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The increasing vocalization by both supporters and opponents of homosexual rights has launched the topic into the spotlight, reenergizing a vibrant discussion that personally affects millions of Americans and which will determine the direction in which U.S. national policy will develop. This essay serves as a continuation of this discussion, using the Matthew Shepherd hate crime, which occurred in October of 1998, as a focal point around which a detailed analysis of homophobia and masculinity in American culture will emerge.

Synopsis

The increasing vocalization by both supporters and opponents of homosexual rights has launched the topic into the spotlight, reenergizing a vibrant discussion that personally affects millions of Americans and which will determine the direction in which U.S. national policy will develop. This essay serves as a continuation of this discussion, using the Matthew Shephard hate crime, which occurred in October of 1998, as a focal point around which a detailed analysis of homophobia and masculinity in American culture will emerge.

The opening pages will describe and elaborate on the chain of events which led to the attack on Matthew Shephard and his subsequent death, introduce the primary figures in the case and their roles, and provide an update on the current condition of those involved. By placing events within a historical context, the actions and motivations of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, the men who were found responsible for Shephard's death, may be better understood and this historic event's impact on and relevance to the intercultural communication community will become clear.

Once a complete description of the event and the additional objectives stated above have been produced, an identification and analysis of the various cultural issues that influenced and even caused this event will occur, and the overarching theme of homophobia and heterosexism will emerge. An intercultural approach will be used here, incorporating familiar terminology to better identify, examine, and describe the concepts that are discussed. Cultural, traditional and social influences will be discussed to provide a better understanding of the motivation behind McKinney and Henderson's actions, as well as to illustrate the broader

theme of homophobia and its influences. Also, though the Matthew Shephard hate crime will remain the central focus, alternative case studies will be included to further demonstrate and support the claims that will be made.

Finally, several solutions to the issues mentioned will be addressed, and an evaluation of each of these solutions will follow. This section will incorporate all aspects of this essay, including the historical context in which the Matthew Shephard murder occurred and the intercultural perspective, to address the validity of possible solutions, as well as comment on the current state of homosexual rights in America as a result.

Matthew Shephard Hate Crime Description:

Early Life and Background Information

Matthew Shephard was born on December 1, 1976, to Judy and Dennis Shephard in Casper, Wyoming. As a member of a wealthy family, Shephard grew up in a variety of locations, including Wyoming, North Carolina and Switzerland. This culturally enlightening childhood provided Shephard with an accepting disposition, according to his father. Dennis Shephard describes his son as

> an optimistic and accepting young man who had a special gift of relating to almost everyone. He was… very approachable and always looked to new challenges. Matthew had a great passion for equality and always stood up for the acceptance of people's differences. (www.matthewShephard.org)

However, in 1995, during a high school trip to Morocco, Matthew Shephard was beaten and raped. This attack began his gradual withdrawal into himself; he began losing contact with his close associates and experiencing severe panic attacks, as well as becoming noticeably depressed. The development of his primary insecurities, revolving around his emerging identity as a gay man, is commonly attributed to this incident.

Despite his personal issues, Shephard opted to continue with his education, enrolling in the University of Wyoming as a political science major. It was during this first year at college that the attack, which would lead to his eventual hospitalization and death, occurred.

Murder

Not long after midnight on October 7, 1998, Shephard, while drinking at the Fireside Lounge in Laramie, Wyoming, encountered Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson. Both men were familiar with Shephard, having seen him on several occasions at the bar, and both knew that he was gay. It was well known

that he came from a wealthy family, and since his apparel reinforced this notion, McKinney and Henderson selected him as their target for a robbery. He was also very slight of build, making him an easy target for the two athletic men.

