THE KILLING OF CHILDREN IN VICTORIA, 1985-1995

A Report to the Criminology Research Council

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Preface

This report is a compilation of publication and papers in which the the findings of a research project funded by the Criminology Research Council are analysed. The first chapter provides an analysis of child homicides committed by women. This chapter combines data from the present project and data collected previously by June Baker and Ken Polk. As a consequence, the data in this chapter cover a slightly different, but overlapping, time period (1978-1991) than the remaining chapters in the book (1985-1995). Both Chapter 2 and 3 consist of analyses of child homicides committed by men. While there is substantial overlap between these chapters they are framed by somewhat different theories, with Chapter 3 concentrating more specifically on theories of masculinities and crime and focusing more on the perpertrators own comments on their actions. The final chapter focuses on the killing of children by other than parents: these cases all involve male perpertrators.

The Research Process

The data source for this study was the files of the Office of the Coroner in the state of Victoria, Australia, for the period 1985 - June, 1995. These files provided information on all cases of unnatural deaths of children during that period. This is public information. Not infrequently homicide studies are based on arrest or conviction data, and consequently do not include suspects who do not proceed to the committal stage or who commit suicide (an important issue, as we shall see, since it is not uncommon when the offender is parent of the child victim, for the offender to commit suicide after the homicide). Arrest or conviction data exclude these homicides.

It nevertheless needs to be noted that child homicides, especially filicides, may be less likely to be detected than other forms of homicide. In fact, the actual incidence of child homicide is elusive due to undetected and unreported cases, and forensic problems in establishing the timing and the cause of death (Wilson 1985; Stone and Johnson 1987). For some examples, the circumstances of what amounts to virtually accidental discovery of neonate remains suggests that there are other deaths of children in the first minutes or hours after birth that go undetected; some cases of extreme neglect result in physical deterioration but then become recorded as "death by natural causes" when the specific cause of death is something like pneumonia, and there are cases of suspicious patterns of injuries which suggest the death was a function of a beating, but the evidence is unobtainable regarding who was responsible for the injuries. In the study of children as victims of homicide, as in other investigations using official data, there will be the unresolvable problem of the "dark figure of crime."

Coroner's Court files, which formed the basis of this research, contain a number of reports collected for the coronial inquest, including: an initial police report of the incident; an autopsy report regarding the cause of death; a toxicology report (where relevant); a police prosecutor's brief; and the report of the inquest itself. The most helpful of these documents is the prosecutor's brief, which typically contains lengthy witness statements as well as transcripts of interview with defendants where these have been taken. Using these files, lengthy case studies were complied which were then subjected to both quantitative (for information such as demographics, number of children killed, type of weapon used and use of alcohol) and qualitative analysis (to capture the overall scenarios and to examine emerging themes in terms of such issues as motivation, and nature of relationship to child). Pseudonyms have been used to designate the cases and throughout all the presentation of findings to protect the privacy of family members. It should be noted that these are victim-based files, and thus they tend to be somewhat better for the analysis of characteristics of victims rather than offenders (where at times the data are not as complete as might be desirable).

There is considerable diversity across studies of child homicide in the age definitions employed for the crucial term "childhood." (Unnithan 1991). Silverman, Reidel and Kennedy (1990: 405), have observed that "most previous research has indicated neither theoretical nor empirical reasons for the age 'cut-offs' used." In the present study, "children" were defined as under 18 years of age. This age limit is consistent with the legal standard in Victoria for when the state has some responsibility for the welfare of minors.

Overview of findings

There were 89 child victims of homicides recorded in the Coroners Court reported in the period 1985-June, 1995. Of these child homicides, 58 of the 89 (or 65%) were filicides, that is, the child was killed by either parent or step-parent (including de facto relationships) of the child victim. The remaining one-third (31 cases, or 35%) were homicides in which the child was killed by someone other than a parent. Involved were 79 known offenders, of whom 51 were parents and 28 were not. The number of "known" offenders includes 5 neonaticides where the offender was not identified but is assumed to be the unidentified mother of the child. Research indicates that in contemporary western societies, in virtually all known cases, the mother is involved in the killing of newborn infants The numbers for victims and offenders do not agree, because in some cases the offenders were unknown (6 cases), other cases involved a single offender and multiple victims, while in others more than one offender was responsible for the death of a child.

While homicide in general is predominantly committed by men, child homicides involve a higher proportion of women. The present study involved 29 female offenders (37% of known offenders) and 50

male offenders (63%). While this proportion of male offenders is lower than occurs in general studies of homicide (where the proportion is likely to fall in the 85-90% range), it is somewhat higher than in many of the studies of child homicide.

The most apparent differences in child homicides committed by women and those committed by men are the age of the victims and the relationship of the perpetrator with the offender. Women almost always killed children under the age of 10 years. Put another way, virtually all of the teenage victims were killed by men. This age difference is related to differences in the offenders relationship with the child. All but two women (of 27 female offenders) killed their biological children. When men killed children who were in their care, the victims were most likely to be the children of the man's defacto partner. However. just over half (56%) of the men killed children of whom they were not parents or guardians. In fact, all but one homicide committed outside of the family involved men (there was an additional case where a woman was a co-defendant with the male, although it was alleged that the male was largely responsible for the death). To put this situation another way, virtually all of the children who were killed by other than a parent, were killed by a man.

Papers delivered at professional conferences

While this report consists predominantly of materials published from the research, the investigators also delivered a number of papers at professional conferences and meetings in the development of the materials for publication. A list of these papers follows.

Alder, C.M. (1993) "Parents who kill their children: a gender analysis". Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology, Phoenix, U.S.A.

Christine Alder and Ken Polk, (1994) " Masculinity and non-parental child homicide." Paper presented at the 10th Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, October, Sydney.

Christine Alder (1994) " Masculinity and child homicide." Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology, November, Miami.

Kenneth Polk (1994), "Gender, age and non-parental child murder". Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology, November, Miami.

Christine Alder and Ken Polk (1996), "Masculinities and Child Homicide", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology, Wellington, N.Z., January.

Christine Alder (1996) ,"Women Who Kill Their Children." Lecture/seminar presentation at Institute of Criminology, University of Tuebingen, Tuebingen, Germany. 1st April, 1996.

Christine Alder and Kenneth Polk (1996), "Masculinity and Crime: Australian Research." Seminar presentation, Institut fuer Rechts und Kriminal Soziologie, Vienna, Austria. 5 April,1996.

Christine Alder and Kenneth Polk, (1996), " When Fathers Kill Their Children." Lecture/seminar presentation, Law School, The Free University, Amsterdam. 10 May,1996.

Maternal Filicide: More Than One Story to be Told

Across time and cultures, violent crime, in particular homicide, has been predominantly committed by men (Wolfgang 1958; Daly and Wilson 1988; Polk 1994). Male violence against women has been the subject of a substantial body of feminist research in recent years. In fact, one of the significant contributions of feminists to criminology has been to name as criminal, and to expose the extent of, male violence against women in domestic situations (eg Stanko 1985; Dobash and Dobash 1992). While less extensively, feminists have also drawn attention to female violence, in particular to the situation of women who kill their husbands who have abused them (Browne 1987; Walker 1989; Jurik and Winn 1990). However, as Allen has observed of feminist research in this area,"... something of a veil tends to be drawn over those more uncomfortable cases where the victim is a child or another woman, or where the circumstances of the offence seem more unambiguously discreditable" (Allen a 1987:93).

Feminists have "virtually ignored" (Dougherty 1993:92) the issue of women's violence against their children. This is despite the estimation that "... 70% of the physical assaults against children are perpetrated by women" (Dougherty 1993:92). Dougherty is able to convincingly argue that in not addressing this issue, feminists have left a "... critical void in a field dominated if not defined by a perspective that provides fertile ground for misogynist assumptions to thrive." (Dougherty 1993:94).The intention of this article is to approach this gap in feminist analysis through an examination of case studies of women who kill their children.

Brownstein et al conclude that, "... the existing literature on lethal violence by women does not fully or definitively explicate the complexity of this phenomenon. " (Brownstein, Spunt, Crimmins, Goldstein and Langley 1994:114). The complexity of female lethal violence is also suggested by the observation of

Silverman and Kennedy (1988: 125) that ".. women who kill their children appear to do so under circumstances quite different from those who kill their husbands and from other groups of perpetrators." They conclude thereby that, "female perpetrators of homicide should not be treated as a homogenous group." (Silverman and Kennedy 1988: 125). Feminists are also increasingly calling for more "multidimensional explanations" (Daly 1994) of women's crime and a recognition of the insufficiency of analyses of official statistics alone to capture the complexity and diversity of women's lives. With these sorts of observations in mind, the objective of this article is not to discern a unitary explanation for why women kill their children, but rather through an exploration of the circumstances as presented in coroners court files, to capture some of the complexity of these events.

In Australia, the rate of homicide for children is above the overall rate for all age categories (Strang 1994). Both Australian and United States research have found that the risk of homicide is greater during the first year of life than at any other equivalent age span (Crittenden and Craig 1990; Strang 1993). Christoffel (1983), also in the United States, has observed that homicide is the only cause of death of those under the age of 15 to have increased in the last 30 years.

Contrary to most parents' fears, pre-school age children are almost never the victims of stranger homicide (Crittenden and Craig 1990). Most child homicides are committed by biological or de-facto (non-biological) parents (Strang 1994; Kaplun and Reich 1976; Silverman and Kennedy 1993:185). Further inconsistent with everyday understandings, a significant proportion (approximately half in most studies) of filicides are committed by the child's mother (Kaplun and Reich 1976;Goetting 1988; Wilczynski and Morris 1993; Wallace 1986). In fact, the younger the child victim of homicide, the more likely the offender will be the mother (Wallace 1986:113). In turn, child homicides make up a substantial proportion of homicides committed by women: Silverman and Kennedy (1988:116) found that for one-fifth of the female homicides in their Canadian study, the victim was under 18 years of age (see also Polk 1994:146; Wallace 1986).

Despite the distinctive level of involvement of women in filicide, these homicides have rarely been the subject of sociological analyses in terms of the gender of the perpetrator. The child abuse literature has similarly been criticised for its limited gender analysis (Dougherty 1993; O'Donnell and Craney 1982).

Nevertheless the child abuse literature is more extensive than the literature on the killing of children and will therefore be drawn upon in the following consideration of explanations for maternal filicide. The relevance of this literature is indicated further by the observation that a significant proportion of maternal filicides follow a long term pattern of physical abuse of the child (eg Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Weisheit 1986).

It has been suggested that mothers are more likely to be the abusers of children because they are the primary child carers and therefore spend the most "time at risk' with the children (Gelles and Cornell 1985:55). In this vein, Silverman and Kennedy (1993:187) argue that the decline in homicide rates for children after the age of five years is related to the increase in time children then spend away from the major source of the violence against them, that is their parents and in particular their mothers. Such explanations clearly beg the question as to why it is mothers who spend most of the time with children. Consequently, as Dougherty (1993:107) has observed of such explanations, "many of the key insights into women's experience as mothers in the patriarchy are lost," significantly limiting the depth of our understanding of the women's violence against their children.

Birth control has been proposed frequently as a motive for the occurrence of maternal filicide (Jones, 1980:51; Backhouse, 1984:447; Behlmer, 1979:415). In fact, an inverse relationship has been observed between the availability of safe and effective contraception, especially abortion techniques, and filicide (Wallace 1986:25; Laster 1989:156; Allen 1990:38, 98, 110, 164). Filicide, has also been a method of eliminating devalued or unwanted children such as those lacking a socially accepted father, deformed infants, infants possessing an undesirable physical characteristic such as the wrong skin colour or sex, and those conceived by rape (Jones 1980:51; Williamson 1978:65; Rose 1986).

Throughout history, the victims of infanticide have more often been female than male (Lomis 1986:503; Backhouse 1984:450). In recent years the killing of female babies has been commented on in some third world countries where female babies are considered an economic liability. However, Mann (1993:234) notes that the findings of some homicide studies in the United States also suggest the devaluation of female babies.

The killing of children in "other" cultures has justifiably generated expressions of outrage in recent times. However children are also killed in western cultures. In any culture, simply to use notions of "birth control" or the elimination of "unwanted" children is to speak euphemistically about events that are embedded more deeply in the cultural, social and economic relations of society.

This broader context is outside the parameters of the dominant explanations for maternal filicide in western societies that have most often focused on the mental state of the individual mother. Recent exceptions include macro level analyses of the relationship between the rates of homicides committed by women and structural factors such as gender inequality (e.g. Baron 1993; Fiala, R. and LaFree 1988). At this point there are inconsistencies in the conclusions drawn from these studies.

Mothers and Madness

Overall, the criminological and sociological research on child killing is relatively sparse in comparison to the psychiatric literature (Wilbanks 1982:152). Particularly in the case of filicidal mothers these reports emphasise the significance of psychiatric disorder (Husain and Daniel 1984; Resnick 1969). However, from a sociological perspective, these observations need to be considered in light of evidence that women are more likely than men to seek, or be referred for psychiatric or psychological treatment and women are at greater risk of being hospitalised when considered to be "unable to cope" (Wallace 1986: 129; Chessler 1973).

The assumption that mothers who kill their children, especially very young children, must be "mad" is not limited to the medical profession (Lunde 1976:98; Wilbanks 1982:175). Since the killing of children by their mother is so inconsistent with understandings of motherhood and with other gender stereotypes, the act itself is understood as evidence of psychiatric problems (Willbanks 1982; Wilczynski 1991). Of course this construction of the behaviour is true to some extent for women who kill in general. Wilbanks (1982: 173) reports a study that found that college students considered female killers to be more deranged than equivalent males. Examining judicial decisions regarding female felons in England, Allen (1987 b) documented the significance given to psychiatric explanations of the behaviour. More specifically in regard to women who kill their children, Wilczynski (1991:78) concludes that such women are viewed as either "mad" or "at the other extreme of the pathological scale...bad". Silverman and Kennedy (1988)

found that police were significantly more likely to classify the motive for women who kill their children as "mentally ill" than they were for women who killed their spouses. Women who kill their children have been found to themselves believe that they should have been placed in a mental health facility rather than a prison (Totman 1978 noted in Weisheit 1986:442)

This understanding of the situation of women who kill young children has in fact been enshrined in British and Commonwealth law in the offence of infanticide that is applicable in circumstances where a mother kills a child, generally under the age of 12 months, while the balance of her mind is disturbed due to the effects of lactation or giving birth (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:27). However, the medical assumption and its legal affirmation that some mothers may be pathologically predisposed to filicide faces increasing scepticism (Wilczynski 1991:5; Silverman and Kennedy 1993:155). As Wilczynski notes, "..it is fallacious to equate the undeniable emotional and physical upheaval of the birth with mental illness, or even temporary insanity. Further, there is usually no evidence of psychosis or mental illness either before or after the birth" (Wilczynski, 1991:7).

