

# The Meaning of Murder

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## Newspaper Framing of Hate Crimes Against Lesbians

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities  
at

The University of Ontario Institute of Technology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Masters of Arts

in

Criminology

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Oshawa, Ontario  
2014

## Abstract

The overall purpose of this study is to assess the representations of lesbians within United States news print media to examine the effect these representations can have on societal level ideologies. Using two separate incidents of hate crimes resulting in death, this study looks at newspaper articles from two distinct locations (North Carolina and Florida). The 1990 murder of Talana Quay Kreeger and the 2010 murder of Courtney Elizabeth Bright are analyzed in order to illustrate the divergence between these crimes based on location and time. Although lesbians have been identified in both government statistics and previous research as being less likely to experience hate crimes than gay men (Jacobs & Henry, 1996; Stotzer, 2012), the news media depictions of these crimes may give insights into the under-representation of lesbians. Findings from this study suggest that hate crimes against lesbians in newspaper reports are more likely to discuss the victim's sex instead of their sexuality, causing the lesbian as a victim to become invisible. In other words, by failing to properly depict the victim's sexuality as being a factor in the crime, the rates of hate crimes against lesbians are less likely to be acknowledged by wider society. Results of this study therefore contradict findings presented within official government hate crime statistics, suggesting that current methods of collecting data may be unable to properly account for lesbian victimization due to the dual identities they hold.

Keywords: media, hate crimes, news, framing, lesbian

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## Dedication

To all those who have experienced hatred in the wake of difference, who have struggled through the discord, and to those individuals who have provided support for those who needed it, your efforts are not in vain.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those who helped me through completion of this dissertation. Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Barbara Perry for the continuous support, her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. Without your supervision and help this dissertation would not have been possible. In combination with the mentorship of my advisor, I am blessed to have gotten the opportunity to work with dynamic and intelligent committee members, Dr. Aziz Douai and Dr. Suzanne de Castell, who provided me with encouragement, insightful comments, suggestions, and hard questions.

I'd like to thank Tessa Troughton, Carla Cesoroni, and Michelle Armstrong for providing me with feedback when I presented posters and talked about my research at conferences, meetings, and even in everyday conversations. My sincere thanks also go to Dr. Abbee Corb, for offering me the opportunity to grow and providing me with the guidance and experience in working on new and exciting projects. Furthermore, I would like to thank my college professor Mr. Roger Nicholson for encouraging me to pursue my academic goals and providing me with the support needed to set off in the right direction.

I would like to thank my fellow students, those who have moved on, those in the quagmire, and those just beginning, for their support, feedback, and friendship. I would like to thank all my friends, especially those I have gained whilst pursuing my academics, for accepting nothing less than completion from me. Finally, a special thanks to my family for supporting me throughout my life. Words cannot express how grateful I am for all of the sacrifices you've made on my behalf. Thanks for making me push harder.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Defining the Problem**

In the early morning hours, on February 22, 1990, 32-year-old Talana Quay Kreeger was murdered by a long-haul truck driver in Wilmington, North Carolina. Over two decades later, on Thursday April 22, 2010, 24-year-old Courtney Elizabeth Bright was murdered by her girlfriend's father in Lakeland, Florida. The motives surrounding the murders of Kreeger and Bright were reportedly based on the victim's sexual orientations (Sprinkle, 2011). Kreeger's killer became enraged over an argument fueled by the fact she was a lesbian while Bright's killer sought revenge over the fact that Bright had 'corrupted' his daughter. While both cases have similarities between them, the media depictions of each incident are entirely different.

Some have argued that newspaper texts teach and influence reader's ideas surrounding sex and sexuality (Entman, 2007; Sinkhorn, 2011). Previous research has shown that the framing, within news print media of hate crimes against lesbians, positions them primarily under heterosexual norms (Calhoun, 1995; Comstock, 1991; Norton, 2008). This is done by categorizing hate crimes against lesbians as violence against women (Renzetti & Edleson, 2008). Since lesbians may hold two or more positions within subordinate groups, based on their social placement as women and lesbians; the depiction of both sex and sexuality should be analyzed (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). If news print media's representation of lesbians overlooks their sexual identity and emphasizes sex, official statistics may be influenced due to methods of recording hate crimes in the United States (Graff, 1993). Therefore, it is no surprise that violence against lesbians has primarily been displayed in the media as violence against women, a viewpoint which fails to distinguish these acts from those committed against heterosexual women (Tomsen & Mason 1997). The generalization of violence has become a primary frame within newspaper

reports (Calhoun, 1995; Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Representations of violence against lesbians in the media raises concerns for those within this field of study, and as such, this research is concerned with answering the question of how these incidents are portrayed within news print media, and with how this portrayal affects social perception of hate crimes against lesbians.

## 1.2 Importance and Aim of Research

The research conducted attempts to analyze how lesbians, as hate crime victims, are framed within the media and how this framing causes the miscategorization and disappearance of lesbian victimization. Additionally, the research seeks to assess the way the two crimes presented are framed, as well as the impact that regional and time differences may have on media coverage of hate crimes against lesbians. Results will provide evidence of whether or not media reports on the victimization of lesbians emphasize the victim's sex over their sexuality and whether or not sexuality is even acknowledged. Furthermore, results will highlight the discrepancies that are likely to occur in the representation and recording of hate crimes against gay males compared to lesbians. The study examines print news media coverage (newspaper articles) of lesbian hate crime murders occurring in the United States, specifically the death of Talana Quay Kreeger in 1990 and Courtney Elizabeth Bright in 2010. These two studies were selected based on the overall lack of U.S. newspaper coverage covering hate crimes against lesbians. Newspaper representation of hate crimes committed against lesbians will be assessed, focusing on the ways in which the content of these articles contribute to the wider social perceptions of hate crimes against lesbians. Using Cissel's (2012) method of framing, newspapers are coded based on the representation of the victims' sex and sexuality within articles, as well as the relationship these identities have in terms of negative, positive, or neutral framing in news reports.

Due to the lack of news print media attention given to anti-lesbian hate crimes within Canada, focus was directed toward analyzing incidents within the U.S. (Jiwani & Freda, 1998). The U.S. was chosen based on the lack of recent U.S. studies focused on hate crimes against lesbians (Ault, 1996; Tate, 2012). This study was unable to retrieve and analyze more incidents of hate crimes against depicted in U.S. newspapers, therefore the sample was limited to two cases. These two cases were chosen based on the lack of newspaper articles that covered hate crimes committed against lesbians needed to provide a larger sample for analysis. Although there were other reports in other locations throughout the United States, in order to analyze the differences in representation based on time and location Talana Kreeger and Courtney Bright were chosen based on similarities (race and age). For example, if one victim was African American and the other Caucasian, based on previous research, race could play an important role in the differences between the media coverage of each crime (Entman, 2007). Due to length and time restraints this paper only addressed the framing of sex and sexuality within newspaper articles. It was beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other intersecting identities that impact media coverage of hate crimes against lesbians. However, this will provide a basis for those wishing to analyze hate crimes against lesbians and the impact that these intersecting identities held by lesbians. This research will analyze the different lesbian identities surrounding gender, sexuality, and sex which can have an impact in the media's framing process (Cissel, 2012). Results of this study can be used for future analysis on the portrayal of hate crimes against lesbians within other media outlets, expanding on the research in lesbian hate crime literature.

The articles obtained for each case were drawn from newspaper and academic databases (Lexis Nexus, Wilmington and Lakeland newspaper archives, and Google News Archives) and were then organized by victim and date published. Due to the limited number of articles and

newspapers which covered each crime, comparison and analysis was only done regionally. Information used for analysis was obtained from six different newspapers with a total of 46 articles overall. Only one newspaper, titled The Star, reported on the Kreeger case, producing a total of 26 articles. Bright's case, however, was reported by five newspapers, The Ledger, Sun Sentinel, Tampa Tribune, Associated Press, and Gainesville, producing a total of 20 articles.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper centers on Herek's (1990) theory of cultural heterosexism. Cultural heterosexism is the pervasion of heterosexism in societal customs and institutions (Johnson, 2012; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Previous studies had falsely categorized negative attitudes toward homosexuals as homophobia (MacDonald, 1976). It was not until around the 1970s that scholars asserted that the denigration of homosexuals was not based on personal pathology but was a social construct of society. As a result the term heterosexism, which was first employed in the gay and women's liberation movement, was coined (Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). Heterosexism was used to show common language and offer political importance to concerns linked to the systemic oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals (Suter, 2008). The use of the term 'heterosexism,' in research, led to a more logical and contemporary definition (Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). Compared to previous terms such as homophobia, the use of heterosexism within literature has been identified as being a more suitable conceptualization of violence and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, and as such, this construct is seen as being a more inclusive representation of anti-homosexual attitudes (Meyers, 1996).

Heterosexism, was designed as a way to provide a more contemporary and holistic understanding of anti-homosexual discrimination (Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). This study

has employed the definition of cultural heterosexism used by Herek (1990) in order to provide consistency for understanding discrimination of LGBTQ persons within institutions and social customs. Herek (1990) defines cultural heterosexism as “heterosexism [that] is manifested both in societal customs and institutions, such as religion and the legal system” (p. 89). This theory helps develop the framework for understanding the media’s institutional discrimination of lesbians through their representation, and is appropriate for the current study as it assesses the root of the problem in suppressing the lesbian identity within news articles. There have been some previous studies that focused on analyzing media messages that relate to news coverage of homicide (Sorenson, Manz & Berk, 1998), attacks against gay males (Husselbee & Elliott, 2002; Ott & Aoki, 2002), anti-gay crimes against both gay males and lesbians (Henley, et. al., 2002), as well as violence against heterosexual women (Meyers, 1996). Moreover, although there are some studies that use the theory of heterosexism as a framework to analyze newspaper articles (Suter, 2008), cultural heterosexism has not been used as a framework to assess the framing of sex and sexuality within newspaper coverage of hate crimes against lesbians. Therefore, this study provides an essential contribution to expanding the literature on, not only hate crimes against lesbians but also cultural heterosexism.

One of the limitations of the theoretical framework chosen for this study is that cultural heterosexism requires further investigation as empirical research is lacking (Johnson, 2012; Suter, 2008). Based on the lack of quantitative research that has been conducted on cultural heterosexism, the research method chosen for this study is quantitative in nature. A content analysis was conducted in order to get an understanding of the ways in which U.S. news print media portrays two incidents of hate crimes against lesbians. This media portrayal may then influence individual attitudes and behaviours. The influence that news print media can have on

individual attitudes and behaviours can either increase reader's ideologies of hate crimes against lesbians (Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). An example of can be seen in the lack of public discussion, or outcry, addressing issues or creating policies that are needed in combating hate crimes against lesbians. The effects of minimal reporting of hate crimes against lesbians within the media can also be reflected in the failure of lesbians to report incidents of hate crimes against them (Bartle, 2000). If there is no acknowledgment of others who have been victims of this type of violence, this can reduce the rate in which other lesbian women feel comfortable reporting incidents to police and other officials. Furthermore, reporting patterns are also influenced by lesbians' fear of secondary victimization from police based on sexual orientation (Comstock, 1991; Gerstenfeld, 2013). Another example of the effect of institutional practices of the media on individual behaviours is through the sexualization of lesbians (Gill, 2007; Oerton, 1996). Research confirms that lesbians are more likely to be sexually assaulted or raped compared to gay men (Sinclair & Hertl, 2010; Smith & Ingram, 2004). The mainstream media often stereotypes lesbians, as only engaging in sexual relations to arouse heterosexual men, may validate perpetrators to act sexually aggressive toward lesbians (Fountain, 2008).

#### 1.4 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction provides an outline to the study and discusses the importance and aim of the research. This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of cultural heterosexism that is used throughout this study and the reasons why research is needed.

Chapter 2: Contexts for Anti-Lesbian Violence provides an overview of previous literature on hate crimes against lesbians, looking at the available information to provide context for the current study. This chapter explores the social construction of both sex and female

sexuality. Furthermore, Hereks (1990; 1992) theory of cultural heterosexism is analyzed and discussed in detail in relation to the study of violence against lesbians in the United States.

Chapter 3: Cultural Institutions gives an overview of four different institutions that create, promote, and enforce social standards of behaviour and ideologies in relation to cultural heterosexism. These systems are presented in the following order: (1) Religion, (2) The Legal System and Hate Crime Laws, (3) The Education System, and (4) The Media.

Chapter 4: Methodologies and Data Collection discusses and reviews the framework used in order to obtain newspaper samples of both Talana Kreeger and Courtney Bright murders. This chapter explores the different procedures, measures, and coding of the information presented within each article obtained in relation to the victims. The method of content analysis used in the study is discussed and detailed information on how the articles were coded is explained.

Chapter 5: Results identifies the outcomes of the study and provides a descriptive and thematic analysis of the findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion tries to account for the differences that were found between each case, including the time frame of each case and the location which shows variations between political, legal, and religious views.

Chapter 7: Conclusion suggests the directions of future research and the conclusions that have been formed based on this study.

## Chapter 2: Contexts for Anti-Lesbian Violence

### 2.1 Prior Research

Until recently, criminological research focusing on the cause and effect of hate crimes based on sexual orientation has been limited. A search of the literature on the topic of hate crimes based on sexuality resulted in a noticeable absence of lesbian-focused studies (Bartle, 2000; Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000). This lack of research may lead to the minimization of violent incidents committed against lesbians based on the lack of attention toward raising concerns about these incidents. There is a large selection of literature focused on homophobia and hate crimes committed against homosexual males (Herek & Glunt, 1997), transgendered persons (Moran & Sharpe, 2004) and both homosexual men and lesbian women (Boyd, Berk & Hamner, 1996; Herek & Berrill, 1991; Plummer, 2001). However, limited research has been conducted which focused primarily on the issues of lesbian experiences with hate crimes in the United States (Bartle, 2000; Wilkinson, 2004). The lack of up-to-date research on hate crimes against lesbians is problematic when trying to understand the rates of lesbian victimization.

Articles on hate crimes continually establish research and information on hate crimes against gay men, but often do not properly account for the gender differences among victims (Bartle, 2000). A large majority of the literature has ignored a feminist framework for this type of violence which would incorporate the intersectionality of victims (Ault, 1997). There is a lack of exploratory research present in literature of hate crimes against lesbians, as well as a lack of research which provides feminist analysis (Wilkinson, 2004). Lesbian invisibility and sexism found in policies and literature highlights the lack of sexuality-specific legislation for hate crimes. Looking at literature that focuses on hate crimes statistics promotes the notion that it is

gay men who are more often the victims (Ault, 1997). The causation of hate crimes experienced by women may be ignored, thereby limiting the production of research and analysis. Based on the lack of previous research focusing on hate crimes committed against lesbians, there is a general assumption that lesbians experience fewer hate crimes compared to gay men because they report fewer occurrences (Bartle, 2000). Statistics collected on hate crimes based on sexual orientation indicate that lesbians, compared to homosexual men, are less likely to experience victimization (Bartle, 2000; Wilkinson, 2004). This misrepresentation of violence experienced by lesbians has led to focus being shifted away from important issues surrounding the experiences of lesbians who are victims of hate crimes. Although lesbians report fewer hate crimes than gay men we cannot conclude they are victimized less frequently (Bartle, 2000; Berrill, 1990; Kuehne & Sullivan, 2001; Mason & Tomsen, 1997). There are numerous reasons why data gathered by the Uniform Crime Report (UCR), on hate crimes committed against lesbians, does not accurately represent the frequency in which these incidents occur.