Since Shephard was clearly too intoxicated to drive, McKinney and Henderson, sensing their opportunity, offered to drive him home. He agreed, but instead of driving him home, Henderson and McKinney brought him to a remote, rural area far outside of the town. Here, they proceeded to rob him, beat him repeatedly about the head and chest with a pistol, and torture him, screaming obscenities, including "faggot," "pervert," and "queer" (www.matthewsplace.com). After Shephard had been knocked unconscious, they tied him to a nearby fence with a length of rope and left him there, taking his shoes and wallet with them.

Alone and severely injured, Shephard remained tied to that fence for 18 hours, suffering through 16-degree weather and unimaginable pain, until a passing biker, Aaron Kreifels, spotted him. Kreifels, who immediately contacted the police, originally mistook Shephard for a scarecrow. Because of the multiple head injuries he had sustained, Shephard was in a coma by the time he was transported to the nearest hospital.

At Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado, it was discovered that Shephard had suffered significant fractures to both the back of his head and just in front of his right ear. There was severe brain-stem damage, preventing his body from maintaining a consistent heart rate, body temperature or other vital functions. In addition to these vicious injuries, a dozen or so small lacerations were found around his head, neck and face. After assessing the damage, doctors concluded that his injuries were too great to operate, and he was placed on life-support. While he remained in his coma, several of Laramie's citizens held candlelight vigils in his honor.

He never regained consciousness. He was pronounced dead at 12:53 a.m. on October 12, 1998. Shortly after, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were arrested, connected to the murder by witness testimony stating they had seen the two leave with Shephard earlier, as well as by the shoes and wallet, belonging to Matthew, in their truck.

Impact and Current Condition

On April 5, 1999, after a relatively straightforward trial, in which McKinney and Henderson both pleaded "gay panic," claiming they had been driven temporarily insane after Shephard had made sexual advances at them, both men were sentenced to two consecutive life sentences, without the possibility of parole. They both were placed in the Wyoming State Penitentiary, but were later moved to other prisons due to overcrowding.

In the wake of Matthew Shephard's death, both his mother, Judy, and his father, Dennis, have become prominent supporters of homosexual rights, speaking at countless venues and heightening the awareness of violence and discrimination against gays, using their own son's tragic death as a dramatic example.

To aid in these efforts, Judy and Dennis Shephard have established The Matthew Shephard Foundation, which seeks to "Replace hate with understanding, compassion and acceptance" (www.matthewShephard.org). The organization promotes and supports efforts in local communities across the nation to "establish environments where young people can feel safe and be themselves" (www.MatthewShephard.org). This and many other associated organizations place the issue of homosexual rights in the public eye and are responsible for the gradual shift in the cultural perception of gay men and women.

"The Laramie Project," a wildly successful theater production that depicts and reflects on the cause and aftermath of Matthew's death, has also been developed to promote the values of acceptance and understanding, while combating and reducing hate and violence against homosexuals. It has been hailed as "A pioneering work and a powerful stage event" by *Time Magazine*, as well as "Nothing short of stunning. Not to be missed" by John Simon, a critic for *New York Magazine*. This play has been reproduced countless times and continues to demonstrate the value and importance of remembering this tragic event.

In addition to these noteworthy methods of carrying on Matthew's Shephard's legacy, the government has used his case to develop and enforce the Matthew Shephard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, also known as the Matthew Shephard Act, which was passed by Congress on October 22, 2009, and signed into law by President Barack Obama on October 28, 2009. This act of legislature "expands the 1969 United States federal hate-crime law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability" (www.hrc.org/laws_and_elections). In addition, the act

> removes the prerequisite that the victim be engaging in a federally-protected activity, like voting or going to school, gives federal authorities greater ability to engage in hate crime investigations that local authorities choose not to pursue, and provides $5 million per year in funding for fiscal years 2010 through 2012 to help state and local agencies pay for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. (www.hrc.org/laws_and_elections)

Within the context of intercultural communication, the Matthew Shephard hate crime directly illustrates the possible negative consequences of when a minority

group interacts with a majority group, in this case homosexuals interacting with homophobic heterosexuals. Because of the cultural context in which this event occurred, with the two members of the majority group maintaining a strongly antagonistic perception of the minority group, violence and the death of an innocent man ensued, highlighting the importance of developing intercultural competence. This makes it an appropriate and effective topic to discuss when examining real-world examples of intercultural communication.

