

12-2001

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Exploring Racial Variations in the Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing

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The following article examines differences in the social situation of intimate partners as an explanation of racial differences in the female to male ratio of spousal homicides in Canada. An analysis of homicide data from 1961 to 1983 generated by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics reveals that the ratio of women killing their husbands to men killing their wives is highest for Aboriginals and lowest for Blacks, with the ratio for Whites falling in between. The possible sources of racial differences in this ratio include the proportion of couples (a) in common-law relationships, (b) who are co-residing as opposed to being separated, and (c) for whom there is a substantial age disparity between the partners. These factors are related to the spousal sex ratio of killing more generally. An exploration of interracial homicide patterns and racial variation in jealousy-motivated homicides was also undertaken. The findings reveal that controlling for the above factors substantially reduces the importance of race in predicting the gender of the homicide victim.

When women kill, a family member is most likely to be the victim (Blum & Fisher, 1978; Goetting, 1988; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993; Wilbanks, 1983). However, the extent to which this occurs varies tremendously. Wilson and Daly (1992) have demonstrated substantial variation across countries in the spousal sex ratio of killing (SROK), defined as the number of women who kill their husbands per 100 men who kill their wives. For example, in the U.S. the SROK is 75, meaning that 75 women kill their husbands for every 100 men who kill their wives. By comparison, Canada has a sex ratio of killing of 31 indicating that 31 wives kill their husbands for every 100 husbands who kill their wives.

The female/male ratio of spousal homicides also varies by race (Riedel & Best, 1998; Wilson & Daly, 1992). In California, Riedel and Best (1998) found higher SROKs for African Americans compared to Whites, Latinos, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. According to the findings of Wilson and Daly (1992), in the U.S. the spousal SROK is 131 for African Americans, 43 for Whites, and 29 for Latinos, while in Canada the spousal SROK is 15 for Blacks, 24 for Whites, and 76 for Native Canadians.

What is noteworthy is which groups in the two countries have the highest SROKs. In the United States, African Americans have the highest followed by Whites and Latinos. In Canada, the SROK is lowest for Blacks, but highest for Native Canadians. What this suggests is that spousal killings may be less a matter of race and more a matter of conditions

that African Americans and Native Canadians share. If so, such agreement argues for a general theory of violence that reaches across national boundaries to encompass both groups. It is the thesis of this article that racial variations in the spousal SROK can be at least partially accounted for by differences in the nature of the relationship and the nature of homicide across racial groups. Race actually serves as a proxy for these conditions and its explanatory value is substantially weakened once these other factors are taken into account.

THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Registered Marriage Versus Cohabitation

Previous research indicates that the risk of homicide by females is higher among cohabiting couples than registered marriages (Riedel & Best, 1998; Wilson & Daly, 1992; Wilson, Daly, & Wright, 1993). Studies consistently find higher rates of violence among cohabiting couples than either married or dating partners (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs, 1985; Makepeace, 1989; Stets & Straus, 1989; Yllo & Straus, 1981). While the available data are limited, they indicate that a smaller percentage of the native population is officially married compared to the Canadian population generally (e.g., Frideres, 1993). If the same can be shown to be the case among Aboriginal spousal homicides, this would suggest that it is the nature of the intimate partner relationships rather than race which accounts for the higher SROK, and thus the effect of race should disappear once the impact of cohabitation is partialled out.

Coresidency Versus Separation

Previous research consistently finds that the risk of being killed by a husband is higher for women separated from as opposed to residing with their spouses (Wilson & Daly, 1992; Wilson et al., 1993). Research on homicide in Canada has found a higher risk of homicide linked to estrangement (Crawford & Gartner, 1992; Crawford, Gartner, & Dawson, 1997; Fedorowycz, 1996; Noonan, 1993; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987). If there is a lower prevalence of spousal homicides involving separated couples among Aboriginals which is producing a more even distribution of female- and male-perpetrated homicides, this relationship factor, rather than race, would serve to explain the higher SROK.

Age Disparity

Previous research suggests that age disparity may be related to the SROK (Wilson & Daly, 1988, 1992; Wilson et al., 1993). In their analysis of spousal homicide data for Chicago, Wilson and Daly (1992) found that couples who were less than 10 years apart in age had a SROK of 102. However, the SROK drops to 57 when wives were at least 10 years older than their husbands, but rises to 117 in cases where the wives were at least 10 years younger. These findings may have important implications if it can be established that Aboriginal spousal homicides are more likely to involve couples where the woman is at least 10 years younger than the man.