Although literature is minimal, Bartle (2000) states that evidence suggests that the reason why lesbians report fewer hate crimes compared to gay men is not due to the fact that they experience lower levels of hate crimes, but rather that they experience different types of hate crimes. Compared to gay men lesbians are more likely to experience (1) sexual assault; (2) violence from family members; and (3) verbal harassment from family members (Bartle, 2000; Berrill, 1990). Since hate crimes against lesbians are more likely to occur in private spaces, it is connected to domestic violence (Daley, Solomon, Newman & Mishna, 2000). The relation between the two is made based on the fact that both hate crimes against lesbians and violence against women are less likely to be strangers to the victim, and occurrences often happen in private spaces (Bartle, 2000). Based on the fact that perpetrators of hate crimes against gay men

are usually not well-known to the victim, they are punished more severely than those who commit hate crimes against lesbians (Ault, 1997). Furthermore, research has shown that victims are less likely to report crimes that are committed by partners, friends, or relatives to the police (Kuehne & Sullivan, 2001). Finally, homosexual males experience physical violence more often than lesbians, and are therefore more likely to report these incidents to the police (Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2002).

Previous and current literature fails to acknowledge the evidence provided that shows lesbians are more frequently victims of misogynist or homophobic stalking (Ault, 1997). As shown above, hate violence experienced by lesbians may not be generally experienced by gay men (Tate, 2012). Furthermore, it is suggested that men are more likely to obtain protection under the law than women (Jacobsen, 2012; Seidman, Fischer & Meeks, 2006). This may be due to the fact that men are shown to hold more positions of power within the criminal justice system, thereby deterring the lesbian victim from seeking the aid of protection under the law (Bartle, 2000). By failing to seek protection under the law, the rate of lesbian victimization would decrease within official government hate crime statistics.

Until the work of Dorothy Smith was published in 1979, a large majority of research failed to provide a gendered standpoint which can impact an individual's experience of reality (Harding, 2004). It is reported that researchers often use sampling techniques and methodologies that produces more data favoring males (Bartle, 2000). Inadvertently, androcentrism has commonly been present in previous research conducted on women (both heterosexual and homosexual) (Hesse-Biber, 2011). Androcentric reporting of gender differences was based on researchers' beliefs that male behaviour and thinking was normal while the behaviour and thinking of females was something inferior, deviant, and abnormal (Knepper, 2013). Not only

were the majority of senior researchers men, but the agenda they studied followed the concerns of men, ignoring and stigmatizing women based on gender differences (Hesse-Biber, 2011). Moreover, when female sexuality was studied it was often marginalized or eroticized (Miller & Mullins, 2006; O'Brien & Yar, 2008). One important piece of work that focused some attention on lesbians was the work of Cesare Lombroso (1890) which used the term lesbian to describe a specific type of individual, and also describe erotic activity. Prior to Lombroso's work, the acknowledgment of lesbianism, in scientific and medical journals, was not specifically named, rather, the term homosexual or congenital invert was used (Knepper, 2013). This reference was made to describe an individual who possessed a deviant identity (sexual or gendered). Since research on female homosexuality was conducted primarily in women's prisons and asylums, the information obtained by that kind of research provided misleading ideologies (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; O'Brien, 2009). Based on these studies, female homosexuals were viewed as being psychologically impaired and criminally deviant (Knepper, 2013).

The reinforcement of the perception that hate crimes are predominantly experienced by gay men takes attention away from lesbians and instead focus is directed toward middle-class, white, educated men (Ault, 1997). Since it is middle-class, white, educated men that make up the majority of anti-gay hate crime statistics, lesbians are therefore not properly incorporated within government hate crime data (Bartle, 2000). Making lesbians and their issues visible is difficult. As research suggests, it can be hard to distinguish between anti-lesbian crimes and anti-woman crimes (Doyle, 2003). Understanding and studying women's experiences became an important aspect needed to develop theories on the inequality and patriarchy present within cultures and institutions (Chesney-Lind, Okamoto & Irwin, 2006). The rise of feminist theories within criminological research expanded previous literature on crime by providing gendered

examinations of crime (DeKeseredy, 2011). Feminist scholars have highlighted the domination and control that men have, both in the criminal justice system and criminology (O'Brien & Yar, 2008). Challenging the male dominated field of criminology, feminist theories have provided a more holistic approach to the analysis of hate crimes by addressing how sexuality and gendered power are embedded within society (Gelsthorpe, 2004). Therefore, in order to understand why hate crimes are committed against lesbians, focus will be directed toward the social construction of sex and its relation to violence (Messerschmidt, 1997). In some instances the 'lesbian' identity has been made invisible in western culture, making the issues faced by lesbians difficult to address (Castle, 1993). In other words, the representation of lesbians both in society and literature has been noted as posing a risk to patriarchy (Eliason, Donelan & Randall, 1992). For centuries there has been fear of women who do not need men within western civilization (Calhoun, 1995). Moreover, there has been a fear that women could resist men and ultimately live without a desire for male companionship (Castle, 1993).

Violence against lesbians occurs on a scale which can range from being an act that consists of conduct that is fully anti-woman to fully anti-lesbian (Comstock, 1991). Violence against lesbians has been frequently identified, politicized, and studied as being either "anti-woman" or "anti-gay," which fails to discuss the connections that exist between the victims' sexuality and gender (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 796). Furthermore, this can influence the issues of lesbian violence to be placed under issues of violence against women or gay bashing (Ault, 1997; D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). This becomes problematic as violence against women has been noted as being primarily concerned with women who are presumed to be heterosexual, while gay bashing is concerned with the violence affecting gay men (Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). As a result, violence against lesbians has been seen and treated as a secondary concern and coverage

of lesbian victimization is often invisible as a separate category of violence (Bolich, 2007; Calhoun, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Although during the last couple of decades there has been increased concern and attention directed toward violence against lesbians, a large majority of research on homophobic violence and discrimination has only made passing references to lesbians and focused primarily on male homosexuality (Ault, 1997; Boyle, 2005).

In order to address the discrepancy found in hate crime literature, research must focus on the intersection of sex and sexuality to get a more holistic approach to anti-lesbian violence. Research and literature needs to provide a more in-depth understanding of hate crimes against lesbians (Sinclair & Hertl, 2010). Qualitative methods have been suggested to provide a more holistic view of hate crimes committed against lesbians (Bartle, 2000). It is suggested that bias plays a role in the under-reporting of hate crimes by lesbians. Researchers fail to frame questions in a way that properly accounts for the frequency in which lesbians experience sexual harassment (Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). Qualitative research allows individual experiences to be brought forward (Hardy & Bryman, 2004). As such, qualitative research may lead to the formation and framing of questions within hate crime reports which will properly account for the unique experiences of lesbian victims (Bartle, 2000). Lesbian issues need to be separated from gay men's issues since attitudes toward women and men differ throughout society (Herek, 1990). More feminist lesbian analysis is needed to address the male-centered research analyzing gendered bias that is present.

## 2.2 Social Construction of Gender, Sex, and Female Sexuality

Gender, according to Schur (as cited in DeKeseredy, 2011, p. 29), is the “sociocultural and psychological shaping, patterning, and evaluating of female and male behavior.” It has been argued that gender identity is not natural, and instead it is reflective of wider social processes

(Goffman, 1978). In other words, gender is not something which we possess from birth, but rather it is a social process where specific attributes and behaviors are performed based on what is believed to be appropriate for our gender identity (Butler, 1995; Carr, 1999; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Throughout mainstream culture sex is classified into two categories, male and female. These categories are then further defined by their association with a specific set of characteristics labeled as either masculine or feminine (Blumenfeld, 1992). Female roles are associated with behaviours that are sensitive, nurturing, and emotional, while male roles are associated with physical strength, dominance, and control (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). These gender roles and the conceptualization of feminine and masculine behaviours support and maintain male domination and power over females (Goffman, 1978). Subsequently, social roles are then assigned to each sex based on the specific social constructs of gender. Social roles are patterns of behaviour, specifically a gender role with which people are expected to identify, and conform to, based on dominant views of feminine and masculine identities (Jackson, 2006; Messerschmidt, 1993). The term sex refers to biological characteristics between men and women which are determined from birth (Uzzell & Horne, 2006). In other words, sex is biologically ascribed and is created through the application of biological criteria's that are socially agreed on and used to classify women and men (Torgimson & Minson, 2005).

In order to understand that individuals can identify as female without actually being assigned the gender of female at birth, it is important to discuss gender as a socially constructed phenomenon (Goffman, 1978). With this in mind, gender performativity, introduced by Butler (1995), helps us to understand the sociological aspects of gender within current society and culture. Gender as performative is associated with the idea that gender is not natural; rather it is linked to sex-assignment that occurs at birth and that is then internalized over time (Butler,

1995). This assignment of sex at birth is decided by the appearance of an individual's external genitalia. Gender is achieved when an individual demonstrates their sex under the sociocultural expectations given (Norton, 2008). In other words, an individual performs the gender through culturally accepted behaviours associated with that specific sex (masculine and feminine) (Bolich, 2007). The male identity, and its association with power, has become a dominant ideology used to maintain society's sexist structure embedded within Western culture (Messerschmidt, 2012). Meanwhile, in order to understand this dominant ideology in relation to female sexuality and gender identity, scholars have directed attention toward the lesbian body and its connection/representation of social relations (Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). Men and women are continually encouraged to accept and conduct forms of nonverbal and verbal behaviour styles that replicate, and ultimately support, the current social and cultural norms (Lindsey & Christy, 2011). The categorization of sex within the current western culture is used as social identification, guiding interactions that are based on 'doing gender' (Messerschmidt, 1997; Tomson & Mason, 1997). Gender is not only systematically accomplished but is also reproduced and regulated by the cultural and structural context in which it takes place (Messerschmidt, 1993; Perry, 2001). Moreover, male violence within this framework can be used to support and maintain the heteronormative masculine status (Cowan, et al., 2005). The male identity is viewed as a routine accomplishment which males achieve by presenting a socially accepted masculine image (DeKeseredy, 2011; Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005).

Social discourses of femininity and masculinity presented throughout mainstream culture support the notion that women should be submissive to men (exemplifying femininity) and that men should be aggressive and dominating over women (displaying masculinity). Cultural scripts of gender roles (connected to one's biological sex) are learned by individuals at a young age and

reinforced throughout their lives (Eguchi, 2006). For example, boys are commonly shown within the media as playing with trucks and girls playing with dolls. These cultural scripts of gender roles also reinforce heterosexuality as the norm, discouraging deviation from these scripts and punishing individuals who fail to conform (Boyle, 2005; Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Ryle, 2012). Heteronormativity is based on producing, and maintaining the fundamental ideology, value, and belief which discriminates against homosexuality (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). The social status and positioning of homosexuals within current Western culture have significant implications for the norms with which they are associated (Ryle, 2012).

When it comes to understanding and analyzing the intersection of lesbian identity and gender identity, there are two possibilities that emerge when defining self (Stein, 1997; Shapiro, Rios, & Stewart, 2010; Tate, 2012). The first possibility is that in order to be defined as lesbian, one must identify as female and recognize an attraction to other individuals who identify themselves as female (Stein, 1997). The second possibility is that any time in an individual's life can serve as the basis for identifying one's self as lesbian within a social construct (Tate, 2012). The latter point is important in understanding gender performance. In this way an individual coordinates meanings and understanding through others, ultimately influencing experiences. In other words, the social construction of gender is both internally and socially constructed. A social construct is produced by social practices that are unintended or intended by the individual(s) producing it (Blumenfeld, 1992; Stein, 1997; Weston, 2009).

Providing a multidimensional perspective for studying the sexual identity of lesbians is the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones, et al., 2002). This model exposes the changing contexts of influence and the complex construction of multiple identity dimensions (class, race, religion, sexual orientation, culture) (Jones & Abes, 2004). Incorporating the context

of personal experiences in life experiences, such as family and sociocultural conditions, provides a more holistic perspective on the construction of lesbian identity. Identifying outside normative heterosexist expectations has been identified in research as a possible contributing factor in the complexity that surrounds lesbians' construction of identity (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). These normative heterosexual expectations are influenced by contextual influences. Examples of contextual influences are factors such as peers, stereotypes, family, and social norms (Jones, et al., 2002). Furthermore, it is the mixture of contextual influences and meaning-making structures which control the construction of identity generated internally and externally (Jackson, 2006; Jones & Abes, 2004). These structures work as filters between self-perceptions of lesbian identity and external influences. Lesbians, like heterosexual women and men are dependent on dominant gender codes produced within a patriarchal discourse (Abelove, Barale & Halperin, 1993). This dependence occurs in a large majority institutions and cultural norms through heterocentric glasses and is highlighted through the social classification of individuals as being either masculine or feminine. The categorization of gender for lesbians, like that of any other socially and culturally produced identity, is constructed in and through performances (Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Treadwell, 2012). A central component to the formation of this identity is the categorization of lesbian based on heterosexual standards of relationships (Mohondro, 2011; Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). For example, lesbians are often referred to or identified as, "butch" (masculine) or "femme" (feminine) (Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004).

Upon examining the reported and recorded incidents of hate crimes committed against lesbians, as well as numerous studies conducted, show that there is an overwhelming number of male perpetrators in cases of violence against lesbians (Comstock, 1991; Herek & Berrill, 1992). For example, even looking at all hate crime perpetrators, 81% in the National Crime

Victimization Survey (NCVS) and 84% for the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), were male (Harlow, 2005). Moreover, 50% of female hate crime victims reported that they were victimized by a male (Harlow, 2005). It may be concluded in some instances that male violence against lesbians is used as a way to physically and mentally ‘punish’ them for their failure to conform to heteronormative ideologies of female sexuality. The notion of what is deemed as ‘appropriate’ for women sexually is based on gender roles. Gender roles are based on a collection of norms that create and are associated with sex roles, which set certain expectations about how women and men should behave sexually (Lindsey & Christy, 2011). These expectations of behaviours and attitudes are ones based on heterosexuality (O'Brien, 2009; Ryle, 2012). Gender roles dictate which gender an individual ‘should’ be attracted to (Beere, 1990). Women are expected to be attracted to the opposite sex (men) and face repercussions when they fail to follow this expectation (Lindsey & Christy, 2011).

Nevertheless, there are some women who also perform gender, based on the socially and culturally accepted feminine image (Suter, 2008). Anti-lesbian violence, like anti-gay violence, can be attributed to the multiple causes explained above (Stein, 1997; Tate, 2012; Woodell, 2013). The employment of a political analysis of violence against lesbians provides a more holistic approach by moving past individual behaviours and attitudes, considering social institutions and power dynamics (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). It is these learned cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity that are supported and reinforced by social institutions, such as mainstream media, public schools and the legal system (Silverblatt, 2004). Therefore, it is no surprise that hate crimes frame meaning and influence from the wider arrangement of institutional and social patterns (Perry, 2001). Although there have been a large variety of perspectives, more literature focusing on lesbian identity in relation to cultural heterosexism is

needed (Augelli & Patterson, 1995). A socially recognizable definition of lesbian should be based on the idea of a woman who is attracted to other women sexually, emotionally, and intellectually (Zimmerman, 2000). The classification of individuals based on their sexuality generates divides among them, ultimately reinforcing sexual hierarchies within society (Mohondro, 2011). These hierarchies place homosexuality in an inferior position and reaffirm the idea of heterosexuality as natural (Jenness & Grattet, 2004). A more universalizing approach needs to include significant factors of identity (religion, class, race, gender, and others) in the analysis of sexual identity (Eliason, Donelan & Randall, 1992).

