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# STRANGER HOMICIDES IN NINE AMERICAN CITIES\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Past studies of homicide have focused either on the general demographic characteristics of homicide or on causal factors or processes descriptive of selected types, such as homicides within the family or those associated with felonies.<sup>1</sup> Few studies have examined homicide comparatively by describing ways in which various types of homicide differ from each other.<sup>2</sup> Even fewer studies describe the interactions between demographic variables such as age, sex, and race between and within types of homicide.<sup>3</sup> For example, while numerous studies have established a greater volume of homicide victimization for young black males,<sup>4</sup> these studies seldom determine whether such victimization exists in all contexts, such as within the family, between friends, and in robbery situations.<sup>5</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Farley, *Homicide Trends in the United States*, 17 DEMOGRAPHY 177 (1980); Klebba, *Homicide Trends in the United States*, 90 PUB. HEALTH REP. 195 (1975); Loftin, *Homicide Related to Crimes Other Than Drug Traffic*, 62 BULL. N.Y. ACAD. MED. 517 (1986); Zimring, *Determinants of the Death Rate From Robbery: A Detroit Time Study*, 6 J. LEG. STUD. 317 (1977).

<sup>2</sup> For one complete study that analyzes types of homicide, see M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *THE NATURE AND PATTERNS OF AMERICAN HOMICIDE* (1985).

<sup>3</sup> For a study that attempted to analyze race in relation to homicide type, see Zimring, Mukherjee & Van Winkle, *Intimate Violence: A Study of Intersexual Homicide in Chicago*, 50 U. CHI. L. REV. 910 (1983).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* 31-33 (1975); Farley, *supra* note 1, at 179; Klebba, *supra* note 1, at 199.

<sup>5</sup> For one study that has explored victimization in various contexts, see M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *supra* note 2.

Article will first describe different types of homicide in terms of characteristics of victims, offenders, location, method of attack, and presence of witnesses

This Article will next explore the types of homicide in terms of interactions among the variables of age, sex, and race.

## II. TYPES OF HOMICIDE

While numerous typologies of homicide have been suggested,<sup>6</sup> a typology used in homicide research is generally based on differences in victim-offender relationships.<sup>7</sup> Classification schemes for such studies are diverse and inconsistent across studies. Wolfgang has classified victim-offender relationships into thirteen categories;<sup>8</sup> Boudouris has used twelve categories;<sup>9</sup> and Curtis has used four primary categories.<sup>10</sup> In Curtis' study of seventeen American cities in 1967, 24.7% of homicides were found to be within the family; 9% were within other primary relationships, which include lovers and close friends; 45.4% were within non-primary relationships, which include prostitutes, acquaintances, neighbors, and strangers (15.6% of the combined group were strangers); and 20.9% were unknown.<sup>11</sup> Studies using such classifications often provided frequencies of the type of killing.<sup>12</sup> No study has compared the characteristics of homicide types in order to elucidate structure and process.

More recent studies, such as Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz in 1980,<sup>13</sup> Loftin in 1986,<sup>14</sup> and Cook in 1985,<sup>15</sup> have focused on violence or homicide within specific relationships, such as family homicide versus robbery homicide. These studies have added immensely to our understanding of family and robbery murders. Gelles, for example, found that the families which have the most violence

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of typologies, see M. RIEDEL, *A REVIEW OF HOMICIDE TYPOLOGIES* (1980).

<sup>7</sup> Numerous studies have used the victim-offender relationship as the basis for homicide typologies. *E.g.*, L. CURTIS, *CRIMINAL VIOLENCE* 45-64 (1974); M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 4, at 254-57; Boudouris, *A Classification of Homicide*, 11 *CRIMINOLOGY* 525 (1974).

<sup>8</sup> M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 4, at 254-57.

<sup>9</sup> Boudouris, *supra* note 7.

<sup>10</sup> L. CURTIS, *supra* note 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 52.

<sup>12</sup> *See, e.g.*, Boudouris, *supra* note 7 at 536.

<sup>13</sup> M. STRAUSS, R. GELLES & S. STEINMETZ, *BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: VIOLENCE IN THE AMERICAN FAMILY* (1980). *See also* R. GELLES, *THE VIOLENT HOME: A STUDY OF PHYSICAL AGGRESSION BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES* (1972).

<sup>14</sup> Loftin, *supra* note 1.

<sup>15</sup> Cook, *Is Robbery Becoming More Violent? An Analysis of Robbery Murder Trends Since 1968* 76 *J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY* 480 (1985).

within them are those families which are isolated and lack social supports.<sup>16</sup> Unlike family homicides, robbery-motivated homicides are relatively more likely to occur in urban environments.<sup>17</sup> High rates of robbery-murder are likely to be found in urban areas which have concentrated poor populations and which have young males who possess guns and are ready to use them to secure material goods.<sup>18</sup> Types of homicide and whether there is variation between and within these types have seldom been examined systematically.<sup>19</sup> Smith and Parker in 1980<sup>20</sup> and Parker in 1984,<sup>21</sup> however, studied felony types of homicide and discovered important differences in causal factors for intimate versus felony-related homicides. In their work, Smith and Parker examined predictors of four types of homicide: robbery murders; other felony murders; homicides occurring between friends and acquaintances; and homicides occurring among family intimates.<sup>22</sup> Some predictors were type-specific. For example, racial composition is a factor in the robbery and the friends and acquaintances homicide types, but not in the other types.<sup>23</sup> In his 1984 study, Parker concluded that the composition of homicide types needed greater elaboration.<sup>24</sup> Such elaboration is important both theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, as Parker has shown, the search for the causes of homicide can only be effectively completed with a refined set of appropriate categories of types of killings.<sup>25</sup> Pragmatically, strategies for intervention should be quite different if there are clearly different types of homicide with different populations involved. For example, if stranger murders involve young male felons and family homicides involve middle-aged adult females, the causes and strategies of intervention and prevention will most likely differ.