THE NATURE OF HOMICIDE

Homicide Motive

Male sexual jealousy and proprietariness are proposed to be the motivating factor for a substantial number of wife-killings (see Wilson & Daly, 1995) and may be a contributing factor in the SROK. In particular, less inclination by males to act possessively toward their partners may be disproportionately characteristic of Aboriginal couples. The higher SROK among Aboriginal women may be reflecting such a pattern. What little evidence exists reveals racial variations among homicide motives in Canada (e.g., Doob, Grossman, & Auger, 1994). Whether differences in homicide motives are also evident with respect to spousal homicides still needs to be examined.

Interracial Homicide Patterns

The high female/male ratio of spousal homicides among Aboriginals compared to other races may be concealing an unequal engagement in self-defense by Aboriginal women against abuse by Aboriginal men. Research on institutionalized populations provides evidence of the high rate of victimization experienced by Aboriginal women (Adelberg & the Native Women's Association of Canada, 1993). LaPrairie (1987) suggests that this victimization is linked to Native female violence, proposing that the high level of violent crime committed by Aboriginal women is a product of colonization and underdevelopment and that crimes by native women are a response to the victimization they experience within this context. This suggests that the high rate of victimization experienced by Aboriginal women may be an important factor in understanding why they are relatively more likely to kill their spouses.

While the data used in the present analysis do not contain any information with respect to a history of abuse for either the victim or the offender, the extent to which the high rate of Aboriginal homicides by women is a function of the abuse they experience at the hands of Aboriginal men can be studied using an analysis of interracial homicides. Specifically, if the spousal SROK for cases involving Aboriginal women and White males is much lower than the spousal SROK where both partners are Aboriginal, this may provide an indirect indication of the significance of abuse by Aboriginal males in understanding the high rate at which Aboriginal women kill their partners.

This article will systematically explore how each of the above outlined factors—legal marriage versus cohabitation, coresidency versus separation, age disparity, and homicide motive—are related to racial differences in the spousal SROK. Race may serve as a proxy for these various kinds of conditions. After assessing each hypothesis individually, a multivariate analysis tests for the significance of race after controlling for these other factors. By establishing that various relationship characteristics occur more often among Aboriginal Canadians, and then examining these factors simultaneously, it can be demonstrated that it is these negative characteristics which underlie the high spousal SROK of Aboriginals, thereby highlighting where the search should begin for explanations of the high rate at which Aboriginal women kill their husbands. Once these conditions pertaining to the nature of the relationship are controlled for, race no longer matters.

The results of this inquiry have substantial theoretical importance. If it turns out that what accounts for higher SROKs among minorities are relationship variables rather than racial designations, then it is possible to ask whether the same relationship variables also characterize minorities other than the ones under study. Hence, results that demonstrate the importance of relationship factors, independent of racial designations, open the door to a cross-cultural theory.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The Canadian homicide data which form the basis of this analysis were generated by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada. These homicide data cover the years 1961 through 1983,¹ and include 9642 homicides. Unfortunately, it is not possible to examine more recent data, because micro-level data on homicide beyond 1983 have not been released by Statistics Canada. However, it is unlikely that gender and racial patterns in homicide have changed so dramatically over the past decade and a half as to diverge significantly from the findings of the current analysis.

The data are drawn from summary police reports on homicides occurring in Canada which provide information regarding victim and offender characteristics, offense characteristics, and the clearance status of the offense. Information is also available on the apparent motive of the offense, which is based on police assessment. The subjective interpretation of this variable suggests it should be treated with caution. For the present purposes, it is important to highlight the contention of Daly and Wilson (1988) that police attribution of motives significantly underestimates the role of jealousy in spousal homicides.²

The limitations inherent in the use of official statistics are well known within the field of criminology. However, in the case of homicide, these problems are less serious because a larger proportion of these crimes is detected, reported, and recorded. In addition, official statistics on homicide are probably least likely to be affected by changes over time in police practices.

Definitions

All events classified as murder or manslaughter are considered homicides. Consistent with Wilson and Daly (1992), a homicide is considered spousal if the relationship between victim and offender is one of official marriage, common-law association, separated, or divorced. "Aboriginal" includes those described as Indian, Eskimo, and Métis (all of whom are identified as Native people by the Canadian Census). To be consistent with Wilson and Daly (1992), race is categorized according to the race of the perpetrator.

