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PATTERNS OF MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS HOMICIDE

EDWARD GREEN* AND RUSSELL P. WAKEFIELD**

INTRODUCTION

The study of crime has traditionally focused upon the conventional criminal behavior patterns of the lower classes. Not until Sutherland's seminal work on white-collar crime did researchers improve the representativeness of the subject matter of criminology by studying the crimes of the rich as well as those of the poor.¹ This development shows that predatory crime is not exclusively, necessarily, or even primarily a product of lower class character structure. It also proves that social class differences in the conditions of life give rise to different kinds of opportunities and methods for criminal gain. The investigation reported here initiates a similar effort in the area of criminal homicide. Because it occurs rarely, middle or upper-class homicide has largely eluded systematic analysis. Nevertheless, information on the circumstances of its occurrence is essential to the development of a comprehensive theory of homicide. This study, therefore, explores how patterns of criminal homicide in the middle and upper-class differ from those of the lower-class.

The research literature displays relatively consistent findings regarding the circumstances of criminal homicide. The characteristics of offenders and their victims, the motives of the killers, the patterns of interaction between the offender and victim, the methods and techniques employed, and the accompanying temporal and spatial patterns all tend to remain somewhat constant. Collectively summarized, the leading American studies² show that:

1. Black males from 15 to 30 years of age kill more frequently than any other racial age-sex category.
2. As many as 64% of offenders and 47% of victims have prior criminal records.
3. From one-half to two-thirds of homicides are unpremeditated crimes of passion arising out of altercations over matters which, from a middle class perspective, hardly warrant so extreme a response. Robbery, the next most frequent interactional context, accounts for 8 to 19% of homicides.
4. The victim provoked the attack upon himself by an overt act of aggression in from 22 to 38% of the cases.
5. Almost one-half of the killings of married women are perpetrated by their husbands and, when a man is killed by a woman, the offender is most likely to be his wife.
6. Homicide followed by suicide accounts for 2 to 9% of the cases and it usually involves members of the same family.
7. Firearms are most commonly the instrument of death, followed in order of frequency by piercing instruments and beating with fists, feet, or a bludgeon of some sort.
8. Homicide is alcohol-related in 40 to 65% of cases.
9. The incidence of homicide reaches its peak from 8:00 P.M. Friday to 12:00 midnight Saturday.
10. The place of occurrence of homicide is almost evenly divided between incidents taking place in the home of the victim or the offender and those occurring outside the home.

The data on which the above findings are based consist of cases involving almost entirely persons of lower socio-economic status. Very few studies have focussed on middle or upper status levels. Wolfgang

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY 296 (1941); Frankel, *One Thousand Murderers*, 29 J. CRIM. L. & C. 672 (1939) [hereinafter cited as Frankel]; Harlan, *Five-hundred Homicides*, 40 J. CRIM. L. & C. 736 (1950) [hereinafter cited as Harlan]; Pokorny, *A Comparison of Homicides in Two Cities*, 56 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 479 (1965) [hereinafter cited as Pokorny]; Schmid, *A Study of Homicides in Seattle, 1914 to 1924*, 4 Soc. FORCES 745 (1926) [hereinafter cited as Schmid]; Voss & Hepburn, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide in Chicago*, 59 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 499 (1968) [hereinafter cited as Voss & Hepburn].

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¹ E. SUTHERLAND, *WHITE COLLAR CRIME* (1961).

² R. BENSING & H. SCHROEDER, *HOMICIDE IN AN URBAN COMMUNITY* (1960); L. CURTIS, *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* (1974) [hereinafter cited as Curtis]; M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958) [hereinafter cited as Wolfgang]; Block, *Homicide in Chicago: A Nine-year Study (1965-1973)*, 66 J. CRIM. L. & C. 496 (1975) [hereinafter cited as Block]; Block & Zimring, *Homicide in Chicago, 1965-1970*, 10 J. RESEARCH IN CRIME & DELINQUENCY 1 (1973); Cassidy, *Personality Study of 200 Murderers*, 2 J. CRIM.

estimated that nearly all of the offenders in his Philadelphia study of homicide covering the five-year period 1948-1952 were of lower socio-economic status.³ Similar assessments appeared in studies by Brearley,⁴ Frankel,⁵ and Harlan.⁶ It is thus unlikely that the more recent studies by Pokorny,⁷ Voss and Hepburn,⁸ Curtis,⁹ and Block,¹⁰ differ in regard to social class distribution.