Four types of homicide will be examined in this Article. The first two categories are homicide within the family and homicide

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<sup>16</sup> R. GELLES, *supra* note 13, at 132.

<sup>17</sup> Parker & Smith, *Deterrence, Poverty and Type of Homicide*, 85 AM. J. SOC. 614 (1979).

<sup>18</sup> Loftin, *supra* note 1, at 528.

<sup>19</sup> M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *supra* note 2; Parker & Smith, *supra* note 17.

<sup>20</sup> Smith & Parker, *Type of Homicide and Variation in Regional Rates*, 59 SOC. FORCES 136 (1980).

<sup>21</sup> R. Parker, *Poverty, Subculture of Violence and Type of Poverty on Urban Homicide* (1984)(unpublished manuscript)(paper presented at American Society of Criminology meetings, Atlanta).

<sup>22</sup> Smith & Parker, *supra* note 20.

<sup>23</sup> R. Parker, *supra* note 21, at 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 19.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

among friends and acquaintances.<sup>26</sup> The third and fourth categories emerge as a result of the distinction between two types of stranger murders: those associated with felonies and those not associated with felonies. To date, the research literature has for the most part associated robbery or felony-related murders with stranger killings as though the two were synonymous.<sup>27</sup> Statistical evidence from a national study suggests, however, that stranger felony and stranger non-felony homicides may be distinct.<sup>28</sup> These data show that stranger homicides are associated with felonies in 57.3% of the cases and are not so associated in 42.7% of the cases, although the ratio between felony-related and non-felony-related stranger murders is as low as 1:1 in some cities.<sup>29</sup> Table 1 reveals these patterns. Given these data and the importance of this issue,

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENT OF STRANGER HOMICIDES ASSOCIATED WITH A FELONY IN EIGHT CITIES, 1978**

	STRANGER HOMICIDES	
	FELONY ASSOCIATED	NOT FELONY ASSOCIATED
Philadelphia	52.5% (53)	47.5% (48)
Newark	66.7% (18)	33.3% (9)
Chicago	60.0% (54)	40.0% (36)
St. Louis	62.2% (23)	37.8% (14)
Memphis	65.2% (15)	34.8% (8)
Dallas	55.6% (35)	44.4% (28)
Oakland	50.0% (7)	50.0% (7)
"Ashton"	50.0% (10)	50.0% (10)
Total 8 Cities	57.3% (215)	42.7% (160)

Source: Marc Riedel and Margaret A. Zahn. *The Nature and Patterns of American Homicide*, U.S. Government Printing Office, May, 1985, p. 59.

this Article stresses the importance of the investigation of factors affecting the two types of stranger murder and how such murders differ from murders in more intimate circles.

### III. METHODS

Data for this report were drawn from a nation-wide study of the

<sup>26</sup> These categories are congruent with previous homicide research. *E.g.*, L. CURTIS, *supra* note 7; M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *supra* note 2; M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 4.

<sup>27</sup> L. CURTIS, *supra* note 7, at 46-47; M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 4, at 203-21.

<sup>28</sup> M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *supra* note 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 59.

nature and patterns of homicide in the United States.<sup>30</sup> The nine cities selected for study were: Philadelphia and Newark, New Jersey in the Northeast; Chicago and St. Louis in the Midwest; Memphis and Dallas in the South; and Oakland, San Jose,<sup>31</sup> and "Ashton"<sup>32</sup> in the West. In these cities, with the exception of Chicago, data on all cases of homicide occurring in 1978 were collected. In Chicago, because of the large number of homicide cases (over 800), a 50% sample was used.

In each of the nine cities, police and medical examiner departments were asked to supply records for all homicide cases which had occurred in their jurisdictions in 1978. This particular year was selected because the departments have closed active investigations on most of the cases occurring in 1978, yet the data were sufficiently recent to have relevance for current policy and understanding of current homicide patterns. Once permission was secured, coders, persons familiar with the extensive data form used, went to each site and coded information on various aspects of each case, including: characteristics of the offender, such as age, sex, race, and past criminal history; characteristics of the victim; the relationship between the victim and the offender; and a variety of elements surrounding the homicide event, such as the number of witnesses present and the type of weapon used.

Data on a total of 1,748 homicide cases in the nine cities were collected. The original data collection included seventy killings by police in which a police officer was the "offender" and a number of cases in which data were either missing from the files or in which the relationship between the victim and the offender remained unknown (N=260). For the most part, police killings and those homicides in which offender-victim relationship remained unknown have been eliminated from this analysis. After eliminating police killings and those killings in which the relationship was unknown, 1,373 homicide cases with known victim-offender relationships remained.