Identification and Analysis of Relevant Cultural Issues:

Introduction to Homophobia

The primary cultural issue in the Matthew Shephard hate crime, around which the entire controversy and impact revolves, is homophobia. Properly defined, homophobia is "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals… the revulsion toward homosexuals and often the desire to inflict punishment as retribution" (Sears, 2007, p. 15). This concept acted as the driving influence in the murder of Matthew Shephard, and lies at the heart of the intercultural communication debate between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Historically, homosexuals have been persecuted and discriminated against almost universally. Very few cultures have developed with a socially accepting view of homosexuality. Instead, the mere condition of being a homosexual was considered a crime, and men and women were forced to either hide who they were or face political and social repercussions. Still, it has remained a popular topic of discussion, and as a result,

> Volumes have been written on homosexuality, it origins and its development. This is because in most western civilizations, homosexuality is itself considered a problem; our unwarranted distress over homosexuality is not classified as a problem because it is still a majority point of view. Homophobia is still part of the conventional American attitude. (p. 15)

However, within the last 25 years or so, the cultural perception of homosexuality has been changing, largely due to the efforts of activists and an increasingly liberal-minded public. Within this period, "Legal codes have gradually changed, first removing homosexuality as a crime and later categorizing a violent act motivated by homophobia as a 'hate crime'" (P. 15).

Geography as a Cultural Influence

This shift in policy, despite its ambitious intentions, has had difficulty in altering some of the more traditional perceptions of homosexuality, and the prevalence of these negative views is often geographically determined. Coastal regions typically

reflect a more libertarian view of the issue, while inhabitants of the South and Midwest typically maintain a more prominent level of homophobia. The strong religious tradition in these areas is most commonly attributed to this viewpoint, preventing individuals from embracing the more contemporary mindset of acceptance for gay men and women.

This is the cultural climate in which Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson were brought up, and which is believed to have provided the motivation for their actions. Both men stated during their trial that they were not responsible for their actions due to "gay panic," where they were driven temporarily insane because of Shephard's supposed sexual advances. Since homophobes "tend to be surprisingly rational people until the subject of homosexuality comes up, at which point they become overwrought, panicky and defensive" (Kantor, 2009, p. 6), the temporary insanity plea, although weak, applies. Their use of this defense demonstrates their subscription to this viewpoint, and represents, although quite violently, the popular sentiments regarding the subject at the time in that region.

Pervasion of Religion in Midwest and its Influence

Though there has been an observable shift in the national public perception of homosexuality, with the medical model of homosexuality evolving to match the changing popular image, the religious model has remained largely unchanged. Religious traditions still remain a dominant influence on the American psyche, ingrained so deeply, almost inexorably, that is has become a part of the American cultural identity.

Staunch religious opponents of homosexuality use religious literature, which is commonly regarded as divine law, to defend their position, citing several passages, primarily from Leviticus and Genesis, as "proof" of their beliefs. These include:

> Leviticus 18:22: "Though shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is an abomination."

> Leviticus 18:22: "For whosoever shall do any of these abominations… shall be cut off from among their people."

> Leviticus 20:13: "If a man practices homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman, both men have committed a detestable act. They must both be put to death, for they are guilty of a capital offense."

With these and other passages, religious opponents of homosexuality defend their stance on the issue, choosing to disregard medical changes in ideology. This phenomenon, due to a variety of other cultural influences, is more easily observed

and common in Midwestern and Southern communities than it is along either coast.