Analysis

I begin with a descriptive analysis of the number of people killed by their spouses in Canada between 1961 and 1983, from which the spousal sex ratio of killing for Whites, Aboriginals, and Blacks is calculated. The remainder of the analysis is concerned with potential sources of racial differences in the spousal SROK. Wilson and Daly found the following factors to be related to the spousal SROK: the type of marriage (registered or common-law), the marital status of the couple (co-residing versus separated), and the couple's age disparity. These

hypotheses are evaluated as explanations for the racial variation in the spousal SROKs in Canada. In this respect, my analysis goes beyond the work of Wilson and Daly. Two additional issues are also examined—the homicide motive and inter-racial homicide patterns—which I hypothesize may also be implicated in the racial variation of spousal SROKs in Canada.

RESULTS

Between 1961 and 1983 in Canada there were 1475 male-perpetrated and 407 female-perpetrated spousal homicides. Thus, the spousal sex ratio of killing for these years is 28. This is similar to the figure of 31 calculated by Daly and Wilson (1992) for the years 1974 through 1983 for Canada. Calculation of the SROK on the basis of homicide samples used in other Canadian research reveals this ratio to be relatively consistent. Studies of homicides in Canada report data indicating that the spousal SROK has ranged between 27 and 37 over the last 35 years (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1987; Fedorowycz, 1996; Meredith & Paquette, 1991; Roberts & Grossman, 1992; Silverman & Kennedy, 1993).

A breakdown of the spousal homicide rate according to the race of the perpetrator is displayed in Table 1. For the 1389 spousal homicides involving Whites, 1126 spousal homicides were committed by males and 263 were committed by females between 1961 and 1983 in Canada. This yields a SROK of 23, almost identical to the figure of 24 calculated by Daly and Wilson on fewer years of data. The spousal SROK for Blacks is 17 (36 male-perpetrated and 6 female-perpetrated), consistent with that calculated by Daly and Wilson of 15.³

TABLE 1. Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing by Race in Canada, 1961-1983^a

	Female-Perpetrated		Male-Perpetrated		SROK
All Spousal Homicides in Canada 1961-1983	407	(0.153)	1475	(0.555)	28
White Perpetrator	263	(0.109)	1126	(0.469)	23
Black Perpetrator	6 ^b		36		17
Aboriginal Perpetrator	122	(6.181)	233	(2.937)	52

^aRates per 100,000 in parentheses.

^bRates for this group could not be calculated due to a lack of reliable population estimates.

TABLE 2. Hypothetical Example Demonstrating the Differing Interpretations of Racial Variations in the Spousal SROK

		Female-Perpetrated	Male-Perpetrated	SROK
Husbands Same/ Wives Differ	White Offender	125	250	50
	Aboriginal Offender	200	250	80
Wives Same/ Husbands Differ	White Offender	200	500	50
	Aboriginal Offender	200	250	80
Both Differ	White Offender	90	180	50
	Aboriginal Offender	176	220	80

Where an Aboriginal (Canadian Indian, Eskimo, or Métis) is the perpetrator, there are 233 male-perpetrated spousal homicides and 122 female-perpetrated spousal homicides, giving a SROK of 52. This is substantially lower than the SROK of 76 in Daly and Wilson's results. The increase in the SROK in recent years suggests that Aboriginal women have been committing a greater number of spousal homicides relative to Aboriginal men post-1974. Understanding why this is so would be an important avenue for future investigation.

The use of a ratio such as that of the spousal SROK does raise some challenges with respect to interpretation. Specifically, the same SROK may have different interpretations. For example, racial differences in the SROK may be generated by three separate kinds of dynamics:

1. Whites, Aboriginals, and Blacks may be identical in the rate at which husbands kill their wives but differ in the rate at which wives kill their husbands;
2. Whites, Aboriginals, and Blacks may kill their husbands at the same rate but differ in the rate at which husbands kill their wives; or
3. Whites, Aboriginals, and Blacks may differ in both of these rates.

A hypothetical example provided in Table 2 demonstrates how this might occur.