This study advances the general hypothesis that the patterns of criminal homicide delineated in the existing research literature do not apply to the middle and upper levels of American society. This position is consistent with a large body of sociological theory and research which holds that the various social classes comprise selective culture groupings differing profoundly in attitudes, values, and patterns of social behavior.¹¹

METHOD

The design of the analysis follows that employed by Wolfgang's study of criminal homicide¹² and replicated by Pokorny,¹³ Voss and Hepburn,¹⁴ and Curtis.¹⁵ The results will be compared with the corresponding findings of these researchers and other major studies. The chi-square test of significance with probability level of .05 or less has been used to ascertain the probability that any difference between the cases of this study and those of the comparison studies in the distribution of a particular variable is a product of chance variation.

A major methodological problem was the procurement of a sufficiently large number of cases for purposes of analysis. We found exceptionally few instances of homicide committed by affluent individuals in the official records of individual communities and even of all the communities within a given state.¹⁶ We therefore sought a data source

with a much wider demographic base. In the absence of any official national or regional compilations containing the requisite information, we were compelled to use newspaper accounts.

Accordingly, the study focused on 119 cases of criminal homicide, reported in the *New York Times* during the sample period from 1955 through 1975, where the offender met the criterion of middle or upper class status. The cases used involved 121 offenders and 191 victims. The procedure for selecting the cases entailed examining the accounts of all cases of homicide given in the *New York Times Index* under the title "murder" (as it related to the charge, not necessarily to the conviction) for each state of the United States. Those cases which described the occupation of the killer in terms of one of the following categories were included in the sample:

- a. professional,
- b. industrialist,
- c. self-employed businessman,
- d. craftsman,
- e. executive-sales,
- f. farm owner,
- g. manager, and
- h. spouses or offspring of persons in above categories.

The occupational distribution of the offenders included fifty-four professionals, of whom fourteen were physicians, eighteen self-employed businessmen, and eighteen sales executives. There were no offenders in the "farm owner" category. The remainder were distributed among the other categories.

Although social class embodies many dimensions other than occupation, it is based fundamentally on the division of labor.¹⁷ Occupation is one of the best indicators of social class membership.¹⁸ The importance of occupation in the ranking of the individual by self and others and its high correlation with other criteria of social status make it the most valid measure of social class position. The exceptional dependability with which it was re-

prosecutors of all 83 counties in the state of Michigan inquiring of any instances of homicide committed by persons in the stipulated occupational categories over a three-year period. Replies received from thirty-two counties yielded only one case.

¹⁷ W. L. WARNER, M. MEEKER, & K. EELLS, *SOCIAL CLASS IN AMERICA 8-9* (1960)

¹⁸ Mayer & Hault, *Social Stratification and Combat Survival*, 34 *SOC. FORCES* 155 (1955); Hodge, Siegel, & Rossi, *Occupational Prestige in the United States, 1925-1963*, 70 *AM. J. SOC.* 290 (1964).

³ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 7.

⁴ H. BREARLEY, *HOMICIDE IN THE UNITED STATES* 146 (1932).

⁵ Frankel, *supra* note 2, at 683-84.

⁶ Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 738-39.

⁷ Pokorny, note 2 *supra*.

⁸ Voss & Hepburn, note 2 *supra*.

⁹ CURTIS, note 2 *supra*.

¹⁰ Block, note 2 *supra*.

¹¹ T. LASSWELL, *CLASS AND STRATUM* (1965); Lenski, *Status Crystallization: A Non-vertical Dimension of Social Status* 19 *A. S. R.* 405 (1966); E. BERGEL, *SOCIAL STRATIFICATION* (1962).

¹² WOLFGANG, note 2 *supra*.

¹³ Pokorny, note 2 *supra*.

¹⁴ Voss & Hepburn, note 2 *supra*.

¹⁵ CURTIS, note 2 *supra*.

¹⁶ In a preliminary effort to track down cases of high status murderers, we distributed a questionnaire to the

ported in newspaper accounts of killings made it more practical for our purposes than any other indicator.

The use of the *New York Times* as a source of data raised questions concerning the representativeness of the cases and the reliability of the information about them. The press coverage of homicides involving lower class victims and offenders seldom extends beyond the community in which the killing occurred or in which the offender or victim resided. However, when the accused or the victim is a person of some prominence, the story is transmitted nationwide by the wire services and influential newspapers are more likely to print it. The *New York Times* is perhaps the leading national newspaper in providing news coverage of important events in all of the states as well as foreign countries. Confidence in the representativeness of the sample is based on the finding that homicides meeting the criteria for selection occurred in eighty-five different cities distributed among twenty-seven states.