Poverty and Welfare Interventions

Poverty and unemployment have been consistently noted as features of the lives of women who come to official attention for child abuse and women who kill their children (eg Gordon 1988; Weisheit 1986; Kaplun and Reich 1976; Mann 1993). While Baron (1993:210) observed that "A substantial amount of evidence suggests that poverty increases the likelihood of child homicide," the findings of his own macro-level research are inconsistant with this observation. However, there is a growing body of research indicating that economic marginalisation is a factor to be considered in efforts to understand female crime and delinquency more generally(Jurik 1983; Box and Hale 1984; Carlen 1988; Alder 1986). Research based on women's own accounts of their lives provides the strongest evidence of the importance of their economic circumstances to their life decision-making (eg Miller 1986; Carlen 1988; Alder 1986).

At the same time, feminist research also reveals that there is no necessary, simple, direct causal relationship between economic factors and female crime (Alder 1986; Daly 1994), nor with women's violence towards their children. Clearly not all women living in poverty physically abuse their children (Gordon 1988; O'Donnell and Craney 1982). Relevant to consideration of the ways in which economic

circumstances may play a part in some women's violence against their children is the observation that poverty is more than simply not having sufficient money to survive. Carlen speaks of the "multifarious ways in which women saw the relationship between poverty and law-breaking" (Carlen 1988:71). Poverty means not only limited access to financial resources, but also limited options and opportunities for dealing with the range of problems that confront women. Women's stories reveal the reality of the everyday life of poverty , the feeling of powerlessness, the boredom, the futility, and the dependence (Carlen 1988). All of these have consequences for the individual woman's sense of self, of future, of worth, her relationship to others and the choices she makes in terms of dealing with the problems that confront her.

A woman's economic circumstances limit the options available to her and it has been suggested that in some circumstances the options that are available may aggravate her situation. Women with limited resources tend to seek out public social welfare agencies to help them find solutions to their problems with their children, while other women may have available to them more independent solutions (Gordon 1988; O'Donnell and Craney 1982). Their poverty then influences the ways in which women are dealt with by professionals and government agencies, and in return, the ways in which women relate to them, and in so doing can affect the form of coercive intervention to which they are subject (Carlen 1988; Worrall 1990). In the case of child welfare, it is often the same agencies from whom they seek help, that have the power to invoke coercive responses to the situation such as removing the child from the mother. Gordon (1988:175) observes that "the threat of losing one's children was an extremely anxiety-provoking stress in an already stressful life." Government agency intervention not only caused embarrassment and humiliation, but the anonymity of informants provoked distrust of friends, neighbours and relatives and thereby further isolated the mother. Gordon concludes that "some women's violence was intensified, possibly even provoked, by intervening social agencies "(Gordon 1988:175).

Emotional Outbursts: A Matter of Stress

When consideration of economic and social circumstances enters the literature on women's violence toward their children , these factors are collapsed with a number of others under the psychological rubric of "stress." An image emerges of a woman extremely "stressed," whose frustration and anger build to the point where she explodes in a highly emotional, uncontrolled moment of violence against her children.

Speaking more generally of male and female aggression, Campbell (1993) argues that while men's aggression is instrumental, women's is expressive and represents a loss of control: aggressive behaviour for women is a consequence of a mounting anger that develops to a fury that "... can erupt into physical aggression" (Campbell 1993:40).

A similar representation of women's violence is found in Ogle, Maier-Katkin and Bernard's (1995) theory of "homicidal behaviour among women." They argue that women have "overcontrolled" personalities and that at "somewhat random intervals" they erupt "...in a display of uncontrolled aggression that is very extreme and violent" (Ogle, Maier-Katkin and Bernard 1995: 181). While Silverman and Kennedy (1988) differ from Ogle, Maier-Katkin and Bernard (1995) in that they argue that women's killing of their children requires a different explanation to when they kill their spouses, they nevertheless

similarly invoke the notion of loss of control of anger and frustration when postulating explanations for non infanticide child killing by mothers.

Violence Begets Violence

An explanation for female violence that has been recently gathering support draws attention to the violent experiences of the women themselves. Certainly feminist research on women who kill their husbands exposed the extent to which such events had to be understood in the context of the histories of extensive abuse that the women had suffered at the hands of the men they eventually killed (eg Jones 1980; Browne 1987). However this issue has not been as extensively explored in the limited research on women's violence towards their children. Some of the literature on child abuse poses a notion of the "cycle of violence" (Gordon 1988: 172) which suggests that those who are abused as children are more likely to abuse as adults. This remains a contentious proposition. While Silverman and Kennedy (1988:124) cite evidence that " ... the child from a violent home is more at risk to be violent in his own home," Goetting (1994: 187) concludes from a review of the literature that, " The evidence on this connection is contradictory and therefore inconclusive."

Others have argued that women's aggression and violence entail a process of reproducing the physical and emotional harm they have suffered as adults at the hands of violent men (Daly 1994:59). Observing

that maternal filicides that are non-infanticide child killings may be best understood in terms of "child abuse gone awry," Silverman and Kennedy (1988: 124) suggest that the more a women is assaulted by her male partner, the more likely she is to be violent toward her children. They postulate that such women transfer their feelings of frustration, anger and hurt to the child as a "convenient and perhaps frustrating target." Some support for this general proposition is found in studies of maternal filicides: between 19 and 56% of suicidal women in cases of maternal filicide have been found to have a history of being subjected to violence perpetrated by their partners (Cheung, 1986:188; d'Orban, 1979:5; Korbin, 1986:333).

However, the existence and nature of this proposed relationship also remains contentious. Gordon (1988: 173) observes that while "Many female child abusers are themselves victims,... most wife beating victims did not beat their children." Dougherty (1993:104) also points out that some women who have never experienced violence do abuse their children and she thereby challenges explanations for child abuse by women in terms of a "mechanical modelling of violent behaviour." Taking a similar position, Gordon (1988:175) concludes from her historical study of child abuse that we cannot simply "... explain women's violence against their children with an analogy to referred pain or deflected anger."

Summary

In conclusion, as we look to the literature for an understanding of women who kill their children, we find that it is sparse, and that pathological explanations predominate (Wilczynski 1991). In the criminological literature maternal filicide is most often represented as taking one of two forms: a psychologically disturbed young women who kills her newborn or young infant; or a stressed mother who regularly loses control and physically abuses her children. Looking to the more extensive child abuse literature, explanations tend to be offered in gender neutral terms (Dougherty 1993; O'Donnell and Craney 1982) with a consequent failure to elaborate on the broader social and economic context and the ways in which this is manifested and reproduced in the everyday experiences of mothers within the family. More recently, these gaps in the existing literature are beginning to be identified and efforts being made to develop more explicitly gender based analyses that entail broader structural considerations (eg Dougherty 1993). In proposing a theory of female homicide generally, Ogle, Maier-Katkin and Bernard

(1995) call for recognition of the particular structural situation of women and analysis of the implications of these for women. Their particular effort however, with very little reference to data regarding the circumstances in which women kill, supposes a unitary phenomena of female violence and ultimately represents these acts as emotional losses of control. In part our understanding of the circumstances in which women kill their children is limited by the paucity of information. It is hoped that the following analysis of case studies of mothers who kill their children will elaborate the complexities of these events thereby providing a foundation for further consideration of the circumstances in which they occur.

Methodology

The data source for this study was the files of the Office of the Coroner in the state of Victoria, Australia, for the period 1 January, 1978 to 1 January, 1991. These files provided information on all cases of unnatural deaths of children during that period. This is public information. Not infrequently homicide studies are based on arrest or conviction data, and, consequently do not include suspects who do not proceed to the committal stage or who commit suicide. The Coroners Court data used in the present study include such cases. In the time period of the present study 26% (n=8) of the mothers who killed their children also committed suicide. These figures indicate the need to examine other than arrest or conviction data in an analysis of maternal filicide.

It nevertheless needs to be noted that filicide may be less likely to be detected than other forms of homicide. The actual incidence of filicide is elusive due to undetected and unreported cases, and forensic problems in establishing the timing and the cause of death (Wilson 1985; Stone and Johnson 1987). The size and the dependency of the child and the privacy of the circumstances of the event all contribute to speculation that the extent of filicide is greater than that revealed in any official records.

Coroner's Court files, which formed the basis of this research, contain a number of reports collected for the coronial inquest, including: an initial police report of the incident; an autopsy report regarding the cause of death; a toxicology report (where relevant); a police prosecutor's brief; and the report of the inquest itself. The most helpful of these documents is the prosecutor's brief, which typically contains lengthy witness statements as well as transcripts of interview with defendants where these have

been taken. Using these files, lengthy case studies were complied which were then subjected to both quantitative (for information such as demographics, number of children killed, type of weapon used and use of alcohol) and qualitative analysis (to capture the overall scenarios and to examine emerging themes in terms of such issues as motivation, and nature of relationship to child). Pseudonyms have been used to designate the cases and throughout all the presentation of findings to protect the privacy of family members.

There is considerable diversity across studies of child homicide in the age definitions employed for the crucial term "childhood." Silverman, Reidel and Kennedy (1988: 405), have observed that "most previous research has indicated neither theoretical nor empirical reasons for the age 'cut-offs' used." In the present study, "children" were defined as under 18 years of age. This age limit is consistent with the legal standard in Victoria for when the state has some responsibility for the welfare of minors.

FINDINGS

From January 1978 to January 1991 there were 57 incidents of filicide in Victoria. In two incidents the offender was not identified and two other cases involved a heterosexual couple. There were thus 58 suspected perpetrators of whom 32 (55%) were women. All of the women who killed children were the biological mother of the child/ren they killed. For presentation purposes, the cases are discussed in three major groupings: 1) murder-suicides(n=11 perpetrators, 34% of maternal filicides); 2) neonaticides (n=10 perpetrators, 31%); and 3) fatal non-accidental injuries (n=7 perpetrators, 22%).[1] Another four cases (12%) were individually distinctive and cannot be covered in this article.

i) Filicide and suicide

A third of the mothers who killed their children, at the same time, attempted (n=3) or succeeded (n= 8) at suicide. The following is an example of these cases:

> Cindy was aged 24 when she killed herself and her 2 children, aged 5 and 2 years. She had earlier been involved in a car accident in which she had suffered a severe neck injury which resulted in on-going severe headaches and nausea. The son received severe brain damage in the same accident. Both Cindy and her husband made several trips to the United States to try and treat the son's brain damage: this left them financially drained. Cindy complained of insufficient help from her husband in handling the son. Over the years she had been admitted to psychiatric hospitals three times and had previously attempted suicide twice. Her husband had left her and moved in with another woman. Her Greek parents blamed her for her marriage break-up. Cindy felt that she had no one to talk to and would not go to psychiatrists or psychologists for further

help for fear of hospitalisation. She left detailed instructions before taking the life of herself and her children. She labelled all drawers so that her husband could find things in the house. On the previous night she had talked to the baby sitter about suicide and said that she loved her kids too much to leave them behind. In a suicide note she said, "I don't feel I am murdering my children but saving them from sorrow and pain without their father...it's the only way out...all I ever wanted was a happy marriage with happy, healthy children...I have tried very hard...I can't leave my children behind".(Harris Case)

As in the above case, in seven of the murder-suicide incidents (25% of all maternal filicides) the mother indicated, either in a suicide note, or in prior comments to friends and relatives, that she believed that the filicide was in the best interests of the children. for example:

> I just had to put them out of their misery... I wanted them to be at peace (Zavos Case).
> She is happy now...I wanted to send her to eternal peace. (Chopin Case)
>
> I cannot leave my children behind... At least with God there will be peace and happiness and no pain, so I will take them where they will be happy, and I will be there to care for them. (Harris Case)

Such expressions of motivation are consistent with the terms "altruism" or "misguided altruism" that have been used in other studies to describe such cases (d'Orban, 1979; Resnick, 1969,1970; Wallace, 1986). Altruism either took the form of relieving suffering, or was associated with suicide. Resnick (1970:1414) found that altruism was possibly the most common motive for maternal filicide.

Consistent with the sentiment of this expressed motivation, in all but one of the cases the mother killed all of her children: 7 of the cases involved multiple victims. The children ranged in age from 17 months to 14 years, with the average age being 5 years. The children killed in incidents of murder-suicide were generally older than the infants killed in fatal non-accidental injuries, or the babies killed as neonaticides. This finding thereby contradicts Resnick's observation that "The younger the child, the more likely is the suicidal mother to think of him as a personal possession and feel inseparable from him" (Resnick, 1969:327).

The mothers ranged in age from 18 to 48 years, with an average age of 40 years. Most mothers were coping alone (8 of 11): 2 were single women, 5 were separated from their spouses and another woman's husband had recently died. In most of these cases the women were also facing a range of difficult and pressing circumstances, for example: one woman was coping alone with financial difficulties and a brain

damaged son (Hunter Case); another with an intellectually disabled daughter who she believed had been recently sexually assaulted at her day care centre (Chopin Case); another women suspected her defacto husband of infidelity and of sexually molesting her daughter, but she was not able to obtain full custody of the child (Simpson Case); and two women had left violent relationships, had received psychiatric treatment and did not have custody of their children at the time (Murphy Case and Ronik Case). In the Murphy Case, her doctor noted that "She felt trapped by her life circumstances and her only escape was to take her life."

The married women were also dealing with difficult circumstances: one women claimed that her husband was often drunk, did not give her enough money for food and was violent towards her (Kora Case); and another woman with a non-English speaking background whose husband had been through many job changes, suspected him of infidelity, she had sought psychiatric help and she was very "socially isolated" (Raoul Case).

Physical violence against the women by their male partner was reported more often in these filicide/suicide cases (4 of the 7 cases) than in either the neonaticides (no cases), or the fatal non-accidental injuries (1of the 6 cases). Of course no notations in official records by either friends, relatives or criminal justice officials, does not mean that these women were not the victims of either child abuse or domestic violence: research consistently indicates that many women do not report such experiences; and friends and family who are aware of abuse may not necessarily report it to those investigating a child homicide.

Whether married, single or separated, it was not uncommon for these women to be attempting to deal with their problem essentially by themselves: in one way or another they felt that they had no one to turn to. For example: one woman was described as "Withdrawn and reserved...she found it difficult to make friends and to communicate to people" (Mills Case); another as, "She was a loner" (Borg Case); and "She felt she had no one to talk to" (Chopin Case). The words of the Coroner in regard to the Murphy Case captured the nature of the lives of many of these women when he noted the "violence, hopelessness and despair."

That the women were having difficulty coping with their lives is indicated by seven of the eleven women having had prior psychological and emotional disturbances either in terms of prior suicide attempts or prior psychiatric treatment including hospitalisation. Four of the women had been previously hospitalised for psychiatric treatment: one of these women had been hospitalised on 3 occasions and another on 8. Two of the woman had first had psychiatric treatment in their teenage years.

In most cases, friends and relatives reported that the mother had a particularly close relationship with her child/ren and was judged to be a good mother:

> Hilda was totally devoted to Jake...Hilda adored Jake... He was an extension of herself (Mills Case).
> She was a loner and was devoted to her daughter (Borg Case)
> She was an excellent and loving mother to her children.(Raoul Case)
> She was a devoted mother who looked after {her daughter} extremely well and was extremely concerned about her welfare(Chopin Case)

These mothers apparently cared about their children, but believed that filicide was the only option available to them to ensure the happiness of their children. On surviving her attempt at suicide, one mother stated to police, " I did not do it out of malice, but it was just that I loved my children so much" (Raoul Case). Another surviving mother said after the event:

> I didn't consider what I was doing was wrong. I just felt I was uniting a family that had suffered a lot... I just felt that I have been driven to an absolutely agonising point where I just couldn't see my way out. (Ronik Case).