To examine how these different interpretations relate to racial variations in the spousal SROK in Canada, male and female spousal homicide rates for Whites and Aboriginals were calculated for the years 1961-1983. The lack of reliable Canadian population estimates for Blacks discouraged the calculation of spousal homicide rates for this group. As a result of the very limited data available from which to derive population estimates by race in Canada,⁴ these rates can only be considered as rough approximations. The rates were averaged over the 23-year period for this reason, as well as to help deal with the problem of very small numbers of spousal homicides occurring on a year-to-year basis.

Examining the spousal homicide rates in parentheses in Table 1 reveals differences both across and within racial groups. Among Whites, the spousal homicide rate is 4.3 times higher for males than for females. Among Aboriginals, the spousal homicide rate is only 2.1 times higher for males than for females. Thus, for both racial groups, the male spousal homicide rate is higher, although this is more so the case among Whites than among Aboriginals. Comparing across racial groups, the spousal homicide rate for Aboriginal males is 13 times higher than the spousal homicide rate for White males. However, the spousal homicide rate for Aboriginal females is 27 times higher than the spousal homicide rate for White females. Thus, although the spousal homicide rates for male and female Aboriginals is higher than for White males and females, the discrepancy between the female rates is much greater than for the male rates. Consequently, although there are differences in the rate at which White and Aboriginal males kill their wives and there are differences in the rate at which White and Aboriginal females kill their husbands, the disparity is substantially greater in the latter case and it is that discrepancy that likely has the greatest influence on the spousal SROK.

In summary, it is evident that, regardless of race, the SROK is always less than 100, indicating that women are more likely to be the victims of spousal homicide than are men. Nevertheless, there is substantial variation by race in the SROK. The following sections explore factors that may account for these racial differences.

TABLE 3. Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing by Race According to Marriage Type, Co-Residency, Age Difference Between Husband and Wife, and Homicide Motive

	Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing ^a			
	White	Black	Aboriginal	Total
<i>Marriage Type</i>				
Registered	20 (976)	17 (28)	42 (155)	23 (1159)
Common-Law	31 (413)	17 (14)	61 (200)	39 (627)
<i>Co-Residing vs. Separated</i>				
Co-Residing	23 (795)	21 (23)	42 (148)	26 (966)
Separated	9 (167)	0 (6)	0 (5)	8 (178)
<i>Age Difference</i>				
Wife Less Than 10 Years Younger Than Husband	24 (1185)	21 (34)	47 (277)	28 (1496)
Wife 10 or More Years Younger Than Husband	20 (198)	0 (8)	73 (76)	30 (282)
<i>Motive</i>				
Jealousy-Motivated	6 (339)	0 (9)	27 (56)	8 (404)
Non-Jealousy-Motivated	33 (946)	23 (32)	69 (263)	39 (1241)

^aTotal number of cases in parentheses.

BIVARIATE ANALYSES OF FACTORS RELATED TO THE SPOUSAL SEX RATIO OF KILLING

Registered Versus Common-Law Marriages

Consistent with Wilson and Daly's work, the data used here also show that those in common-law unions have a higher spousal SROK than those in legally registered unions. For Whites, Blacks and Aboriginals combined, the spousal SROK is 23 for legally married couples, compared to 39 for common-law couples (Table 3). Further, the results also indicate that the SROK is higher for common-law than legally married couples for each race. These data also indicate that a substantially greater percentage of Aboriginal killings are perpetrated among common-law unions compared to other races (56% compared to 30% for Whites and 33% for Blacks). These differences between the races are statistically significant ($p < .01$). If a larger proportion of Aboriginal unions are common-law unions,⁵ this pattern could help explain the higher SROK found for Aboriginals compared to Whites and Blacks in Canada.

Co-Residency Versus Separation

These data support the contention of Daly and Wilson (1988,1992) and others (e.g., Silverman & Kennedy, 1993; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987) that among separated couples it is almost solely the man who pursues his partner with violent intentions. The second panel of Table

3 reveals that for all three races combined, the spousal SROK is 26 where the couple is co-residing, compared to a SROK of 8 when the couple is separated. This overall pattern holds true when the races are analyzed separately. The data also indicate that a substantially lower percentage of spousal homicides among Aboriginals involves separated couples (3% compared to 17% for Whites and 21% for Blacks). These differences are statistically significant (Aboriginals versus Whites, $p < .001$; Aboriginals versus Blacks, $p < .05$). Thus, if a larger proportion of Aboriginal couples are co-residing as opposed to separated, the high spousal SROK for Aboriginals may be partially accounted for by the risk associated with co-residency, as discovered by Wilson and Daly (1992), which is disproportionately present in Aboriginal spousal killings. This explanation is further supported by the finding that the SROK for Aboriginals who are separated is lower than the SROK for White separated couples and is the same as the SROK for Black separated couples.