In order to check the reliability of the sample, the indices of other influential metropolitan dailies located in widely separated cities (the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New Orleans Picayune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*) were examined to see if these newspapers reported the same middle and upper-class murders.¹⁹ Because this indexing was not available for murders that occurred before January 1, 1972, only a partial check was possible, based on the twenty-nine cases reported after that date. The results of the cross-check showed an almost total uniformity in coverage among the newspapers, indicating the unlikelihood of a regional bias in reporting. This uniformity may reflect the fact that all of these publications subscribe to the same news services. However, the check confirms that the *New York Times* coverage does not omit pertinent cases in other regions of the nation.

Another reliability problem stems from the disparity between the frequency of officially known crimes and the actual frequency of criminal acts. Crimes of low visibility such as petty theft, embezzlement, and rape are markedly underreported in official tabulations. Homicide, however, is one of the most visible and least underreported²⁰ of all crimes, with a higher percentage of known offenses cleared by arrest (91) than any other serious

crime.²¹ Since newspaper reporters depend mainly upon official sources for their information, their knowledge and reporting of homicide cases is likely to be more complete than their reporting of other major types of crime.

RESULTS

The investigation involved eight dimensions of middle and upper class homicide: frequency, characteristics of killers, motives, patterns of interaction, homicide-suicide, methods of killing, effects of alcohol, and temporal and situational factors.

In reporting the results the term *upper* is used to include persons or the spouses and children of persons in those occupations indicated above, as well as those persons who might elsewhere be characterized as middle class. This is done to provide a contrast with other studies emphasizing lower class victims and offenders.

Frequency

The most outstanding difference between the upper and lower-classes is in the rate of homicide. Because of uncertainty concerning the statistical properties of the samples, the calculation of class specific rates would be somewhat speculative. Nevertheless, a vast disparity in the likely rates can be readily demonstrated. Wolfgang estimated that 90 to 95% of the offenders in his Philadelphia study were at the lower end of the occupational scale in the categories of skilled, semi-skilled and service workers, and unemployed.²² Our study, however, indicated a much smaller proportion of murders committed by persons above the lower classes. During the twenty-one year period covered by this study, nearly 228,500 homicides were cleared by arrest in the United States.²³ Assuming an average of one offender for each homicide, the 121 upper-class killers in our sample would constitute only five one-hundredths of one percent (.05%) of the homicide total.

It is likely that a more accurate assessment of the proportion of homicides committed by upper-class persons could be obtained if we confine our calculations to homicides committed in the New York City area, because the *New York Times* could be expected to give more coverage to local cases, especially to homicides committed by persons of

¹⁹ The index used has been published by the Micro Photo Division of Bell and Howell, Wooster, Ohio.

²⁰ PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE TASK FORCE REPORT: CRIME AND ITS IMPACT—AN ASSESSMENT (1967).

²¹ UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS 19 (1965).

²² WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 36-39.

²³ UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS (1955-1975).

prominence. From data provided in the *Uniform Crime Reports*, we can estimate that there were approximately 13,000 arrests for homicide in the New York Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area during the period 1955-1975. Of these, twenty involved middle or upper-class persons. This represents less than one-fifth of one percent. Given that the middle and upper-classes account for roughly 60% of the work-force, the difference in rates between the two classes is enormous. Fewer than 1% of the homicides were committed by that portion of the population comprising 60% of the labor force and members of their immediate families (upper-class members), while more than 99% were committed by the remainder of the population (lower-class members).

Although the small number of killings committed by upper-class persons would seem to reflect the binding power of middle and upper-class values disfavoring expressions of personal violence, the possibility exists that because middle and upper-class persons are more sophisticated and future-oriented than persons in the lower classes, they have better resources to evade detection. They can exercise greater caution and use more effective concealment methods. The findings reported below provide limited support for this supposition and indicate that planning is much more often a feature of upper-class than of lower-class homicide. The extent to which such greater prudence may account for undetected or unsolved murders cannot, however, be readily determined.

Characteristics of Offenders and Victims

The differences between the lower and upper-class offenders in race, sex, and age as shown in Table 1 achieve, overall, a high level of significance. Not one of the 121 upper-class persons accused of murder was black, whereas in studies of preponderantly lower-class homicides by Wolfgang,²⁴ Voss and Hepburn,²⁵ Curtis,²⁶ and Pokorny,²⁷ from 62.8 to 82.3% of homicide offenders were black.²⁸

The preponderance of offenders was of the same race as the victims. The proportion of interracial homicides committed by the entirely white upper-

class offenders (1.6%) was about the same as it was for lower-class white offenders (1.32%-3.8%), but it was significantly lower than the percentage for lower-class black offenders (2.19%-5.28%).

Upper and lower-class offenders did not differ in the sex ratio of the offenders. Approximately 80% were males. They differed greatly, however, in the sexual offender-victim ratio when the offender was a male. Table 1 shows that 58.1% of the upper-class cases, but only 16.0 to 24.27% of the lower-class cases, involved a male offender with a female victim. Killings of females, whether upper or lower-class, were done predominantly by males. Conversely, female offenders in both classes killed five times as many males as females.