In some cases the mother's efforts to "care" for the children are reflected in the planning and the preparations to ensure that they were successful in their endeavour, and in the detailed instructions stipulated in suicide letters regarding burial, for example:

> After having shot herself and her two children, a surviving mother told police," I gave the children some milk and in the milk I put some of the powder from my sleeping tablets as I knew what I planned to do and I didn't want them to suffer (Ronik Case)
>
> {The mother} wrote numerous letters to other people. She also left instructions regarding details for their funerals. She wished that they all be buried in white coffins with {her son} placed to her left and {her daughter} to her right. She had bought new suits for the burial. These were placed on the couch ready for the undertaker. {the mother} had also labelled all the drawers so that {the father} would be able to find things in the house. (Harris Case)

Overall, these were women most often over 30 years of age with two or more young children, who felt that they could no longer cope with the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves and killed themselves and their children whom they believed would be better off dead: "I wanted them to be at peace." These are women who planned a desperate act, having decided that it was the only option left for them to bring peace and happiness to themselves and their children.

ii) Neonaticides

The second most frequent form (n=10)[ii] of maternal filicide was neonaticide, that is, the killing of the child within the first twenty-four hours after birth. Three of these cases involved the abandonment of a newborn baby and the mother was never identified. The nature of the neonaticides in this research was generally consistent with the findings of other research on this specific form of filicide (Wilkey et al 1982;Wallace 1986; Resnick 1970; d'Orban 1979), for example:

> Alice Price (17 years of age, unmarried) gave birth in the toilet of the family home. Her parents were home at the time. She placed the body in a plastic bag and left it in the laundry. Her mother found the bag the next morning. Her family had thought she had put on a bit of weight, but her sister with whom she shared a bedroom noted that," At no time did I realise that Anne might be pregnant". Alice did not see a doctor during or after the pregnancy. Sex education had not been discussed at all in the family. Alice stated to police, "I was in bed and I started getting pains in the stomach. I went to the toilet but nothing happened. I went back to bed... the pains got really bad and I went back to the toilet. I got into the room and started to pull down my pants and the baby came....I didn't know I was pregnant. I was scared...I thought about being pregnant a couple of times but I didn't think I was... I effectively closed my mind. I didn't want to know. I was hoping it would go away." Alice thought that her partner would leave her and that the family would be ashamed. She was also scared of her father's physical abuse to discipline her. (Price Case)

Neonaticides are characterised more by total denial of the pregnancy and the birth, than by a motivation to kill the child. As the psychiatrist in one case reported: "I believe that she genuinely pushed the thought of pregnancy out of her mind. At no stage during the pregnancy did she ever give it a serious thought. As far a she was concerned she was not pregnant" (Harris Case). In other cases where the pregnancy was at some point acknowledged by the woman, she effectively denied it to herself by "just hoping it would go away" (McKenzie Case):

> Amy Johnson(19 Years) stated " I denied to myself that I was pregnant. I knew deep down that I was, but I put it to one side and hoped that it would go away. I just went on as though I wasn't pregnant." When asked why she didn't seek help during labour, she stated "I didn't think to."(Johnson Case)

Consistent with this state of mind, the women rarely go to elaborate efforts to conceal the pregnancy that was nevertheless rarely suspected even by close family and friends. In two cases, the young woman's male partner, with whom she continued to have sexual relations, did not realise she was pregnant(Harris Case, Price Case). In another case the young woman had been in a car accident three days before giving birth. She received bruising to the abdomen and thighs, and had vaginal bleeding, but the examining doctor apparently did not realise she was pregnant (Martin Case). In one case, although the women had been wearing loose fitting clothing, she did not appear to realise or recall that she had worn the same dress every day for the previous two months, washing it out at night (McKenzie Case).

Frequently the birth was precipitous and the little, if any, pain that was experienced was incorrectly interpreted as a desire to urinate or defecate. According to Rita Martin (15 years):

> I felt like I wanted to go to the toilet, so I stood up and got a cramp in my side and that's when the baby came...First the baby's head popped out and then I realised I was having a baby. (Martin Case)

Birth was most frequently given in the toilet (5 cases) or the bedroom (2 Cases). Often family members were in the home at the time. In one case, the women's nieces were in the same bungalow (Moda Case). Most neonaticidal women continue with their usual work activities during pregnancy and also resume normal activities shortly after the birth, including going to work only hours afterwards. It is uncommon for these women to make elaborate plans to conceal the offence. The baby is most often strangled or suffocated immediately after and then put in a bag and placed out of sight in a nearby location, under the bed (Moda Case), in the garbage bin (Harris Case), in the dirty clothes basket(McKenzie Case), or in the laundry (Price Case).

Other research has found that generally neonaticides are committed by young, predominantly teenage, unmarried women . In the present research the seven identified mothers were unmarried: four were teenagers and three were in their twenties. Of the older women, one was a 28-year-old woman who was a recently arrived migrant from a culture in which illegitimate birth could result in stoning to death (Moda Case). A second woman was a 21- year-old who was engaged to be married, who had been told nothing of contraception, and was intent on planning her forthcoming wedding (Harris Case). The third neonaticide

by an older woman involved a 29-year-old who lived in a small country town, from a deeply religious family, who was extensively involved in community and church activities, and who had a history of heavy alcohol consumption. She was thoroughly confused about the event but did comment, "I didn't know what else to do. I was worried about what the people in the town would have said." (McKenzie Case).

In all of these cases the women were deeply fearful of the repercussions of a pregnancy, so they never acknowledged to themselves that they were pregnant, nor did they really come to terms with the fact that they had given birth. The baby was killed immediately after birth, frequently in an effort to stop it from crying, and then placed out-of-sight and out-of-mind. These scenarios reveal the burden of responsibility for contraception that is born by women in our society, and the continuing negative consequences for young women of single parenthood.

iii) Fatal non-accident injuries

The feature shared by the cases in the third group (n= 7) is that the intent was not to kill the child. In most cases, there is evidence of prior physical abuse of the child and on the occasion in question, this extreme physical violence results in the child's death. For this reason the term "fatal non-accidental injury" is often used to refer to such cases: it is the fatality of the injury rather than the injury itself that is "accidental." For the parents the action is intended to punish or discipline the child. Filicides of this type constituted over a third of cases in several studies (Wallace, 1986; d'Orban, 1979; Polk & Ranson, 1991).

In the present study, in 5 of the 7 cases in this group, there was evidence of prior physical abuse of the child that had been observed by friends and/or relatives (Ross Case, Moss Case, Hurst), or a social worker (Hurst Case), or was acknowledged by the mother (Evatt Case), or was discovered at the autopsy (Moss Case, Haines Case, Ross case). Thus the lethal violence ended an escalating pattern of violence. (Wallace 1986: 137). Consistent with the findings of other research (Cheung, 1986:187; d'Orban, 1979:568), the prior abuse was known to child protection or health authorities in four of the cases (Moore, Hurst, Haines and, Ross Cases).

These maternal filicides involved young mothers (average age of 25 years) killing their babies under the age of 9 months (the exception was a 23 month old infant). All but one of the mothers was either

married or in a defacto relationship. Each of these women was facing her own set of unique, but invariably difficult, circumstances. To give some examples:

> Edna Hurst (19 years) was described by hospital staff as "intellectually dull... trying to do her best": a social worker made a similar observation. She sought assistance from the hospital social worker before the birth of the baby. Her husband had a "serious drinking problem" and they were anxious about their financial situation. They shared a small public housing flat with his family. She was pregnant again and suffering morning sickness, fatigue, was depressed, suffering with headaches and not eating well. Her Social Worker commented that "she generally was having a miserable time" (Hurst Case).
>
> Majorie Casa (26 years) was Rumanian and spoke little English: her family had remained in Rumania. She had 5 children ranging from 9 months to 9 years old. Her husband worked full time and neither he nor his family helped with the children. Complaints by her neighbours about the children crying upset Majorie. Both parents described the baby as "nervous," "irritable," and "always crying" (Casa Case).
>
> Jane Evatt (19 years) was described as " ... a mother who was deeply depressed as a result of the child's birth, severly lacking in coping strategies, totally unprepared for a mothering role and totally unable to tolerate a crying infant, since his crying stimulated awareness of her own intense distress (Evatt Case).

Women who kill their children in this way most often face a number of difficulties from among the following: financial problems, inadequate housing, dislike of the child, health problems, exhaustion, frustration, depression, isolation and lack of practical support. However the scenario of the immediate event generally involves the mother lashing out in response to the misbehaviour, most often the crying, of an individual child (Cheung, 1986:188; Korbin, 1986:336; Wallace, 1986:139-140; Piers, 1978:100). Thus these events always involved the death of one child. The women speak of frustration, of just having had enough, and trying to stop the child crying:

> The more I spoke to him, the more he cried so I said, "alright you bugger, want a smack?"....I hit him with my knuckles on the back of the head. Fifteen minutes later I hit him again...plenty of times. I was pretty mad, he wouldn't stop crying (Hurst Case)

The baby was described as being "overactive and demanding" (Ross Case) , "bad tempered" (Hains Case), or ""nervous and irritable" (Casa Case). The women spoke of feelings of incompetence, of worrying about what the neighbours would think about the screaming baby, about not wanting the screaming baby to upset their husbands.

> I had a nervous breakdown...I didn't feel competent that I'd be a good mother...I tried to stop him from crying. I put my hand over his nose to stop him crying. I killed him, poor little baby..I

was frightened that people would hear him next door.. I can't calm him down by myself...my mind just went blank- awful...I didn't want to upset my husband. (Jansen Case)

Frequently, these young women were also frustrated by the failure of their partners to help with the parenting of the difficult baby:

Silvia Jansen had been receiving psychiatric treatment since the birth of her baby. She was depressed and lacked confidence in her mothering abilities. Her husband left her in a motel room for the day in another city without a baby bath, pram or formula preparation equipment. When she expressed concern about how she would cope, her husband reported responding, "Don't throw all your problems on my lap. Make do with what you've got. And make sure the baby's well", and then left her. (Jansen Case)

. Ann Hains (22) had rejected her baby from birth. She stated that, " To tell the truth, I wished the hospital had kept him...With Peter drinking all the time. If he was at home more often to give me a hand with the kids, it wouldn't be so bad. I might have been able to cope, and bills piling up..." (Hains Case)

In most instances, these cases involved mothers who were having trouble coping with a new and "difficult" baby in otherwise difficult circumstances, the frustration built up and the baby was killed before it reached its first birthday. They were often young first mothers, who had little support and were ill prepared and ill equipped to cope alone with a crying baby. They were young women who were given all the responsiblity for their child, but little preparation or support, and few resources.

Conclusion

It is apparent from these findings that present conceptualisations of maternal filicide are inadequate: the phenomenon is more diverse and complex than previously identified in most of the research on this topic. In part this diversity is revealed as a consequence of the data source, which included women who committed suicide. These women would not be included in studies using prison or arrest data. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that while these women made up a significant proportion of the cases in this study, their stories are the least acknowledged of the three scenarios in present literature: neonaticides and abuse cases have been more extensively researched and commented on. For example, Silverman and Kennedy identify two main forms of maternal filicides: infanticides in which the "socio-pyschological factor that mediates the event is immaturity" (Silverman and Kennedy 1988:115) and non-infanticides that are essentially "child abuse gone awry" (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:180). The suicide/filicides

identified in this study fit neither of these categories. The cases are not consistent with the infanticides discussed by Silverman and Kennedy: the children were generally older than 12 months of age (the age limit of infanticides) and the mothers were generally older than the other mothers in this study. Nor did the mothers kill their children as part of a pattern of physical abuse. Rather these were mothers who were generally recognised as "good mothers," who killed their children out of a deep sense of caring, bonding and personal responsibility for their well-being.

The scenario of the maternal filicide/suicide also challenges conceptions of female homicide as an highly emotional, eruption of aggression representing a sudden loss of control. This characterization of female homicide perhaps has some fit with the non-accidental injury filicides. However, many of the women who kill themselves along with their children, carefully plan the deaths, taking care to ensure death with little pain and the ordering of events after the deaths. It is not argued here that these are not highly emotional events. Rather that these acts challenge the tendency to talk in terms of binary oppositions of emotions and rationality. In general, homicides committed by men are probably also emotional events, but we tend to emphasise the decision-making component of the act. In the case of women, recent literature has essentially conceptualised the murders committed by them as emotional explosions. These acts by women are undoubtably highly emotional: at the same time, however, they do not necessarily represent a sudden loss of control.

When maternal filicide is not conceptualized as a sudden emotional loss of control, it is likely to be understood as the act of a woman who is "mad." At first glance such an explanation would appear to be more consistent with the histories of the women who kill themselves and their children. While the circumstances of the pregnancy, the birth, and the aftermath of neonaticides suggest that an unusual psychological process took place, the women had no prior history or signs of psychiatric illness, either immediately before or after the event. In all but one case, the same is true of non-accidental injury filicides. However, the women who killed themselves and their children were more likely to have had prior psychiatric treatment and to have previously attempted to commit suicide. These were also women who were generally coping alone in the world with a range of exceptionally difficult circumstances. These scenarios suggest that relevant to further understanding of these women's situations is consideration of

the research and literature on the medicalizing of women's problems, and further analysis of the ramifications of psychiatric treatment for women.

The murder/suicides are also distinctive in terms of the reports of women's experiences of abuse by their male partners: it was more prevalent in these cases than in either of the other two filicide scenarios discussed in this research. These data thereby suggest that while women's own experiences of violence may be a significant factor in the life circumstances of some women who kill their children, not all women who do so have been physically abused. However, official documents in criminal justice system files are not to be relied upon as sources of information regarding incidence of domestic violence. It is therefore not possible to draw any definitive conclusions in regard to this issue, other than to acknowledge contemporary debates about the relationship between women's experiences of violence as either an adult or a child and their own violent actions, and to identify it as a matter for further research.

The murder/suicides and the neonaticides also raise questions about the relationship between economic circumstances and women's violence. While none of the mothers were in situations of economic or social privilege, it was the mothers who were involved in the fatal non-accidental injury cases who were most likely to be unemployed or in the most difficult economic circumstances. These were the mothers who were living on the margins: they were frequently on social welfare benefits, public welfare or health professionals were involved with the case, and alcohol and drug use were more often a feature of the women's lives. This finding provides support for the conclusion of Silverman and Kennedy (1988: 123) that "female perpetrated homicide is not a monolithic act that can be easily explained by one framework" and that there are fundamentally different forms of maternal filicide that will require different explanations. It thereby also indicates that aggregate studies examining the relationship between economic factors and child murder rates need to disaggregate the type of child murder being considered.