Lesbian identity, as defined by Ponce (1978), is “one’s social and/or personal identity in terms of preference for sexual activity with a particular gender” (p. 27). However, this definition only represents one type of lesbian identity, showing that defining lesbian identity is not as clear-cut as it may seem. Through compulsory heterosexuality, women are commonly positioned within sexual boundaries that are based on social and institutional standards that emphasize heteronormativity and stigmatize the lesbian identity (Jackson, 2006; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). Consideration of using an intersectional approach would provide a more holistic understanding in development (Abelove, Barale & Halperin, 1993). When looking at lesbian identity development, this study considers the flexibility of women’s experiences based on sex and sexuality intersecting with developmental and social experiences (Augelli & Patterson, 1995; Calhoun, 1995). One of the essential themes within identity development is organizational structures. These structures, which are known as institutions (for example, universities and religious institutions), are seen as influencing political and/or personal identities by promoting or discouraging identities that are not heterosexual (Orbe, 2013; Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). The importance of institutional influences and support in the

development of sexual identity is seen on multiple levels, such as social and physical (Norton, 2008). Lesbian identity is significantly different from the institutional and cultural processes of men, both heterosexual and homosexual, and heterosexual women (Stein, 1997; Taylor, 2009). It is these differences between individuals that contribute to changes in the experiences of stigmatization (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005).

Findings have documented the fluidity of female sexuality, yet many current homosexual identity development models are applied to both male and female participants (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). This generic model and its application have ignored the role of gender in identity development, causing another area for the lesbian identity to disappear (Calhoun, 1995). Current conceptions of sexual orientation are seen as mutually exclusive and dichotomous, failing to account for the ways in which human sexuality is a complex social phenomenon (Carr, 1999). The subordination of lesbians (socially, economically, and legally), based on their social positioning as women and their 'deviance' of not adhering to heterosexual standards of female sexuality, places them in a double minority status (Syzmanski, Kashubeck-West & Meryer, 2008). The lesbian identity is seen as socially and culturally deviant within current western culture which is fueled by patriarchy (Eliason, Donelan & Randall, 1992), therefore the cultural model of gender and sexuality is one that favors specific genders (men) and sexualities (heterosexual). The term sexuality is centered on the entire essence of a person, incorporating all human qualities, however, the social construction of sexuality is not unified due to the complexities that surround differences between sexuality and gender (Marchionni, 2006; Ryle, 2012). Based on the multiple complexities surrounding the social construction of female sexuality, women's sexuality must be distinguished from men's (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Castle, 1993). Unlike female sexuality, descriptions of male sexuality reflect their dominant

social placements (Jacobsen, 2012). In some locations male sexuality is viewed as central and essential, while female sexuality is associated with being submissive and adaptive for the purposes of male satisfaction (Jackson, 2006). Unlike male sexuality, female sexuality is underscored and often regulated through institutional and social constraints, emphasizing the importance of body image, sexual expression, and physical appearance (Gunter, 2009). These sexual stereotypes affect behaviours and thoughts, causing women's sexuality to be seen as more flexible compared to men's (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Differences in sex are primarily attributed to differences in biology such as emotional make-up, sex hormones, and sex chromosomes, etc. (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). Moreover, sex differences have been purely based on biological origins (Uzzell & Horne, 2006).

Double standards, based on sexual differences, construct an outline of sexual restrictions, morality, and depiction among women (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). Social and cultural values that shape female sexuality lead to the disempowerment of women and enforce men's empowerment (Seidman, Fischer, & Meeks, 2006). It has been argued that pre-determined limits placed on female sexuality by the wider culture are done so for the purpose of control and regulation (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). This regulation and control leads to the subordination not only of female sexuality, but of women's bodies in general. Discourse on the body is linked to forms of institutional power (Foucault, 1978). Within all forms of knowledge, discursive patterns and relations are circulated (Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). Institutionalized heterosexual structures may encourage individuals to negatively acknowledge differences between lesbian and heterosexual women (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). As shown above, since lesbians hold multiple subordinate group identities, they often face various negative consequences associated

with internalized heterosexism, institutional discrimination, and institutional violence (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West & Meryer, 2008).

### 2.3 Cultural Heterosexism

When focusing on the notion of homophobia within current research on violence and discrimination against lesbians, significant issues emerge (Abelove, Barale & Halperin, 1993); in particular three main problems with the notion of homophobia are noted. Plummer (1999) states homophobia disregards women, fails to properly acknowledge how sexuality intersects with other oppressed groups, and it overlooks the ways in which the larger social and structural conditions contribute to sexual oppression. The term homophobia cannot properly account for the experiences of lesbian victims of hate crimes, as it focuses primarily on the individual, and fails to account for the underlying cultural and social conditions in which sexual differences are stigmatized (Yep, 2002). The term homophobia is rooted in misogyny and is largely used within the context of male homosexuality, failing to incorporate lesbian women (Herek, 1995; Plummer, 1999). Moreover, it removes focus from collective activism of certain groups (i.e. lesbian and gay groups) and promotes social forces that maintain heterosexual norms (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). Heterosexist attitudes embedded within institutions support the subordination of women and lesbians, viewing them as threats to male patriarchy. For this reason heteronormativity and heterosexism provide a better understanding of lesbian victimization. Heteronormativity is the normalization of heterosexuality which assumes all individuals are heterosexual, therefore it stigmatizes and labels those who do not conform as ‘deviant’ (Jackson, 2006).

There are two important types of heterosexism that contribute to discrimination and violence against lesbians. These have been identified as psychological and cultural heterosexism

(Johnson, 2012; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Operating through dual processes, social institutions and customs are instilled into the everyday practices of individuals exemplifying the configuration of cultural heterosexism (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Furthermore, it is through cultural heterosexism that homosexuality becomes obscured, and when acknowledged, it is often stigmatized within society (Cowan, et al., 2005). Cultural and psychological heterosexism are intrinsically linked to one another since cultural heterosexism is manifested individually through psychological heterosexism (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Psychological heterosexism is displayed on an individual level through behaviours and attitudes, while cultural heterosexism is displayed on the societal level through institutions and customs, such as the media, legal system, and religion (Herek, 1995). Although heterosexism is displayed at numerous levels of society, cultural heterosexism is embedded within social customs and institutions, leading to an individual manifestation of feelings and behaviours toward homosexuality, also known as psychological heterosexism (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Structural violence against lesbian women and gay men is a reflection of cultural heterosexism (Cowan, et al., 2005).

When the psychological needs of an individual unite with the ideologies of society, it can result in psychological heterosexism. It is when an individual's self-conception of homosexual prejudice becomes linked with homophobic social values that this prejudice is verbally and/or physically expressed (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995). Individuals are primarily presumed as being heterosexual due to cultural heterosexism. The universal discrimination faced by homosexuals throughout various institutions result in the marginalization of specific individuals that are not heterosexual (Morrow & Messinger, 2006). An important element of oppression is based on the fact that there are benefits received by members of dominant social groups based on their use of oppression (Treadwell, 2012). This highlights the structural element that is present in oppression.

The denial of rights and equality for homosexuals provides heterosexual privilege to individuals who identify as heterosexual (Morrow & Messinger, 2006). Cultural heterosexism creates a context where individual acts of homophobic violence occur and are culturally justified (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). Furthermore, cultural heterosexism highlights the relationship between criminal acts against lesbians through embodied sexual and gendered practices. Religion, the legal system, the education system, and the media are major institutions that produce codes and policies that reinforce values, behaviours, and attitudes that are heterosexist (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Niesen, 1990). Moreover, these institutions hold a large amount of social power and employ structures of consequences and rewards to control and regulate individuals (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988). In order to address the current gap in literature focused on hate crimes against lesbians, particular attention should be given to the ways in which lesbians experience institutional discrimination within religion, the legal system, the education system, and the media.

## Chapter 3: Cultural Institutions

### 3.1 Religion

In order to analyze the potential connection between religion and discrimination, three aspects of religious thinking identified by Kirkpatrick (1993) are: idolizing past and future events, the maintenance of religion-based boundaries, and reacting to perceived threats against values (Kirkpatrick, 1993). These aspects of religious thinking have been noted as contributing to the potential for violence motivated by religious beliefs (Wilkinson, 2004). Although religious fundamentalism exists within oral cultures, a major component has been identified as scriptural literalism which is based on beliefs that religious scriptures (e.g. the Bible) are literal transcriptions of the word of God and are to be taken as ultimate truth (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Throughout history Biblical/scriptural interpretations of writings have been used to justify the subordination of women, support racism and slavery, and the condemnation of homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Individuals who consult religious scriptures may do so for behavioural guidance and as such, these scriptures are more likely to be followed based on the belief that this guidance originates from a sacred source (Hill, et al., 2006). Specifically, institutional religion has historically been used as a mechanism for heterosexist oppression and intolerance of individuals who identify as being attracted to the same-sex (Davidson, 2000).

Different faiths have unique views and beliefs on human sexuality, which has been seen as an important influence on the way people view sex (Baldwin & Baldwin, 2012). The Bible has been used as a way for individuals to interpret issues pertaining to human sexuality (Davidson, 2000). There are numerous passages in the Scripture that discuss homosexuality in practice (Machacek & Wilcox, 2005). Lesbianism and homosexuality are viewed as a violation of God's chastity law (Boyd, Berk & Hamner, 1996). Passages in the Old and New Testaments, that some

believe are focused on homosexual behaviour are: Genesis 19, Jude 1:7 Romans 1:26-27, and Corinthians 6:9–11 (Bible, 1995). In the New Testament, Romans 1:26–28, 32: Paul points to desires that are homosexual as being an individual’s refusal to worship and acknowledge God (Fox & Virtue, 2002). Furthermore, a specific example found in the New Testament, Romans 1:26-27, states that “[w]omen had also exchanged sexual relations that were deemed “unnatural” (sexual relations with a woman instead of a man) (Fox & Virtue, 2002). Passages in the Old Testament, particularly Leviticus (Genesis 19), tell the story of Sodom and Gomorrah which has been viewed as condemning the practice of homosexuality (Robertson, 2007).

Throughout the years, the religious right has brought up numerous challenges against gay and lesbian rights framed by heterosexist interpretations (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Babst, Gill & Pierceson, 2009). A large majority of these challenges were successful due to the resources and connections that religious rights groups had with the Republican Party (Fetner, 2008). The 1990s saw a particularly noticeable change in a number of statewide policies. In the United States religious groups played an active role in obstructing anti-discrimination protections at the federal level. Religious groups started initiatives that placed bans on same-sex marriage (Engebretson, 2010). These debates resulted in the emergence of obstacles for the advancement of gay and lesbian equality because of religious beliefs, as well as constraints being placed on LGBTQ involvement within institutions (Dillion & Savage, 2006; Engebretson, 2010). Religious right groups were active in the marginalization of gays and lesbians, ultimately removing their rights and presence within social institutions (Fetner, 2008; Wilkinson, 2004; Woodell, 2013). There have been numerous debates and attacks on gay and lesbian rights which have limited LGBTQ equality (Babst, Gill & Pierceson, 2009).

Previous research conducted in the United States emphasizes that religion is one of the strongest predictors of attitudes towards homosexuality (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Research conducted by Adamczyk and Felson (2006) demonstrates the influence social institutions can have on individual attitudes and behaviours. Results of the study found that even individuals that are not personally religious can be influenced by the religious culture in which they live (Adamczyk & Felson, 2006). Within developed countries (United States, Australia, Germany), religion may have a greater effect on attitudes due to higher levels of diversity, views, and self-expression (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). As nations undergo modernization and industrialization, individual values and attitudes may shift to an increase in tolerance, trust, and rationale (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Within more religious regions, individuals are shown to hold more conservative attitudes toward gender (ARDA, 2000; Babst, Gill & Pierceson, 2009). Personal religious beliefs may have an effect on disapproving attitudes toward homosexuality in countries that are characterized by strong self-expressive orientation (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009).

Overall, a majority of American religions have taken conservative actions against sexual minorities, ultimately condemning and labeling same-sex behaviours as a sin (Marrow, 2003). Empirical research has shown that some forms of authoritarianism and religion are associated with homosexual prejudice, while others are associated with greater acceptance (Kirkpatrick, 1993; Wilkinson, 2004). For example, mainstream Protestant, Judaism, and Catholicism are viewed by scholars as more liberal compared to Catholic and Christian denominations which are noted as being less accepting of homosexuality (Hill et al., 2005; Marrow, 1996). The lower acceptance of homosexuality by some Christian denominations is of importance to this study, as both Wilmington, North Carolina and Lakeland, Florida have a large number of residents who identify as belonging to this religion (Christensen, 2007; Dockery, 2009; Stuart, 2010).

Furthermore, the study of religious impact on homophobia is important considering the recent connections and influences religion has had on the creation and withdrawal of hate crime laws and policies within the United States (Johnson, 2012). Mainstream Western society has historically, and more recently, seen an increase in clashes between gay rights groups and religion within the American legal system. For example, religious groups had an active role in supporting the implementation of Proposition 8, which sought to ban same-sex marriage (Baim, Colbert & Bensen, 2010). To this end, religious groups' lobbying for their legal issues has been employed through the Church's ideological control over the state (Harris, 2014; Rohrer, 2013; Wilkinson, 2004). Religions and legal institutions foster discrimination (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Myers, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to examine religion and law separately in order to consider them in an individual context.

### 3.2 The Legal System and Hate Crime Laws

There are a number of statutes and laws in the United States that foster discrimination against individuals based on sexual orientation (O'Brien, 2009). Clear examples of legal discrimination can be seen in adoption and custodial rights over children, in Social Security benefits, gay panic defense pleas (used in court to justify the murder or assault of someone who is homosexual), Sodomy laws (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986; *Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003), and the recent Defense of Marriage Act (Harris, 2014; Kunin & Baumgardner, 2013). Institutionalized heterosexuality has a significant role in influencing and forming laws and policies which limit and restrict access to civil rights based on an individual's adherence to specific gender and sexual norms (Lind, 2004; O'Brien, 2009). Heterosexist biases found within federal policy and laws restrict the rights of LGBTQ individuals by legally and culturally defining socially acceptable forms of marriage, family, and other guidelines to which individuals should adhere

(Lind, 2004). The effects of heterosexist bias can be seen in the implementation of previous social policies aimed at removing equal rights from LGBTQ individuals and families in the United States (Koppelman, 2010; Myers, 2013).

Although the LGBTQ community have made some progress towards obtaining certain rights, through the implementation of laws and policies seeking to prevent discrimination and bias, institutionalized heterosexuality within the legal system continues to impact rights to social and cultural equality for all LGBTQ individuals (Herek, 1995; Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). There are important laws that impact the treatment of certain groups at the institutional and individual levels, such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” 2010, in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), the Respect for Marriage Act, 2013 (which repeals the Defense of Marriage Act), and the Safe Schools Improvement Act 2013 (Fitzgerel, 2012; Man, 2013; Montopoli, 2012). Of these, the inclusion of anti-gay victimization as a category in hate crime legislation has been hailed as a victory for LGBTQ civil rights (Jenness & Grattet, 2004).

Another important and more recent law that highlights the heterosexuality embedded within the legal system is the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA privileges and supports the families and unions of specific groups of individuals while marginalizing and penalizing others (Lind, 2004). The implementation and passage of DOMA which defines marriage as between one woman and one man, is one example of institutional heterosexism (Koppelman, 2010; Myers, 2013; O’Brien, 2009). From the enactment DOMA in 1996, until it was ruled unconstitutional in 2013, it was reported that around 40 states had passed explicit prohibitions on same-sex marriage (Harris, 2014; Kunin & Baumgardner, 2013). Supporters of DOMA claimed that the only appropriate marriage was heterosexual for the purposes of family formation and reproduction (Myers, 2013; O’Brien, 2009). Under this view, allowing same-sex marriages to

occur would undermine heterosexual marriages. Furthermore, it is believed that same-sex marriages would promote the acceptance and normalization of unconventional families as well as deviant relationships (Harris, 2014; Koppelman, 2010). Moreover, these heterosexist ideologies that are enforced through the law are then used to shape gender and sexual norms for future and current generations of individuals.