Research findings consistently show that homicide offenders are older on the average than those who commit other serious crimes. This tendency is even greater among upper-class homicide offenders. In the present study and in Wolfgang's study, the classification by age consisted of a younger category, *under 30* years of age, and an older category, *30 and older*.²⁹ In the Curtis study, the cutting point between the older and younger categories was age 26.³⁰ Comparing the upper and lower classes of offenders with regard to the two age categories (Table 1), it was discovered that 76.9% of the upper-class offenders are in the older age group. This contrasts with a considerably smaller 56% in the Wolfgang study³¹ and 57.2% in the Curtis study.³²

Motives in Killing

Since the term "motive" conveys widely different meanings in law and behavioral science,³³ we shall, like other researchers,³⁴ follow Wolfgang in employing the term to mean the ostensible purpose of the actor, using the categories that he derived from

²⁹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 65.

³⁰ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 35.

³¹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 361.

³² CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 35. Data on the age of offenders were not comprehensively supplied in the Voss and Hepburn report. It can be ascertained, however, that the offenders were decidedly younger than the upper-class offenders in the present study. Fifty-two and three-tenths percent of the white and 44.5% of the non-white offenders were between 15 and 29 years of age; while 33.5% of all offenders were between 20 and 29. In Block's study, the median age during the nine year periods studied was also relatively young (in the mid-twenties).

³³ A. KORMAN, *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MOTIVATION* (1974).

³⁴ Voss & Hepburn, note 2 *supra*; CURTIS, note 2 *supra*; Pokorny, note 2 *supra*.

²⁴ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 31.

²⁵ Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 501.

²⁶ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 20.

²⁷ Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 480.

²⁸ Likewise Block's study of homicides in Chicago during the years 1965-1970 shows that Blacks accounted for 77 to 83% of the offenders. Block, *supra* note 2, at 498.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF UPPER AND LOWER-CLASS HOMICIDES, BY AGE, SEX, AND RACE OF VICTIM AND OFFENDER

	Social Class				
	Upper	Lower			
		Wolfgang ¹	Voss & Hepburn ²	Curtis ³	Pokorny ⁴
<i>Age (Offender)</i>					
under 30	23.1	44.4*		42.8*	(under 26)
30 & over	76.9	55.6*		57.2*	(26 & over)
(N)	(121)	(620)		(542)	
<i>Sex of Offender and Victim</i>					
M v M	22.7	61.0*	57.58*	62.3*	59.85*
M v F	58.1	16.0*	24.27*	17.5*	16.06*
sub-total	80.8%	77.0%	82.05%	79.8%	75.91%
F v M	16.1	20.0	15.30	16.4	20.19
F v F	3.1	3.0	2.65	3.8	3.90
sub-total	19.2	23.0	17.95	20.2	24.09
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(119)	(588)	(405)	(668)	(423)
<i>Race of Offender and Victim</i>					
B v B	0.0	72.18*	77.57*	65.7*	60.58*
B v W	0.0	3.64*	5.28*	6.5*	2.19*
sub-total	0.0	75.82*	82.25*	72.2*	62.77*
W v W	98.4	21.82*	15.83*	24.0*	35.28*
W v B	1.6	2.36	1.32	3.8	1.95
sub-total	100%	24.18*	17.15*	27.8*	37.23*
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	(119)	(588)	(405)	(571)	(423)

* Significant ($p \leq .05$).

¹ M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958).

² VOSS & HEPBURN, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide in Chicago*, 59 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 499 (1968).

³ L. CURTIS, *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* (1974).

⁴ POKORNY, *A Comparison of Homicide in Two Cities*, 56 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 61 (1965).

terminology adopted by the police in reporting the apparent reason for killings.³⁵ The categories (see Table 2) represent types of situations which could elicit murderous assaults. We added to Wolfgang's original classification two categories from other studies, *psychopathic* and *sexual*, and two categories developed out of our analysis of the upper-class cases: *insurance*, *property*, *inheritance* and *depression*.

The reliability and validity of the subjective judgments which underlie motive imputation are understandably problematical. Nevertheless, the relative consistency among the lower-class comparison studies coupled with the marked differences between the upper-class and lower-class studies in the distribution of ascribed motives clearly indicated that the two homicide class levels stem from different causal origins.