Because their value systems differ so greatly from those of homosexuals, those who maintain a strictly religious view to the subject identify homosexuality as a threat to societal stability. Those who espouse "the religious model view gays and lesbians as sinners and their sins as threatening the straight's own emotional homeostasis" (Kantor, p. 16). Furthermore, they internalize this threat concept, corrupting it to an even greater extent to perceive gays and lesbians as deficient. The "homosexual imperfection renders gays and lesbians as defective, and therefore, they condemn gays and lesbians" (p. 20).

Surrounded by this strong religious influence, it is not surprising that both Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson absorbed some of this homophobic ideology. Born and raised in the Midwest, where religion remains a central focus of daily life, they would have been surrounded by anti-homosexual viewpoints constantly, and when confronted with the source of this animosity, personified within Matthew Shephard, the motivation behind their actions, though not excusable in the least, can at least be better understood.

Importance of Identity

In all intercultural interaction, the concept of identity plays a central role, since it determines specifically how members of differing cultures view each other, as well as themselves. These identity concepts are known as *avowed identity* and *ascribed identity*, and they can influence the level of relatability that individuals possess when communicating with others.

Avowed identity refers to the way in which a person perceives his or her own self (akronworldaffairs.org). Matthew Shephard had gradually developed an identity that revolved around his homosexuality, and it became an integral part of who he considered himself to be as an individual. However, as is seen in this case, it is possible that the avowed identity is different from the norm of that culture, and this can lead to cultural misunderstandings and a sense of social anomy. Matthew's gradual retreat from social interaction was most likely in response to this observed deviation from cultural norms.

Whereas avowed identity relates to the self from the individual's perspective, ascribed identity is the identity given to that individual by those he or she interacts with (akronworldaffairs.org). It is how others perceive you as a person, and is often subject to biases or stereotypes, since these assist in an observer's construction of another's identity. This identity may be similar to the avowed identity or in direct opposition, depending upon numerous variables, most notably the personal values held by the observer.

Though McKinney, Henderson and Shephard all identified Shephard as a homosexual, their interpretation of that identity altered drastically and established the framework upon which they interacted with each other. Matthew, viewing his identity on a personal level, understood the homosexual lifestyle more completely than either McKinney or Henderson, and therefore did not subscribe to the negative cultural interpretations of this condition. His attackers, unequipped with this perspective, interpreted homosexuality according to other influences, namely the popular negative viewpoint held by the greater public in the region. This perspective is communicated effectively within C. J. Pascoe's (2007) *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Pascoe, who observed students of a high school in the general region, describes his encounter with popular homophobia: "Jeremy, a Latino Junior, told me that this insult (fag) literally reduced a boy to nothing, 'To call someone *gay* or *fag* is like the lowest thing you can call someone. Because that's like saying that you're nothing'" (p. 55). By relying solely on their ascribed identity of Shephard, which cast him as a minority and a socially undesirable figure, Henderson and McKinney were more likely to treat him as such, and this directly contributed to their actions on the outskirts of Laramie.

Conflict as a Cultural Issue

This difference in identity interpretation often results in conflict, and, depending on the cultural method of addressing or mitigating conflict, this can eventually lead to violence, as in the case of the Matthew Shephard hate crime. Conflict is defined as "a perceived or real incompatibility of goals, values and expectations" (www.dictionary.com) and often develops in response to poor intercultural communication.

Cultures either view conflict as opportunity or as destructive, and the cultural acceptance of either of these two methodologies determines how conflict is handled and viewed within a society. Societies that view culture as opportunity consider it to be a normal, useful process through which the negotiation of an implied contract, a redistribution of opportunity, a release of tensions and a renewal of relationships can be achieved. In cultures such as these, conflict is encouraged as a method of achieving conciliation. Cultures that view conflict as destructive believe it to be a disturbance of the peace and adopt a strategy of conflict avoidance to restore social harmony.