Victim-offender relationships were classified into four types. The first type, homicides within the family, includes immediate family members, unmarried couples living together, and separated or divorced couples. The within family type does not include hetero-

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<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> Data from San Jose were not included in the national study, *see* M. RIEDEL & M. ZAHN, *supra* note 2, because the focus of that study was on cities with 100 or more cases of homicide in 1978. San Jose did have that many cases. Adding data from San Jose helps provide a more complete picture of homicide and so are included in this survey.

<sup>32</sup> "Ashton" is a code name for a city in the Far West. The police chief of "Ashton" required the use of a code name in exchange for release of information of the city's homicides.

sexual partners who have had some sexual relationship but have not lived together or had some other more extended relationship. These types of cases were classified as the friends and acquaintances homicide type. This second type, friends and acquaintances, includes people who have known each other in some way, ranging from neighbors and business associates to close personal friends. Stranger killings are those in which there is no evidence of prior acquaintance between the victim and the offender. The stranger type is further subdivided into those situations in which a felony is involved and those in which a felony is not involved. Most stranger felonies are robbery-connected, while stranger non-felonies represent a variety of situations. The following four situations, based on actual police records, are examples of stranger non-felony homicide. First, a thirty-one year old black female parked her car in a driveway for a short time in a heavy snow. The car got stuck. When she returned, the offender's father yelled at her and hit her child. The offender, a twenty year old black male, came out of the house, shot and killed the victim, and wounded her two children. Second, the victim and three companions were riding down the street when they became involved in an argument with the occupants of another car. When the car pulled over, the victim, a twenty-two year old white male, got out as did the person in the other car. The latter killed the victim with a shotgun. Third, the offender picked up a hitchhiker and drove down to a deserted creek bottom, where both got out and started drinking some beer. According to the offender, the victim made homosexual advances to him. The offender pushed him away, got a steel pipe from his car and beat the victim to death by hitting him over the head with the pipe. Fourth, the victim, a sixty year old white female, was the owner of a gift store. The offender, a seventeen year old white male, walked into the store and stabbed the victim twice in the chest. He stated that his sister and he had been in the store earlier to buy some "stuff." When they left, he said, "something came into my head to hurt the lady." He went home, got a butcher knife, went back to the store and stabbed the victim after talking to her for about five minutes. The offender's father informed the police that the offender had deep mental problems and had killed a six year old boy in Texas in 1975. As is apparent from these examples, stranger non-felony homicides differ in both weapon and victim characteristics.

General descriptive data for the four types of homicide will be presented. The types of homicide will be described by the age, race, and sex of both the victims and offenders, as well as by method of assault, the location of the killing, and whether or not witnesses

were present. Following the discussion of general characteristics, the types of homicides will be examined, with race, age, and sex held constant in the statistical analysis. White, black and hispanic groups will be examined. Homicides among "other" races were too sparsely represented in the data set to justify inclusion in the analysis and, therefore, were eliminated.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. TYPES OF HOMICIDE IN NINE CITIES

As shown in Table 2, of the 1,373 cases with known victim-offender relationships, 18% occurred within the family, 54% occurred between friends and acquaintances, 16% were stranger felonies and 12% were stranger non-felonies. Clearly, the largest percentage of murders were those in which the killer and victim were acquainted. Twenty-eight percent of those with known relationships, however, were stranger killings, and stranger killings surpassed the percentage of people killed by family members. These data indicate that, among murder victims in the nine cities, the most likely offender was a friend or an acquaintance, and the second most likely offender was a stranger.

**TABLE 2**  
**FREQUENCY, PERCENTAGE AND RATE OF VICTIMIZATION OF FOUR**  
**TYPES OF HOMICIDE IN NINE CITIES, U.S.A., 1978**

	f.	%	RATE PER 100,000
Family Homicide	247	18	3.41
Acquaintance Homicide	736	54	10.47
Stranger Felony Homicide	219	16	2.95
Stranger Non-felony Homicide	171	12	2.28
Relationship Unknown	*	*	4.86
Total	1,373	100%	

\* The above percentage table includes only those cases in which data on the victim-offender relationship is known. There are 260 cases where the relationship is not known (14.8% of total); 36 cases where all data are missing from files (2%); 9 cases of stranger murders which could not be classified into felony or non-felony types (.5%) and 70 police killings (4.0%). Total number of homicides = 1,748.

##### B. CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPES OF HOMICIDE

###### 1. Gender and Type of Homicide

The differential involvement of males and females as victims and as offenders in homicide is shown in Tables 3 and 4. The majority of victims and offenders in all four types of homicide were



**TABLE 3**  
**FREQUENCY AND PERCENT OF VICTIMIZATION BY SEX OF VICTIM**

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	SEX OF VICTIM				
	MALE		FEMALE		
	f	%	f	%	
Family	167	14.8	80	32.9	
Acquaintance	619	54.7	117	48.1	
Stranger Felony	187	16.5	32	13.2	
Stranger Non-Felony	157	13.9	14	5.8	
Total	1,130	99.9	243	100.0	

\* Rates of male and female victimization were also computed using 1980 census data for each of the nine cities as a base. The race and sex specific rates are provided in Table 5. All rates in the paper are calculated similarly.

males. In terms of victimization, both a percentage and a rate analysis show males to be at a greater risk than females. In situations which the victim-offender relationship is known, 82% of the victims were male and 18% were female. Both male and female victims were more likely to be killed by someone that they knew (70% for males and 81% for females). The victims of stranger killings were predominately male; 85% of the victims involved in stranger felony killings and 92% of the victims involved in stranger non-felony killings were male. Although males were killed in many relationships, females were primarily killed within the friends and acquaintance,<sup>33</sup> and family categories.