The most distinctively upper-class motive was

material gain as denoted by the category *insurance*, *property*, and *inheritance*. Aside from robbery-homicide cases, this motive does not appear in studies of lower-class offenders; however, it accounts for 24% of the upper-class cases studied. The mean amount of money at stake in murders for insurance, property, or inheritance was well over \$300,000. Accounts of upper-class homicide for material gain more nearly corresponded to folk conceptions of why people murder. The most common scenario depicted a calculated scheme of predatory gain entailing the elimination of a close associate, usually the spouse. The offender may attempt to conceal his involvement by hiring someone to do the job or by employing less visible murder techniques as poison, administering an overdose of medication, or arson.

Depression was found to be the second most common motive in upper-class homicide, accounting for 21.5% of the cases. In nearly all of these, the

³⁵ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 187-90.

TABLE 2
MOTIVES IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE, BY SOCIAL CLASS OF
OFFENDER

	Social Class			
	Upper	Lower		
		Frankel ¹	Wolfgang ²	Curtis ³
Trivial altercation	2.5	51.6*	36.6*	35.7*
Domestic quarrel	12.4	15.4	13.4	7.7*
Jealousy	4.1	—	11.1*	4.4
Altercation over money, cards, dice	0.8	—	10.3*	—
Robbery	1.6	18.8*	7.9*	8.8*
Revenge	1.6	—	4.8*	2.5
Accidental	0.0	—	4.5*	—
Self-defense	0.0	—	1.3	5.5*
Halting a felon	0.0	—	1.1	0.8
Escaping arrest	0.0	—	1.0	—
Concealing birth	0.0	—	0.8	—
Sexual	3.3	5.9	—	2.6
Psychopathic	8.3	—	—	0.9*
Insurance, property, inheritance	24.0	—	—	—
Depression	21.5	—	—	—
Other	12.3	—	—	—
Unknown	7.6	—	3.1	31.1
Total Percent	100	100	100	100
N =	121	713	620	688

* Significant ($p \leq .05$).

¹ Frankel, *One Thousand Murderers*, 29 J. CRIM. L. & C. 672 (1939).

² M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958).

³ L. CURTIS, *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* (1974).

killing was followed by the offender's suicide. Depression as a category of motives was not found in the lower-class comparison-studies, perhaps because so few cases are homicide-suicides. It seems plausible that this disparity reflects a fundamental difference between the classes in vulnerability to depression or in how people are socialized to cope with blows to self-esteem.

Designated as the motive in from 7.9 to 18.8% of the cases in the lower-class studies, robbery accounted for only 1.6% of the upper-class cases.³⁶ Similarly, the percentage of killings motivated by the desire for revenge was quite low in both classes,

³⁶ The one case in which it did occur is not typical of felony-murder. Two female university students who belonged to a radical organization attempted to secure funds for the group's program by a robbery which resulted in the death of a police officer.

although significantly smaller in the upper-class cases (1.6%) than in Wolfgang's Philadelphia study (4.8%).

The fact that so many victims die in quarrels over minor differences is one of the most tragic features of criminal homicide, yet it hardly applied to the upper-class cases. Only 2.5% of the upper-class homicides, as compared to between one-third³⁷ and one-half³⁸ of the lower-class homicides, were the result of a trivial altercation.³⁹

Upper-class homicide most nearly approximated the lower-class pattern in murders arising out of domestic quarrels. Upper-class offenders killed spouses in family fights in almost the same proportion (12.4%) as the lower-class offenders in the Frankel⁴⁰ (15.4%) and Wolfgang⁴¹ (13.4%) studies, and in a significantly greater proportion than the lower-class offenders in the Curtis⁴² (7.7%).

This suggests that upper-class persons are more secure in their love relationships than are lower-class persons. Jealousy motivated only 4.1% of the 121 upper-class offenders, as compared with 11.1% of Wolfgang's 620 offenders.⁴³

The category of psychopathic motives supplemented Wolfgang's classification of motives to accommodate the 8.3% of upper-class homicides which appear to be symptomatic of mental illness (such as delusions, paranoia, or cases where there is a prior history of psychiatric treatment).

Patterns of Interaction

Victim-precipitated killings. Wolfgang employed the term "victim-precipitated homicide" to refer to those cases "in which the victim is a direct, positive precipitator in the crime,"⁴⁴ the first to use physical force in the homicide drama. The comparison of our findings regarding victim-precipitation with those of Wolfgang, Voss and Hepburn, and Curtis,

³⁷ Frankel, *supra* note 2, at 687; CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 66.

³⁸ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 191; CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 78.

³⁹ Studies by Voss & Hepburn and Block also indicate a high percentage of killings attributable to rows over unimportant matters. Block, *supra* note 2, at 505, 510; Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 505.

⁴⁰ Frankel, *supra* note 2, at 687.

⁴¹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 207.

⁴² CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 661.