Hate crimes are defined as “words or actions intended to harm or intimidate an individual because of her or his membership in a minority group; they include violent assaults, murder, rape, and property crimes motivated by prejudice, as well as threats of violence and other acts of intimidation” (Finn & McNeil, 1987, p. 2). Currently, there are two federal hate crime laws in the U.S., the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (P.L. 101-275) enacted in 1990, and the 1995 Hate Crimes Sentencing Enactment Act (P.L. 103-322). Previously, there were efforts to include sexual orientation in hate crimes legislation on both the state and federal level (H.R.C., 2013). In 1992, penalties for homophobic violence succeeded in 12 states through the introduction of hate crimes legislation (Ault, 1996). As of 2001, 40 states (including the District of Columbia) had included religion, ethnicity, and race in legislation on hate crimes, while 24 had also included sexual orientation (Cowan, et al., 2005). As of 2005, while 41 states had hate crime status, only 19 states as well as the District of Columbia actually include sexual orientation (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001).

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (S. 909, H.R. 1913) was signed into law in 2009 by President Obama (King, 2010; Miller, 2012). The law was in response to the 1998 anti-gay murder of Wyoming resident Matthew Shepard and the racially motivated murder of Texas resident James Byrd Jr. (Hulse, 2009; Jackson, 2009; King, 2010). Matthew Shepard, an openly gay college student, was tied to a fence and brutally beaten by two

men who left him there to die because of his sexual orientation (Loffreda, 2001; Petersen, 2011). That same year, James Byrd Jr. was tied to the back of a pickup truck and dragged to death by three white men in Texas (Hulse, 2009). The brutality behind these hate-motivated crimes led to increased pressure to enact stricter federal hate crimes legislation (Jackson, 2009; Miller, 2012). The law provides a number of new measures that expand on the Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 (Petersen, 2011). For the first time ever, at the federal level, transgendered persons in the U.S. were explicitly protected under this law (Gerstenfeld, 2013). The Department of Justice, under this law, is granted new powers to not only investigate but also to prosecute acts of violence which are believed to be motivated by hate (Miller, 2012). Furthermore, local law enforcement officials are provided with the resources and support to improve investigations of hate crimes (Petersen, 2011). It ensures that any hate crimes against LGBTQ persons will be covered under federal jurisdiction, so that if local governments do not prosecute these crimes, the authorities at the federal level can intervene (Gerstenfeld, 2013; King, 2010).

There have been numerous individuals and groups who were opposed to sexual orientation being included in the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (Perry, 2003; Schier, 2011). Conservative politicians and religious organizations consistently spoke out against the Act, and even President Bush suggested that any hate crimes legislation proposed to him would be vetoed (Schier, 2011). The founder of the socially conservative organization Focus on the Family, strongly opposed the Matthew Shepard Act, stating it would "muzzle people of faith who dare express their moral and biblical concerns about homosexuality" (Bob, 2012, p. 94). Although the Act was passed, despite opposition, it included language used to indicate that this measure does not promote tolerance, or encourage the lifestyles, of lesbians and gays (Brandzel, 2006; Perry, 2003).

Unfortunately, both hate crime laws are flawed. Therefore, the application of these laws for aiding government officials in recording and responding to hate crimes against lesbians is insufficient (Stotzer, 2012). The Hate Crimes Statistics Act is maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice (Rayburn, Mendoza & Davidson, 2003). However, local/state agencies are not required to report statistics on hate crimes to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (Jacobs & Henry, 1995). The U.S. Sentencing Commission is required under the Hate Crimes Sentencing Enactment Act (P.L. 103-322) to enhance the sentences for crimes which are determined beyond a reasonable doubt to be hate crimes. Making hate crimes only punishable beyond a reasonable doubt has led to a decrease in the numbers of hate crimes against lesbians that are recorded compared to hate crimes against gay men (Levin & McDevitt, 1999). Based on this, the law can be seen as an instrument of suppression, fostering marginalization and stigmatization of specific groups, particularly lesbians (Finn & McNeil, 1987; Graff, 1993). Hate crimes policies frequently ignore hate-motivated incidents of misogyny and work to promote ending heterosexism without directing attention to challenging issues of male domination (Ault, 1996). For example, violent acts against women are not included as a category under the Hate Crime Statistics Act (Hull, 2009). It was suggested that hate crime data based on gender would be difficult to obtain as violence against women is a pervasive issue (Ault, 1996; Hall, 1992).

Recently there has been a growth in the number of gay and lesbian anti-violence projects, research on homophobic violence, and the implementation of new laws and policies within the United States (Russo, 2006; Yep, 2002). Unfortunately, these advancements focusing on homophobic violence place violence against lesbians in the same category as gay men; this leads to decreased visibility of violence against lesbians in ‘official’ hate crime statistics (Luzzatto & Gvion, 2004). Similar to lesbian representation in other areas, current hate crime policies in the

United States, support the idea that lesbian women are more like gay men than heterosexual women (Ault, 1996; Meyers, 1996). Overall, when looking at the growth of literature on hate crimes, there is an absence of attention directed toward lesbian violence (Henley, et al., 2007). Hate crime policies and laws collapse categories (such as gender) of victims of anti-gay violence (Boyd, Berk & Hamner, 1996). Failing to take into account the differences between the experiences of men and women, the development of literature on hate crimes promotes the view that gay men are the most frequent targets of hate violence (Finn & McNeil, 1987; Henley, 2002; Herek, 1990). These reports produce heightened attention toward educated, middle-class, white men who provide statistics resulting in lesbian-focused legislation becoming obscured by the categorization of lesbians both as ‘gay’ and as ‘women’ (Ault, 1996; Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010).

### 3.3 The Education System

The education system in the U.S. has been criticized as failing to provide equal protections to LGBTQ individuals (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000). The reinforcement of homophobia within a school setting is particularly concerning for LGBTQ students struggling in everyday social interactions (Eguchi, 2006; Kashyap, Mir & Iyer, 2006). A study conducted by Russo (2006), on non-discrimination policies among 50 states and the District of Columbia found that 40 of the states (78%) did not afford LGBTQ students anti-discrimination protections based on sexual orientation. Furthermore, South Central, Southeast, South Midwest, and North Midwest states were less likely to be sensitive to public protections and policies based on sexual identity for students compared to the northeast (Russo, 2006). Previous research has found that being free of harassment and feeling safe in one’s environment is an important factor to all students’ personal and mental development (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000; Yep, 2002). However

despite this, within the United States, policies and state public protections are less likely to provide protection of LGBTQ students within schools (Eguchi, 2006).

The acknowledgement of difference and diversity within the U.S. education system has become an increasingly emergent priority within western society, yet limited attention has been given within some areas in the U.S. to the production and enforcement of gender and sexuality within schools (Russo, 2006; Yep, 2002). Primary schools have been demonstrated as institutions which aid in the social and cultural construction of masculine and feminine norms (Wallis & VanEvery, 2000). Embodied gender practices are developed and influenced at an early age through interactions between a child, other children, adults, and parents (Karlson & Simonsson, 2008; Yep, 2002). It is through early interactions that children take on the practices represented and promoted within society (Messerschmidt, 2012). Children learn to place themselves within a social field based on gender and sex, in relation to others (Jackson, 2006). The early recognition and enforcement of heterosexuality and gendered behaviours are displayed within the education system and the practices used (Rivers & Duncan, 2013). Young children are seen as needing protection from that which is viewed as ‘dangerous’ or ‘inappropriate’ sexual identities (Russo, 2006).

The construction and enforcement of sexual discourses can also be applied to gendered identities. Sexual and gender identities can be understood through the notion of pedagogy, which is the science of education, focusing on the socialization of children (Foucault, 1978). Pedagogies work toward producing social ‘normalcy’ in school children (Bryson & de Castell, 1993). School Institutions operate in a way that heteronormalizes youth and works toward legitimizing heterosexuality through the knowledge they produce (Anderson, 2009). Roles

associated with gender have been unconsciously and consciously brought into classroom dynamics by both students and teachers (Kashyap, Mir & Iyer, 2006).

Through classroom observations, it has been shown that learning and teaching practices within large numbers of schools in the U.S. are gender-biased (Mortimore, 1999). In other words, some methodologies do not provide boys and girls with equal chances to participate (Kincheloe, 2005). Some teachers may not actually be aware that the language being employed can support the formation of negative attitudes toward gender (Kashyap, Mir & Iyer, 2006). Gender roles are reinforced through such things as curricula, class management styles, and course texts (Russo, 2006). Some material for learning and teaching, used in the classroom, may in fact reinforce gender stereotypes (Kashyap, Mir & Iyer, 2006; Mortimore, 1999). For example, texts may show only men in certain work positions, like a doctor, judge, or police officer and females may only be portrayed cooking, cleaning, and working as nurses or secretaries (Kincheloe, 2005). Boys and girls are brought up differently and as a result learn different things. It is through dominant power structures that knowledge is influenced and produced, leading to categorizations that confine individuals' competencies and behaviours, based on their socially 'assigned' gender (Karlson & Simonsson, 2008). Gender, through culturally assenting concepts of masculine and feminine identities is heterosexualized, directly affecting the notions of homosexuality (Kimmel, Hearn & Connell, 2005). Penalties for failing to conform to gender norms are learned at a young age through bullying (Rivers & Duncan, 2013). Previous surveys conducted on school children highlights the link between gender non-conformity and violence against lesbians (Comstock, 1991).

One study conducted by Taylor (2009) found that a high number of LGBTQ students feel unsafe within the school system and there are numerous schools that do not have anti-

homophobia policies. Those schools that do not have anti-homophobia policies were found to be less safe than those that did (Rivers & Duncan, 2013). A survey conducted by Herek (1998) found that anti-gay slurs among school children were the most feared form of harassment. Although many schools acknowledge the need to promote and teach tolerance, this continues to be a controversial issue based on the assumption that even discussing homosexuality would promote ideas of sexual deviance among students (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). The failure to provide students with accurate information on homosexuality causes a major barrier to making LGBTQ students feel safe or providing them with equal protection (Eyre, 1993; Rivers & Duncan, 2013).

### 3.4 The Media

The media is one of the most important ways in which people receive news and information from everywhere around the world (Silverblatt, 2004). The history and evolution of the media has affected the representation of certain groups of individuals and their treatment within society (Gross & Woods, 1999). The way humans attempt to clarify and understand the world through events, individuals, and objects is based on representation (Fourie, 2001). One may argue that the representation of individuals within the media generates social expectations regarding the identity and behaviours of that particular group (Suter, 2008). Thus, negative representations can lead to the stigmatization and marginalization of individuals who belong to certain groups (Taylor, 2009). Therefore, looking at the representation of lesbians within the media is an essential element in understanding the construction and maintenance of social norms influencing the treatment of lesbians. Hall (1992) notes that mass media is a part of culture, which is a social construct that shapes the social dimensions of sexuality, gender, and race.

Traditionally, research on the media and its influence on sexuality and gender have focused on questions surrounding the representation of women (Jacobsen, 2012; Miller & Mullins, 2006). In the past, lesbians and gay men were often invisible within the media and when mentioned were more likely to appear as dramatic or negative figures (Fourie, 2001; Gross & Woods, 1999). It was only recently that the media began to direct some attention toward representing lesbians and gays in a more positive way (Hetcher & Opp, 2001). However, it is important to note that there are numerous differences in the news media's depiction of lesbians compared to gay men. When looking at the media representation of lesbians, we must look at the construction of gender and sexuality within the media (Sinkhorn, 2011; Stein, 1997).

There is minimal depiction of those who do not meet the sexualized ideal of female sexuality (Gill, 2007). In order to appeal to a heterosexual male audience, the media representations of lesbians have increasingly been shown as lipstick lesbians and other lesbian identities are invisible (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009). Lipstick lesbians are shown as young, conventionally feminine, attractive women who do not break the acceptable boundaries of sexuality (Jacobsen, 2012). Yet the portrayals of women in the media primarily depict those within heterosexual norms (Gill, 2007). In this view it can be concluded that lesbian stereotypes adhere to male desire in which lesbians are often eroticized. Themes of objectification and dominance over women's sexuality play a large role in the formation of cultural norms toward gender and sexuality (Blackwood, 2002). The experiences of lesbians are shaped by their positioning in both a sexual-minority subculture and a male dominated heterosexual society (Fingerhut, Peplau & Ghavami, 2005). This dual-identity held by lesbians often creates difficulties in conceptualizing the double-victimization that occurs in numerous areas of their lives.

Drawing on Goffman's (1978) analysis of gender display, it can be concluded that when those 'traditional' standards of femininity are not met by women in media images, individuals within the wider culture are more likely to respond negatively (Henley, et al., 2002). Therefore, some individuals are conditioned to believe that women, who fail to conform to these heterosexual standards of femininity shown within popular culture, are not real women (Calhoun, 1995). Lesbians are seen in this light as failing to conform to their assigned gender roles of being dependent on a male partner for sexual gratification. Female sexuality is seen as something which men are entitled to (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009; Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). A study conducted by Angelini and Bradley (2010) on homosexual imagery in print advertisements, found that imagery that featured homosexual images resulted in negative responses, impacting participants' opinions about the advertisement. Emotional responses were shown to impact consumers' memory, attention, and attitudes of the brand and advertisement. Keeping this in mind, it is suggested that individual membership and identification within a social group permits the enhancement of the group's social standing, as well as differentiating them from other groups (Jones & Abes, 2004). Participants were more likely to remember information that portrayed heterosexual norms and attitudes. Existing mental structures that were held caused individuals to remember information based on familiarity (Angelini & Bradley, 2010). Results suggest that existing mental structures that are rooted within heterosexism and individuals are less likely to remember and assign importance to media reports depicting violence against lesbians.

The representation of homosexuality in the media reflects the ideological framework that serves the interest of appealing to a heterosexual audience (Suter, 2008). Lesbians have been symbolically positioned beneath heterosexual norms. It is through the media that homosexuality has become heterosexualized, and homophobic assaults and attitudes are thus no longer viewed

as news (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). The media culture marginalizes lesbians by ignoring differences they experience in relation to homosexual men (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). The media represses lesbian representation, automatically assuming that mentioning homosexuality addresses lesbians (Gunter, 2009). The employment of the phrases ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ are deployed blindly by the media, resulting in the invisibility of lesbians (Norton, 2008).

Over the years the news media has been more supportive of gay and lesbian rights (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Numerous reasons have been associated with this recent growth in support, such as events and government action; however, media coverage is dependent on the attention given by media owners and news institutions (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Few studies have been directed toward the impact of the media (Kellner, 2004). In relation to this research, a study focusing on the representation of lesbianism in Georgian print media, conducted by Kharchilava and Javakhishvili (2010), found that out of 272 articles about homosexuality (2008-2009), lesbianism was only mentioned 20% of the time (22 articles). This lack of attention given to lesbianism, although focusing on Georgian print news, could also be reflective of social media outlets throughout the world (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). Society, entrenched in patriarchal practices, represents the female body as ‘territory’ in which men are to conquer (Marchionni, 2006; Meyers, 1996). Under this belief women’s bodies are viewed as social property (Johnson & Ferraro, 2004). Furthermore, how women should behave and appear is based on expectations of a feminine model created by society (Ponse, 1978). Based on this standard, since lesbians cannot be placed within the current paradigm of a ‘women,’ hate crimes committed against them are often overlooked (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010).

As shown above, a large part of social and cultural norms within current Western society are constructed through stories produced and circulated by media institutions (Orbe, 2013).

Social constructions of gender and sexuality are shaped by the media, influencing how individuals construct their own and others social identities (Boyle, 2005). These media representations are central to our social realities and the constructs of sexuality and gender alter with officially recognized ideologies promoted within the media (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Pacey & Flynn, 2012). When it comes to the media, rather than aiding in the repression of hate, it has been a contributing factor in the spread of homophobic and heterosexist ideologies (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). The images and ideas associated with marginal identities are established and produced through the media, which shows the importance of considering the effects that the media has on social norms and perceptions (Briant & Thompson, 2004). The construction of social norms are often produced and maintained through the media, influencing individuals' opinions toward certain groups and how people interact with each other (Dines & Humez, 2003). The media has the ability to be selective in the information it provides the viewer in terms of representing marginalized groups, research has suggested that the media has an interest in maintaining a heterosexual balance of power (Brooks & Hébert, 2006). As a result, social institutions, particularly the media, influence the maintenance of heterosexual ideologies (Rentschler, 2011; Suter, 2008). Understanding the roles played by social institutions in shaping social perceptions of gender and sexuality is complex, yet important (Marchionni, 2006).