Age Differences

To test whether age disparity is a factor related to the higher spousal SROK among Aboriginals, the SROK for each race was calculated separately based on the couple's level of age disparity. Since Daly and Wilson found the spousal SROK to increase in cases where husbands were at least 10 years older than their wives, these types of cases were compared with the remaining cases.⁶ The third panel of Table 3 shows that for both Whites and Blacks, the spousal SROK is lower for couples where the wife is 10 or more years younger than the husband compared to those where she is not. However, among Aboriginals the SROK is substantially higher for cases where the wife is 10 or more years younger than the husband compared to other couples (the SROKs are 73 and 47, respectively). These findings suggest that age disparity may be a factor in the high SROK for Aboriginals. Furthermore, the data indicate that of the three races, Aboriginals have the highest percentage of homicides involving couples where the wife is at least 10 years younger (22% compared to 14% for Whites and 19% for Blacks), where the difference between Aboriginals and Whites is statistically significant ($p < .01$), although the difference between Aboriginals and Blacks is not. Thus, if a higher proportion of Aboriginal marriages involves couples where the wife is substantially younger than her husband, age disparity may provide a partial explanation of the high SROK among Aboriginals.

Motive

For the sample as a whole and for each race analyzed separately, the spousal SROK is much lower when only cases deemed by police to be motivated by jealousy are examined. This established, it is also found that a smaller proportion of spousal homicides among Aboriginals (18%) than Whites (26%) or Blacks (22%) is motivated by jealousy. The difference between Aboriginals and Whites (but not Blacks) in the proportion of spousal homicides which are jealousy-motivated is statistically significant ($p < .01$). Thus, as Aboriginals have the smallest proportion of homicides deemed by police to be motivated by jealousy, and it is in this category where fewer female-perpetrated spousal homicides will be found, racial differences in homicide motives may provide a partial explanation to the higher spousal SROK among Aboriginals.

Inter-Racial Homicide Patterns

Table 4 examines whether the spousal SROK varies according to the inter-racial composition of the relationship, an issue not addressed by Wilson and Daly. The data show that between 1961 and 1983, there were 120 inter-racial spousal homicides. To avoid the problem

of very small frequencies, Aboriginals and Blacks were categorized as ethnic victims or offenders; the two interracial categories were: White offender/ethnic victim and ethnic offender/White victim. Although spousal homicides are distributed fairly evenly between the two inter-racial categories, it is apparent that the distribution by gender varies greatly. More specifically, for spousal homicides involving a White offender and an ethnic victim, the spousal SROK is 12, whereas for cases involving an ethnic offender and a White victim, the spousal SROK is 93 ($N = 64$ and 56 , respectively). This means that in couples composed of ethnic offenders and White victims, women are killing their husbands at rates almost equal to husbands killing their wives.

One tentative conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that explaining the high spousal SROK for Aboriginals requires moving beyond the suggestion that Aboriginal women are simply reacting to the violence of Aboriginal men. This does not preclude the possibility that in some of these inter-racial killings, Aboriginal women are defending themselves against abusive White husbands. What it does suggest is that accounts of the high level of violence committed by Aboriginal women cannot focus exclusively on their role as targets in Aboriginal men's backlash to their marginalization in society, because Aboriginal women are also in violent relationships with White men, whose life circumstances are generally quite different from those of the Aboriginal male.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF FACTORS RELATED TO THE SPOUSAL SROK

The final section of the analysis involves an investigation of the independent and combined effects of the variables found to be related to the spousal SROK. First, victim gender is regressed on each of the factors found in the bivariate analyses to be related to the SROK, as well as the two race variables, to establish that each of the predicted variables is significant taken alone.⁷ Second, the group of factors related to the SROK is analyzed simultaneously to determine whether each retains its predictive value in the presence of the others. Finally, the race variables are added to the previous model to assess whether they are still significant predictors of victim gender once the control variables are present in the model.

Because of the categorical nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression is used for the analysis. Gender of the victim is the dependent variable (0 = male; 1 = female). The independent or predictor variables are:

1. Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal female;
2. Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal male;
3. registered versus common-law marriages (1 = registered; 2 = common-law);
4. the age difference between the two parties (the husband's age minus the wife's age);
5. jealousy-motivated versus non-jealousy-motivated (1 = jealousy-motivated; 2 = non-jealousy-motivated).

