home, while at work/school I do not want others to know about my lifestyle. T F
3. Being lesbian/bisexual is a valid private identity that I do not want made public. T F
4. I have feelings I would label as homosexual or bisexual. T F
5. I have little desire to be around most heterosexual people. T F
6. I doubt that I am lesbian or bisexual, but still am confused about who I am sexually. T F
7. I do not want most heterosexual people to know that I am definitely lesbian/bisexual. T F
8. I am very proud to be lesbian or bisexual and make it known to everyone around me. T F
9. I don’t have much contact with heterosexual people and can’t say that I miss it. T F
10. I generally feel comfortable being the only lesbian or bisexual person in a group of heterosexual people. T F
11. I’m probably lesbian/bisexual, even though I maintain a heterosexual image in both my personal and public life. T F
12. I have disclosed to 1 or 2 people (very few) that I have homosexual feelings, although I’m not sure I’m lesbian or bisexual. T F
13. I am not as angry about society’s treatment of lesbian/bisexual people because even though I’ve told everyone about my being lesbian/bisexual, they have responded well. T F
14. I am definitely lesbian/bisexual but I do not share that knowledge with most people. T F
15. I don’t mind if lesbian/bisexual people know that I have homosexual thoughts and feelings, but I don’t want others to know. T F
16. More than likely I’m lesbian/bisexual, although I’m not positive about it yet. T F
17. I don’t act like most lesbian or bisexual people do, so I doubt that I’m lesbian or bisexual. T F
18. I’m probably lesbian or bisexual, but I’m not sure yet. T F
19. I am openly lesbian/bisexual and fully integrated into heterosexual society. .....T F
20. I don’t think that I’m lesbian or bisexual. .................................................................T F
21. I have thoughts I would label as homosexual. ............................................................T F
22. I don’t want people to know that I may be lesbian/bisexual, although I’m not sure if I am or not. .................................................................T F
23. I may be lesbian or bisexual, and I am upset at the thought of it. .........................T F
24. The topics of homosexuality or bisexuality do not relate to me personally. ..........T F
25. I frequently confront people about their irrational, homophobic (fear of homosexuality) feelings. .................................................................T F
26. Getting in touch with lesbian and/or bisexual people is something I feel I need to do, even though I’m not sure I want to. .................................................................T F
27. I have homosexual thoughts and feelings, but I doubt that I’m lesbian/bisexual. T F
28. I dread having to deal with the fact that I may be lesbian/bisexual. ....................T F
29. I am proud and open with everyone about being lesbian, but it isn’t the major focus of my life. .................................................................T F
30. I probably am heterosexual or non-sexual. .................................................................T F
31. I am experimenting with my same sex, because I don’t know what my sexual preference is. .................................................................T F
32. I feel accepted by lesbian and/or bisexual friends and acquaintances, even though I’m not sure I’m lesbian or bisexual. .................................................................T F
33. I frequently express to others anger over heterosexual people’s oppression of me and other lesbian and/or bisexual people. .................................................................T F
34. I have not told most of the people at work that I am definitely lesbian/bisexual. T F
35. I accept but would not say I am proud of the fact that I am definitely lesbian/bisexual. .................................................................T F
36. I cannot imagine sharing my homosexual feelings with anyone. .........................T F
37. Most heterosexual people are not credible sources of help for me. .......................T F
38. I am openly lesbian/bisexual around lesbian and bisexual people, and heterosexual people .................................................................T F
39. I engage in sexual behavior I would label as homosexual. .......................................T F
40. I am not about to stay hidden as lesbian/bisexual for anyone. ...............................T F
41. I tolerate rather than accept my homosexual thoughts and feelings. ....................T F
42. My heterosexual friends, family, and associates think of me as a person who happens to be lesbian/bisexual, rather than as a lesbian/bisexual person. .........................T F
43. Even though I am definitely lesbian/bisexual, I have not told my family. ..........T  F

44. I am openly lesbian/bisexual with everyone, but it doesn’t make me feel all that different from heterosexual people. .................................................................T  F
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE AND INFORMED CONSENT

Did the articles you just read bring back any memories or feelings?  
Please tell me about the first time you heard about Matthew Shepard.