## Chapter 4: Methodology & Data Collection

### 4.1 Kreeger Case

On February 22nd, 1990, Talana Quay Kreeger, a thirty-two-year-old woman was raped, disemboweled, and left in a field in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she bled to death. Her body was found the next day by the police who were told of the location by Ronald Shelton Thomas, a long-haul truck driver. Kreeger had been murdered by Thomas after she had taken a ride from him on February 21st, 1990 (North Carolina v. Thomas, 1992). Kreeger met Thomas at a local bar, the Park View Grill, where she was accompanied by the owners of the bar, Wanda Whitley and Heidi Crossley. The three women were drinking beer and playing pool when they noticed the defendant's truck in the parking lot and commented on it (Sprinkle, 2011). Thomas stated to the authorities that he and the three women were drunk. He said that he had consumed approximately ten beers in an hours' time (North Carolina v. Thomas, 1992).

After the bar closed, Whitley, Crossley, Kreeger, and Thomas decided to go get some food to eat at Hardee's, a couple miles away (West's South Eastern Reporter, 2007). At approximately 1:30 a.m. Kreeger and Thomas left the bar and headed toward the restaurant in his truck, while Whitley and Crossley decided to go meet them at the restaurant (Sprinkle, 2011). While Kreeger and Thomas were heading to the restaurant, he claimed to police that he got into an argument with the victim about homosexuality (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). Thomas stated in the police report that he knew Kreeger and her friends were lesbians by the way they were acting at the bar that night, he told Kreeger that he disapproved of that lifestyle and asked the victim why a man wouldn't satisfy her (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). Following this statement, a heated debate ensued and Thomas grabbed Kreeger's breasts, after which she slapped him across the face (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). Enraged, Thomas

slapped her back causing her to fall into the sleeper at the back of his truck. Thomas then began to beat the victim around the head with his hands (Sprinkle, 2011). The victim, bleeding from the mouth and head was then tortured and brutally raped. After the assault the defendant turned on the light in his truck and saw copious amounts of blood everywhere (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). With the truck parked, the victim crawled out of the passenger seat and fell to the ground (Sprinkle, 2011). Grabbing the victim by her arms Thomas dragged her into the woods (West's South Eastern Reporter, 2007). The defendant stated to authorities that when he left the victim she was still conscious, begging for her life, and telling the defendant to, "Leave me alone, let me die" (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992, p. 553). Thomas left Kreeger in the woods barely alive, naked, and covered in blood. He drove away from the scene and continued on his delivery route (West's South Eastern Reporter, 2007).

The following morning when Kreeger failed to emerge, Whitley remembered the defendant discussing his delivery route and called Hoggard High School where Thomas was expected to make a fruit delivery. Whitley spoke to Thomas on the phone and he identified himself as the delivery driver. However, he denied knowing anything about Kreeger or being at the bar the night before (Sprinkle, 2011). After speaking with Kreeger's friend, Thomas made a call to a local Minister, Kenneth Spivey (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992) and admitted he had killed a woman the previous night and needed help. Spivey met the defendant at Robinhood Truck Stop accompanied by Deputy McLean (Sprinkle, 2011) at which time Thomas admitted to killing Kreeger to the Deputy (West's South Eastern Reporter, 2007). The defendant also informed him that the victim's clothing was in his truck, as well as a pocketbook containing identification belonging to Kreeger. Deputy McLean dispatched the Wilmington Police

Department with the location of the body that was given to him by the defendant (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992).

Kreeger's body was found on February 22, 1990, by Dennis Pridgen, Wilmington Police (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). When Pridgen approached the victim's body he noted she was face down, covered in leaves and blood. The victim's internal organs appeared to be hanging out of her body (North Carolina v. Thomas, 1992). Dr. Charles Garrett noted multiple lacerations to the victim's forehead, eyebrow, and upper lip (Sprinkle, 2011). An autopsy revealed that approximately twenty inches of her small intestine and right kidney were pulled out of her body as well as part of her rectum and vagina, which was torn open four to five inches (North Carolina Supreme Court, 1992). The pathologist found that the victim had bled to death from internal damage to the colon and kidney, causing severe pain, leaving her conscious for ten to twenty minutes (Sprinkle, 2011).

For the analysis of this case, online print newspaper articles from Star News were located using public search engines (Lexis Nexus, Star News Archives, and Google News Archive). A sample of news articles were obtained by searching for newspaper reports including keywords "Talana Quay Kreeger," "Talana Kreeger," "Kreeger," "Ronald Shelton Thomas," and "Ronald Thomas." Star News was selected as a source for analysis because it was identified as the local newspaper for the town of Wilmington, North Carolina where the murder occurred. Data was limited to local newspaper articles due to an absence of national newspaper coverage. Searches were also conducted on other newspapers within North Carolina but produced no results. A search was conducted in the Star News online website first using the key words "Talana Kreeger" and again using "Talana Quay." This provided a total of five articles. A Lexis Nexus search was then conducted using the key words, and a total of two articles were found. Finally, a

Google search was then conducted using the newspaper archives and entering the key words “Talana Kreeger.” Newspaper articles belonging to Star News were then collected, providing 21 articles that mentioned the victim. Another Google newspaper archive search was conducted using the keywords “Ronald Shelton Thomas.” Newspaper articles belonging to Star News were then collected, providing eight articles that mentioned the perpetrator. A total of 34 articles were collected for analysis. After sorting articles by date and article heading, duplicate articles were removed, eliminating ten articles and leaving 26 for analysis. Each article retrieved on Lexus Nexus, the newspaper database, and Google News Archive was given through website links and did not consist of actual PDF files. The search was conducted during December 2012 and included all articles from 1990 to date.

#### 4.2 Bright Case

On the morning of Thursday April 22, 2010, the body of twenty-four-year-old Courtney Elizabeth Bright was discovered in the closet of a foreclosed home in Lakeland, Florida. Reports from the Polk County Coroner indicated that Bright was strangled to death (Shelton, 2013). Bright’s body was found naked, with only a pair of socks on and a T-shirt over her head. Based on witness’ statements and evidence recovered, detectives obtained a warrant for the arrest of Jerry Lee Seger, and charged him with First Degree Murder (Chambliss, 2010). Seger, the father of the victim’s girlfriend Ashley Dunn, admitted to killing his daughter’s girlfriend of three years, stating that he disapproved of their relationship (Shelton, 2013). Detectives interviewed a friend of the victim, Shawn Thompson, who told them he last spoke to Bright on the phone on Tuesday, April 20, 2010, when she called him asking for a place to stay and some money (Walter, 2010). After Thompson spoke with Bright, Seger and another man, Rabon Strain, had shown up at his house (Eleazer, 2010).

Seeger stated that Bright was to blame for his daughter's arrest. He then began asking Thompson if he had heard from Bright (Walter, 2010). Thompson told him about his telephone conversation with Bright and that he was going to pick her up. Seeger told Thompson that instead he would pick up Bright and give her a bus ticket to leave town (Fields, 2010). Strain, accompanied Seeger to Thompson's house and later when he picked up Bright on April 20. Strain said that Seeger made several statements about Bright such as that he blamed his daughter Ashley's arrest on her and that he had never liked her (Chambliss, 2010). Strain told detectives that throughout Tuesday, April 20, Seeger continued to drink alcohol and stated that he was going to kill Bright (Fields, 2010). After picking up Bright, Strain asked Seeger to take him to a friend's house hoping that he could calm Seeger down (Eleazer, 2010). Unfortunately, after dropping Strain off, Seeger drove away in his car with Bright. About an hour-and-a-half later, after being dropped off at his friend's house, Strain received a call from Seeger indicating to him that they needed to talk. When Seeger arrived, Strain stated in the report that when he looked in the back of Seeger's Ford Explorer where he saw women's shoes, clothing, and a wallet (Fields, 2010). Strain then asked Seeger what had happened to Bright. Seeger stated that he had strangled her to death and disposed of her body (Shelton, 2013).

For the analysis in this study, online print newspaper articles from The Ledger, Orlando Sentinel and The Gainesville Sun were located using public search engines (Newspaper Archives, Lexus Nexus, and Google News Archive). A sample of articles was obtained by searching for newspaper reports including keywords "Courtney Elizabeth Bright," "Jerry Lee Seeger," "Courtney Bright," and "Jerry Seeger." Duplicate articles were eliminated, leaving a total of 20 articles for analysis. Print news articles were selected for analysis instead of online coverage in order to look at the institutional portrayal of these crimes. The Ledger, Orlando

Sentinel, and Gainesville Sun were selected as sources for analysis because they were identified as the local newspapers for the town of Lakeland Florida where the murder occurred. Data was limited to local newspaper articles due to an absence of national newspaper coverage. Lakeland is a city in Polk County, Florida, in the United States, and is located between Tampa and Orlando along Interstate 4. Since Lakeland is located near Tampa and Orlando the top newspapers in Tampa (Tampa Bay Times) and Orlando (Orlando Sentinel) were chosen for analysis. A search was conducted in The Ledger online newspaper article archive, first using the key words “Courtney Elizabeth Bright,” and “Courtney Bright.” This provided a total of 23 articles. Another search was conducted using the keywords “Jerry Lee Seger,” and “Jerry Seger.” Newspaper articles were then collected which provided 24 articles that mentioned the perpetrator. A Google search was then conducted using the newspaper archives and entering the key words “Courtney Bright,” and “Jerry Lee Seger.” Newspaper articles belonging to The Ledger were then collected, providing 47 articles in total. Duplicates were removed, leaving 13 articles from the Ledger newspaper for analysis. The Orlando Sentinel newspaper archives were used to search for all newspaper articles that contained the keywords selected. Only one article was found in the Orlando Sentinel newspaper when using the keyword “Courtney Bright.”

The Tampa Bay Times archive was searched using the key terms and produced no results. A third search was conducted using “Google” newspaper archives and produced no results. Since no results appeared in the Tampa Bay Times, The Gainesville Sun, all ‘other Florida newspapers’ were selected and a search was conducted on each using key words. In the Gainesville Sun’s newspaper archive a search was conducted using the key term “Courtney Bright.” The search produced one result. A second search was conducted using the key term “Seger.” The search produced one result. The Sun Sentinel, Tampa Tribune, and The Associated

Press had two articles each. Gainesville had one article for analysis. All other Florida newspapers were searched and produced no articles of the incident. Each article retrieved on Lexus Nexus, the newspaper databases, and Google News Archive, was given through website links and did not consist of actual PDF files. The search was conducted during December 2012 and included all articles from 1990 to date.

### 4.3 Procedures

Drawing from numerous studies that analyzed LGBTQ media coverage, this study examined the terms used to describe the victims as well as the way in which each victim was framed within the articles (Henley, et al., 2002; Pacey & Flynn, 2012; Suter, 2008). Examining the portrayal of anti-lesbian hate crimes in United States newspaper print media, representations of specific incidents (Taleena Kreeger, February, 1990 and Courtney Bright, April, 2010) are presented. Using content analysis each article was analyzed in order to find out the number of times each article mentioned specific terms in reference to the victim and perpetrator. Based on Herek's (1992) theory of cultural heterosexism, it was predicted that heterosexism would be projected in newspaper reports by either denying or stigmatizing the victim's sexual identity. Overall, it was predicted that when the print media made the victim's sexuality apparent to readers, it would be framed in a negative way by associating lesbian sexual identity with deviant acts (Meyers, 1996; Sinkhorn, 2011; Suter, 2008).

Units of analysis are newspaper articles published after each murder up until December 2012, when the sample was collected. Given time limitations for this study, only two cases that occurred 20 years apart were analyzed (1990 to 2010). This 20 year gap between each case will provide variation in the sample of lesbian hate crime victim's newspaper representation over time. During this period of time, the LGBTQ community has experienced numerous strides as

well as setbacks in the fight to achieve equal rights, such as the enactment of Proposition 8, enactment of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act, and the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell (Fitzgerel, 2012; Herek et al., 2002; Man, 2013; Montopoli, 2012). Another important factor that was considered to affect the sample size over the 20 year period was the growing use of the internet and the deployment of online newspapers. Therefore, based on the growth of internet use it is theorized that media representations of lesbians as hate crime victims would have become more visible over the 20 year period between each crime. In order to understand the representation of norms, this study also sought to explore the differences between time and location. Lakeland is located in Florida, where there are a large number of residents, and this might lead to more media coverage of the incidents which occur within that location compared to Wilmington, North Carolina.

Based on these predictions, it was believed that the framing of lesbian hate crime victims in news media would manifest in the denial and stigmatization of the lesbian community within both North Carolina and Florida. As shown within previous research, these representations can influence social norms and contribute to the perpetuation, or lack of, hate crime laws and policies (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Therefore, it was assumed that the framing of the Kreeger and Bright incidents may limit the discussions about the need to improve research and the ways to prevent this type of violence in the future. This study serves to inform questions of lesbian visibility in acts of violence, and how the lack of coverage results in the failure to systematically acknowledge hate crimes against lesbians as a common occurrence. Each article was analyzed and specific words/themes were counted and recorded (sex, sexuality, accused, and victim). All of the terms and information was coded were based on previous studies, and used as a way to analyze the information being presented to the readers. The number of words each article

contained was also recorded, as it is suggested from previous studies that the length of each article, based on the number of words presented, reflects the attention given to the story (Hardy & Bryman, 2004). It is suggested that articles containing higher word counts will provide more details and personal information within the article (Neuman, 1992).

The word sex has been medically applied to label specific mixtures of secondary sex characteristics, chromosomes, external gender organs, and hormones (Jackson, 2006). Since sex is generally subdivided into female and male, this category does not account for intersexed bodies (Jackson, 2006; McNulty & Burnette, 2006). Sex represents a separation based on mutually exclusive categories based on biology, which is then superficially divided into groups based on social ideologies of differences between sexual bodies (Bolich, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the coding of sex was completed in a dichotomous fashion (male or female). The victim's sex was indicated through pronouns used in each of the articles (Henley, Miller, Beazley, et al., 2002). The words that are commonly associated with female sex were counted within the analysis (female, women, girl, and lady).

**Sexuality.** Looking at the social and cultural formation of sexuality, it is apparent that sexual identity is made relevant in language (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Dunbar (2006) examined the impact of hate crimes committed against lesbian and gay victims. 1,538 hate crimes that were committed in Los Angeles County were assessed and the differences between the categories of hate crimes were analyzed (Dunbar, 2006). Results of the study showed that sexual orientation bias crimes were more severe in terms of violence against the individual. As well, differences in the victim's gender were an important factor in the rates of reporting the crime. Sell (1997), contends that if there are to be improvements in the understanding and research of sexual orientation, it needs to be consistently measured and defined. This study will

be analyzing how the victim's sexual identity is represented linguistically through commonly associated words and phrases (popular discourse). Every time the victim's sexuality is mentioned, it is recorded (i.e. her relationship status, her sexual preference/identity). Victim is defined based on rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure Evidence (ICC RPE) that states, victims are individuals who, either collectively or individually, have experienced harm resulting from acts or omissions of a crime within Member States (Cited in Rentschler, 2011). Herek, Cogan, and Gillis' (2002) study on the experiences of victims in hate crimes, based on sexual orientation, discusses the multiple factors involved in the experience of hate crime victims. Sorenson, Manz, and Berk's (1998) study, looking at newspaper coverage pertaining to homicides, promoted a model that analyzed characteristics of the suspect, victim, and incident. Results suggested that some homicides (primarily those committed against a child, elderly person, or female and those committed in wealthier neighbourhoods) were given more coverage than others (race, education, non-firearm weapons).