TABLE 4. Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing for Inter-Racial Homicides

	Female-Perpetrated	Male-Perpetrated	SROK
White Offender/Ethnic Victim	7	57	12
Ethnic Offender/White Victim	27	29	93

**TABLE 5. Logistic Regression Equations for Factors Predicting
Gender of Spousal Homicide Victim (N = 1548)**

Independent Variables	Zero-Order Equations		Model 1		Model 2	
	Estimated B	Odds Ratio	Estimated B	Odds Ratio	Estimated B	Odds Ratio
Registered Versus Common-Law	-0.513***	0.599	-0.553***	0.58	-0.484***	0.62
Age Difference	-0.022**	0.978	-0.023**	0.98	-0.022**	0.98
Jealousy-Related Versus Non-Jealousy Related	-1.497***	0.224	-1.546***	0.21	-1.549***	0.21
Ethnic Offender/ White Victim Versus Other Racial Patterns	1.265***	3.543	0.871**	2.39	0.799**	2.22
Aboriginal Male Versus Non-Aboriginal Male	0.391**	1.479			0.393	1.48
Aboriginal Female Versus Non-Aboriginal Female	0.681***	1.976			-0.019	0.98

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Also included is a variable denoting whether the homicide involved an ethnic offender and White victim⁸ (1 = ethnic offender/White victim; 2 = all other racial combinations). Due to the large number of missing cases (677), the variable measuring whether the couple was co-residing versus separated was excluded from the analysis.⁹

The logistic regression results are presented in Table 5. Column 1 shows the results of regressing victim gender on each predictor individually. The zero order estimates reveal that all of the variables have significant effects on their own. The next column presents the results of analyzing just the group of control variables (Model 1). These findings demonstrate that each predictor retains its significance in the presence of the other control variables. The directions of all of these relationships are consistent with the bivariate results. The final column presents the results for Model 2, where the two race variables are added to the model containing the set of control variables. These estimated effects reveal that while all of the control variables are still significant predictors of victim gender, the two race variables are not.¹⁰

This insignificance of the two race variables has substantial implications given the consistent focus on the importance of race as a predictor of criminal behavior generally and violence in particular. It is also in distinct contrast to the findings of Daly and Wilson, where race—in this case Blacks versus non-Blacks—continued to be a strong predictor of the victim's sex for spouse killings in Chicago. These findings suggest that the high spousal SROK among Aboriginal Canadians is not so much a function of race per se. Rather, marital patterns, age differences between the two parties, and the circumstances leading up to the homicide are what increase or decrease the probability that the wife will be killed as opposed to the husband. Thus, race is only important insofar as it is related to these factors. Once these other factors have been taken into account, race is no longer a statistically significant predictor of which party will be killed.

CONCLUSION

Between 1961 and 1983, an average of 419 individuals were killed each year in Canada, and almost one-fifth of these deaths occurred between spouses. Breaking down the spousal homicide rate by race reveals that the female/male ratio of spousal homicides is substantially

higher among Aboriginals than Blacks or Whites. Factors which were found to help explain this pattern were the type of marriage (registered versus common-law), the marital status of the couple at the time of the killing (co-residing versus separated), and age differences between the husband and wife. These findings are consistent with the research of Daly and Wilson.

An additional factor related to the SROK in the current analysis is whether the homicide was deemed by police to be motivated by jealousy. A larger proportion of Aboriginal homicides than those involving Blacks or Whites was found to involve common-law couples, which have higher spousal SROKs. Further, a smaller proportion of spousal homicides involving Aboriginals was found to involve couples who were separated as opposed to co-residing, and fewer Aboriginal spousal killings were deemed by police to be jealousy-motivated. These two factors were associated with lower SROKs. When combined, these patterns suggest that both marital patterns and the nature of homicides among Aboriginals play a role in producing their higher SROK.

In essence, these findings emphasize how taking a step back from a narrow focus on the importance of race per se reveals a different perspective concerning where to search for an explanation of the racial variation in spousal SROKs. Future research on racial differences in spousal homicides should more closely examine the nature of marriage, dating, and marital dissolution patterns for the different races in Canada. A more in-depth understanding of intimate relationships involving Aboriginals would shed further light on the high rate of female-perpetrated spousal killings among Aboriginals.