While the cases in this study have been discussed in three groupings distinguishable from each other along a number of dimensions, grouping the cases in this way may also obscures some other differences among cases. For example, up to ten different motivation categories have been identified in other research (New South Wales Child Protection Council 1995:32; Baker 1991). Whilst the diversity of the cases is perhaps their most striking feature, some overarching themes are also apparent. In these cases

we see the dark side of the burden of "motherhood" as it is socially and culturally constructed: the burden of responsibility for conception; the belief that the mother alone can care for her children and is responsible for their wellbeing to the point of removing them permanently from perceived harm; the depth of identification of a mother with her children; and the responsibility for her children's behaviour, including ensuring they do not bother others. The overwhelming image that emerges across the cases is of women who feel pushed up against a wall, who perceive they have few other options, that is, they are acting from a position of relative powerlessness.

On the other hand, it would be incorrect to represent all of these women as simply passive beings, who are victims of circumstances beyond their control. These are women who do ultimately take action. Especially in the murder/suicide cases, the mothers make a determined, desperate bid to in some way take control of the situation in the only way they perceive to be available to them: they act to protect their children, to remove them from harm. Overall, the findings presented herein indicate the need for further analysis of the ramifications of the construction of motherhood in our society for the everyday lives of women. The findings also challenge some of the dominant understandings of women's violence and suggest the need for further elaboration of the complexities of such events.

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Masculinity and Child Homicide

One of the major contributions of feminists to criminology has been the identification of the nature and extent of male violence against women. Not only have these works revealed violence against women that had previously been rarely acknowledged as criminal, in so doing, they draw attention to the fact that most violent crimes are in fact committed by men. Feminists have put the issue of masculinity and crime firmly on the criminological agenda. The intent of this article is to explore further the nature of the relationship between masculinity and violence by examining cases studies of child homicides committed by men in Victoria, Australia between 1985 and 1994.

In the late 1980's Judith Allen could legitimately observe that "masculinity", was rarely considered as "a variable, an analytic dimension, a causal factor, a discursive condition" (Allen 1988:16) by non-feminists and feminists alike. However, by 1994 in Australia Sandra Egger could observe that, "masculinity is recognised as central to most forms of violence in Australian society "(Egger 1994:96). As is to be expected, as masculinity became increasingly a focus of attention in discussions of violence, so too did the debates about how we speak about masculinity. Within Australia, some feminists particularly concerned with the development of government policy wanted to maintain the analysis at a level which concentrated on structured power differences between men and women, and the broader cultural understandings of masculinity and violence (eg Ollis and Tomaszewski 1993; National Committee on Violence Against Women 1993; Women's Coalition Against Family Violence 1994). From this perspective discussions about the circumstances of individual men, or groups/classes of men were to be avoided as it was felt they would constitute or establish excuses for male violence and would detract from analyses in terms of more fundamental structural and cultural issues.

Other Australian feminists however are beginning to question arguments which tend to attribute a unitary masculinity to all men that "can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and the other realities of experience" (Carrington 1993:6). While this argument is frequently posed as

oppositional to the one outlined above, the work of Australian sociologist R.W. Connell suggests that this need not necessarily be the case. Connell observes that hegemonic masculinity is "always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women." (Connell 1987:183) That is, recognition of male diversity need not undermine acknowledgment of the importance of broader cultural definitions of masculinity and structured gender differences in power relations.

Feminists have for some time questioned the appropriateness of speaking in terms of universal femininity and womanhood, and have been calling attention to the diversity of women's lives. Unfortunately, these perspectives tend to be posed as binary opposites. One of the challenges currently occupying some feminists is finding ways of speaking of women-as-a-group where appropriate, while at the same time recognising and acknowledging differences among women (Stubbs 1994:4).

Similarly we need to explore further both the shared components of men's lives as well as the diversity among men not only in terms of such long standing sociological categories as race and class, but at the same time, in terms of masculinity. The notion of constructions of different masculinities is not totally new to feminist criminology, for example,: Morgan (1987) in Women, Violence and Social Control spoke of various constructions of masculinity and their differing relationships to violence. More recent works have made significant contributions to the development of discussion on this topic (Newburn and Stanko 1994; Messerschmidt 1993).

The research reported in this article sought to examine case studies of child homicide as a means of exploring further these developing ideas of difference and convergence as they relate to the constructions of both masculinity and homicide.

Child homicide

Child homicide accounts for a significant proportion of all homicides. In Australia, individuals under the age of one year are more at risk of homicide than any other age group (Strang 1993). The most recent Australian data indicate that the rate of homicide for children was well above the overall rate (Strang

1994). Between 1968 and 1981 in New South Wales, child victims 5 years and under made up a total of 8.7% of all reported homicides (Wallace 1986: 111). Consistent with Australian findings, US research has found that the risk of homicide was greater during the first year of life than at any other equivalent age span (Crittenden and Craig 1990: 202). Christoffel (1983), also in the U.S., has observed that homicide is the only cause of death of those under the age of 15 to have increased in the last 30 years.

A majority of child homicides are committed by parents or de-facto (non-biological) parents (Strang 1994). Pre-school age children are almost never the victims of stranger homicide (Crittenden and Craig 1990). In a study of 112 homicides involving child victims in New York, it was reported that over two-thirds of the perpetrators were either natural or common law parents of the victim (Kaplun and Reich 1976). A Canadian study found that parents were the suspects in almost three-fourths (74%) of child homicides (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:185).

A not unrelated observation is that a distinctive feature of child homicides is the gender of the offenders. As a general matter, homicide is committed by men. Most research indicates that the proportion of male offenders in homicide ranges from 85 to 90 percent (Wolfgang 1958; Strang 1994; Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Polk 1994a). However, filicide, that is, cases where parents kill their children, stands in contrast to other forms of homicide since women are as likely as men to be perpetrators. Of 36 parent killers in Detroit between 1982-86, 53% were female and 47% male (Goetting 1988:341). Of the 395 parents suspected of the murder of their child in the UK between 1982-89, 48% were mothers (Wilczynski and Morris 1993). Comparable sex ratios were observed in Canadian national data, where 48% of filicide offenders were female (Silverman and Kennedy 1993). Even more striking was the early study of filicide in the US conducted by Resnick (1969), in which 67% of the offenders were mothers of the victims. Looking more widely at all child homicides, a study in New South Wales found that women made up a majority (55%) of all offenders (Wallace 1986: 112).

In part this level of involvement of female offenders is a consequence of the age of the child in filicides: the younger the child, the more likely it is that the child will be killed by a parent (Crittenden and Craig 1990), and this is as likely to be the child's mother as the father. As the child ages, the risk of homicide shifts to outside the family and the offender is more likely to be male (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:184). The incidence of women as offenders in child homicide makes possible a gender analysis of violence in terms of both masculinity and femininity. However this is not possible within the confines of a single article and so the focus of this particular work is on what we can learn about masculinity from an analysis of these cases.

Silverman and Kennedy (1993:187) are among those who have observed that the probability of becoming a victim of homicide outside of the home is much greater for older than younger children. They go on to point out that homicide rates tend to decline after the age of five, and argue that this is a reflection of their removal from parents as a source of violence. They note that the daily activities of children over five take them out of the house for large parts of the day and thus away from those who have been most likely to harm them, that is, their parents (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993: 188)

However, such explanations for the pattern of child homicides in terms of the "routine activities" of their lives, is insufficient for addressing the gendered aspects of these patterns. Specifically in regard to the present research, "routine activities" explanations offer little in terms of understanding why it is men who are most likely to kill older children. Recent years have seen the production of a few works which have specifically addressed the issue of the overwhelming masculinity of homicide and it is to these works we now turn.

Masculinity and Homicide

Some of the most detailed empirical studies of homicide in recent times which have as a central observation the maleness of violent crime, are those conducted by Daly and Wilson (1988, 1989). They note that there is no evidence that the women in any society have ever approached the level of violent

conflict prevailing among men in the same society (Daly and Wilson 1988:149). Working from a perspective based in evolutionary psychology, Daly and Wilson argue that male violence has to be understood in the context of the human reproductive process. They maintain that man's psyche is "obsessed with social comparison, with the need for achievement and with the desire to gain control over the reproductive capacities of women" (Daly and Wilson 1988:136). The most common type of homicide, according to Daly and Wilson (1988:125) involves two acquainted, unrelated males, in a dispute over status or face.

In terms of the killing of children, Daly and Wilson note that children are less likely to be killed by their biological fathers as they grow older and that fathers who do kill older children are likely to also kill themselves. Often suicide also follows familicide, that is, where the man kills his wife and children. Familicide, they note, "is a peculiarly male crime" (Daly and Wilson 1988:82), which they suggest, "must be understood in terms of men's proprietary attitude toward women and their reproductive capacity" (Daly and Wilson 1988:83).

While Daly and Wilson derive their conclusions from aggregate data and analysis, Jack Katz argues for approaching the study of crime from another direction entirely. Katz calls for us to "track the lived experience of criminality" (Katz 1988:311). From this perspective, Katz concludes in regard to homicide that "In committing a righteous slaughter, the impassioned assailant takes humiliation and turns it into rage; through laying claim to a moral status of transcendent significance, he tries to burn humiliation up" (Katz 1988:312). In regard to the murder of a child, he considers a case where a child dies as the result of a battering following the child's persistent crying, and suggests as an interpretation that "the father defined the crying as defiant and enacted his violence to honour parental authority" (Katz 1988:13). For Katz such acts are characterised as self-righteous, unpremeditated acts that "emerge quickly, are fiercely impassioned, and are conducted with an indifference to the legal consequences" (Katz 1988: 18). While most of the "lived experiences" considered by Katz in his work are those of men, and he acknowledges at

some points that it is men who are more likely to engage in violent acts than women, masculinity is not one of the "contours of crime" that for Katz warrants direct attention in his conclusion to the book.

In a similar vein to Katz's interest in "foreground," Campbell is concerned with "factors that are relevant *at the moment* when the action takes place" (Campbell 1993: 84). However for Campbell, gender is a key issue in an analysis of aggression. Campbell acknowledges the emotionality of men's aggressive acts: "... it is an almost automatic and well-practiced response to challenge, and it is accompanied by righteous fury." (Campbell 1993:56). But the main thrust of her argument is that men's aggression is instrumental while women's is expressive. According to Campbell, men report that the trigger to their aggression and anger is a "perceived threat to the man's sense of personal integrity, his pride, and his mastery of the social environment" (Campbell 1993:56). In the face of such threats, men's use of aggression is strategic, it is a "means of instilling fear and gaining power" (Campbell 1993: 72).

From the work of both Campbell and Katz emerges the notion of a generic aggressive experience, a universality of the moment of attack. Katz (1988:18) details three notable features of the "typical" homicide. Campbell's aggressive scenarios involve men in a rage but nevertheless instrumental in their efforts to maintain or establish power. While there are clear differences between the works, basic to both are universalistic assumptions about men and violence. Jim Messerschmidt (1993) in the most extensive analysis of masculinity and crime to date, on the other hand, calls for us to begin with the notion that " Behaviour in men is considerably more complex than that suggested by the idea of a universal masculinity that is performed and embedded in the individual prior to social action" (Messerschmidt 1993:80; see also Jefferson 1994:13). He argues that gender is something that is accomplished in social interaction and thus "diverse forms of masculinity arise, depending upon prevalent structural potentials and constraints" (Messerschmidt 1993:83). For Messerschmidt, "...crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity" (Messerschmidt 1993:85). Thus he argues that the home is an important site for authority for working class men, and violence in the home is a means of affirming masculinity. Similarly, he argues, corporate crime is a "means of

accomplishing profit and gender"(Messerschmidt 1993:136). Since gender is situationally accomplished and crime is a means of accomplishing it, we can expect both variability in masculinity, and diversity in the way men do or do not use crime to "do masculinity".

It is our intention in the present research to explore some of the issues raised in this recent literature. The extent to which commonalities or diversities of events and experiences are evident is of particular interest as a means of considering the implications of these for our understanding of masculinity, or masculinities and violent behaviour.

FINDINGS

Overview

In Victoria, Australia, in the nine year period (1985-1994) covered by this research, there was a total of 83 child victims of homicide and 68 known offenders (in 8 cases the offender remains unknown): 45 male and 23 female offenders. While the focus of this article is on the male offenders, this needs to be placed in to context of the overall gendered nature of child homicide. As in other research, the majority (48 of 74 or 65% in cases with known offenders) of children in this study were killed by a parent or step-parent (including de facto relationships). Women constituted half (21 of 41) of the known filicide offenders. All of the mothers killed their biological children. However, just over half of the male offenders (12 of 20, 60%) were step-fathers, or men living in defacto relationships with the mother of the child they killed. While most child murders involve parents, a considerable proportion do not (26 of 74 or 35% in cases with known offenders) and these homicides are predominantly committed by men: there are 25 male and 2 female non-parental offenders in this research. Child homicide outside of the family network is definitively a male crime and it is with these cases that we begin our analysis

Non-parental child homicides.

Consistent with the findings of other research, the children in this research who were killed by someone other than a parent, were, in all but one case, teenagers who were killed by slightly older (generally aged in their 20's to early 30's) men. The nature of most of these child homicides (67%) is consistent with the scenarios of masculine violence identified by Polk (1994a) in a study of homicides committed by men. Three of these scenarios (named as Confrontation, Conflict Resolution and Homicide in the Course of Another Crime) generally involve males as both victims and offenders, and the fourth (Sexual Jealousy) involves male offenders and female victims.

The single most prevalent pattern of non-parental child murder (n=6 victims in this research) typically involves two young men in what Polk (1994b) describes as the Confrontation scenario. These are situations in which young males threaten or challenge the "honour" of other young men, this then provokes an exchange between the males which leads to violence. While most of such honour contests which result in murder involve older males, boys under the age of 18 can be swept up in such lethal violence as well:

> Milton S. (age 16), his brothers and some friends were drinking in a Glenroy reserve on a New Year's Eve, when a small Datsun pulled up and the driver began abusing the group. They responded by gathering around the car, abusing the driver in return, laughing at him, and thumping and banging on the sides of the car. The driver sped off, and returned a few minutes later with a large group of friends. Insults were again exchanged, and a fight quickly developed between the two groups. Greatly outnumbered, Milton's group broke and ran. Milton, who through most of the unfolding events had been a peripheral spectator, was a bit slower in making his escape, and was overtaken and beaten severely, suffering from head injuries which caused his death the following morning. (Case No. 2-89)

Common features of such confrontational scenarios (Polk, 1994a, 1994b) include: the events took place in what is definitively public space (a reserve); involved a contest of honour between males (laughing at the driver of the car); involved groups of males which provided both audience and participants for the violence; and the groups had been involved in drinking.

A second masculine pattern of violence involves death which arises out of the risk taking behaviour of males when they engage in serious criminal violation (n=4 victims in this study). The most common pattern here is where the victim of a crime, such as armed robbery, becomes the victim of lethal violence during the course of the initial crime. For example, one of these cases began as an armed robbery of a gun shop. As the events unfolded, the robber decided to kill those present in the shop, including the owner, a friend of the owner, and the owner's 14 year old-daughter who happened to be in the shop at the time (Case No. 2637-93). In other cases, it is the male offender of an initial crime who becomes the victim of homicide. For example, as he attempted to flee the scene, a young man (17 years of age) was shot and killed by his intended robbery victim (Case No. 151-88).