**Victim mentioned.** Based on previous studies, acknowledgment of the victim's name within articles will be counted. As such, every time any part of the victim's name is mentioned (Courtney Elizabeth Bright, Courtney, or Bright), it is recorded.

**Accused mentioned.** Every time any part of the accused's name is mentioned (Jerry Lee Seger, Seger, or Jerry) it is recorded. The number of times the victim and the accused are mentioned within an article recorded in order to analyze which agent is given more attention by the media and how this may shape public portrayal of the events that occurred (Greer, 2003).

**Photographs.** Stories that were accompanied by a photo were identified and coded based on what image was shown (i.e. victim, accused, or other).

Based on a previous study conducted by Cissel (2012), each article was coded based on its framing. Framing describes how mass opinions can be shaped by the coverage of news media through the use of particular frameworks that direct understanding among readers (Cissel, 2012). After analyzing the content, articles were assessed and coded based on the number of times the victim and/or accused was portrayed ‘positive,’ ‘negative,’ or ‘neutral’ (Cissel, 2012). Each coding was based on the following:

**Positive.** Every time the victim and/or accused was portrayed in a favorable way it was coded as positive. If the article had any general mention of a positive characteristic or action of the individual it was counted. For example, the article, “Love Tragedy Left Behind: Friends Find Comfort in Sharing Memories of Talana Kreeger,” found in Star News reported on the memories they had of the victim (Whisnant, 1991). Kreeger was remembered as being compassionate and was “an outgoing, laid-back person who valued her friends and would do just about anything for them” (Whisnant, 1991, 7B). The article, “Lakeland Man Gets Life for Strangling Daughter's Girlfriend,” found in The Ledger, focused on the crime, trial, and the victim’s family members discussing the life of the deceased (Bright) (Geary, 2011). The victim is described by her mother as a sweet young woman working to get her life back together.

**Negative.** Articles were coded as negative every time the accused and/or victim was portrayed in an unfavorable way through the mention of negative characteristics or actions. Each time the accused and/or victim was mentioned in a negative way it was recorded. An example of negative content was found in the article “Wilmington Filmmaker Tells the Story of a 1990 Murder That Some Call a Hate crime,” found in Star News (Steelman, 2008). This discusses the tragic events that occurred during and after the victim’s murder. The accused is described as being an alcoholic with a troubled past. Another article, “Father of Victim's Girlfriend Charged

in Murder,” found in The Ledger, mentions numerous times negative results that occurred because of the victim’s addiction to drugs (Chambliss, 2010). It continues by discussing her past behaviour that resulted in prison time from “petty theft and forgery in Lakeland and Marianna” (Chambliss, 2010, p. 2).

**Neutral.** Articles that did not depict the accused or victim in either a negative or positive way were coded as neutral. For example, the article titled “New Hanover: Jury Selected for Murder Case,” written by Star News staff (1991), is framed in a neutral way by only providing non-bias information related to the court case. An excerpt states “[b]oth sides agreed on Friday on a jury with two alternates for the Ronald Shelton Thomas murder case...[t]estimony will begin at 11 a.m. in New Hanover County Superior Court” (Star News Staff, 1991, 2B).

## Chapter 5: Results

The present study sought to understand the ways in which hate crimes against lesbians are presented within news print media. This study was further interested in how the portrayal of hate crimes against lesbians could impact social perceptions of these incidents. Results of the content analysis are shown in five separate tables that are presented in the descriptive results below. Table 1 shows the length of the articles. Table 2 shows media coverage of the victim's sexuality and sex. Table 3 has the number of pictures and article information. Table 4 shows media portrayal of the victim. Table 5 shows media portrayal of the accused. The descriptive and thematic results support the notion that minimal attention is given to reporting hate crimes against lesbians. Instead when information was presented, it was often done so incorrectly. Articles occurring earlier in time (1990) continuously failed to mention the sexuality of the victim as a factor in the crime, and instead the incident was framed as an act of violence against women. The case that followed (2010) mentioned the sexuality of the victim, however framed it negatively. Results suggest that sexuality has been redefined negatively within newspaper reports of hate crimes against lesbians, influencing social perceptions of these incidents and those involved.

### 5.1 Descriptive Results

For both cases, the length of articles, information about coverage of the victim's sex and sexuality, as well as the framing of the victim and accused, were analyzed. The number of words within each article was recorded to find out what type of story was being presented. Since the article is the unit of analysis, coding was based solely on content.

Table 1: Length of Articles

	Short	Medium	Long
Kreeger	53.84% (N=14)	34.61% (N=9)	7.69% (N=2)
Bright	75% (N=15)	25% (N=5)	0% (N=0)
Total	29	14	2

For Kreeger, 53.84% (14) of the articles were short (0-400 words), 34.61% (9) were medium (401-800 words), and 7.69% (2) were long (801-1,200+ words). This suggests that when the incident was acknowledged it was rarely discussed in detail, causing readers to direct minimal attention toward the issues surrounding the case. In the articles, the length of each article provided important insights into the framing of Bright’s murder. For Bright, 75% (15) of the articles were short, 25% (5) were medium length, and 0% (none) were long (see Table 1). A majority of the articles were short in length (75%) and often overlooked details of the crime. Articles that were longer in length focused more on the victim’s past, framing her in a negative light. This could have led to readers viewing the victim as deserving the attack. The fact that no articles in the Ledger had a long word count highlights the lack of attention given to the incident.

Table 2: Media Coverage of Sexuality and Sex

	Sex	Sexuality
Kreeger	42% (N=11)	19.23% (N=5)
Bright	100% (N=20)	90% (N=18)
Total	40	23

There is a noticeable difference between the framing of sexuality and sex in both cases. For Kreeger, the victim’s sex is mentioned in 42% (11) of the articles (see Table 2). When it comes to Bright, the victim’s sex is mentioned in 100% of the articles. In both cases the articles continuously mention the sex of the victim. In each case, sex is mentioned more times than

sexuality, which can cause the reader to categorize the crime as an act of violence against a woman, not based on her sexuality.

In the Kreeger articles, the victim’s sexuality is mentioned in 19.23% (5) of the articles (see Table 2). In the articles for Bright, the victim’s sexuality is mentioned in 90% (18) of the articles. Sexuality is not emphasized or mentioned as a leading factor in the crime within most of the articles. The victim’s sexuality is often under-reported within each article and her sex is emphasized multiple times. Again, this finding suggests that readers will more likely assume that this was an act of violence against women and not a hate crime based on the victim’s sexuality.

Table 3: Pictures and Article Information

	Number of Articles	Number of Pictures	Dates
Kreeger	26	14 Pictures	February 23, 1990 - September 16, 2012
Bright	20	10 Pictures	April 22, 2010 - June 21, 2013
Total	46	24 Pictures	

For Kreeger, there were a total of 14 pictures within all 26 articles. For Bright, there were a total of 10 pictures for all 20 articles (see Table 3). When it comes to the pictures in the articles for Kreeger, almost all were of the accused (Ronald Shelton Thomas) and only one picture of the victim was found. The limited media coverage given to the victim could have reinforced a separation of the incident from the victim’s experience of the attack. By not showing pictures of the victim in the articles, it can increase the public’s disassociation and decrease the concern about the incident. Showing a picture of the accused draws attention away from the victim. Photographs of the victim have been noted as being a powerful element in reporting crime (Angelini & Bradley, 2010) as they familiarize people instantly, in a way that words cannot. Photographs have the power to decide what individuals remember of an event (Doyle, 2003). We

are able to understand information with stories and words, but it is through pictures that we recollect (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007).

When the public is able to see pictures of the victim it can add to the viewer’s emotional perception of the victim and the loss connected to their death. Pictures personify the victim and events by indirectly endorsing the need for justice (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007). It often remains difficult for individuals to invest emotionally in situations that are not personally connected to their life or personal opinion (Angelini & Bradley, 2010). Moreover, through photographs, individuals are able to humanize victims of crime, making the situation seem more real than it would be through just words and text (Doyle, 2003).

Table 4: Victim Portrayal

	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Kreeger	3.84% (N=1)	11.53% (N=3)	88.46% (N=23)
Bright	70% (N=14)	15% (N=3)	30% (N=6)
Total	15	6	29

For Kreeger, the victim was only portrayed negatively in 3.84% (1) of the articles and positively in 11.53% (3) (see Table 4). Interestingly enough, the victim was portrayed in a neutral way in 88.46% (23) of the articles. In the articles for Bright however, the number of times the victim was portrayed in a negative way was far greater than in the articles for Kreeger. For Bright, the victim is portrayed negatively in 70% (14) of the articles and positively in 15% (3) (see Table 4). Moreover, the victim is portrayed in a neutral way in 30% (6) of the articles. The negative framing of Bright within the articles will be discussed in detail within the following section entitled thematic analysis.

Table 5: Accused Portrayal

	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Accused Kreeger	19.23% (N=5)	19.23% (N=5)	73.07% (N=19)
Accused Bright	40% (N=8)	0% (N=0)	60% (N=12)
Total	13	5	31

The accused in Kreeger’s case (Ronald Shelton Thomas) is portrayed both negatively and positively in 19.23% (5) of the articles. Furthermore, he is portrayed in a neutral way in 73.07% (19) of the articles (see Table 5). The accused in Bright’s case (Jerry Lee Seger) is portrayed negatively in 40% (8) of the articles, positively in 0% (none), and neutral in 60% (12) (see Table 5). When comparing the victim and the accused’s portrayal in the Bright case, results show that the accused was framed in a positive way more often than the victim. Results suggest that attention is more likely to be directed toward the accused rather than the victim. This may encourage readers to focus on the situation of the accused instead of the effects of the crime on the victim’s friends and family members. In a majority of the articles, the victim was mentioned only in reference to the actions of the accused. This misguided attention may cause the victim’s experience as well as the impact the crime had on family and friends to be viewed as a secondary issue. The underrepresentation of the victim suggests that she does not fit into what has been suggested as the ‘ideal victim’ (Rayburn, Mendoza & Davison, 2003). Furthermore, the minimal attention given toward describing personal details of the victim may influence readers to distance themselves from relating to the victim and seeing her as a person, rather than just a victim (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007). There was also a lack of focus given to the impact of the crime on the friends and family members of the victim.

## 5.2 Thematic Analysis

In the data collected for this study on hate crimes against lesbians, the negative depiction of lesbian sexuality is emphasized. When the victim's sexuality is framed negatively, it can lead to the formation of bias and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes amongst readers (Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Dines & Humez, 2003). Furthermore, the media can, and does, influence opinions and the negative portrayal of lesbians as victims of hate crimes (Rentschler, 2011; Suter, 2008). Media influence can lead to a decrease in support for LGBTQ policies (Sinkhorn, 2011). In order to go beyond the surface meanings presented within the data, it is important to present an accurate account of what the themes mean to the overall framing of lesbian hate crimes within the media. To identify the segments/codes that share a common category, the similarities, differences, patterns, and structures within the data were analyzed. When comparing and contrasting the data obtained, the codes used to classify the data form three common overlapping themes. These codes center on the lack of attention and response to the crimes, improper framing of the victims, and the attention directed toward the accused compared to the victim. The themes are based on common codes found within the data which have been grouped together. Theme One: The Lack of Attention and Response to the Crimes, is based on regional and national coverage of the crimes, length of the articles, and the failure to view the incidents as reflective of a wider social problem. Theme Two: Improper Framing of the Victims is based on the negative framing of the victims' sexuality, referring to the victims based on their sex, and emphasizing sex while ignoring sexuality. Theme Three: Attention Directed toward the Accused Compared to the Victim is based on pictures presented in the articles and mentioning of the accused more than the victim.

## **Theme One: The Lack of Attention and Response to the Crimes**

**Regional/National Coverage of the Crimes.** Results show that the numbers of newspapers that cover each incident are substantially different. Both the murder of Kreeger and Bright were not present in any newspaper articles at the regional or national levels. Kreeger's murder was only reported in one newspaper (The Star). Bright's murder was reported in five different newspapers (The Ledger, Sun Sentinel, Tampa Tribune, Associated Press, and The Gainesville Sun). The difference in the number of newspapers reporting these crimes may be due to the location of each incident. Since Wilmington, North Carolina is a less populated, more rural area, there are fewer newspapers locally (Petri, 2013; Stuart, 2010). Furthermore, national newspapers may be more likely to overlook incidents occurring within this small town area. The time difference between each crime is also significant to the differences in newspaper coverage of each crime (Sinkhorn, 2011). With the growth of technology in recent decades, it is more likely that a crime will be covered by more newspapers and the information will be presented to a larger audience than before (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). Individuals are able to search and access news reports from anywhere in the world; this increases the number of readers viewing the information that is presented than in previous decades (Boczkowski, 2005). Interestingly, although Kreeger's murder was only covered by one newspaper, there were six more articles covering her murder than all of the articles combined for Bright. Bright's murder was discussed within 20 articles and Kreeger's in 26 articles (see Table 3). The difference in coverage may be due to the fact that since Kreeger's murder occurred in a small rural area and news outlets in that area are likely to pay more attention to the crime than in a larger area.

**Article Length.** What is surprising is although there is a 20 year difference between each crime, media coverage of Bright's murder was not more substantial. The length of articles

provided important insights into the framing of these murders (Cissel, 2012). While Kreeger had two long articles, Bright had none (see Table 1). The fact that no articles for Bright had a long word count highlights the lack of attention given to the incident. For Bright, a majority of the articles were short (75%) and often overlooked details of the crime (see Table 1). This suggests that when the incident was acknowledged it was rarely discussed in detail, which may cause readers to direct minimal attention toward the issues of the case. The reason why Bright's murder is given minimal attention, as explained above, might be due to the location of the crime. There is also a substantial difference in the ways each article discusses certain aspects of the crimes.

**Social Problem.** There is a noticeable lack of attention given to hate crimes against the victims. The lack of attention may be part of a wider social problem. No policies are discussed in both cases and no suggestions of the acts being a hate crime based on sexual orientation are made. Results highlight the failure of reporters and public officials to recognize the larger social issues relating to each crime. Acknowledgement of hate crimes against lesbians are needed in order to address effective and necessary responses to these types of crimes (Greer, 2003). The misrepresentation of hate crimes against lesbians can cause misleading views about the frequency and level in which these crimes occur (Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). Findings suggest that the invisibility of hate crimes against lesbians in the media distorts societal perceptions of these incidents, ultimately removing attention from the wider structural and social factors that influence these crimes (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007). Although news media representations may not directly lead to the creation of policies after a crime has occurred, the media does play a large role in producing and influencing public debates (Greer, 2003; Sinkhorn, 2011). Moreover, it can be said that the creation of policies and legislation, in reaction to a specific crime, is influenced by the emergence of public debates surrounding the issues presented

(Rentschler, 2011). Therefore, news media can be seen as a driving force in the implementation and creation of policies (Kellner, 2004). The ways in which crimes are framed in the media is a crucial factor in raising public concerns (Davies, Francis & Greer, 2007). It is interesting to note, no articles published around the time of each incident, suggest these crimes are part of a wider social problem of hate crimes against lesbians. Only after a couple of years had passed articles began to emerge discussing the Kreeger incident as being an anti-lesbian hate crime (Steelman, 2008). The Kreeger article titled “Wilmington Filmmaker Tells the Story of a 1990 Murder That Some Call a Hate Crime” (Steelman, 2008), discusses the lack of attention given to the crime at the time it was committed. Furthermore, the prejudice against homosexuality that was present in Wilmington is discussed. For example, an excerpt from the article states “Ballis said he hopes the Park View documentary can raise support to extend North Carolina's hate crimes law to cover attacks on gays and lesbians” (Steelman, 2008, p. 1).