How did this impact you personally?

Did you continue to follow it in the news? If so, how long?

Please tell me a little bit about how “out” you are and what your coming out experience has been like.

Did Shepard’s murder affect this process or your feelings about it?  
Did it affect your participation in the gay community?  
Where are you in this process now?  
Are there some places you are more out than others?

Do you consider yourself similar or dissimilar to Matthew Shepard? In what ways?

Did you think about Shepard often following the event, or dream about him at all? If so, how long did this last?

How, if at all, did his death affect your behavior? If it did, how long did this last?  
  e.g. Did you become involved in any new activities?  
  Did you avoid any activities or places?  
  Did you take any extra measures to ensure your own safety or sense of safety?

What sort of emotional response did you have?  
  e.g. Did you experience disbelief, shock, anger, or depression?

Have you heard about other hate crimes since then? Have your feelings, reactions, or awareness about those changed at all?

If attended Candlelight Vigil in Amherst, please describe that experience.

Did you talk to others about what happened to Shepard? Did you find that their reactions were similar to your own?

How, if at all, did you make sense or meaning of Shepard’s death?

How, if at all, do your feelings and/or thoughts about the crime differ today from previously?
What made your rating of how deeply affected you were go from X to X’ (fill in) out of seven?

What did/do you think of the circumstances under which Shepard was abducted?
   Do you think this could have happened to you?
   Do you think he could have prevented it?

What do you predict will happen to the perpetrators? What do you think should happen to them?

Have you had any similar reactions to hearing about other crimes or other media-publicized deaths?

Do you think this crime could have happened here?

Have you heard recently or in the past about hate crimes in this area? How is your reaction similar or different?

Do you think you would feel the same way if Shepard were not gay, but this was simply a random crime? What if it was a hate crime against another group (e.g. if he was black)?

Did you hear about reactions of others to Shepard’s death, in the news? How did these make you feel?

What would you say is the greatest (number one) effect that this event has had on you?
   What was the main thing that made you rate your reaction as an X (fill in) out of seven?

If no to hate crimes experienced on questionnaire: Already asked on questionnaire, but have you experienced any hate crime, or aggression or intimidation based on sexual orientation?
   Any other experiences of discrimination?
   Do you know anyone else who has experienced a hate crime?

If yes: You answered that you had experienced a hate crime(s) yourself. Please tell me about that/those incidents.
   Were you reminded of that experience when you heard about Shepard?

Is there a pseudonym that you would like me to use when writing about this interview?

May I call you with additional small questions?
INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

This project explores individuals’ reactions to the murder of Matthew Shepard, considered a hate crime, in October 1998.

My participation in this study will consist of taking part in a 60 to 90-minute interview with the investigator, Monique Noelle, a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I understand that I will be asked to describe my feelings, thoughts, and reactions now and at the time of Shepard’s assault, and death. This may involve examining and talking about some painful feelings and personal experiences.

I understand that I may ask questions of the investigator, Monique Noelle, at any point during the interview and that I may refuse to answer any question asked of me. I also may withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that I will not be penalized in any way.

I understand that the interview will be audiotaped and then verbatim transcripts and summaries will be made from the tapes. All of the information I provide during my participation in this study will be kept confidential. In the reporting of results (and any publication), my name and all other identifying information will be altered. If complete anonymity is not possible for any reason, I will be consulted for further consent.

Although this interview may be conducted in the Psychological Services Center (PSC) at the University of Massachusetts, it is not affiliated with the PSC, but rather with the Psychology Department as a whole. My participation is research-related and does not constitute clinical psychological services.

I have read the above and understand the nature of this project and what is required of me. I am willing to participate in this research study.

________________________________________  _____________
Signature                                      Date
REFERENCES


Denizet-Lewis, B. (1999, October 12). It could have been me. The Advocate, 50-53.


Gallagher, J. (1999, October 12). A year’s worth of history: The events that have shaped us since we first learned about Matthew Shepard. The Advocate, 41-42.