In both of these accounts, it is the willingness of young men to take risks, as represented by the original crime, which sets in train the events which result in the homicides. A relationship between the risk-taking behaviour of young males and violence is also apparent in the two accidental shootings which occur in these data. These cases involve groups of young adolescents (the victims were aged 11 and 12 years), "playing" with guns, playing with symbols of manhood, with the consequence being the death of two of them.

While women are sometimes victims, men are most often the victims of homicides which result in the course of another crime. However, the sex of the victim is not an intrinsic aspect of the developing scenario in these events. This is unlike the Confrontational scenarios above, where masculine status is being established and maintained amongst male peers, or the Separation/Jealousy scenarios or Secondary

to wife murder cases to be discussed below, where male possessive jealousy of female partners is a crucial feature of the unfolding events.

In another of the masculine scenarios identified by Polk (1994a, 1995), the violence arises out of a conflict between two men where one of the men decides that violence is the means of resolving the conflict. (n=4 victims in this research). In one such case a 15 year old witnessed his brother and a friend stealing a car. While at first promising not to testify, the young man later went to the police. His brother's friend, furious at being "dobbed in" and wanting to ensure he did not testify in court, shot the young man (Case No. 1606-86).

Homicides where the violence is a mechanism for resolution of a dispute are most likely to occur among older males who are enmeshed in a criminal life style. However, this case illustrates how teenagers who become affiliated with these older males may become pulled into the violent exchanges which take place.

In the child murder scenarios examined thus far, both the offenders and the victims are most often male. These are scenarios of young men using violence either to establish their masculine status amongst male peers or to resolve conflicts with other males, or the violence is a consequence of engaging in the risk-taking business of other criminal activities. The other forms of non-parental child homicide identified in these data involve female victims of male violence. The first of these overlaps with themes identified in adult homicide where a man kills a women with whom he has been sexually intimate, because she left him, or has threatened to do so, and/or of whom he is jealous (Polk 1994 a).

In the present research, there are three of these cases: one involves a couple who had been living together (Case No. 2850-88) , in another the man was a boarder in the young woman's family home (Case No. 4396-88), and in the third, the couple were not living together but had been going out together for nine months and were planning to start a family (Case 3143-86). These are cases in which two young people

(the average age of the victims was 16, and the offenders' average age was 21) are very close to each other before the young woman decides to end the relationship.

Consistent with the adult scenarios of this general type, one case in this group explicitly involved both despair about the separation, and jealousy. The case involved a young man (18) who was a boarder in the family home of his girlfriend (16). However, the girlfriend wanted to end their relationship. After attending a party at which the young woman made clear her interest in another young man, the boyfriend later that evening killed his girlfriend while she lay sleeping (Case No. 4396-86).

This account has much in common with accounts of homicide among older males that involved possessive rage, including the attempt of the female partner to withdraw from the relationship, the jealousy as she attracts the attention of other males, and the brooding rage and despair that spills into violence. One difference in this account is the absence of previous violence (commonly found in older male offenders) which might serve as a warning of the ultimate use of violence by this young man.

Unlike the adult scenarios of this general type, neither previous violence nor jealousy were a feature of the other two cases in this group. In both cases the young men were distraught about the separation itself, for example:

> Betty S. (16) had been going out with Greg M. (20) for nine months. They had formed a sexual relationship, and were attempting to start a family. They were reported to be an affectionate couple with no indications of any prior violence on the part of Greg. There had been some arguments regarding Greg's long spell of unemployment. On their way home, after an evening out drinking, an argument broke out over Greg's unemployment. Betty announced for the first time that she wanted to end the relationship. Greg became further depressed on the drive home

and said to another passenger in the car "What have I got to lose by shooting Betty and myself?". In the early hours of the morning he shot her in the head and neck.(Case No. 3143-86)

Apparent in the child homicide cases in this study is another scenario of non-parental homicide which involves male offenders and female victims. These cases (n = 4 victims in this research) involve the murder of a female child victim (average age = 12 years) by an older male (average age = 28 years) who had previously had sexual intercourse with the victim. Fearing that his sexual exploitation of the female child, which would be defined in law as sexual assault were to become known, the man kills in an effort to cover his crime. The following is one of the cases illustrating this pattern.

> Richard (age 46, unemployed, alcohol problem and prior criminal record) resided in a bungalow at the back of the Cordray household when he is released from prison. Richard and the Cordray's daughter, Tammy (age 12), became sexually involved. When Richard moved away from the Cordray household, he continued to see the family, including Tammy. Tammy suffered a miscarriage and told two of her young friends that Richard was the father, and further, that he had threatened to kill her if she revealed that he had been involved with her sexually. Becoming apprehensive, Richard invited Tammy to his house to receive a birthday present. When she arrived, he shot her once in the head, killing her instantly (Case No. 1199-86).

The common thread in these cases is the forbidden character of the sexual contact between the adult male and the young child, so that the public disclosure of the exploitation poses a great peril for the male. The killing represents a tragic and futile attempt to silence that threat.

Most, but not all, of the non-familial child homicides can be placed within these basic clusters of violent behaviour. There were four additional cases (representing 15% of the 26 non-familial cases) which included cases such as one victim of a serial killer, and three victims where the circumstances were either so confused or difficult to determine that they simply cannot be readily incorporated into the analysis (see

Polk, 1994a: 156-175 for a discussion of such cases). But the scenarios outlined above, as scenarios of violent crimes which are almost exclusively committed by men, challenge our understandings of the relationship between masculinity and violence. However, before considering the meaning of these findings we turn to the remaining cases of child homicide committed by men, cases where the killing takes place within the family.

Filicides

As indicated previously, a majority of homicides of children involve parents as offenders.
The single most prevalent form of men killing children is that often referred to as Non Accidental Injuries (NAI). This type of homicide applies to the offence committed by just over half (12 of 20) of the men in this study who killed children in the family setting.

The key defining characteristic of the cases in this group is that the apparent intent was not to kill the child, rather, from the parent's point of view, it was to punish or discipline the child. In most cases there was evidence of prior physical abuse of the child and on the occasion in question, this extreme physical violence resulted in the child's death. To give an example of a paternal filicide of this form:

> Grant H. (29) had been living with Roberta F. and her 15 month old son, Arthur, for nine months. Because of Roberta's problem with alcohol, Grant claimed that he took responsibility for Arthur's care. Roberta stated that "{Grant} treated both {Arthur} and me well but couldn't cope with Arthur crying and this made him upset." On the day of Arthur's death, Grant and Roberta were watching television when Arthur began to cry. Grant picked Arthur up, hit his buttocks and his head and violently shook him. Arthur lost consciousness and died of brain damage two days later (Case No. 0500-87).

In general these filicides occurred in families consisting of young adults and young children: the men ranged in age from 19 to 33, with the majority being 25 or under; all but one child was 2 years old or

younger. In general, these young families were coping with stressful circumstances: reference is made to "money troubles" and arguments over money; unemployment and reliance on social service benefits are not uncommon ; and drug and alcohol use were frequently mentioned.

In all but three of the cases of this form, the male perpetrators were stepfathers, or men living in a defacto relationship with the mother. In one of the cases where the parent was the biological father, he frequently accused his wife of infidelity and denied paternity of the child whom he had abused over a period of time (Case No.1304-87). Another biological father was intellectually impaired (Case No. 1633-90).

In several cases, the man played a significant role in the "caring" of the children. For example, one stepfather who had terminated his employment when shift work was introduced in order to maintain his family responsibilities, was known as an excellent step-father who actively participated in the child care duties (Case No. 1973-86). Another mother reported that, "He virtually took over the care of Sam and from the time we shifted in, seemed to be doing a good job of it." (mother in Case No. 3184-86)

However, autopsy reports often revealed that the child had been the victim of prior physical violence. There is also evidence of violence against the female partner in 4 cases, and in a fifth case, the ex-wife reports extreme violence. That is, for these men, the child murders were not isolated incidents of violent actions.

In general, the men attempted first to deny or cover up their part in the child's death. They created stories, which they sometimes pressured their partners into supporting, such as "I was just playing" or the child was "accident-prone" (Case 3184-86), or that the child fell down stairs (Case No. 1975-87).

When men did acknowledge their involvement, their explanations were in terms of the frustrations of the immediate event, for example, "I went down the park with Sam...he was good as gold, then he fuckin shit, put shit all over the place, then I belted him"(Case No. 9434-89). Or as another step-father reported:

> Austin was sitting on the floor eating a packet of chips and he started crying. I picked him up and whacked him on the bum three or four times with an open hand. I put him down and he was still crying. I picked him up and shook him (to) shut him up... I didn't lose my cool, I was just annoyed...I was just annoyed because I couldn't hear the video. He was getting on my nerves. (Case No. 0500-87)

The scenarios involving the remaining nine men who killed children within the family are distinguishable from the NAI's on a number of dimensions, perhaps the most apparent of these is that the fathers in the following scenarios are, in all but one instance, the biological fathers of the children they kill. These fathers also tend to be older (in their 30's) than the stepfathers in the above scenarios and the child victims also tended to be older . In most instances these men are not reported to have been previously physically violent towards their children. Most either attempted or were successful in committing suicide (in contrast, none of the NAI offenders committed suicide). Thus there appears to be something quite different occurring in these scenarios than in the NAI's already discussed. However, while the following scenarios share some features, again there is also considerable variation.

We have referred to the first of these following scenarios as instances of "Misguided Altruism". These three cases involve biological fathers who killed their children and who indicated, either in a suicide note, or in prior comments to friends and relatives, that they believed that the filicide was in the best interests of the children, a not uncommon sentiment being that "They're better off dead", for example:

> Police officer: Why did you kill your children
>
> Father: I killed my children because we have been living in hell, the situation is horrendous and we've been tormented. (Case No. 9423-89)

"Well, if she's dead- she's all right, nothing can happen to her....I wouldn't have to worry about my daughter any more" (Police interrogation, Case No. 2514-91).

However, other of the men's comments also suggest an awareness that the mother would also suffer as a consequence of the action, and was to some extent a target of the action. The Coroner's Record of Investigation notes in one case that the offender had previously threatened suicide "...in order to force Maria [his wife] to accede to circumstances he sought". He had indicated the "...if he couldn't have Maria then no one would", that he would do anything not to lose Marie and that he would use the children to prevent the loss of Maria (Case No. 9423-89). Vindictiveness towards the wife is also suggested in the following:

Police officer: How did you feel about [your wife's] attitude to you?.

Father: Lousy, quite selfish

Police officer: Hmmm

Father: Vindictive

Police officer: And what did you decide to do about that?

Father: What I did, kill my daughter. (Police interview, Case No. 2514-91)

In each of these cases, the parents had separated and there were ongoing battles over the custody of the children. In two cases there is some evidence of prior violence and threats of violence against the mother (Case No. 9423-89, Case No. 5281-89). However, there is not necessarily a previous pattern of violence towards the children: "Rob was a caring father towards Kate and he was never violent towards us" (Mother, Case No. 2514-91); another mother told the police on the day of the homicide, that "he wouldn't hurt them" (Case No. 9423-89).

These men reported attempts at suicide at the time they killed their children. By their own accounts, these men felt "hopelessness, helplessness and uselessness" (Psychiatrist's report, Case No. 5281-89); one

father said "I thought I was doing the only thing I could do, that was left, the only possibility" (Police interview, Case No. 2514-91). They were also reported by psychiatrists to be men with "few if any close friends" (Psychiatrist's report, Case No. 2514-91) and who felt "alone and lonely" (Psychiatrist's report, Case No. 5281-89).

There are then indications of feelings of powerlessness, of matters having gone beyond their control, of pain as a result of the loss of children and anger at female partners. The murder of their children is described by these men as an emotional outburst in the face of their own pain.

> Father: I just became emotional. I just couldn't take any more. My kids were being tormented
>
> Police officer: What was your intention when you hit Emily and Ben?
>
> Father: I just wanted it finished, I've been through so much"
>
> Police officer: Did you realise by hitting your children you would probably kill them?
>
> Father: Yes, I know, I wanted them killed. I've been through so much and I couldn't take any more? (record of interview Case No. 9423-89).

While these murders are often depicted by the men as emotional outbursts, in two of the three cases there was some evidence of preparation: a steel pole had been previously sharpened (Case No. 5281-89) and a particular form of nail gun had been purchased (Case No. 2514-91).

A second scenario of filicide by men which was identified in this study is referred to as "Secondary to Spousal Harm". In this scenario, the primary intended subject of harm appears to be the wife/female partner of the alleged offender. In two cases the female partner is killed, in the third case the wife manages to escape and alert police. In all three cases the male perpetrator kills himself as well as a child. Separation was an issue in each of these cases. Two cases involve the biological father. In the third case, the male kills his defacto wife and her child, but does not take his biological son, who also lives with them, on the journey which ends with the homicide.

A history of extreme physical violence towards the mother of the children and jealousy are features of these cases. Threats of violence against the children to control the female partner were also present. For example, one husband had previously threatened to "cut [the children's] throats" if his wife attempted to get help in regard to his violence against her (Case No. 0190-88).

If there was some suggestion in the Misguided Altruism cases that the father killed the children at least in part as a way of punishing the mother for leaving him, this is even more apparent in these cases. It is the relationship to wife/partner, rather than to children which is so important to these men. The children become a vehicle for causing pain to the mother. While there is also some indication of emotions of pain and loss in regard to the children in the Misguided Altruism cases discussed above, these "Secondary to Spousal Harm" scenarios ring more with sounds of anger and possessive jealousy. However, while themes of control and possession of the female partner are evident in these cases, we have to address the fact that the perpetrator also killed himself. It is not simply that he lost or was in fear of losing a possession: there is something here about the "possession" of wife and family that runs deeper and is connected to feelings of masculine self-worth and identity for some men.

Before ending this discussion, a further case is worth mentioning which does not fit into any of the scenarios otherwise described here. The case involves a man who killed himself, his wife and two children. To friends close to the family, they appeared to be a close unit. However, the father was a small business proprietor who had run into financial difficulties and believed that he was at the end of his rope (Case Nos. 558-88 and 559-88). While this man killed his wife and children, the scenario is quite different to those described above. This case indicates how expectations in regard to male responsibility for family well-being, can also play a part in murders in which biological fathers kill their wives and children.

Conclusion

After reading the case files of child homicides, you are left with the notion that men will use violence as a solution to what are apparently many different situations and problems confronting them. For example, a male peer calls them names; a baby will not stop crying when asked; their lover is leaving them; they can no longer support their family; they are losing their children through separation; or there is a risk that they will be reported to the police. Do all of the men in these situations share a common experience, is there a single process of "righteous slaughter" occurring here? If so then perhaps we can begin to think of a more homogenous masculinity which responds to certain situations in this way. Or is there any indication that there are some qualitatively different things happening in some of these scenes that might suggest some differences in the form of the violence and the men who are using it?