The United States typically displays a tendency to view conflict as opportunity, a tendency possibly exemplified most clearly in George W. Bush's statements immediately following the September 11 attacks, in which he "took advantage of discursive and emotional opportunities in crafting messages supportive of war and repression" (Maney, Coy, Woehrle, 2009, p. 299). American policy, in this instance, was determined by culturally accepted responses to aggression and

typified this notion of opportunity. As demonstrated, America has developed a culture in which conflict is encouraged as a way to reconcile issues. Those with strong opinions are praised for voicing them, and constant social negotiation is performed to placate all parties.

This approach to conflict classifies the United States as a high-conflict culture, and it is with this cultural approach that McKinney and Henderson approached their issues with homosexuality, and, in particular, Matthew Shephard. Through their actions, subtly reinforced by society's conflict management standards of dominance and vocalization, both men addressed conflict directly, rather than approaching it from the less aggressive stance of a low-conflict culture.

This specific incident also serves to demonstrate affective conflict, which describes the emotional significance of conflict engagement. McKinney and Henderson's strong personal beliefs and attitudes were communicated through their actions, and the "gay panic" defense that they both adopted reveals the emotional and deeply personal homophobic tendencies that each man possessed.

Of the several styles of conflict management, including dominating, integrating, compromising, obliging and avoiding, McKinney and Henderson most directly used the dominating style. As specific representations of the broader cultural environment in which they function, their literal destruction of opposition to the traditional norm, personified by Shephard and his homosexuality, demonstrates an aversion to other types of conflict styles, all of which place an emphasis not on conflict escalation, but rather conflict mitigation and resolution (Leung, Kim, 2007, p. 176).

Facework as a Response to Conflict

A common repercussion of conflict is the loss of respect or veneration of those involved by members of the community. Since this can often lead to social anomy and group exclusion, those involved often rely on facework to preserve the respect of others and dignity within that community (Clinard, 1964, p. 13). Facework is the creation and maintenance of a favorable social impression, and is a key component of conflict management.

Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, in an effort to dissipate the unpopularity that their actions produced, developed an extensive facework campaign during their trial. Although they took their claim of "gay panic," resulting in temporary insanity, to court, they originally claimed that all they had planned to do was rob Shephard and that killing him was never premeditated. Since the homophobic element of the defense had been omitted, this claim makes them socially more acceptable in the view of society since it could no longer be classified as a "hate crime."

Another tactic that both men employed included rationalizing their actions as direct responses to Shephard's alleged sexual advances, making them the victims. The *New York Times*, which covered the trial extensively, reported:

> Lawyers began designing a strategy that paints the defendant as a victim, selling juries the idea that the defendant was either acting out of self-defense against homosexual advances or as a consequence of suspended rational thinking because a homosexual advance unloosed painful memories of sexual abuse. (www.nytimes.com)

Both of these efforts aimed at portraying McKinney and Henderson in a more flattering light than a homophobic label did, and to maintain some face within their community. Though this strategy can be effective when the conflict is localized and the community could be approached on a personal level, facework on a national stage proved to offer too many strong, negatively-inclined opinions to overcome, and both men still received harsh sentences as a result.

Currently Used and Proposed Solutions to Combat Homophobia:

Introduction of Solutions and Case Study Relevancy

The various influences that contributed to the actions of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson have been explained extensively above, including the highly traditional and religious climate in which they grew up and their exposure to the cultural norm of disapproval regarding homosexuality, and an analysis of these influences has been completed. Continuing with the theme of homophobia and its cultural implications, various solutions that aim at eliminating homophobia will be presented and elaborated upon, many of which are currently in effect. These include increasing social awareness through music, placing a greater stress on sexual orientation in the educational system, and pressuring the media to portray homosexuality more positively though a set of steps.