⁴³ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 191. Curtis' results also showed a low proportion of jealousy-motivated homicides (4.4%), but because of the large proportion of cases in which the motive is unknown, the reliability of this finding is uncertain.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 252.

suggests an extensive difference between the two social classes in attitudes toward violence and the functions it serves in interpersonal relations. Of the lower-class killers, 25.5% in the Wolfgang study,⁴⁵ 37.9% in the Voss and Hepburn study,⁴⁶ and 22% in the Curtis study⁴⁷ could claim some mitigation of the offense by virtue of the initial show of force by the victim. In contrast, none of the upper-class killers in the present study was provoked by a victim's overt act of force.

Interpersonal relationships. The kinds of relationships in which people are most likely to kill differ greatly between the upper and lower-classes. The upper level killers victimized members of their own family in 73% of cases, proportionately three times as frequently as their lower-class counterparts for whom the comparable figure ranged from 22.9 to 24.7% in the three studies furnishing comparable data.⁴⁸ The upper-class offenders chose victims from among close friends less than half as frequently (10.5%) as the lower-class offenders in studies by Wolfgang (28.2%)⁴⁹ and Pokorny (27.9%),⁵⁰ and in about equal proportion to those in the Curtis study (9.0%).⁵¹ The upper-class offenders killed acquaintances in generally the same proportion (13%) as the murderers in the Wolfgang (13.5%)⁵² and Curtis (15.4%)⁵³ studies, and in a significantly greater proportion than the murderers in the Pokorny study (4.7%).⁵⁴ Killings of paramours, sex rivals, and enemies collectively accounted for 11.1 to 18.5% of the lower-class victims, but comprised none of the upper-class victims.

The upper-class offenders killed their spouses in a significantly higher proportion of cases than did their lower-class counterparts. Forty-seven percent of the upper-class offenders killed their spouses, while in the studies by Pokorny, Wolfgang, and Voss and Hepburn, less than 20% of the lower-class offenders were found to have murdered their marital partners.⁵⁵ The basis for this marked deviation in spouse-homicide is suggested by a comparison

of the present study with Wolfgang's study in respect to the ostensible motive for the act. In the latter, dealing with a preponderantly lower-class population, 64% of the killings were attributed to a *family quarrel* and 23% to *jealousy*.⁵⁶ The corresponding figures found in this study for the upper-class homicides were significantly lower, only 21.4 and 7.2%. None of the lower-class spouse-killings, but 26.9% of those in the upper-class, were linked to pecuniary motives such as insurance benefits or property inheritance, while 28.6% were attributed to profound mental depression. Of the 56 upper-class spouse-slayers, almost one-fifth (six husbands and five wives), hired someone else to do the job.

Offender-victim ratios. The upper-class homicide claims more victims on the average than its lower-class counterpart. One fourth of the upper-class offenders killed more than one person. The offender/victim ratio in the upper-class cases was less than one to one (.63:1) and was significantly lower than in the lower-class cases which averaged slightly more than one to one (1.008:1 to 1.06:1).⁵⁷

Homicide-Suicide

As axiomatic as any generalizations in the social sciences are the positive association between suicide and social status and the negative association between homicide and social status.⁵⁸ These results afford additional confirmation. Although upper-class offenders made a minute contribution to the total homicide rate, what killings they did commit were followed by suicide in a relatively large 27% of cases, as compared with only 0.8 to 9% of the cases studied by Dublin and Bunzel, Wolfgang, and Boudoris.⁵⁹

The median age of the upper-class homicide-suicides exceeds that of the predominantly lower-class killers who committed suicide in Wolfgang's study by fourteen years (52.5 to 38.8).⁶⁰ The findings suggest that injury to one's self-esteem coming at a time of life when the prospects of repairing the damage appear less hopeful than in younger years, heightens the risk of suicide. All of the upper-class

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 254.

⁴⁶ Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 506.

⁴⁷ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 82.

⁴⁸ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 207; Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 483; CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 46.

⁴⁹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 207.

⁵⁰ Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 483.

⁵¹ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 46.

⁵² WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 207.

⁵³ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 47.

⁵⁴ Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 483.

⁵⁵ *Id.*; Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 506; WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 207.

⁵⁶ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 213.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 27; Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 479; Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 500.

⁵⁸ A. HENRY & J. SHORT, JR., *SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE; SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF AGGRESSION* (1954).

⁵⁹ Dublin & Bunzel, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, 24 SURVEY GRAPHIC 127, 130 (1935); WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 272; Boudouris, *A Classification of Homicides*, 11 CRIMINOLOGY 525, 539 (1974).

⁶⁰ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 278.

homicide-suicides were characterized by despondency resulting from a loss of status or an impaired ability to take accustomed roles, manifested by the failure to receive a desired promotion or recognition, financial insolvency, illness, or sexual humiliation. The motive ascribed in 76.9% of the upper-class cases is depression, a category that did not appear in other studies of homicide-suicide. The motives of family quarrel, jealousy, and revenge accounted for 73.1% of Wolfgang's homicide-suicide cases,⁶¹ but for only 15.6% of the present study's upper-class cases.