Furthermore, males were more frequently the offenders in each of the four homicide types, with this dominance increasing as the relationship between the victim and the offender became more distant. Males were almost exclusively the offenders in stranger murders, with 96% of stranger felonies having male offenders and 93% of stranger non-felonies having male offenders.

## 2. *Race and Type of Homicide*

This Article makes contrasts only among the race categories of

<sup>33</sup> Within the friends and acquaintance category it is likely that women were killed by their boyfriends. See M. Zahn & N. Cazenave, *Women, Murder, and Male Domination: A Research Note on Domestic Homicide in Chicago and Philadelphia* (1986) (paper presented at American Society of Criminology meetings in Atlanta). That research note suggested that women were frequently killed by husbands or boyfriends when women attempt to end a relationship. Furthermore, women seldom kill other women. See L. CURTIS, *supra* note 7, at 32. Thus, women were usually killed by men with whom there was prior involvement.

**TABLE 4**  
**FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**  
**BY SEX OF OFFENDER\***

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	SEX OF OFFENDER				TOTAL	
	MALE		FEMALE			
	f	%	f	%		
Family	145	60.0	97	40.0	242	100%
Acquaintance	623	88.0	86	12.0	709	100%
Stranger Felony	167	96.0	7	4.0	174	100%
Stranger Non-Felony	140	93.0	11	7.0	151	100%
Total	1,075		201		1,276	

\* Cases where sex of the offender is unknown are not included in the table.

White, Black and Hispanic.<sup>34</sup> As Table 5 shows, the victimization rates are dramatically higher for black males than for any other group, with 84.4 per 100,000 black males killed as compared to 46.8

**TABLE 5**  
**RATES OF VICTIMIZATION AND OF OFFENDING BY RACE AND SEX**  
**(PER 100,000 POPULATION)**

	VICTIMIZATION	OFFENDING
White Male	16.2	10.5
Black Male	84.4	72.7
Hispanic Male	46.8	42.8
White Female	3.6	1.2
Black Female	14.4	13.2
Hispanic Female	5.3	1.7

per 100,00 for hispanic males and 16.2 per 100,000 for white males. In addition, black females have higher victimization rates than white or hispanic females, although these rates are not as high as the rates for any male victims. As Table 6 shows, the highest rates of victimization for black males were in the friends and acquaintances, and family types of homicide. The highest rates for white males were in the friends and acquaintances, and stranger felony types. The highest rates for hispanic males were in the friends and acquaintances, and stranger non-felony contexts. Women in all three racial groups

<sup>34</sup> Homicides among "other" races were too sparsely represented in the data set to justify inclusion in the analysis.

**TABLE 6**  
**RATES OF VICTIMIZATION IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**  
**BY RACE AND SEX OF OFFENDER.**

	WHITE MALE	BLACK MALE	HISPANIC MALE	WHITE FEMALE	BLACK FEMALE	HISPANIC FEMALE
FAMILY	1.6	10.9	3.7	.8	4.3	1.7
ACQUAINTANCE	4.7	41.5	21.5	1.0	6.5	1.9
STRANGER FELONY	3.7	8.7	3.5	.7	.7	1.5
STRANGER NON-FELONY	2.5	7.0	5.7	.2	.8	0
UNKNOWN & OTHER	3.7	16.3	12.4	1.0	2.1	.2
TOTAL	16.2	84.4	46.8	3.7	14.4	5.3

were more frequently killed within intimate circles and had very low rates of victimization in stranger contexts.

Rates for offenders follow the same pattern, with black males having much higher rates than any other population group. Rates of offenders by race and sex, from highest to lowest, are: black males, hispanic males, black females, white males, hispanic females, and white females. Seventy-one percent of the offenders were black, 16% were white, and 12% were hispanic. Black males were more likely to be, in both rate and percentage, offenders in all type of killings. As shown in Table 7, differences in rates between black and white offenders vary, although black male rates always exceed white male rates across types of homicide.

In terms of offending, the general pattern is the same for black and white males. While black males killed more frequently in all contexts, these contexts were the same for Blacks and Whites. The major difference by race seems to be the decreased relative frequency of killing within the family by hispanic males and hispanic females and the higher relative frequency of hispanic male offending and victimization in stranger non-felony killing within the family by hispanic males and hispanic females and the higher relative frequency of hispanic male offending and victimization in stranger non-felony killings. Rates for each type are given in Table 7.