Heightening Awareness through Music

Music, increasingly so today with the development of mp3 technologies, has a pervasive quality that allows it to permeate hugely diverse groups of people across a wide range of cultures. An individual's ability to retain and recall the lyrics and melodies of a song far exceeds their ability to remember and explain almost any other type of communication channel. Therefore, it seems clear that music has the potential to act as a means of altering a person's views and perceptions of other people, since the lyrics and messages that they convey can be recalled so easily. Expounding upon this premise, Glenda M. Russell, author of "Using Music to Reduce Homophobia and Heterosexism," has begun using music

as a means on combating the negative nature of homophobia. Having found that the presentation of statistics and facts lacked the impact that she desired, she began to examine other approaches. She recalls,

> My intuition suggested that it was in this affective domain of attitudes that many people's homophobic and heterosexist lessons had been planted. I also had the suspicion that, if people could be moved emotionally in relation to homophobic issues, they might be more likely to be moved to action of behalf of those same issues. (as cited in Sears, p. 156)

With this approach in mind, Russell set out to develop a repertoire of gay and lesbian-oriented music that could be used in exercises with homophobic and heterosexist people to attempt to alter their limited and prejudiced point of view.

One such song that has been found successful in her research is "Bat Boy" (1993) by Tom Wilson Weinberg. "Bat Boy" is a disturbing song that depicts an episode of violence against two gay men. The song's vivid description of gay bashing allows listeners to connect affectively with the reality of antigay violence. It has been used successfully in trainings with public safety officials, including police officers. As Russell explains, "'Bat Boy' provides a good segue between facts and statistics about bashing and the psychological effects of bashing" (as cited in Sears, p. 158).

In contrast to the violent focus of "Bat Boy," Holly Near's song, "Simply Love," (1986) addresses gay and lesbian relationships in terms of love and affection, providing a medium through which several important questions can be asked to those who maintain homophobic or heterosexual notions. This song "interweaves the story of two women who share touches, glances, hard work, children and love, while challenging the listener: 'Why does my love make you shift in your chair?'" (as cited in Sears, p. 158). Russell finds that this song is particularly effective during focus discussion groups, where the participants are forced to examine their reactions to the idea of two women making a life together.

Through these songs and other similarly themed compositions, Russell has found enormous success in drawing attention to the state of homosexual perception by the public and addressing, on a personal level, individual views and reactions to the concept, initiating noticeable and commendable change.

The Teaching of Sexual Orientation in Education

Much of an individual's understanding of sexuality and personal identity comes from the school system in which they participate, as well as the social atmosphere that they are exposed to. Because of this, the education system offers a unique and perfectly structured opportunity to expose and educate the younger generations

about homosexuality, gay-related violence and same-sex relationships. This can benefit both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, since heterosexuals are given the opportunity to learn more about an alternative form of sexual expression, and homosexuals or questioning youths are shown, in an unbiased and nondiscriminatory way, that their lifestyle is both natural and a shared experience. Those who suffer from homophobia "who understand homophobia through and through will almost certainly be less intimidated by it and so be better able to cope adequately with the homophobia of today and to change the homophobia of tomorrow" (Kantor, p. 157). Paul Van de Ven, author of "Promoting Respect for Different Viewpoints and Ways of Living to Australian High School Students," observed that, when dealing with defensive homophobia, "provision of sex education and accurate information about homosexuality, including presentation of models that demonstrate that sexual orientation is a continuum of feelings, behaviors and preferences, may counter homophobic anxieties" (as cited in Sears, p. 218).

Success has been found using a variety of strategies, all of which focus on defining homosexuality and sexual orientation, providing an opportunity for students to examine their feelings and reactions to these concepts, and developing a dialogue through which a better understanding of alternative lifestyles can be achieved. One such strategy includes having students anonymously respond either "true," "false," or "I don't know" to statements that describe in some manner the homosexual experience, such as "Most gay and lesbian people would change if they could," "If you have a homosexual experience it means that you are gay or lesbian," and "Lesbians and gay men rarely force their sexuality on others" (Sears, p. 221). Another strategy involves having students complete sentences structured to reveal personal reactions to and perceptions of the gay and lesbian experience. These include "I've heard that gay men…" "Violence against gay and lesbian people happens because…" and "Violence against lesbians and gay men include…" Both of these exercises aim at identifying how an individual perceives homosexuality, and, now aware of their personal opinions, allow individuals to reevaluate possible biases and unfounded preconceptions.