There is no question that some of theses scenarios fit the pattern proposed by Katz, the example he uses himself of the non-accidental injury, is perhaps the classic example: the father exploding in anger at the child who by continuing to cry challenges his parental authority. However we have to be able also to account for the fact that for these men, the violence is frequently not a one off event: they have been violent to the child in the past and not infrequently their female partner as well. The explosions that end in the death of children may not be premeditated, but these are men for whom violence is an option as a response to issues confronting them. It is not simply a solution that emerges from the contingencies of the specific situation.

There are other situations that seem to fit less easily into this scenario, for example, some child homicides are carefully planned in advance: the father prepares the instrument of death, plans an excursion that ends in death, writes a suicide note, or the protagonist arranges the setting for the killing. There is a mood in some of these events of the man thinking about what he is going to do and planning the event. This appears to be more the case when the event is one that arises out of pain or loss, rather than anger.

Talk of male violence, in particular homicide, tends to highlight the rage and anger that is presumed to dominate the scene. Certainly there are scenarios of which this appears to be true. However there are others where there are other emotions at play that we tend not to have explored. There are cases in which there are significant emotions of pain and despair associated with loss, of sadness, of the loss of hope, for example, the man who having lost his business destroys his close knit family; the father who having had custody of his children loses it after a lengthy court battle and believes this is not in the children's interest. This is not to say that anger and rage are not at all part of the emotions that these men are feeling, but rather that they are not the only significant emotions. There appear to be aspects of these scenarios that are quite different to the non-accidental injuries for example.

There is little doubt that in most cases the men use violence as a response to a perceived threat, but the nature of these threats can vary in ways that again suggest that there is something quite different about some of these scenes that requires further elaboration. Children rarely represent a direct threat of personal violence to their killers. The threat maybe indirect as in the cases where the perpetrator is concerned that the child is about to reveal criminal activity on his part (eg sexual assault). Or it may be a more direct threat to his standing or self-definition, his masculinity, as in the threat to authority posed by the crying child, or the name calling of male peers. But also in child murder cases, the ultimate victim may not be the source of the threat at all, children may be killed as a means of punishing or responding to a threat posed by another person entirely, the child's mother. Or the threat to masculinity may be posed from right outside the immediate family, as in the case of the failed businessman, where the threat is not posed by the ultimate victim in other than an obscure notion of "threat". This diversity of scenarios and threats, calls for further consideration of the nature of the immediate event and the adequacy of descriptions in terms of predominant emotions of rage and anger in response to threats.

The diversity of the scenarios defies efforts to capture them in a single emotive outline. The perception of a "threat" varies, there are a range of emotions at play, and they reflect a variety of differing relationships to other members of the family. Different men with different identities, different emotions and different

objectives are somewhat visible in these stories: angry men, men filled with despair, men who have given no previous indication of the willingness to use violence, and men who regularly use violence. Perhaps the most glaring difference between the men which is related to the homicide scenario, is the man's relationship to the child. Biological fathers are not the ones who fly into a rage at an apparently disobedient child. The circumstances in which they do kill their children are such that they may also kill themselves. This difference is so strong that is calls out for further analysis of the meaning of parenthood to fathers, of the role of father in affirming masculinity, of how differing relationships to children relate to understandings of masculinity, and how this relates to preparedness to use violence and in what circumstances.

Thus, the men and their violence, in this study defy the development of an homogenous grouping. Nevertheless, it is also true that all of the men in this research were white and were, with rare exception, unemployed, or working class men. When we speak of diversities of masculinities, the tendency is to talk of difference across cultural or class boundaries, yet these case studies make apparent diversity even within these standard sociological categories.

In recognising the diversity of masculinities, Messerschmidt (1993) maintains that masculinity is "situationally accomplished" and that crime is a resource for affirming masculinity. He speaks of men utilising crime to situationally construct distinct forms of masculinity. However, the child homicide cases reviewed here present some questions regarding the extent to which we can privilege the securing of masculinity as an objective of these acts. This proposition clearly fits some scenarios such as the confrontations between young men and Secondary to Spousal harm scenarios where the violence over a period of time before the event may be seen as part of an ongoing process of affirming masculinity. In some other scenarios the affirming of masculinity may not be as central to the event. It is not clear to what extent it captures the despair of the unemployed men who kills his girlfriend who is about to leave him alone in the world, or the extent to which young men who engage in the risky business of armed robberies are more concerned with affirming their masculinity ,or acquiring the goods. To raise such a

question is not to dismiss the importance of an analysis in terms of masculinity for an understanding of these behaviours or to deny that the behaviour may be an affirmation of masculinity. Rather, the concern here is that we do not let this overwhelm our analyses as we begin to unravel the nature of the relationships between masculinities and violence.

The child homicides described as Non Accidental Injuries, illustrate some particular complexities in terms of differing expectations of appropriate male behaviour and the different ways in which they are achieved. On the one hand these men present themselves as particularly capable and willing carers of children to their partners and to the public environment in which they participate with the children. These men and their partners frequently vehemently deny violence towards the children and indicate in their statements that they find such behaviour objectionable - it is not "manly" , it is not being the responsible parent, to physically abuse children.

On the other hand, the autopsy reports indicate that they have been violent towards the children on more than one occasion. Their private actions with the child differ from their public actions - and yet both are masculine affirming, but affirming of different masculinities. In private the child's actions were interpreted as challenging masculine authority, the violence reaffirms control of the situation. But these same actions cannot be part of a public affirmation of masculinity, in fact they are actions which if made public might be used to question masculinity. These scenarios in particular reveal both the complex and sometimes contradictory expectations of masculinity and the ways in which they are achieved differently in different situations.

The major thrust of this conclusion concerns the diversity of the violent scenarios, and of the masculinities they reveal. Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that these are crimes committed by men, that some forms of child homicide are distinctively male crimes and that across cultures violence is predominantly male behaviour, that is, we must not let our growing awareness of the complexity of

masculinity and the relationships to violence, totally obscure more universalistic analyses. The challenge is for us to be able to understand and speak of difference at the same time as we recognise correspondence.

Footnotes

1. This research was funded by a grant from the Criminology Research Council, Canberra, Australia.

2. The data source for this study were the files of the Office of the Coroner of Victoria for the period from January, 1985 to June 1994. Case files contain a number of reports collected for the coronial inquest, including: an initial police report of the incident; transcripts of police interviews; an autopsy report regarding the cause of death; a toxicology report (where relevant); a police prosecutor's brief; and the report of the inquest itself. To protect the anonymity of individuals, all names used in relation to cases are pseudonyms. Coroners Court files are public documents, nevertheless permission was obtained for this research and publication of results. The case numbers used in the text to identify cases are those of the Coroners Court.

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Guardians, Fathers, Lovers and Others: Men Who Kill Children

Violent crime, including homicide, is committed primarily by men, across time, and across cultures (Wolfgang, 1958; Daly and Wilson, 1988). Nevertheless, in the past, the maleness of violent crime was rarely considered as "a variable, an analytic dimension, a causal factor, a discursive condition" (Allen 1988:16; Miedzen 1991). More recently, in part as a result of the substantial body of research on male violence against women, feminists have put the issue of the maleness and the masculinity of violence firmly on the criminological agenda. The intent of this chapter is to explore the nature of the relationship between masculinity and violence through a study of child homicide committed by men.

Child Homicide

Child homicide accounts for a significant proportion of all homicides. In Australia, individuals under the age of one year are more at risk of homicide than any other age group (Strang, 1993). The most recent Australian data indicate that the rate of homicide per 100,00 for children less than one year is 3.5, compared with the overall rate of 2.1 (Strang, 1994). Between 1968 and 1981 in New South Wales, child victims 5 years and under made up a total of 8.7% of all reported homicides (Wallace, 1986: 111). In the five year period 1985-1989 for which a total homicide sample is available (Polk, 1994), there were 380 homicides recorded in Victoria, of which 51 (or 13.4%) involved victims below age 18. Consistent with Australian findings, US research has found that the risk of homicide was greater during the first year of life than at any other equivalent age span (Crittenden and Craig, 1990: 202). Homicide is the leading cause of injury related death for children below age one in the U.S. (Unnithan, 1991)

A majority of child homicides are committed by parents or de-facto (non-biological) parents (Strang 1994). Pre-school age children are almost never the victims of stranger homicide (Crittenden and Craig 1990). In a study of 112 homicides involving child victims in New York, it was reported that over two-thirds of the perpetrators were either natural or common law parents of the victim (Kaplun and Reich 1976). A Canadian study found that parents were the suspects in almost three-fourths (74%) of child homicides (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:185).

A related observation is that a distinctive feature of child homicides is the gender of the offenders. As a general matter, homicide is committed by men. Most research indicates that the proportion of male offenders in homicide ranges from 85 to 90 percent (Wolfgang 1958; Strang 1994; Silverman and Kennedy 1993; Polk 1994a). However, filicide, that is, cases where parents kill their children, stands in

contrast to other forms of homicide since women are as likely as men to be perpetrators. Of 36 parent killers in Detroit between 1982-86, 53% were female and 47% male (Goetting 1988:341). Of the 395 parents suspected of the murder of their child in the UK between 1982-89, 48% were mothers (Wilczynski and Morris 1993). Comparable sex ratios were observed in Canadian national data, where 48% of filicide offenders were female (Silverman and Kennedy 1993). Even more striking was the early study of filicide in the US conducted by Resnick (1969), in which 67% of the offenders were mothers of the victims. Looking more widely at all child homicides, a study in New South Wales found that women made up a majority (55%) of all offenders (Wallace 1986: 112).

In part this level of involvement of female offenders is a consequence of the age definitions employed for the child victims. Research indicates the younger the child, the more likely it is that the child will be killed by a parent (Crittenden and Craig 1990), and this is as likely to be the child's mother as the father. As the child ages, the risk of homicide shifts to outside the family and the offender is more likely to be male (Silverman and Kennedy 1993:184). Silverman and Kennedy go on to observe that homicide rates tend to decline after the age of five, and argue that this is a reflection of their removal from parents as a source of violence. They note that the daily activities of children over five take them out of the house for large parts of the day and thus away from those who have been most likely to harm them, that is, their parents (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993: 188). However, such explanations for the pattern of child homicides in terms of the "routine activities" of their lives, insufficiently address the gendered aspects of these patterns. Specifically in regard to the present research, by itself this offers little explanation for why older children outside of the family are more likely to be killed by men than women.

While men commit significant numbers of child homicides, studies of child homicide have tended to focus on those offences predominantly committed by women, in particular infanticide (Unnithan 1991). This is consistent with the more general child abuse literature which several feminist writers have demonstrated either focuses attention on the mother's direct or indirect responsibility, or speaks in gender neutral terms (Parton 1990:43). "Feminist work has drawn attention to the failure of mainstream child abuse literature, policy and practice to acknowledge and analyse the high level of men's abuse of children". (Parton 1990:42;see also Archer 1994; Andrews 1994; Hearn 1990). Consequetly we need to turn to the more general literature on maleness, masculinity and homicide to inform the analysis of child homicide.

Men, Masculinity and Homicide Research

That homicide is predominantly committed by men has been noted in most homicide studies. However while noting the maleness of this offence, it is striking that few authors have made this a key component

of their analysis or theory. For example, Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967: 258) noted that with respect to violent crime, "... almost universally... Males predominate everywhere". They concluded from this observation:

> In general, a review of the statistical and clinical literature from many societies indicates that the age-sex category of youthful males exhibits the highest association with violent crime and that physically aggressive behaviour for this group converges with notions about the masculine ideal (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967:260)

However their theory centred on the class and "sub-culture" dimensions of their violent behavior and these became the focus of attention in the research that followed (especially their ideas about the "subculture of violence"), and not the observation regarding the maleness of the behaviour, or the "masculine ideal".

More recently, Katz (1988) also observed that it is men who are more likely to engage in violent acts than women, however once again, masculinity is not one of the "contours of crime" that warrants detailed analysis in the conclusion to his book. One of the cases he considers involves a child who dies as the result of a battering following the child's persistent crying. Katz suggests as an interpretation that "the father defined the crying as defiant and enacted his violence to honour parental authority" (Katz 1988:13). In calling for us to "track the lived experience of criminality" (Katz 1988:311) Katz characterised such acts as self-righteous, unpremeditated acts that "emerge quickly, are fiercely impassioned, and are conducted with an indifference to the legal consequences" (Katz 1988: 18). Katz concludes in regard to homicide that "In committing a righteous slaughter, the impassioned assailant takes humiliation and turns it into rage; through laying claim to a moral status of transcendent significance, he tries to burn humiliation up" (Katz 1988:312). By his silence on the issue, Katz implies that similar understandings apply to violent acts committed by men and women, and different forms of homicide.

Some of the most detailed empirical studies of homicide in recent times which have as a central observation the maleness of violent crime, are those conducted by Daly and Wilson (1988, 1989). They note that there is no evidence that the women in any society have ever approached the level of violent conflict prevailing among men in the same society (Daly and Wilson 1988:149). Working from a perspective based in evolutionary psychology, Daly and Wilson argue that male violence has to be understood in the context of the human reproductive process. They maintain that man's psyche is "obsessed with social comparison, with the need for achievement and with the desire to gain control over the reproductive capacities of women" (Daly and Wilson 1988:136). The most common type of homicide, according to Daly and Wilson (1988:125) involves two acquainted, unrelated males, in a dispute over status or face.

In terms of the killing of children, Daly and Wilson note that children are less likely to be killed by their biological fathers as they grow older and that fathers who do kill older children are likely to also kill themselves. Often suicide also follows familicide, that is, where the man kills his wife and children. Familicide, they note, "is a peculiarly male crime" (Daly and Wilson 1988:82), which they suggest, "must be understood in terms of men's proprietary attitude toward women and their reproductive capacity" (Daly and Wilson 1988:83).

More recently Polk specifically addresses the issue of masculinity and homicide. He identified four major scenarios of masculine violence which account for a majority of homicides, including homicides which arise out of men's violence as a vehicle for controlling the sexuality of their female partner, killings which are the result of male "honor contests," and killings which result from the willingness of males to take the risks of either engaging in dangerous criminal activity such as armed robbery, or of attempting to settle a simmering dispute through the use of violence. While observing that males were responsible for a large proportion of all homicides, and in fact that roughly half of all homicides are male on male events, Polk noted at the same time the variety of homicide scenarios indicated that there was more than a singular "masculinity" at work.

The Problem with "Masculinity"

With the growing acknowledgement of the maleness of violent crime came an increasing interest in masculinity as a concept which might contribute to an understanding of crime in general and violence in particular. As this body of knowledge developed so too have the concerns and questions about the concept itself and the uses to which it is put. For example, the sex/gender dichotomy which underpins many discussions has been questioned by anthropologists (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 9). On another dimension, Hearn (1996: 213) expresses the concern that the "concept may divert attention from women and gendered power relations." Focus on masculinity as the problem, may also shift analyses from what men do: "Instead of wondering whether they should change their behaviour, men 'wrestle with the meaning of masculinity'" (Hearn 1996:207). This concern relates to criticisms of analyses of masculinity which construe it as independent from other social processes and in some instances as an independent causal factor in social problems (Hearn 1996; Messerschmidt 1993).