**TABLE 7**  
**RATES OF OFFENDING IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE BY RACE &**  
**SEX OF OFFENDER (PER 100,000 POPULATION)**

	WHITE MALE	BLACK MALE	HISPANIC MALE	WHITE FEMALE	BLACK FEMALE	HISPANIC FEMALE
Family	1.4	8.7	4.3	.85	6.0	.43
Acquaintance	4.4	41.2	22.1	.27	5.7	1.06
Stranger Felony	1.4	11.4	4.5	.00	.49	.00
Stranger Non-Felony	1.1	7.1	8.4	.04	.73	.21
Unknown & Other	2.2	4.2	3.5	.04	.2	.00
Total	10.5	72.7	42.8	1.2	13.12	1.7

### *3. Racial Homogeneity and Type of Homicide*

Among all types of homicide in which the victim-offender relationship is known, 14% of the victims were Whites killed by Whites, 68% were Blacks killed by Blacks, and 3.7% were Hispanics killed by Hispanics. Thus, approximately 86% of these types of homicides were intraracial, and 14% of the homicides occurred between racial groups. These percentages, however, change dramatically within types.

As would be expected, 95% of the homicides in the family category and 92% of the homicides in the friends and acquaintances category were interracial. The highest percentage of interracial killing occurred in the stranger felony category. As Table 8 shows, 40% of the stranger felonies were interracial. In stranger felony killings with a white offender, 34.4% were interracial homicides. In stranger felony killings with a black offender, 38.8% were interracial homicides. While the numbers are small for stranger felonies involving a hispanic offender ( $n=17$ ), 41% of the homicides involving a hispanic offender were interracial.

Although 89% of the black victims were victimized by Blacks, 74% of the white victims in stranger felony homicides were victims of interracial homicides. Among hispanic victims, 41% were inter-ethnically assaulted.

Stranger non-felonies displayed a lower percentage of interracial killings than did stranger felonies. Twenty-one percent of the stranger non-felonies were interracial homicides. White offenders seldom crossed racial lines in a non-felony stranger homicide. Thus, race appears to determine the rate of homicide and, to a limited extent, the type of homicide.

**TABLE 8**  
**INTRARACIAL AND INTERRACIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STRANGER**  
**FELONY HOMICIDES\***

OFFENDER/VICTIM	WHITE OFFENDER	BLACK OFFENDER	HISPANIC OFFENDER	TOTAL
White Victim	19 (26%) 65.5%	43 (60%) 35.5%	10 (14%) 58.8%	72 100.0%
Black Victim	9 (11%) 31.0%	74 (89%) 61.2%	0 (0%)	83 100.0%
Hispanic Victim	1 (8.3%) 3.4%	4 (33.3%) 3.3%	7 (58.3%) 41.2%	12 99.9%
Total	29 99.9%	121 100.0%	17 100.0%	167

\* (Figures percentaged across rows are in Parentheses; Column percentages are not in parentheses.)

#### 4. *Age and Type of Homicide*

The mean ages of victims and offenders in the four types of homicide are given in Table 9. Victims were older than offenders in

**TABLE 9**  
**MEAN AGE OF VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS IN FOUR TYPES**  
**OF HOMICIDE**

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	MEAN AGE OF VICTIMS/MEAN AGE OF OFFENDERS
Family	31/33
Acquaintance	31/30
Stranger Felony	40/26
Stranger Non-Felony	30/29

all four types of homicide. The difference in mean age between victim and offender is small in all types except stranger felonies. In stranger felonies, the mean age of the victim was forty years, while the mean age of the offender was twenty-six years. Clearly, the stranger felony murder is distinct from the other three types by virtue of the greater age difference between victim and offender. The offenders in family killings were also somewhat older than the offenders in the other three homicide types.

#### 5. *Location, Witnesses, and Type of Homicide*

The homicides occurred in a variety of locations. Locations were divided into public space, such as a street, subway, bar or other

commercial establishment, and private space, such as the victim's residence or other residence. As Table 9 shows, the largest single group of victims (641 out of 1323, or 46%) were murdered on the street. The second largest group of homicides occurred in the victim's residence (521 out of 1373, or 38%). Fifty-five percent of the homicides took place in public spaces, as compared to 42% in private spaces.

**TABLE 10**  
**PERCENT OF VICTIMS KILLED IN PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE SPACE**  
**IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**

	<u>PUBLIC SPACE</u>	<u>PRIVATE SPACE</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	
Family	53 (22%)	193 (78%)	246	100.0%
Acquaintance	368 (50%)	366 (49.9%)	734	99.9%
Stranger Felony	145 (66%)	74 (34%)	219	100.0%
Stranger Non-Felony	145 (85%)	26 (15%)	171	100.0%
			1,370	

Not unexpectedly, the percentage of family killings occurring at home was higher (78%) than with other types of killings. The percentage of killings occurring in public settings increased as the relationship between the victim and the offender became more distant. The stranger non-felony homicide is clearly the most public homicide type, with 85% of these killings occurring in a public space. The public nature of the stranger non-felony homicide is also revealed by analyzing the number of witnesses to the event.

As Table 11 shows, most killings outside of the family were witnessed. While family killings were the most private (53.7%), stranger non-felony homicides were the most public. Eighty-nine percent of stranger non-felony homicides were witnessed by at least one other person. It appears, therefore, that there is an absence of caution in stranger non-felony homicides.