Another strategy that has been found to have success in educating students about sexual orientation and homosexual relationships involves bringing in a panel of openly gay and lesbian adults to speak to students directly. This allows young adults to ask questions and receive answers from those who know the intimate details of the coming out process and what it is to live as an openly gay adult.

These techniques and others have effectively been used in the educational system to engage students in the discussion of sexual orientation, and, through their continued utilization, the national perception of homosexuality can potentially shift.

Changing Homosexuality's Portrayal in the Media

Though music and an adjusted focus toward sexual orientation education in the school system are effective and viable solutions to the issue of homophobia, they tend to only target small focus groups. This makes large-scale change difficult to accomplish. To address a large audience, one of the most effective solutions is to appeal to the media, to pressure producers into portraying homosexuality and same-sex relationships in a more positive light. Robert L. Barrett, author of "Creating Change: Making an Impact in the Local News Media," provides a list of steps to help in the initiation of this change. These steps include:

- Make your initial approach at the top. If the person in charge supports the effort, those below will be more confident. Be sure the tone of your letter/conversation is not overly challenging and accusatory.
- Create a panel that is representative of the diversity in the gay community and be up front in stating that the panel does not represent all points of view.
- Have the panel meet and carefully strategize before meeting with the media. *Careful planning of content and tone is critical.*
- Prepare handouts that show what other press has done, suggested stories, and names of key people in the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community who have agreed to serve as press contacts.
- Acknowledge the difficulty in covering the gay community and help reporters understand the fear many experience as they come out in the press.
- Follow up the meeting with letters of appreciation and initiate future meetings.
- Follow up with individuals who have been in the press to be sure they are having a successful experience.
- Be patient but assertive. Point out insensitive stories and continue to press for fair coverage. (as cited in Sears, p. 425)

Through these steps, a more successful relationship with the press can be achieved, and a more accepting, unbiased portrayal of homosexuality and same-sex relationships can be presented. A much larger population can be addressed, and the perception of sexual orientation can be altered more directly and immediately.

Conclusion:

The violent actions of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, though deplorable and regrettable, launched the controversial topic of homosexuality and gay-related violence into the spotlight, and reenergized the discussion of gay rights. Through Matthew Shephard's death, the lives of countless other gay and lesbian individuals were improved due to increased levels of activism and support from the general public. Through continued efforts by the pro-gay community, a more unbiased perception of homosexuality can be developed, and sexual orientation can cease to become an uncomfortable subject. This is the America that Matthew Shephard envisioned, and this is increasingly the America that the public desires.

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Appendix

Key Terms:

Ascribed Identity: how others perceive you as a person, and is often subject to biases or stereotypes, since these assist in an observer's construction of another's identity. This identity may be similar to the avowed identity or in direct opposition, depending upon numerous variables, most notably the personal values held by the observer.

Avowed Identity: how a person perceives his or her own self.

High-Conflict Cultures: Cultures that value conflict as a means of displaying dominance, maintaining culture cohesion and seek to resolve disputes through confrontation.

Affective Conflict: Conflict that is emotionally motivated.

Facework: The creation and maintenance of a favorable social impression.

Dominating Conflict Styles: Confrontation in which an individual overrides an objector's arguments as a means of winning the disagreement.

Conflict as Opportunity: The belief that conflict is a normal, useful process which acts as a necessary renegotiation of an implied contract, a redistribution of opportunity, a release of tensions, and a renewal of relationships.

Conflict as Destructive: The belief that conflict is a destructive disturbance of the peace and which promotes a system of conflict avoidance.