### **Theme Two: Improper Framing of the Victims**

**Sexuality.** When it comes to acknowledging the sexuality of the victim, a majority of the Kreeger articles fail to mention it as being a leading factor in the crime. It is only in the later articles covering the incident, such as those published after 1998, that the victim’s sexuality is mentioned. For example, the article titled “No. 6: Film Puts 18-year-old Murder Back in Spotlight” (Steelman, 2008), identifies the victim as being a lesbian and connects the crime to her sexuality. It states, “Ballis, a licensed clinical social worker in Wilmington, argued that Kreeger’s killing was a hate crime, motivated in part because Kreeger was a lesbian,” (Steelman, 2008, p. 1). The victim’s sexuality is mentioned in five articles for Kreeger and in 18 articles for Bright (see Table 2). This suggests that the 20 year gap between each crime has resulted in a difference in acknowledging the sexuality of the victims. Recently, scholars have noted that

some newspapers have paid more attention to discussing sexuality (Jackson & Gilbertson, 2009; Kharchilava & Javakhishvili, 2010). Over the past couple of years there has been an increase in the attention directed towards preventing and acknowledging hate crimes, both in the United States and Canada (e.g. Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, Anti-Defamation League, Human Rights First, etc.). Scholars and Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) have worked toward defending human rights by aiding in the monitoring, assisting, and reporting of various hate crimes (Dharmapala, Garoupa & McAdams, 2008; H.R.C., 2013). Furthermore, the need to improve legislation and assist hate crime victims has been an increasing area of social concern (Schier, 2011). This notable increase in hate crime awareness, over the past 20 years, may explain the increase in reports that mention the sexual orientation of victims. The increase in acknowledging a victim's sexual orientation in news media may be seen as an effect of the recognition of hate crimes based on sexual orientation after the murder of Talana Kreeger.

**Framing the Victim Negatively.** Although sexuality is mentioned in more of the articles covering Bright's murder, it was often framed in a negative way (see Table 4). Results suggest there has been minimal change in the acknowledgment of sexuality over sex. However, there has been a significant difference in the framing of the victim's sexuality over the location and time frame of each crime. When sexuality is mentioned (very little) in the Kreeger case it is just in passing and not emphasized. The lack of emphasis given to Kreeger's sexuality may be linked to the portrayal of the victim in a neutral way in a majority of the articles (see Table 4). For Bright, sexuality was commonly referenced but it was framed negatively (see Table 4). An important variation between the newspaper coverage of Kreeger and Bright is the number of times the victim is framed in a negative and positive way. For Kreeger, the victim is framed negatively in only one article and positive in three. Whereas for Bright, the victim is framed negatively in 15

articles and positive in only three (see Table 4). This framing raises the question as to why the news media has increased the framing of victims negatively. A victim's perceived negative characteristics can often be associated with the group they belong to (Herek, Cogan & Gillis, 2002). In this case, the victim's sexuality provides a basis for negative associations (Dharmapala, Garoupa & McAdams, 2008). Previous studies have shown that individuals are less likely to make negative assumptions about those who are in some way similar to themselves (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Jackson, 2006). Since only a small minority of individuals identify as anything other than heterosexual (which is normalized sexuality) it may induce a hierarchy of sexuality (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Gill, 2007). This may cause individuals to attribute the crime to the negative characteristics of the victim, ultimately blaming them for their victimization (Rayburn, Mendoza & Davison, 2003).

For Bright, the victim's history of drug abuse and past criminal record is discussed in numerous articles. Furthermore, her history is used to explain the reason for the murder. For example, Bright's drug abuse and addiction is discussed numerous times in the article, "Lakeland Man Gets Life for Strangling Daughter's Girlfriend" (Geary, 2011). Discussion of the accused's motivation to kill the victim is followed by details of her drug use. The article states that the accused did not approve of the victim's relationship with his daughter. It was Bright's influence on his daughter and her lifestyle that made the accused angry. When the victim's sexuality was mentioned it was noted as a contributing factor in her death and was framed as a negative part of her life (primarily mentioned when discussing the victim's drug addiction, lack of income, or criminal record). For example, the article mentioned the victim's sexuality the same number of times as framing the victim negatively. This article, when discussing arguments made in the trial, notes that the accused was angry about the victim's bad influence on his daughter, not

approving of their relationship. It goes on further to state that this “included using drugs, stealing and not having a stable place to live” (Geary, 2011, para. 3).

**The Victim’s Sex.** The victim’s sex is mentioned in 11 articles for Kreeger and all 20 articles for Bright (see Table 2). For Bright, an example of continuously mentioning the victim’s sex, over all other information, is seen in the article titled “Man Guilty of Strangling His Daughter's Girlfriend” (Geary, 2013). The article states, “[a]nother witness testified Strain attended a get-together showing a disturbing image on a phone...showing a woman with something around her neck...[w]itnesses couldn’t identify the woman in the image” (Geary, 2013, p. 2-3). Increased mention of sex in newspaper articles, over the victim’s name and sexuality, significantly impacts the reader’s perception of the crime as being one of violence against women. This factor connects specifically to the issues surrounding the categorization of hate crimes committed against lesbians. Since sex is a primary characteristic reported within the articles, the acknowledgement and measurement of hate crimes against lesbians becomes significantly altered.

### **Theme Three: Attention Directed toward the Accused**

**Pictures.** There is a substantial difference in the number of pictures presented within articles for Kreeger and Bright. For Kreeger, eight articles have pictures while Bright has 10 (see Table 3). This may be due to the advancement of technology over the years, as it may provide access to more pictures to gain the attention of reader’s (Doyle, 2003). The pictures present within articles for Kreeger and Bright are primarily of the accused and not the victim. This supports the idea previously mentioned that victims of hate crimes are often overlooked and dehumanized by the media (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). Failing to direct attention to the victim can result in them being seen as objects of a crime instead of victims (Davies, Francis & Greer,

2007). By providing pictures of the accused, readers may be more likely to remember and connect the incident to the accused instead of focusing on the victim (Doyle, 2003). Out of the 10 pictures within the Bright articles, eight of them are of the accused and two are of the crime scene (see Table 3). An example of the focus given to the accused, within pictures for the Bright case, can be found in the article titled “Man Guilty of Strangling His Daughter's Girlfriend” (Geary, 2013). The picture shows the accused dressed in a suit and tie while sitting in the courtroom. The accused is shown in a presentable manner and shown in a non-threatening way. This representation can cause the reader to develop the belief that the accused is innocent.

**Accused Mentioned.** The name of the accused is mentioned more times than the victim, in more articles for Kreeger than Bright (see Table 5). This difference shows that newspaper coverage for Kreeger’s murder provided fewer acknowledgements to the victim versus the perpetrator, compared to Bright’s murder coverage. It is important to note that the articles which continuously mentioned the name of accused more than the victim are primarily providing court excerpts. Moreover, these articles are more likely to show the accused as being remorseful. For example, the article titled “Trucker Gets 2 Life Terms for Woman’s Murder, Sexual Assault” (Ippolito & Whisnant, 1991), presents the words of the accused in court as stating “[the night this happened,” Mr. Thomas began, pausing to weep...[I]t wasn’t me. I wouldn’t want to hurt nobody. I asked God why it happened, and he ain’t told me. But he gave me peace of heart. I have got to answer to him.” Mr. Thomas wept some more and continued” (Ippolito & Whisnant, 1991, 1B). Results are consistent with current literature that suggests that in recent years the media has begun to increase the representation of crime victims in the United States (Orbe, 2013; Rentschler, 2011; Sinkhorn, 2011). This growth is linked to the emergence of more victim support programs and services (Gross & Woods, 1999). Furthermore, increased

acknowledgement of victims in the media has had a substantial influence on how the news media shapes the portrayal of victims (Greer, 2003).

Overall, the relationship between the themes found centre on the lack of coverage given to hate crimes against lesbians. Furthermore, themes also suggest that lesbian hate crime victim's sexuality has been redefined as deviant. The three themes mentioned above provide meaningful insights into answering and understanding the research question of this study of how these incidents are portrayed within news print media, and how this affects social perceptions of hate crimes against lesbians. The phenomenon of lesbian invisibility within the media and its association with the research question was found within the data presented. The failure to acknowledge the victim's sexuality and the negative characteristics associated with the crimes may cause lesbian invisibility and the mis-categorization of hate crimes against lesbians. By framing the victim negatively, news media may reduce the number of lesbian hate crime victims that choose to come forward and report the crime to authorities (Sinkhorn, 2011).

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

### 6.1 Accounting for Difference

When looking at possible explanations for variations between the depictions of each crime, the location was an important factor that was considered. Although both North Carolina and Florida have similar laws, when it comes to LGBTQ rights (like the constitutional amendments banning gay marriage), they also have numerous differences (Fitzgerel, 2012; H.R.C., 2014). North Carolina and Florida have different social ideologies and values based on the location and history of each state (Celock, 2013; Christensen, 2007). In order to understand the differences between each crime, variations between the locations and time was assessed. The variations between Wilmington, North Carolina and Lakeland, Florida may shape local views on homosexuality. It is important to note that each of the factors that contribute to differences in the way each crime is framed, overlap and are often linked and supported by one another. Five factors will be identified to account for differences in framing. The first four factors will discuss the variations between the locations of each crime while the fifth factor will look at the 20 year time difference. The five factors are; (1) Community Settings and Population (urban vs. rural), (2) Political Affiliations, (3) Religious Beliefs, (4) Laws and Policies, and (5) Time.

#### *Community Settings and Population*

One notable difference still present today is that North Carolina's population is more rural, while Florida is 98% urban and only 2% rural (Jones, et al., 2002). The variations between rural and urban communities' have an import role in the acceptance of homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Research suggests that individuals living in rural communities are less tolerant and more conservative, possessing traditional sets of values and beliefs (Gottschalk, 2007). Primarily, those living in rural areas are more religious than in metropolitan areas (Dillion

& Savage, 2006). This may be due to the fact that individuals in rural communities are more likely to hold conservative beliefs and attend church regularly (Gottschalk, 2007). Furthermore, small towns have been shown to have more prejudice toward homosexuals (Husselbee & Elliott, 2002). Lesbians may feel isolated and excluded in rural communities as they lack LGBTQ communities (Woodell, 2013). Since there are minimal support systems and services available to lesbians in rural and regional areas, this may cause them to feel less connected to the gay community (Gottschalk, 2007; Stuart, 2010). There are minimal support systems and services available for lesbians in rural and regional areas. People who live in the South are noted as disapproving of homosexuality and same-sex marriage (Woodell, 2013). One study by Dillion and Savage (2006) found that people living in the South were very conservative, with 75% of Southerners believing that homosexuality is wrong. Since Wilmington is in the southeastern corner of North Carolina, the lack of media attention given to the victim's sexuality may be due in part to the location of the crime. Previous research suggests that strict adherence to traditional values has a greater influence on the population within Wilmington, North Carolina compared to Lakeland, Florida (Stuart, 2010). Florida is more diverse in terms of culture than North Carolina, consisting of a large Hispanic population (Hill, Lippy & Wilson, 2005). Therefore, residents may be more accepting of differences among individuals. It is theorized that levels of heterosexism held within society will be affected by an individual's exposure to people of different backgrounds (Hill, et. al., 2006). Individuals may be provided with more insights and new ways of thinking about equal rights (Kantor, 2009). Geographical location and settings can dramatically affect what is being presented within the media and how it is presented (Beale, 2006; McCombs, 2002; Shaw, 1977). As shown within previous research, the stories presented

in the media are often determined by what the public want to know instead of what the public needs to know (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Brown, 2002; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

### *Political Affiliations*

As previously shown, political party affiliation is significantly linked to views on homosexuality (Jones, 2011; Ott & Aoki, 2002; Rohrer, 2013). For that reason, it is important to look at political affiliations within both North Carolina and Florida. North Carolina's voting patterns have remained consistent since the 1990s (H.R.C., 2013). Records show that residents primarily voted for the Republican Party (Jones, et al., 2002). Republicans have been noted in the past to encourage a sense of moral conservatism (Dillion & Savage, 2006). Furthermore, the Republican Party has been shown to promote traditional family values, religious prayer, anti-women, and anti-homosexual views (Dillon & Savage, 2006; Gwenn, 1991). This increases the likelihood of the community and institutions supporting negative views of the LGBTQ community (Jones, et al., 2002). In Florida, at the time of Bright's murder, in the 2012 Presidential Election, a majority of residents (131, 566, 53%) voted for the Republican Party, and 114, 610 (46%) voted Democratic (Jones, et al., 2002). These results show that the majority of the residents in Florida supported the agenda of the Republican Party. As shown above, both Florida and North Carolina have very similar political party affiliations, with Republican Parties receiving the most support among residents (Christensen, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2012).

Political parties have a large influence on social systems and can contribute to heterosexism throughout society (Couch, 2009; Jones et al., 2002). Due to their connections to state institutions, the adoption and passing of laws a community adheres to may be based on the agenda of a specific political party (Kantor, 2009). In order for a party to gain and maintain power their objectives must be consistently applied within the community (Couch, 2009). Voting

patterns are an important factor with regards to attitudes and beliefs, reflecting views held among residents (McCormack, 2013). The political affiliations of residents and the agendas pushed by those in political power may increase the likelihood of supporting either negative or positive views of the LGBTQ community (Kantor, 2009).

In both North Carolina and Florida, Republicans have pushed for the amendment of marriage, the establishment of an official state religion, and have ignored the need to address discrimination against the LGBTQ community (Celock, 2013; Jones et al., 2002). Favoring political parties that promote straight ideologies is a way to ensure that heterosexuals will remain one of the most powerful groups in society (Lipp, 2013). The political agendas deployed within certain areas dramatically impact what is presented within the media (Beale, 2006). As such, political parties use the media as a tool to promote their ideologies in order to gain popularity in the community they are riding (McCombs, 2002; Shaw, 1977). Overall, the media is an important component for all political figures, influencing the general public on what policies and issues are important and which are not (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

### *Religion*

A third important factor affecting social views of homosexuality is religion. The history behind North Carolina's anti-gay attitudes and religious adherence began in 1990 when James Helms ran for Senate (Christensen, 2007). His campaign was promoted throughout local newspapers, which devoted attention toward the moral integrity of North Carolina (Hill, Lippy & Wilson, 2005). Helms portrayed homosexuals as the enemy and in turn won over the interests of religious conservatives (Gwenn, 1991). In comparison, fellow candidate Gantt was portrayed as contributing to the moral decline of North Carolina because of his open support for gay rights (Christensen, 2007). In the end, Helms won over communities by stigmatizing homosexuality as

working against traditional family values and faith (Gwenn, 1991). Currently, a high percentage of the population (35%) in Wilmington, North Carolina identify as the Christian based denomination known as the Southern Baptist Convention (Dockery, 2009; Jones, et al., 2002).

North Carolina contains a large number of religious groups with the Southern Baptist Convention representing half of the state's religious members (Hill, Lippy & Wilson, 2005; Woodell, 2013). Reports show that at the time of Kreeger's murder, in 1990, 1,446,228 people in North Carolina identified as belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention (Jones et al., 2002). Increasing with the state's population, reports from 2000 show that this number grew to 1,512,058 (Hill, Lippy & Wilson, 2005; Stuart, 2010). Notably, the increase in Catholics, until recently, was minimal (Machacek & Wilcox, 2005). In 1990, 149,483 people identified as Catholic and the numbers jumped to 315,606 in 2000. This increase of 166,123 substantially impacted some of the policies in North Carolina (Stuart, 2010). Furthermore, North Carolina's state government, headed by Republicans, led to the amendment of marriage and an attempt to establish an official state religion (Celock, 2013).