Methods Used in Criminal Homicide

Taking into account the race and sex of the offender, the data concerning the method of killing revealed a tendency for the upper-class offender to avoid violent bodily contact with the victim. The most salient social class difference lies in the use of stabbing, employed by only 5% of the upper-class offenders as compared with a significantly greater 25.4% in Pokorny's Houston study,⁶² 29.2% in Curtis' survey of seventeen American cities,⁶³ and 37.5% in Wolfgang's Philadelphia study.⁶⁴

Other techniques of killing involved less pronounced class differentials. In general, upper-class offenders, both male and female, employ firearms proportionately more frequently, in 65.3% of cases as compared with 32.9 to 63.5% of the offenders in the other studies.⁶⁵ It is doubtful, however, that this variation was due solely to class. A regional cultural factor may have been operative inasmuch as the percentage of shootings in the upper-class was exceeded by the white males in Harlan's Jefferson County (Alabama) study (73.9%)⁶⁶ and the white females in Pokorny's Houston study (74.3%),⁶⁷ and was almost equalled by the black and white males and black females in Houston.⁶⁸

An even less pronounced class differential emerged with respect to homicide by beating, which was inflicted significantly less frequently (9%) in the upper-class cases than it was in the lower-class cases reported by Wolfgang (23.5%)⁶⁹

or Curtis (14.0%),⁷⁰ and slightly more frequently than those reported by Harlan (7.1%)⁷¹ or by Pokorny (5.9%).⁷²

In line with these findings, the upper-class offender appears to use more refined techniques for killing than his lower-class counterparts. Included in the 20.7% of the cases categorized "other method" were 5 homicides by hypodermic injections of a lethal drug, four poisonings, and a staged hit-and-run motor vehicle death. Lower-class offenders killed by other methods, whatever they may be, in only 5.2 to 10% of cases.⁷³

Alcohol in the Homicidal Act

Ever since Quetelet⁷⁴ observed that alcohol was a catalyst in 40% of the murders committed in France, criminologists have studied the deinhibitory effects of alcohol.⁷⁵ Police reports commonly note that heavy drinking by one or more parties preceded a murderous assault. Upper-class homicide, to the contrary, involves very little alcoholic consumption. As far as could be ascertained from the newspaper accounts, only 1.7% of the killings examined in the current study revealed a bout of drinking prior to the crime, as compared with 63.3% in Wolfgang's study,⁷⁶ 53.5% in Voss and Hepburn's study,⁷⁷ and 58% in Harlan's study.⁷⁸

Temporal and Spatial Factors

The calendar and the clock exert a powerful constraint upon human affairs. In temperate climates the change of seasons that promotes regular shifts between indoor and outdoor activities affects patterns of human interaction and sociability. A combination of economic convenience and religious preference has created a weekly cycle of activity. The traditional six days of labor followed by a sabbath for rest and religious observance has given way to a more secularly conceived five-day work week and a two-day period to enjoy leisure interests. As work comes to require less time and physical exertion, the evening hours are more likely to be passed in social activities among friends and

⁶¹ *Id.* at 275.

⁶² Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 481.

⁶³ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 102.

⁶⁴ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 85.

⁶⁵ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 102; Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 743-44; Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 481; WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 85.

⁶⁶ Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 744.

⁶⁷ Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 481.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 85.

⁷⁰ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 102.

⁷¹ Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 744.

⁷² Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 481.

⁷³ *Id.*; WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 85; Curtis, *supra* note 2, at 102.

⁷⁴ Quetelet, *Treatise on Man*, in *THE HERITAGE OF MODERN CRIMINOLOGY* 27 (S. Sylvester, Jr. ed. 1972).

⁷⁵ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 134.

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 136.

⁷⁷ Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 505.

⁷⁸ Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 748.

family. Because of this, researchers since Quetelet have observed an increase in homicide rates during warm periods of the year, on weekends, and in the evening hours.⁷⁹

The diurnal distribution of upper-class homicide differed from that of lower-class homicide. We found no significant variations in the rate of upper-class homicide by the day of the week or the month of the year. This finding is consistent with the results noted above that upper-class homicides are more apt to be premeditated and are rarely alcohol-induced eruptions of weekend sprees or holiday celebrations. The findings concerning the effect of the hour of the day, on the other hand, were quite consistent with those of lower-class homicide obtained by Voss and Hepburn, Pokorny, Wolfgang, and Harlan. Each study showed a higher number of homicides occurring between 8 P.M. and 1:59 A.M. than at any other time of the day.⁸⁰