The lack of theory which addresses the interaction of race and gender on violent crime cannot be overemphasized. While the overrepresentation of Aboriginals in Canadian correctional systems is well documented (Frideres, 1993; Satzewich & Wotherspoon, 1993; Silverman & Nielsen, 1992; Valentine, 1980), the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in incarcerated populations is even greater (Johnson & Rodgers, 1993; LaPrairie, 1984; 1993; Satzewich & Wotherspoon, 1993; York, 1989). The results of the present analysis underscore the need for an integration of theories which would simultaneously explain the high rate of violent crime committed by Aboriginals, marriage patterns, and alcoholism. For instance, an understanding of the spousal homicide patterns of Aboriginals would be furthered by an examination of how the social disorganization of Aboriginal communities is associated with patterns of marriage and marital dissolution.

The current findings suggest that family formation may be important in explaining the high rate of violence by Aboriginal women. The development of theory should combine these variables with structural level variables such as the economic situation of Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginals are Canada's most impoverished group (Valentine, 1980). Their situation is characterized by the lowest incomes, worst health, and highest unemployment rates of any one group in the country. The rate of poverty among Aboriginals is twice as high as that of the general population (Frideres, 1993), while their educational attainment levels are considerably lower (Valentine, 1980). Those who are in the labor force are clustered in occupations of low socioeconomic status and high seasonal unemployment rates. Very few are represented in professions or the skilled labor force. Financial support from a variety of provincial and federal welfare assistance programs form a significant portion of native family income.

La Prairie's work points to the significance of economic activity in understanding male and female roles in native society. As the welfare system functioned to make women the primary breadwinners, men forfeited their status as family providers (LaPrairie, 1993). LaPrairie (1987) describes how role loss among males has resulted in work that does not continue year-round and sporadic contributions to the household economy. In contrast, the

more modest contribution of women, consisting largely of social assistance, is much more stable, giving women control of the household economy. Furthermore, the employability of women in the local waged labor economy due the availability of clerical-type jobs and the level of women's skills, further increases the visibility of male unemployment and economic alienation (LaPrairie, 1993). This economic power may reduce women's dependence on men. In such cases, women may be more likely to strike back at those who aggress against them. Economic power has been theorized to play a similar role in explaining Black female violence in the U.S. (Riedel, 1989). Future theorizing should focus on how this economic power is related to marriage patterns, family structure, and attitudes toward violence.

Further, the role of culture requires further investigation. As culture plays a role in shaping attitudes toward and tolerance for violent behavior, as well as views on appropriate gender roles in society, racial variation in the spousal SROK may partially reflect cultural differences.¹¹ Naturally, the present analysis is limited by what variables are present in the dataset. Future research would benefit tremendously from the analysis of valid data on alcohol use, particularly given the findings of one study indicating twice as many alcohol-related offenses for native women than for native men (LaPrairie, 1984). Although information on alcohol-use is available in the current data, the variable suffers from large numbers of missing cases and has questionable validity. Most important, the pervasive stereotype of the "drunk Indian" suggests that the error in this variable will be systematically related to race, making its use problematic.

The current results lend some support to Daly and Wilson's evolutionary theory of homicide. However, their findings with respect to the impact of age disparity on the SROK were only replicated in the case of Aborigines. The benefit of analyzing the spousal SROK for each race separately is emphasized by the finding that the relationship between the SROK and factors like age disparity do not hold across all racial groups. One possible explanation for this finding is that Aboriginal men are less likely to use violence as a response to proprietary inclinations than are Black and White men, as male sexual jealousy would tend to be heightened over young wives. The result would be more equivalent rates of female- and male-perpetrated spousal killings among Aboriginal couples where the wife is 10 or more years younger, as was found here. Alternatively, young Aboriginal women may be more likely to resort to lethal violence in self-defense against older jealous partners, which would also produce more equal spousal homicide rates for Aboriginal males and females. I encourage greater research attention to these kinds of issues, as reducing the rates of both female- and male-perpetrated spousal homicides among Aboriginal Canadians is a goal which is inseparable from the objective of reducing the victimization of Aboriginal women.