#### 6. *Method of Assault and Type of Homicide*

Methods of assault included guns, knives, beatings and strangulation, and other methods.<sup>35</sup> As Table 12 shows, guns predominated as the means of killing in all types of homicide; 65% of all homicides involved firearms. This percentage was somewhat lower for family killings and was somewhat higher for the other three types. Stabbing accounts for 21% of the homicides, with a

<sup>35</sup> Other methods may include arson, poisoning, and pushing from high places.

**TABLE 11**  
**NUMBER OF EYEWITNESSES BY TYPE OF HOMICIDE**

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	NUMBER OF EYEWITNESSES									
	0		1		2		3+		TOTAL	
Family	132	(53.7%)	46	(18.7%)	39	(15.9%)	29	(11.8%)	246	100.1
Acquaintance	212	(29.2%)	210	(28.9%)	121	(16.6%)	184	(25.3%)	727	100.0
Stranger Felony	69	(31.9%)	79	(36.6%)	19	(8.8%)	49	(22.7%)	216	100.0
Stranger Non- Felony	19	(11.4%)	52	(31.1%)	24	(14.4%)	72	(43.1%)	167	100.0
Total	432	31.9%	387	28.5%	203	15.0%	334	24.6%	1,356	100.0

higher percentage in the family homicides and a lower percentage in stranger felonies. Beatings and strangulation occurred in only 11% of the cases, with a higher percentage in family killing only.

**TABLE 12**  
**METHOD OF ASSAULT IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	METHOD OF ASSAULT									
	GUN		KNIFE		BEATINGS		OTHER		TOTAL	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Family	125	51.0	65	26.5	42	17.1	13	5.3	245	99.9
Acquaintance	499	67.8	174	23.6	53	7.2	10	1.4	736	100.0
Stranger Felony	146	66.7	35	16.0	19	8.7	19	8.7	219	100.1
Stranger Non- Felony	116	67.8	36	21.1	14	8.2	5	2.9	171	100.0

Important differences emerge in a comparison of the mean age differences between offender and victim by method of assault. As Table 13 shows, in family homicides and in both types of stranger killings, offender mean age was older when a gun was used and younger when stabbing or beating and strangulation was the method of assault. The average age of an offender who used a gun was older (mean age = 32) than the offender who used a knife (mean age = 27). The youngest offenders used their hands, feet, or other means of beating (mean age = 25).

Comparatively, as Table 14 shows, victim mean age also varies by weapon type, especially in family and stranger killings. In family type homicide, the mean age of those killed by a gun or a knife was

**TABLE 13**  
**MEAN AGE OF OFFENDERS IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**  
**BY METHOD OF ASSAULT\***

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	METHOD OF ASSAULT							
	GUN		KNIFE		BEATINGS		OTHER	
	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f
Family	37	125	29	64	26	39	27	12
Acquaintance	30	471	30	167	29	50	28	10
Stranger Felony	27	113	24	29	22	13	21	8
Stranger Non- Felony	31	99	26	31	22	10	22	4
Total		808		291		112		34

\* Since fewer offenders' ages are known than victims' ages, the totals in this table are smaller than in Table 14.

decidedly older (35 and 33 years respectively) than in those situations in which the victim was killed by beating and strangulation. In homicides in which the offender beat and strangled the victim, the

**TABLE 14**  
**MEAN AGE OF VICTIMS IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE**  
**BY METHOD OF ASSAULT\***

TYPE OF HOMICIDE	METHOD OF ASSAULT							
	GUN		KNIFE		BEATINGS		OTHER	
	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f	Mean Age	f
Family	35	125	33	65	18	41	17	13
Acquaintance	31	498	32	174	31	53	41	9
Stranger Felony	36	145	46	35	59	19	42	19
Stranger Non- Felony	30	115	27	36	38	14	30	5
Total		883		310		127		46

mean age of the victim was eighteen years old. Stranger felony killings, when divided by method, show pronounced mean age differences between victims, according to method. A victim of a stranger felony killed with a gun averaged thirty-six years of age; a victim killed by a knife averaged forty-six years of age; and a victim killed by beating and strangulation averaged fifty-nine years of age. The mean ages for victims in friend and acquaintances homicides and in



stranger non-felony killings do not show dramatic differences, although, in stranger non-felony homicides, victims of beating and strangulation were older (mean age = 38) than victims of other methods.

This analysis suggests that it is the age of the victim, not the relationship between victim and offender, which determines the method of assault used. Specifically, those victims who are young and those victims who are old were more likely to be killed by beatings and strangulation than by any other method. As Table 14 shows, such victims were also killed by more youthful offenders. It could be argued that youthful offenders choose victims who they perceive as being defenseless because these offenders are less likely to possess a weapon.<sup>36</sup>

#### V. OVERVIEW OF HOMICIDE TYPES

This Article has discussed the interactions of methods of assault, victims' and offenders' ages, and types of homicide. An examination of Tables 15 through 18 show that there is considerable variation in the mean age of victims and offenders by type of homicide, race, and sex. This pattern of variation is an indication of main and interaction effects among the variables of race, sex, and homicide type in the determination of the mean ages of offenders and victims. Each variable affects the mean age of the victim and the offender, and particular combinations of variables also affect mean age.