An issue acknowledged by most authors in this area, is the difficulty posed by the different understandings and uses of the concept in the academic literature: "meanings stretch from essential self to deep centre, gender identity, sex stereotypes, attitudes, institutional practices and so on." (Hearn 1996:213). Anthropological studies also reveal the "enormous culture dependent human variability with respect to gender behavior" (Miedzan 1991:44; Hearn 1990; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Messerschmidt 1993).

Even within western cultures, apparent in everyday usage and in different contexts are a complexity of masculinities (Polk, 1994; Messerschmidt 1993; Newburn and Stanko 1994; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Hearn 1996). Discussions now question arguments which tend to attribute a unitary masculinity to all men that "can be isolated and described independently of race, class, sexual orientation, and the other realities of experience" (Carrington 1993:6).

In attempting to address some of these issues in his analysis of masculinity and crime, Messerschmidt (1993) calls for us to begin with the notion that " Behaviour in men is considerably more complex than that suggested by the idea of a universal masculinity that is performed and embedded in the individual prior to social action" (Messerschmidt 1993:80; see also Jefferson 1994:13). He argues that gender is something that is accomplished in social interaction and thus "diverse forms of masculinity arise, depending upon prevalent structural potentials and constraints" (Messerschmidt 1993:83). For Messerschmidt, "...crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity" (Messerschmidt 1993:85). Thus he argues that the home is an important site for authority for working class men, and violence in the home is a means of affirming masculinity. Similarly, he argues, corporate crime is a "means of accomplishing profit and gender"(Messerschmidt 1993:136). Since gender is situationally accomplished and crime is a means of accomplishing it, we can expect both variability in masculinity, and diversity in the way men do or do not use crime to "do masculinity".

In confronting some of the problems of the analyses of masculinity more generally, one of Hearn's (1996:214) recommendations is that ,"it is generally preferable to move from 'masculinities' back to 'men'". From a somewhat different focus, Messerschmidt agrees that we must "bring men into the framework" however he argues that " we should not do this by treating men as the normal subjects, but by articulating the gendered content of men's behaviour and of crime." (Messerschmidt 1993:62). Similarly, Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:4) suggest that "... if we locate and describe the multiplicity of competing masculine identities in any given setting we automatically begin to dislocate the hegemonic versions of masculinity which privilege some people over others." Of particular interest in the analysis of child homicide by men that follows is the extent to which commonalities or diversities of men's behaviors and understandings are evident.

The Research Process

The data source for this study was the files of the Office of the Coroner in the state of Victoria, Australia, for the period 1985 - June, 1996. These files provided information on all cases of unnatural deaths of children during that period. This is public information. Not infrequently homicide studies are based on

arrest or conviction data, and, consequently do not include suspects who do not proceed to the committal stage or who commit suicide (an important issue, as we shall see, since it is not uncommon when the offender is the natural father of the child victim for the offender to commit suicide after the homicide). Arrest or conviction data exclude these homicides.

It nevertheless needs to be noted that child homicides, especially filicides, may be less likely to be detected than other forms of homicide. In fact, the actual incidence of child homicide is elusive due to undetected and unreported cases, and forensic problems in establishing the timing and the cause of death (Wilson 1985; Stone and Johnson 1987). For some examples, the circumstances of what amounts to virtually accidental discovery of neonate remains suggests that there are other deaths of children in the first minutes or hours after birth that go undetected; some cases of extreme neglect result in physical deterioration but then become recorded as "death by natural causes" when the specific cause of death is something like pneumonia, and there are cases of suspicious patterns of injuries which suggest the death was a function of a beating, but the evidence is unobtainable regarding who was responsible for the injuries. In the study of children as victims of homicide, as in other investigations using official data, there will be the unresolvable problem of the "dark figure of crime."

Coroner's Court files, which formed the basis of this research, contain a number of reports collected for the coronial inquest, including: an initial police report of the incident; an autopsy report regarding the cause of death; a toxicology report (where relevant); a police prosecutor's brief; and the report of the inquest itself. The most helpful of these documents is the prosecutor's brief, which typically contains lengthy witness statements as well as transcripts of interview with defendants where these have been taken. Using these files, lengthy case studies were complied which were then subjected to both quantitative (for information such as demographics, number of children killed, type of weapon used and use of alcohol) and qualitative analysis (to capture the overall scenarios and to examine emerging themes in terms of such issues as motivation, and nature of relationship to child). Pseudonyms have been used to designate the cases and throughout all the presentation of findings to protect the privacy of family members. It should be noted that these are victim-based files, and thus they tend to be somewhat better for the analysis of characteristics of victims rather than offenders (where at times the data are not as complete as might be desirable).

There is considerable diversity across studies of child homicide in the age definitions employed for the crucial term "childhood." (Unnithan 1991). Silverman, Reidel and Kennedy (1990: 405), have observed that "most previous research has indicated neither theoretical nor empirical reasons for the age 'cut-offs'

used." In the present study, "children" were defined as under 18 years of age. This age limit is consistent with the legal standard in Victoria for when the state has some responsibility for the welfare of minors.

Findings

There were 89 child victims of homicides recorded in the Coroners Court reported in the period 1985-June, 1995. Of these child homicides, 58 of the 89 (or 65%) were filicides, that is, the child was killed by either parent or step-parent (including de facto relationships) of the child victim. The remaining one-third (31 cases, or 35%) were homicides in which the child was killed by someone other than a parent. Involved were 79 known offenders, of whom 51 were parents and 28 were not. The number of "known" offenders includes 5 neonaticides where the offender was not identified but is assumed to be the unidentified mother of the child. Research indicates that in contemporary western societies, in virtually all known cases, the mother is involved in the killing of newborn infants The numbers for victims and offenders do not agree, because in some cases the offenders were unknown (6 cases), other cases involved a single offender and multiple victims, while in others more than one offender was responsible for the death of a child.

While homicide in general is predominantly committed by men, child homicides involve a higher proportion of women. The present study involved 29 female offenders (37% of known offenders) and 50 male offenders (63%). While this proportion of male offenders is lower than occurs in general studies of homicide (where the proportion is likely to fall in the 85-90% range), it is somewhat higher than in many of the studies of child homicide reviewed earlier. It will be seen later that this is in large part a function of the decision to include victims up to and including the age of 17, since we shall see that for child victims in their teenage years especially, the offender is likely to be male). Close examination suggestions, further, that there are major differences in the nature of the child homicides committed by men and those committed by women. Rather than give an overview of all of the different scenarios of child homicide identified in this research, the intent of this paper is to focus on some of the child homicides that are predominantly committed by men and which raise issues for our consideration of masculinity.

The most apparent differences in child homicides committed by women and those committed by men are the age of the victims and the relationship of the perpetrator with the offender. Women almost always killed children under the age of 10 years. Put another way, virtually all of the teenage victims were killed by men. This age difference is related to differences in the offenders relationship with the child. All but two women (of 27 female offenders) killed their biological children. When men killed children who were in their care, the victims were most likely to be the children of the man's defacto partner. However, just

over half (56%) of the men killed children of whom they were not parents or guardians. In fact, all but one homicide committed outside of the family involved men (there was an additional case where a woman was a co-defendant with the male, although it was alleged that the male was largely responsible for the death). To put this situation another way, virtually all of the children who were killed by other than a parent, were killed by a man. That is, the killing of children outside of the family is a distinctively male activity and so it is to these events that we turn first.

Non-filicide Child Homicides.

While non-filicide child homicides share the important characteristic that they are committed by males, however there is diversity in the nature of the homicides. Many of these killings outside of the family conform to the scenarios of masculine violence previously advanced by Polk (1994a), which include: (a) homicides as a result of an "honor contest" between males which leads to confrontational, often spontaneous, violence; (b) homicides arising out of the commission of another crime, such as armed robbery, burglary or rape; (c) homicides which result from the planned and intentional use of violence as a way of settling an ongoing dispute, generally between individuals involved in lives of criminality and drug use; and (d) homicides in situations of sexual intimacy (Polk, 1994a). A further scenario evident in child homicides consists of an older man killing a girl with whom he has been engaging in illegal sexual activity: the homicide is intended to prevent the detection of this behaviour.

The single most prevalent pattern of non-filicide child murder (n=7 victims in this research) typically involves two young men in what Polk (1994b) describes as the "confrontation scenario." These are situations in which young males threaten or challenge the "honour" of other young men, this then provokes an exchange between the males which leads to violence in which death was not initially intended. While most of such honour contests which result in murder involve older males, boys under the age of 18 can be swept up in such lethal violence as well:

> Milton (age 16), his brothers and some friends were drinking in a Glenorchy reserve on a New Year's Eve, when a small car pulled up and the driver began abusing the group. They responded by gathering around the car, abusing the driver in return, laughing at him, and thumping and banging on the sides of the car. The driver sped off, and returned a few minutes later with a large group of friends. Insults were again exchanged, and a fight quickly developed between the two groups. Outnumbered, Milton's group broke and ran. Milton, who through most of the unfolding events had been a peripheral spectator, was overtaken and beaten severely, suffering from head injuries which caused his death the following morning. (Case No. 2-89)

Common features of such confrontational scenarios (Polk, 1994a, 1994b) include: the events took place in what is definitively public space (a reserve); they involved a contest of honour between males (laughing at the driver of the car); they involved groups of males which provided both audience and participants for the violence; and the groups had been involved in drinking.

Such events often begin with the boys hurling abuse at each other: "When they stopped their car next to us they started calling us "dogs", "fuckwits" and shit like that - just like before. This time we retaliated" (2-89); "I thought the intention was to just swear at them more or less. We were going to go down the road and swear at them when we went past." (Case 35-87); and "The guy with the beanie said to Charles, 'You fucking fat shit. Do you want to fight?' He then went over to Charles and started getting heavy with him" (Case 4189-86).

The common thread that runs through these encounters is masculine honor and its defence: they involve males offenders and victims. There were two other patterns found in these data where the offenders were male, and in most circumstances, so was the victim. Both of these involve the willingness of the offender to take extraordinary risks which involve violence. In the first of these, the risks have to do with engaging in a crime such as armed robbery which results in violent death. There were four victims in the present group of child homicides which conform to this pattern, two of the killings involving "double victims" where the victim is first the victim of a crime such as robbery and then in turn becomes the victim of the homicide, and two where the victim is a "reverse victim" where something goes wrong in a crime like a burglary (as in one of these cases) and the original offender becomes the victim of the homicide. Another form of male on male violence involved a simmering dispute in which an offender decides to resolve the conflict through the use of violence.

These three scenarios applied to forteen homicides, all involving male offenders. The victims in most as well were male, although two of the "double victims" in the homicide in the course of other crime scenario were female (for example, a 14 year old girl who became one of the victims when her father's gun shop was robbed and the three present in the shop were killed, Case No. 2637-93).

While the scenarios outlined thus far involve mostly males killing males, there are other situations of which a characteristic feature is that the victim is female (in fact, in the non-family child killings, 11 of the 27, or in 41% of the cases, the victim is female). The majority (n=7) of these cases involving female victims were consistent with either one of two scenarios. The first of these overlaps with themes identified in adult homicide in which a man kills a women with whom he has been sexually intimate, because she left him, or has threatened to do so, and/or of whom he is jealous (Polk 1994 a). The second involves an

older man who has been engaging in illegal sexual intimacy with a young female and kills her to avoid detection.

In the present research, there are three cases involving a young couple who have been in a sexually intimate relationship: one involves a couple who had been living together (Case No. 2850-88), in another the man was a boarder in the young woman's family home (Case No. 4396-86), and in the third, the couple were not living together but had been going out together for nine months and were planning to start a family (Case 3143-86). These are cases in which two young people (the average age of the victims was 16, and the offenders' average age was 21) are very close to each other before the young woman decides to end the relationship.

Consistent with the adult scenarios of this general type, one case in this group explicitly involved both despair about the separation, and jealousy. The case involved a young man (18) who was a boarder in the family home of his girlfriend (16). However, the girlfriend wanted to end their relationship. After attending a party at which the young woman made clear her interest in another young man, the boyfriend later that evening killed his girlfriend while she lay sleeping (Case No. 4396-86).

This account has much in common with accounts of homicide among older males that involved possessive rage, including the attempt of the female partner to withdraw from the relationship, the jealousy as she attracts the attention of other males, and the brooding rage and despair that spills into violence. Unlike the adult scenarios of this general type, neither previous violence nor jealousy were a feature of the other two cases in this group. In both cases the young men were distraught about the separation itself, for example:

> Betty S. (16) had been going out with Greg M. (20) for nine months. They had formed a sexual relationship, and were attempting to start a family. They were reported to be an affectionate couple with no indications of any prior violence on the part of Greg. There had been some arguments regarding Greg's long spell of unemployment. On their way home, after an evening out drinking, an argument broke out over Greg's unemployment. Betty announced for the first time that she wanted to end the relationship. Greg became further depressed on the drive home and said to another passenger in the car "What have I got to lose by shooting Betty and myself?". In the early hours of the morning he shot her in the head and neck.(Case No. 3143-86)

If anger and jealousy appear to be components of the homicide described previously, this one is permeated more with the mood of defeat, loss, as if the final source of meaning in the young man's life is leaving. Nevertheless in both contexts these young men assert power and attempt to establish their control of the situation by resorting to lethal violence.

Apparent in the child homicide cases in this study is another scenario of non-parental homicide which involves male offenders and female victims. These cases (n = 4 victims) involve the murder of a female child victim (average age = 11 years) by an older male (average age = 37 years) who had previously had sexual intercourse with the victim. Fearing that his actions with the female child, which would be defined in law as sexual assault, were to become known, the man kills in an effort to cover his crime. The following is one of the cases illustrating this pattern.

> When the mother of Narelle Gordon (age 8) checked her daughter's bedroom she found that she was missing. Shortly afterward the body of the girl was found in a nearby street, apparently run over by a car. Medical examination determined, however, that she had been strangled. Further investigation revealed that she had been lured from the house by Lee Kuan (age 33), who had been a former lover of the child's mother. Kuan admitted to the police that he had sexually abused Narelle twice before. On this occasion he had enticed the girl away from the house with the promise of money, and then attempted to sexual assault her. When the girl became frightened and started to scream, Kuan attempted to silence her by putting his hands around her throat. According to his later testimony, Kuan released his hold once, but at this point Narelle became hysterical. Kuan then put his hands around her throat and strangled her to death. (Case No. 3911-92)

The common thread in these cases is the forbidden character of the sexual contact between the adult male and the young child, so that the public disclosure of the exploitation poses a great peril for the male. The killing represents a tragic and futile attempt to silence that threat. Here we have young men willing to use lethal violence to protect themselves in the face of a potential threat to their own freedom. The scene in which Narelle was killed may be consistent with acts of homicide described by Katz (1988): a "self-righteous", "unpremeditated act", that "emerge(d) quickly", and was "fiercely impassioned". However, in another similar case (Case No. 1199-86), the man (age 46) clearly planned the homicide in advance, inviting the young girl (age 12) to his house on the pretence of giving her a birthday present, after their "relationship" had ended, and then killing her.