NOTES

¹Canadian national homicide data from 1961 through 1973 included only those cases where the police laid a charge of murder; cases in which the initial charge was one of manslaughter were omitted. Although this could potentially introduce some biases with respect to sex ratio calculations, it is not likely to have substantially affected the analyses. Even when manslaughter cases were included post-1973, they made up a very small proportion of the overall number of homicide cases generally (490 out of the 5948 that occurred between 1974-83, or 8.2%), and of spousal homicides in particular (59 out of 1058, or 5.6%). Any bias that may have resulted from their exclusion is likely to be in the form of *reducing*

the magnitude of differences between the spousal SROK for Aboriginals versus Whites or Blacks since when these cases were included, more males than females were charged with manslaughter among Whites who killed their spouse (thereby reducing the spousal SROK for this group), while more females than males were charged with manslaughter among Aboriginals who killed their spouse (thereby increasing the spousal SROK for this group). Extrapolating from these patterns, one could surmise that had manslaughter cases been included for the years 1961-73, the spousal SROK for Whites would have been even lower and the spousal SROK for Aboriginals would have been even higher than the present data suggest. This in turn would only have served to increase the discrepancy between the spousal SROK for Aboriginals versus the other groups, further strengthening the findings of the current analysis.

²See Daly and Wilson (1988, 1989) for supporting evidence of this claim.

³Although I am able to analyze data for more than double the number of years analyzed in Daly and Wilson's study (23 years compared to 10 years), my extended time frame adds only 11 more Black-perpetrated spousal homicide cases to the 31 analyzed by Daly and Wilson.

⁴Male and female population estimates by race were derived from information in the Canadian Census pertaining to ethnic origin for the years 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1986. Many thanks to Andy Siggner and Anatole Romaniuc for their help in collecting this information.

⁵Because Canadian Census data on marriages do not distinguish between marriages which are registered and those which are common-law, data are not available to test this hypothesis.

⁶Structuring the comparison this way also helped to alleviate the problem of small case numbers in some of the categories.

⁷Although analyses were based on a population of homicides, rather than a sample of homicides, I still used inferential statistics to evaluate effect size since there are different sources of random error besides sampling error (e.g., measurement error) which may influence parameter estimates.

⁸The interracial variable can be conceived of as a control variable in the sense that it acts as an indirect proxy for victimization experienced by Aboriginal women at the hands of Aboriginal men, which may be a factor contributing to the high spousal SROK among this group. See the section on interracial homicides on page 3 for a full discussion of this argument.

⁹All models were reestimated a second time with this variable included. The number of cases included in the analysis dropped from 1548 to 1094. The inclusion of this variable affects the results to such a degree that it suggests that the values of this variable are not missing at random, thereby discouraging its inclusion. Furthermore, a cross-tabulation reveals that the level of missing values on this variable does vary by race, with nearly twice the percentage of missing values for cases involving Aboriginals (56.9%) compared to Whites (30.7%) or Blacks (31%). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that when the race variables were added to a model that included this variable along with the other four control variables, the race variables still did not attain significance.

¹⁰Due to the finding that the two race variables are very highly correlated (Pearson correlation = .838) as a result of the fact that the large majority of spousal homicides are intra-racial, separate analyses were also conducted which included only one of the two racial variables. No change in the pattern of statistical significance resulted for those variables found to be significant in the original analysis. However, the variable denoting Aboriginal

versus non-Aboriginal female attained statistical significance when the variable for Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal male was removed from the equation. The coefficient for this variable indicated that where the woman was a non-Aboriginal as opposed to an Aboriginal, the odds of the victim being female increased by a factor of 1.6.

¹¹I indirectly tried to assess this possibility by comparing spousal homicides committed by Whites from Quebec versus Whites from the rest of Canada. Although this comparison does not directly explain the high proportion of female-perpetrated spousal killings among Aboriginals, it may have important implications concerning the extent to which Native Canadian culture plays a role in the homicide patterns of its people. The results reveal that there is a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) in the ratio of female-perpetrated to male-perpetrated spousal homicides for Whites from Quebec versus the rest of Canada. In particular, the ratio is lower for White perpetrators from Quebec compared to the remaining provinces and territories (17 versus 25). This may be an indication that French Canadian culture fosters the development of less tolerant attitudes concerning violent behavior among women to the point where they are less inclined to act in such a way. It could also be a reflection of limited tolerance for spousal abuse by males, resulting in fewer females having to defend themselves with lethal force. Extrapolated to Aboriginals, these findings may also suggest that there is greater tolerance in Native Canadian culture for violent behavior on the part of either males or females, which is producing a higher SROK for this group.

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