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<sup>36</sup> In looking at a specific racial groups, there were few differences in method of assault. For all three racial groups of offenders, approximately 65% used a gun in the killing, 18-25% used knives, and 10-16% used their hands or feet as a method of beating or strangulation or used some other means. While a somewhat higher percentage of Whites used their hands or feet, the difference between racial groups were small. The only clear differences in terms of race was that hispanic offenders in stranger felonies and stranger non-felonies used knives more frequently than did their black and white counterparts.

**TABLE 15**  
**MEANS ( $\bar{X}$ ) AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF AGES OF**  
**OFFENDERS IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE BY RACE**  
**AND SEX OF OFFENDER**

		OFFENDER'S RACE AND SEX					
		MALE OFFENDERS			FEMALE OFFENDERS		
		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Family	$\bar{X}$	38	33	30	35	30	21
	SD	18	13	11	15	11	6
	N	31	96	18	20	72	2
Acquaintance	$\bar{X}$	30	30	28	31	30	33
	SD	12	13	12	15	12	13
	N	90	445	75	6	70	5
Stranger Felony	$\bar{X}$	31	25	22	0	21	0
	SD	13	10	6	0	3	0
	N	29	110	17	0	7	0
Stranger Non-Felony	$\bar{X}$	31	31	24	19	29	25
	SD	14	13	8	0	13	0
	N	22	79	29	1	9	1

**TABLE 16**  
**MEANS ( $\bar{X}$ ) AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF AGES OF VICTIMS**  
**IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE BY RACE AND SEX OF VICTIM**

		MALE VICTIMS			FEMALE VICTIMS		
		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Family	$\bar{X}$	34	31	29	37	26	31
	SD	22	17	21	18	18	18
	N	34	115	16	19	55	5
Acquaintance	$\bar{X}$	36	31	28	29	31	38
	SD	16	14	10	17	16	12
	N	95	449	71	24	83	8
Stranger Felony	$\bar{X}$	46	35	34	59	32	21
	SD	18	15	15	18	19	12
	N	72	94	14	16	10	6
Stranger Non-Felony	$\bar{X}$	31	30	24	36	31	0
	SD	15	12	9	19	17	0
	N	46	86	23	4	10	0

**TABLE 17**  
**MEANS ( $\bar{X}$ ) AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF AGES OF VICTIMS**  
**IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE BY RACE AND SEX OF OFFENDER**

		MEAN AGE OF VICTIM					
		MALE OFFENDERS			FEMALE OFFENDERS		
		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Family	$\bar{X}$	38	28	27	32	31	22
	SD	20	18	22	21	17	21
	N	31	96	17	20	72	2
Acquaintance	$\bar{X}$	30	32	29	33	33	30
	SD	13	15	12	18	14	9
	N	89	450	75	6	70	5
Stranger Felony	$\bar{X}$	33	39	41	0	40	0
	SD	14	18	18	0	17	0
	N	29	120	16	0	7	0
Stranger Non-Felony	$\bar{X}$	32	29	26	40	37	36
	SD	13	12	12	0	9	0
	N	22	81	30	1	9	1

**TABLE 18**  
**MEANS ( $\bar{X}$ ) AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF AGES OF**  
**OFFENDERS IN FOUR TYPES OF HOMICIDE BY RACE**  
**AND SEX OF VICTIM**

		MALE VICTIMS			FEMALE VICTIMS		
		WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC
Family	$\bar{X}$	34	31	28	42	32	34
	SD	15	13	10	17	12	14
	N	34	113	16	19	52	6
Acquaintance	$\bar{X}$	29	30	28	29	33	29
	SD	12	12	10	15	16	8
	N	89	422	71	22	82	8
Stranger Felony	$\bar{X}$	23	28	28	21	27	33
	SD	9	12	13	5	10	0
	N	56	70	11	12	7	1
Stranger Non-Felony	$\bar{X}$	28	31	26	30	22	0
	SD	12	13	9	8	8	0
	N	38	72	21	2	9	0

The Tables, especially Tables 15 through 18, in conjunction with the earlier analyses, support the following general picture of homicide types. The features that distinguish family homicides from other homicide types are the lack of witnesses and the proportion of homicides involving a female offender. While males were the predominant offenders in this homicide type, a much higher proportion of family homicides involved a female offender than any other

type. Males were almost equally likely to offend against males and females in the family. Women offenders, conversely, had victims who were almost exclusively male. The one exception to this general pattern of female offenders was hispanic women, who seldom offended within the family group at all. The interaction between race, age, and sex categories, therefore, is quite important within the family homicide type.

The friends and acquaintances homicides are distinguishable from other homicide types by their relative frequency of occurrence. Fifty-four percent of homicides with known victim-offender relationships occurred between friends and acquaintances. The friend and acquaintance killing involved predominately a male with an average age of thirty years killing a somewhat older male in the same racial group. Black males had much higher offender and victimization rates than other racial groups of this type of homicide.