It was possible to determine in every case whether the killing took place in the home of the offender or victim, but in some cases the information did not include the room of the house in which the murder occurred. The comparison is therefore restricted to whether the killing took place at the home of the victim or away from it. Since upper-class homicide more often than lower-class homicide involves offenders and victims who are members of the same family, it was not surprising that the upper-class victims were murdered at home in a significantly higher proportion of cases, 72.3% compared with 51.2% of the cases in Wolfgang's Philadelphia study,⁸¹ 41.9% in Pokorny's Houston study,⁸² and 34.6% in Curtis' survey of seventeen American cities.⁸³

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The infrequency of known homicides committed by persons of middle or upper-class status supports the conventional sociological wisdom concerning the powerful taboo against violence in the value systems of the middle and upper-class subcultures. When there is a resort to violence, the *modus operandi* more often resembles the fictional conception of the calculated murder than the impulsive alcohol-

stimulated passionate outburst of lower-class violence. Premeditation, uncommon in lower-class violence, is a feature of more than three-fourths of upper-class homicides. The wish for pecuniary gain motivates the upper-class killer more than any other single desire; while in studies of lower-class cases, it appears only in connection with murders committed in the course of robberies. Mental depression, the next most frequently ascribed motive in upper-class homicide, does not even appear as a category of analysis in the lower-class studies.

The statistical profile of the middle or upper-class homicide is virtually the opposite of the lower-class homicide, except for the sex of the offender. To summarize:

1. The upper-class killer is a white male, over thirty years old. In the lower-class, he is a black male under thirty.
2. There are no ascertainable cases of victim-precipitated upper-class homicide compared to the one-fifth to one-third such cases in lower-class homicides.
3. Intra-familial homicides predominate in the upper-class cases, occurring three times as often as in the lower-class cases (73%:22.9-24.7%).
4. Homicide followed by suicide accounts for 27% of upper-class cases, but only 0.8% to 9% of lower-class cases.
5. The upper-class method of killing is seldom stabbing. It often involves shooting, though not proportionately more frequently than the lower-class offenders in studies with southern locales.
6. Alcoholic consumption is rarely related to upper-class homicide. Over one-half of the lower-class homicides are alcohol-related.
7. Upper-class homicides, like lower-class homicides, take place during the evening hours, 8 P.M. to 1:59 A.M.; however, unlike lower-class homicides, upper-class cases follow no diurnal pattern.
8. Upper-class killings are significantly more likely to occur at the victim's home than those in the lower-class cases.

The concurrence in the upper-class cases of a complete absence of victim-precipitated homicides with a relatively high proportion of homicide-suicides, and, conversely, in the lower-class cases, a high proportion of victim precipitated homicides with a very low proportion of homicide-suicides, lends credence to Wolfgang's hypothesis that victim-precipitated homicide serves much the same psychological function for the lower-class person as suicide does for the upper-class person. In short,

⁷⁹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 96-98.

⁸⁰ Harlan, *supra* note 2, at 742; Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 481-82; Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 2, at 504; WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 108.

⁸¹ WOLFGANG, *supra* note 2, at 123.

⁸² Pokorny, *supra* note 2, at 482.

⁸³ CURTIS, *supra* note 2, at 176.

the victim who provokes the deadly assault may unconsciously wish to effect his own demise.⁸⁴

However, the fact that the adversary who makes the first overtly threatening move does not always win may reflect chance as much as any unconscious death wish. Whether the original attacker or the originally intended victim winds up in the morgue often depends upon who is stronger, more sober, better armed, or who gains the advantage of a momentary distraction, a slip, or a fall. Thus, victim-precipitated homicide is a distinctly greater possibility in the lower-classes because of the commonly duel-like character of encounters between such assailants.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Wolfgang, *Suicide by Means of Victim-Precipitated Homicide*, 6 J. CLINICAL & EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY & Q. REV. PSYCH. & NEUROLOGY 335 (1959).

⁸⁵ There remains the possibility that, in a criminal case, the allegation of a victim-precipitated homicidal

In conclusion, this exploratory investigation has attempted, first, to ascertain social class differences in rates and patterns of criminal homicide and, second, to suggest how differences in social class subcultures affect the situational context of homicide. The results underscore the necessity of broadening the theoretical base for the explanation of homicide in a way that reflects the full range of personal, situational, motivational, and interactional factors associated with this most seriously regarded form of criminal behavior.

attack is a self-serving act by the defendant and in mitigation of the gravity of the charge against him. Since the victim is not alive to oppose the contention of the survivor, there may be a persistent bias in official reports concerning who made the first overt show of aggression, except where there are witnesses to testify to the contrary (and even then, these witnesses may be friendly to the defendant).