Recently, a bill was proposed in North Carolina that sparked controversy around the world (Robertson, 2007). In an attempt to prevent the country commission from beginning all meetings with Christian prayer, a lawsuit was filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) against the commission (Rohrer, 2013). In response to this lawsuit a bill was drafted by state Representatives (Bolcer, 2011). Although the bill was dropped in North Carolina's House of Representatives, the creation of this bill speaks volumes about the current beliefs held by state representatives. The bill (HB 735/SB 719) sought to launch the separation of the church from state, allowing North Carolina to establish an official state religion (Celock, 2013). The state religion was identified as Christian and it was claimed in the bill that this religion was superior to

others (Rohrer, 2013). A number of churches in Wilmington, North Carolina have influenced the community's opinion on homosexuality (Stuart, 2010). For example, a church in Wilmington (United Methodist Church), in support of laws which prohibited homosexual marriage, placed an anti-gay support sign up in front of the building (Bolcer, 2011). This church was also a site used as one of the voting polls for Amendment One, on same-sex marriage (Robertson, 2007). Another example can be seen during Pride Weekend, when the Sea Gate Community Chapel in Wilmington placed a sign in front of the church reading, "God loves gays but he hates a perverted lifestyle, turn or burn" (Bolcer, 2011, p. 1).

When looking at the religious adherence in the state of Florida, findings are similar to North Carolina. In Lakeland, Florida 33.5% of the residents identify as Southern Baptist and 18.6% identify as Catholic (Jones et al., 2002). In 2000, the state of Florida's biggest religious organization was the Catholic Church, followed by the Southern Baptist Convention (Jones, Dale, et al. 2002). Although the majority of residents in both North Carolina and Florida identify as Southern Baptist, the state of Florida shows more variance in religious bodies that residents might adhere to (Machacek & Wilcox, 2005). This variance may be attributed to the fact that Florida has been noted as being more diverse in terms of culture than North Carolina (Hill, Lippy & Wilson, 2005).

In Florida, religion made its way into public debate with the introduction of Amendment 8 in 2010 (Fitzgerel, 2012). This amendment was promoted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and a coalition of Religious Rights groups, which sought to remove church from state in the Florida Constitution (Postal, 2009). Under Florida provisions all religions are obligated to pay the fees that are associated with their own religious institution (Petri, 2013). However, Amendment 8 would allow taxpayer aid and school voucher subsidies to pay the fees of religious

institutions (Fitzgerel, 2012). In other words, school vouchers would be used to reallocate tax money given to public schools and provide it to religious schools and organizations (Petri, 2013; Postal, 2009). These additional funds would have been given with no proper oversight or any accountability on behalf of these religious institutions (Fitzgerel, 2012).

Throughout the years religion has remained embedded within policies (Rohrer, 2013). Moreover, when looking at religious authorities some possess harsh and continuous condemnation of homosexuality (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Religiosity has been noted by Herek as an important factor that contributes to heterosexism (1989; 1998). In the Kreeger case, a majority of community churches were instrumental in denying marriage rights to same-sex couples (Celock, 2013). Local churches often promoted heterosexual relationships as superior (Stuart, 2010). Furthermore, religion was used as a way to maintain the dichotomy of sex (Machacek & Wilcox, 2005). A number of churches (Providence Road Baptist Church and the United Methodist Church) promoted and legitimized heterosexism throughout the community by posting signs and flyers which condemned homosexuality (Robertson, 2007). This may have influenced the community's opinion of homosexuality, which in turn could have impacted the creation of laws and policies (Stuart, 2010). More recently, civil unions were denied in North Carolina based on the promotion of heterosexuality by religious institutions (Bolcer, 2011). Like Wilmington, the beliefs and practices of some religious institutions in Lakeland, Florida focused on debates in the advancement of religion and the condemnation of homosexuality (Postal, 2009).

### *Policies and Laws*

Another significant factor influencing social views of homosexuality, highlighted throughout this paper, is the laws and policies that existed at the time of each incident. Twenty years after Kreeger's murder North Carolina passed Amendment One, prohibiting same-sex

marriage (Waggoner, 2012). It was only after Republicans had taken control in the 2010 elections that the amendment was taken up on the ballot (Man, 2013). Under Amendment One marriage is defined as a union solely between a man and woman (Elon University, 2012). This amendment not only bans same-sex marriage but also voids the legal status of domestic unions (Petri, 2013). Other laws are complicated by this amendment because it does not recognize those who are not married regardless of living together, and prohibits individuals from filing cases of domestic abuse (Waggoner, 2012). Although Amendment One removed protections and rights of residents in North Carolina, it passed with 39% of voters against and 61% for (Montopoli, 2012).

Numerous areas in the state of Florida fail to offer benefits to same-sex domestic partnerships (Man, 2013). Additionally, anti-discrimination protections are not provided for LGBTQ individuals in housing, employment, and adoption (Brinkley, 2003). Lakeland, Florida, where the murder of Bright occurred, is one of the areas within Florida that offers limited protections to LGBTQ individuals (Kantor, 2009). Looking at the legal history of Florida, the law failed to address the discrimination experienced by the LGBTQ community (Johnson, 2012). The banning of same-sex marriage and civil unions was passed in Florida in November 2008, with 38% of the votes opposed and 62% in favor (Man, 2013). The failure of Florida residents to provide support for LGBTQ individuals might be based on the fact that Florida's legal system only legalized same-sex sexual relations in 2003 (Brinkley, 2003). This was following the *Lawrence vs. Texas* (2003) Supreme Court decision, overturning the previous state criminal laws affirmed in *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) that prohibited same-sex sodomy (Haque, 2007). Since anti-discrimination policies were difficult to enact before the dismissal of this law, the development of rights and policies protecting the LGBTQ community has only recently begun to emerge (H.R.C., 2013). For example, currently Florida law does not offer discrimination

protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Kantor, 2009). In fact, adoption by same-sex couples was only made legal in Florida in 2010 (Johnson, 2012).

When it comes to the legal system in the United States, institutional heterosexism has had a significant influence in dictating the rights provided to individuals under the law (Kantor, 2009). For example, as shown in the Kreeger case, the law in North Carolina denies marriage rights to same-sex couples, as well as other types of domestic unions (Petri, 2013). These laws reflect the majority of the community's views against homosexuality with over 60% of the residents in favor of banning same-sex marriage (Elon University, 2012). Furthermore, the law in North Carolina fails to punish individuals who discriminate or commit acts of violence against based on sexual orientation or gender identity (H.R.C., 2013). Based on these laws, the legal system in North Carolina has been viewed as having a strict adherence to traditional heterosexual values (Stuart, 2010).

In North Carolina and Florida the law denies marriage rights and civil unions to same-sex couples (Elon University, 2012; Petri, 2013). In addition to this, both areas fail to offer anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals in housing, employment, and adoption (Brinkley, 2003; Johnson, 2012). The legal system's implementation of non-heterosexist policies and laws in these areas which impact community attitudes toward violence and discrimination of LGBTQ individuals provides a good example of cultural heterosexism (Postal, 2009). If a state's legal system has been slow to acknowledge LGBTQ rights and reduce discrimination, this can result in communities failing to recognize the urgency in accepting the implementation of laws and policies (Brinkley, 2003).

### *Time Differences*

The 20 year difference between each crime may also play a role in their depictions in the media. Numerous laws relating to LGBTQ rights have been passed over the years and in some instances retracted throughout the United States (for example, the enactment and retraction of same-sex marriage rights) (Haque, 2007). Since the murder of Kreeger in 1990, the recognition of gay rights and legal advances of some areas within the United States have been minimal (Jackson, 2009; Miller, 2012; Simmons, 2009). Laws such as Don't Ask Don't Tell, banning homosexuals from serving openly in the military, and laws against sodomy, were still constitutional at this time (Baim, Colbert & Bensen, 2010). Not to mention that the Hate Crime Statistics Act was not passed until April 23, 1990, two months after Kreeger was murdered (H.R.C., 2013). In the years following Kreeger's murder, gay rights laws and policies advanced to some degree, yet opposition to homosexual rights continued across America (King, 2010; Miller, 2012). The Hate Crime Statistics Act was not signed into law until October 28, 2009 (Hull, 2009; Petersen, 2011). In November, 2008 Proposition 8 was passed and the controversy surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage and gay rights was an increasingly important topic within the media (Chomsky & Barclay, 2010). While Bright was murdered on March 20, 2010, it was not until August 4, 2010 that Proposition 8 was repealed (Baim, Colbert & Bensen, 2010). Looking at the five factors presented above, there are noticeable variations in each crime based on the ideologies created and reinforced by each state's cultural institutions.

Media content is not only shaped by marketing considerations, but also the economy (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Over the years, economic factors have altered the newspaper industry and the ways in which issues are reported to the public (Jones, 2011). Marketing considerations affect what is portrayed within the media, overriding old-fashioned journalistic

standards of newsworthiness (Shaw, 1977). Newspaper content and style has been reshaped in an effort to grab the attention of readers while competing with new media sources (Jones, 2011). Under pressure to produce high margins of profit, newspaper reporters have turned toward market-driven journalism (Beale, 2006). Market-driven journalism caused the media to treat local news as a form of entertainment to gain public interest (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

Cultural heterosexism plays a significant role in areas that account for the differences in the media portrayal of the Kreeger and Bright crimes. The laws and policies, political affiliations, and religious beliefs all highlight the presence of cultural heterosexism and its effects within each community (Dillion & Savage, 2006; H.R.C, 2013; Waggoner, 2012). Overall, the factors described above that contribute to the differences in the way each crime is framed, are important considerations for future research.

## 6.2 Directions for Future Research

As shown throughout this paper, media representation continues to play a prominent role in the struggles of the LGBTQ community and influencing social perceptions of these issues. The implementation of educational campaigns in order to change social norms should be analyzed. When looking at hate crimes committed against lesbians, understanding the ways that the social construction of gender and sexuality impact women's experiences as victims is imperative. Unfortunately, even with the rise of current studies on institutional processes and policies, there is still a lack of theoretical accounts of how social and cultural institutions are both sexualized and gendered (Orbe, 2013). Particular attention should be given to the ways in which all lesbians experience institutional discrimination within a school setting, since early childhood development is an important aspect of an individual's formation of self. Hate crimes that are committed against lesbians should be analyzed using in-depth interviews as a tool to

provide a better understanding of the social differences that can shape victims' and perpetrators' experiences. Using hate crime data to assess the level of victimization experienced by lesbians is insufficient and instead qualitative studies should be employed. The use of qualitative research, such as interviews and focus groups, provides an in-depth understanding of lesbian experiences with victimization that is not found within hate crime statistics data. Research on social institutions, and their construction of sex, sexuality, and other factors influencing violence against lesbians, should be considered in future research. It is these identities that may influence the ideologies surrounding violence against lesbians (Esterberg, 1997).

The development of educational programs in the United States should be considered in addressing homophobia (Karlson & Simonsson, 2008; Russo, 2006). The growing amount of literature on hate crimes and homophobia is attributed to studies conducted in the UK, and most notably, there is a lack of qualitative research on homophobia and hate crimes within the United States. When analyzing homophobia and anti-gay hate crimes, particular attention should be given to expanding the study of hate crimes committed against lesbians and the overlapping theme of violence against women. Previous literature on the development of lesbian identity suggests that personal narratives are important in providing accuracy in the analysis of lesbian experiences (Shapiro, Rios & Stewart, 2010). In order to combat against internalized homophobia and possibly start a resistance to institutionalized heterosexism and homophobia, as well as social and cultural heterosexism, there is need for professional educational intervention. Future research looking at lesbian victimization, within the framework of cultural heterosexism, would benefit from incorporating personal accounts of perpetrators in an attempt to understand the individual motivations for committing these crimes. Furthermore, by obtaining information on an individual level, researchers can connect personal motivations to specific institutional

influences. In order to address the inequalities that are present between individuals, efforts should be directed toward understanding the institutional production of knowledge and discourses that produce and regulate social norms surrounding lesbian identity.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the ways in which hate crimes against lesbians are presented within newspaper media. As shown throughout this study, the murders of both Kreeger and Bright are represented differently within news reports. Newspaper reports (both online and in print) can have an important role in the reader's conceptualization of the victim and offender as well as the overall crime. Lesbian victims of homicide are viewed by readers as failing to conform to the norms of gender and sexuality and as a result, are portrayed in the media in two distinct ways. First, lesbians are depicted in a way that refuses to acknowledge their identities that are in opposition with social norms, and second, if they do acknowledge these identities they are often framed in a negative way.

The first way of framing hate crimes against lesbians in the media, done by ignoring their sexuality and instead focusing on their sex, is shown within the results of Kreeger's story. Results of the study show that these incidents are minimized within the media and often lesbian identity is overshadowed by gender identity. This failure to depict sexuality within reports results in these crimes being discounted or misinterpreted by wider society. This has been shown to divert the public's attention from the important motivating factors of the crime, causing lesbian victimization to become less visible (citation). Furthermore, lesbian victimization, in some cases, can be minimized when placed against an accused that represents members of the dominant class (so in these instances they were white, heterosexual, and male). Results highlight the ways in which the media, as a social institution, adheres to specific social norms while excluding the portrayal of individuals who fail to embody the 'ideal' victim (not heterosexual). It is these social constructs which are instilled within society by institutions leading to levels of individual violence and discrimination of certain individuals. Coverage highlights sex instead of sexuality,

making readers assume the victim as being heterosexual, due to the fact that heterosexual identity is often assumed unless stated otherwise.

The second way that hate crimes against lesbians are framed in the media is negatively which is shown in the results of Bright's analysis. Results show that although the victim's sexuality is emphasized more in reports it is primarily only mentioned when discussing the victim negatively. Framing the victim's sexuality in a negative way permits readers to detach themselves from the crime (Cissel, 2012; Fountain, 2008). Moreover, this negative depiction causes readers to associate the victim's death with their life choices instead of being a result of the views held by the wider society (Suter, 2008). The depiction of hate crime victims within the media is handed off to the public, causing individuals to draw specific conclusions about the incident. The framing of sexuality in a negative way within reports leads to secondary victimization by the media by labeling victims as deviant. As shown within previous research on the framing of sexuality within the media, the portrayal of individuals who are marginalized in society is used as a way to further stigmatize victims, ultimately reducing the blame placed on the accused (Cissel, 2012; Meyers, 1996).

Looking at social institutions such as the media, religion, the legal system, and the education system highlights the influences that these institutions have on influencing attitudes towards gender, sex, and sexual identities. Findings indicate that media narratives promote and influence the subordination and domination in social relations of lesbian hate crime victims. This paper analyzed how social concepts of sexuality and gender promote social regulation and stigmatization of individuals who do not adhere to social and cultural norms. Furthermore, the formation of constructs surrounding the lesbian identity was assessed as being a product of different social institutions through the perpetuation of cultural heterosexism. As results of this

study show, readers are not provided with all of the information about the crimes reported in news articles. Hate crimes against lesbians and their construction within newspapers are important, as more individuals rely on the news for information than official reports. Although news reports have the opportunity to bring issues to the public's attention, the articles within this study failed to do so. This makes these incidents seem less significant in the minds of readers and limits the likelihood that this social issue will be instilled in the consciousness of American citizens.

Limitations: Within this study there were some limitations. For example, since this study only focuses on two incidents of hate crimes, the sample size makes it difficult to get a general idea of how lesbians are framed in the media based on data presented. As suggested in the beginning of this paper, this study was unable to retrieve and analyze all hate crime incidents depicted in US newspapers. The reason why the sample was limited to two incidents was due to the fact that very few articles covered hate crimes against lesbians. Another limitation of the study is that if newspaper articles failed to use language that is recognizable (i.e. if name of the victim or the accused was not mentioned), then it was not used in the sample. Since lesbian victims are stigmatized within the media, there will continue to be limitations on information available or reported in the media.

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