The striking features that distinguish stranger felony homicides from other homicide types are the proportion of intraracial homicides and the difference in mean ages between victims and offenders. The age disparities and the victim-offender age ratios become accentuated for white victims, both male and female. The average age of white male victims is twice that of their offenders (ages 46 and 23, respectively). The average age for white female victims is nearly three times that of their offenders (ages 59 and 21, respectively). With black and hispanic victims, mean age differences persist, but the differences are smaller, thus making the victim-offender ratio smaller. The average age of black male victims is 1.4 times that of their offenders (ages 35 and 25, respectively). The average ages for hispanic male victims is about 1.6 times that of their offenders (ages 35 and 22, respectively).<sup>37</sup> Although most victims of homicide were victims of offenders of the same race, stranger felony homicide is characterized by the highest interracial rate. Young black and hispanic male offenders appear more likely to victimize older whites. Finally, there were very few women offenders in stranger felony homicides ( $n=7$ ). All of the women were black and had an average age of twenty-one.

The stranger non-felony homicides category had the lowest rate of occurrence of the four homicide types. Both victims and offenders were overwhelmingly males and were of similar ages. The average age of the victim was thirty, and the average age of the offender was twenty-nine. The victim and offender mean ages did not vary dramatically by race or sex, although hispanic male victims and of-

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<sup>37</sup> See *supra* Tables 15 through 18.

fenders were younger than their black and white counterparts. The stranger non-felony homicides were similar to the friends and acquaintances homicides in characteristics of victims and offenders. Stranger non-felony homicides are distinguished from other types, however, by their public character. A high percentage of stranger non-felonies occurred in public, and a high percentage were witnessed.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis shows that there are clear differences between types of homicide. The importance of age, sex, and race specific studies on both victims and offenders of types of homicide also has been established. The finding that white victims and offenders were older in most types of homicide and that hispanic victims and offenders were younger deserves closer scrutiny. This phenomenon, as in the disparity between the victim-offender ages in stranger felony homicides, may reflect differences among age-race structures in American cities.<sup>38</sup> In the data base of the nine cities, it is quite possible that Whites in central areas of the cities were older than the Blacks and Hispanics in the area,<sup>39</sup> because in the past, white families with young children have tended to leave central cities for the suburbs, while older Whites remained.<sup>40</sup> Blacks and Hispanics have migrated to cities,<sup>41</sup> have higher birth rates than Whites,<sup>42</sup> and, therefore, constitute younger populations. The age-race findings in homicide victimization and offending, especially in family and stranger murders, may reflect these demographic-ecological city realities.

This Article has also demonstrated that the general category of stranger homicide, frequently used in homicide research,<sup>43</sup> is too heterogeneous and needs to be subdivided. The stranger felony

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<sup>38</sup> For an examination of the age-race structure in the United States, see Morrison, *Urban Growth and Decline in the United States: A Study of Migration's Effects in Two Cities*, in INTERNAL MIGRATION: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE 235 (A. Brown & E. Neuberger eds. 1977).

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 248-50.

<sup>40</sup> This effect is known as "white flight." For an study of "white flight" from the city of St. Louis, see *id.* at 246.

<sup>41</sup> BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, U.S. DEP'T. OF COMM., THE STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE UNITED STATES 14 (102 ed. 1981).

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 59; Morrison, *supra* note 38, at 250.

<sup>43</sup> *E.g.*, F. LOYA & J. MERCY, THE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HOMICIDE IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES, 1970-79: A COLLABORATIVE STUDY BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES AND THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL 104 (1985); A. TIMROTS & M. RAND, VIOLENT CRIME BY STRANGERS AND NONSTRANGERS 1-7 (1987); M. WOLFGANG, *supra* note 7, at 203-21.

type is one subdivision which seems distinct and useful for analysis. The stranger non-felony category, however, needs additional exploration. The stranger non-felony homicide type is similar to the friends and acquaintances homicide type along most dimensions examined. The major exceptions are the locations and the percentage of cases with witnesses. The stranger non-felony homicide was often a very public act; this quality suggests that subsequent research should focus on the role of the public as witnesses to murder. Witnesses may facilitate such killings either by becoming actively involved in the disputes or by providing a climate which facilitates a lethal conclusion. In other types of homicide, such as killings within the family, witnesses may inhibit aggressive responses. This inhibition by the presence of witnesses does not appear to be the case in the stranger non-felony type. Perhaps society's notions of social control should be re-examined to better understand how and when audiences inhibit rather than facilitate homicide. Subsequent research should also examine the perpetrator's view of witnesses and the public.

Additional variables which might subdivide the stranger non-felony type into homogeneous categories include: the use of drugs and alcohol by offenders and victims, past history of violent behavior or mental illness, and the nature of the disputes. The presence of psychotic disturbance may be more highly associated with stranger non-felony homicides than with other types.<sup>44</sup> This hypothesis, as well as the interplay of these factors with situational variables, clearly deserve further attention.

Theories addressing causes of homicide also need further development. Such theories must pay attention to the observed differences within and between types of homicide. Types of homicide may not only have different causes, but also may bear different relations to public order. Subsequent research needs to focus on these and related issues.

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<sup>44</sup> Articles in the popular press have suggested the possible connection of psychotic disturbances and stranger non-felony homicides. See, e.g., Gest, *On the Trail of America's Serial Killers*, U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP., April 30, 1984, at 53; Starr, *The Random Killers*, NEWSWEEK, Nov. 26, 1984, at 100.