In summary, then, these cases where children are killed by persons outside of the family involve males as the predominant offenders. Most of these cases involve victims who are older than other child victims, with only a handful of the victims being under the teenage years. The gender of the victim also tends to be scenario specific, at least in these data. The honor and risk-taking scenarios tended to be male-on-male events (the only exceptions being 2 of the victims of homicide in the course of other crime, with the remaining 12 victims across these scenarios being male). In sharp contrast, the situations in which sexuality was present involved in this study characteristically male offenders and female victims (although a larger data base over a wider time period would probably produce a few young male victims). Thus, an understanding of these homicides requires consideration of the interplay of the gender of the offender, the gender of the victim, and the age of both.

Filicides

In these data 58 children were killed by their parents or step-parents (including de facto partners), of these 25 (43%) were killed by men (two of these cases also involved the mother as co-defendant). The single most prevalent form of men killing children is that often referred to as Non Accidental Injuries (NAI). Of the men who kill children in the family context, 56% (n=14) of the homicides are of this form. To turn this around, children who are beaten to death (n=19) are much more likely to have suffered at the hands of a male carer (n=14) than their mother (n=5). Hearn has commented that, "It is strange that child abuse is often discussed without reference to violence, and less still to men's violence' (Hearn 1990:65). To capture the violent nature of these events, they shall be referred to here as Fatal Physical Assaults.

Fatal Physical Assaults

The key defining characteristic of the cases in this group is that the apparent intent was not to kill the child, rather, by the parent's account, it was to punish or discipline the child. In several cases the male attempted to resuscitate the child and sought urgent medical treatment (Cases 1674-93, 0698-94, 2205-94, 1973-86, 0500-87). At the same time autopsy reports revealed extensive injuries to the child, with the Coroner making comparisons with the injuries suffered by car accident victims, and evidence of prior physical assaults on the child. To give an example of a paternal filicide of this form:

> Kathy Matthews, a senior high school student was 17 years old and the mother of Jacob (15 months). She had been living at home with her parents until 3 weeks prior to the incident when she moved into a nearby caravan park with Trevor Henderson (aged 18). On the day the baby died, Kathy left Jacob with Henderson while she went to buy some food for tea. According to Henderson, Jacob was sitting on a chair in the annexe eating the sandwich and watching TV when he left to take a bag of rubbish to the bin. When he returned Jacob was choking, so he stood him up and put his fingers down the child's throat to try to clear his mouth. He held the child under one arm and banged on his back. When Jacob appeared to improve he stood him up but he fell backwards hitting his head on the concrete floor. The child looked so white, he shook him and gave him little taps on the face. He was breathing but making strained noises. Henderson put the baby in his pusher to wait for his mother to return. When he felt he could not wait any longer for Kathy to return he began to walk to the hospital with Jacob. When the child went "floppy" he tried to resuscitate him and applied hard pressure with both his hands to Jacob's stomach. They were eventually given a lift to the hospital by two women passing by.
>
> The Coroner found that multiple injuries inflicted by Henderson contributed to Jacob's death. The autopsy revealed that in approximately the week prior to his death he received a fractured skull, fractured ribs, laceration to lips, injury to the pancreas area. There were also some injuries that may have occurred in the days prior to his death. The injuries to the abdomen are described as severe and "of a degree occasionally seen in a car accident where there has been severe compression or crushing of the abdomen".
>
> Jacob was a client of the government child protection department at the time of his death . Both Henderson and Kathy denied that Henderson ever hurt the child. Kathy acknowledged to social workers that Henderson was "rough" with her and neighbours also reported the sounds of Kathy being severely assaulted. (Case 1674-93)

Perhaps the most consistent feature of such cases is that the male perpetrators were stepfathers, or men living in a defacto relationship with the mother, in all but three of the cases. In most cases the adults had been together for less than 6 months. In one of the cases where the parent was the biological father, he frequently accused his wife of infidelity and denied paternity of the child whom he had abused over a period of time (Case 1304-87). Another mother commented of a man who killed one of her children of whom he was not the biological father, "Rick always reminded me that Rebecca and Jessica were my children not his... He was different with Anita [his natural daughter] to what he was with Rebecca and Jessica" (Case 1674-93). Whether in terms of theories of evolutionary biology (Daly and Wilson, 1988), or in terms of cultural understandings and structural arrangements, the context, expectations and understandings of "fatherhood" warrant further examination in the analysis of child murders in the family context.

In general, Fatal Physical Assault occurred in families consisting of young adult parents and young children. The men ranged in age from 18 to 38 years, with just over half being 23 years of age or younger. All but one child (who was 4 years of age) killed by a male custodial adult were 2 years old or younger. In general, these young families were coping with stressful circumstances: reference is made to "money troubles" and arguments over money; unemployment and reliance on social service benefits are not uncommon; and drug and alcohol use were frequently mentioned.

In several cases, the man played a significant role in the "caring" of the children. For example, one stepfather who had terminated his employment when shift work was introduced in order to maintain his family responsibilities, was described by witnesses as an excellent step-father who actively participated in the child care duties (Case 1973-86). Another mother reported that, "He virtually took over the care of Sam and from the time we shifted in, seemed to be doing a good job of it" (mother in Case 3184-86).

The men commonly attempted first to deny or cover up their part in the child's death. They created stories, which they sometimes pressured their partners into supporting, such as: the child was "accident-prone" (Case 3184-86, 0050-87); the child fell down stairs (Case No. 1975-87); had "fallen from her cot" (Case 2205-94, Case 0698-94); child fell over on concrete floor (Case 1674-93); had accidentally fallen and hit head on table (Case 1633-90); or that he had accidentally dropped her (Case 1973-86). Such denials of the event indicate that the beating to death of a child does not necessarily in the public context constitute a means of establishing masculinity. In fact, such behaviour might very well lead to a challenging of some aspects of the "masculinity" of the perpetrator. For example, it may be viewed as evidence of bad "fathering" or the man may be spoken of in terms of lack of responsibility and weakness.

When men did acknowledge their involvement in the death of the child, their explanations were in terms of the frustrations of the immediate circumstances, for example,

> I went down the park with Sam...he was good as gold, then he fuckin shit, put shit all over the place, then I belted him ... I just punched him for a minute and a half...the I picked him up and cuddled him...I don't know why I got carried away like that. (Case No. 3184-86).

Similarly another male defacto is reported to have explained his violence towards a child in terms of " I didn't mean it, it just happened", and " I just lost my cool and went off the deep end". He explained that he had been trying to watch TV and so "I put my hand over his mouth to try to stop him crying." When the child continued to cry, his violence escalated dramatically: "I didn't really mean to do it, I just lost it" (Case 1769-93).

Such comments are somewhat inconsistent with Campbell's (1993) argument that men represent their aggressive acts as instrumental and goal directed, while women speak of theirs as an expressive act involving loss of control. Nevertheless, some other men did speak of similar actions in more explicitly instrumental terms. Here notions of fatherhood, and masculinity, are linked with power and control within the family, and the legitimisation of means to establish and maintain their authority, for example

> Neighbour: "At times Caitlin (21 months) would stand up to him and refuse to do what she was told. I remember her saying 'no' to Carnes on occasions which made him even worse. He didn't like the children not doing what they were told". Carnes himself spoke of her "stubborn personality" and commented "I hit her... I hit her hard... but that's Caitlin. She was a...she's a rough nut. I mean, if you don't make it hit home, it doesn't have any affect. She'll, you know, she'll just laugh it off. She'll wait till your not looking at giggle about it." (Case 2001-91)

Frequently the persistent crying of the child despite admonishments to stop, challenges the male carers authority.

> Austin was sitting on the floor eating a packet of chips and he started crying. I picked him up and whacked him on the bum three or four times with an open hand. I put him down and he was still crying. I picked him up and shook him (to) shut him up... I didn't lose my cool, I was just annoyed...I was just annoyed because I couldn't hear the video. He was getting on my nerves. (Case 0500-87)

Other studies have also identified jealousy of the child's relationship with the mother as a feature of the context of some of these types of events (Baker, 1991;Wilcyznski 1989). The following case involves indications of this situation.

> The alleged offender's cell mate reported, "He went on to say that on odd occasions he was put off by Christopher because Margaret spent more time with Christopher and every time he cried Ron took it out on him (Christopher) because he continuously cried in his presence and it got on his nerves. He also told me that the child would always shy away from him and that's why he always tried to put him to bed himself. He told me that he thought that might change things but it did not (Case 1769-93).

Men's explanations for their violence towards children reveal a diverse and sometimes contradictory range of understandings of masculinity in relation to being a father, and the relationship between these understandings and violence. Their comments could not clearly be differentiated as either instrumental or expressive as suggested by Campbell (1993). Contrary to Campbell's thesis, some men were more anxious than others to emphasize their loss of control, while at the same time the act was instrumental in achieving the objection of stopping the child from annoying him. On the other hand some men did speak in more goal-oriented terms. Underlying their explanations is the notion that violence is justified as a response to provocation. Even if the provocation was such that it drove them to "lose it".

The explanations offered by the men also raise issues of understandings of masculinity in relation to being a father and the contradictory nature of varied understandings of masculinity. While the "good father" is not violent towards children, and denies it where possible, a good father can nevertheless justify the of use violence to assure his authority in relation to the child. In the privacy of the interaction between the man and the child, "doing masculinity" may mean using violence to maintain and establish power, but in public it may mean denying such violence.

Suicides and Attempted Suicides

When the focus shifts to filicides by males other than the Fatal Physical Assaults, a very different pattern emerges. These homicides are more deliberate, are often a part of protracted arguments with the mother of the child, and result in either the successful or attempted suicide on the part of the male. In a majority of these cases, and in sharp contrast to the Fatal Physical Assault, the male involved is the natural father of the child. In most instances these men are not reported to have been previously physically violent towards their children. Separation and custody battles are feature of these cases. There were three of these natural fathers who killed all of their children and the mother as well (accounting for 7 of the child victims in the sample). While there were a few cases where a mother killed herself and one or two children, there were no women who killed the whole family including the spouse. This supports the observation reported elsewhere (Daly and Wilson, 1988) that familicide is a distinctively male crime.

The explanations offered by biological fathers for their violence also differ from the Fatal Physical Assaults, and the variability in the fathers' explanations again reveal a diversity of understandings of masculinity. In three of the cases of paternal filicide, the father indicated, either in a suicide note, or in prior comments to friends and relatives, that he believed that the filicide was in the best interests of the children, a not uncommon sentiment in such cases being that "They're better off dead". For example:

> Ben was 10 years old and his sister Eleanor was 13 years old when they were killed by their father, Matthew (41 years). Matthew and his wife Mona were in the process of divorce including ongoing custody battles. Having had custody of the children for the previous eleven months,

> Matthew killed them the day after the court ruled that Mona have sole custody. After killing the children and writing a suicide note, he took some medication, cut his wrist and attempted to electrocute himself, all of which he survived. He admitted his action to the police, saying, "I killed my children because we have been living in hell, the situation is horrendous and we've been tormented". (Case 541/542-88)

Another father who killed his only daughter said, "Well, if she's dead- she's all right, nothing can happen to her....I wouldn't have to worry about my daughter any more" (Case 2514-91).

However, the men's comments suggest an awareness that the mother would also suffer as a consequence of the action, and that to some extent she was a target of the action. The Coroner's Record of Investigation notes in one case (Case 880541/2 - see case study above) that the offender had previously threatened suicide "...in order to force Mona [his wife] to accede to circumstances he sought". He had indicated the "...if he couldn't have Mona then no one would", that he would do anything not to lose Mona and that he would use the children to prevent the loss of Mona (Case 541/542-88).

In two cases there is evidence of prior violence and threats of violence against the mother (Cases 880541/543-88, 5280/5281-89). However, there is not necessarily a previous pattern of violence towards the children: "Adam was a caring father towards Elizabeth and he was never violent towards us" (Mother, Case 2514-91); another mother told the police on the day of the homicide, that "he wouldn't hurt them" (Case 9423-89).

The fathers who did not commit suicide often reported attempting suicide at the time they killed their children. In each of these cases, the parents had separated and there were ongoing battles over the custody of the children. By their own accounts, these men felt "hopelessness, helplessness and uselessness" (Psychiatrist's report, Cases 5280/5281-89); one father said "I thought I was doing the only thing I could do, that was left, the only possibility" (Police interview, Case 2514-91) and another that " I am a very lonely person...I couldn't cope any longer" (Case 541/542-88). They were also reported by psychiatrists to be men with "few if any close friends" (Psychiatrist's report, Case 2514-91) and who felt "alone and lonely" (Psychiatrist's report, Case 5280/5281-89).

There are then indications in these cases of feelings of powerlessness, of matters having gone beyond their control, of pain as a result of the loss of children and anger at female partners. The murder of their children is described by these men as an emotional outburst in the face of their own pain.

> Father: I just became emotional. I just couldn't take any more. My kids were being tormented
> Police officer: What was your intention when you hit Eleanor and Ben?
> Father: I just wanted it finished, I've been through so much"
> Police officer: Did you realise by hitting your children you would probably kill them?

> Father: Yes, I know, I wanted them killed. I've been through so much and I couldn't take any more? (record of interview Case 541/542/88).

While these murders are often depicted by the men as emotional outbursts, in two of the three cases there was some evidence of preparation in regard to the murder weapon: in one case a steel pole had been previously sharpened (Case No. 5281-89) and in another a nail gun had been purchased (Case No. 2514-91), in both instances to provide the ultimate murder weapon.

In three cases involving somewhat different scenarios the father, succeeded in taking his own life as well as those of his children: these men also killed, or attempted to kill, their wives (Cases 558/559-88, 3903-89 and 1274-86). Two of the cases were familicides, that is the father killed the whole family: this included two children in one case. In two cases, they are the biological fathers of the children they kill. In the third case, the man killed himself, his defacto wife and her child, but did not take his biological son, who also lived with them, on the journey which ended with the homicide.

One of these cases was unlike the others, in that there was no evidence of prior violence towards the wife or children. The case involved a man who killed himself, his wife and two children. To friends close to the family, they appeared to be a close unit. However, the father was a small business proprietor who had run into financial difficulties and believed that he was at the end of his rope (Cases 558/559-88).

In the other two cases, the man's relationship with his wife appears to be a significant feature of the scenario: in both cases there is evidence of prior physically violence towards the wife.

> Karen (11 years old) had only moved in with her mother Vera (29), three months before her death. Bob (aged 41) and his son Martin (15 years) were living with Vera. Vera and Bob's relationship had been "on and off" for the past four years. According to Vera's sister, "He was always following her around when she went out on her own... I have seen him assault her when he was sober. It was generally when he got jealous and accused her of seeing other men." Bob was also jealous of the relationship Vera had with Karen and Martin.
>
> Vera's family and friends report that over the years, Bob had beaten, bitten and scratched Vera on numerous occasions: leaving her unconscious in a gutter on one occasion. She had cuts and bruises over her entire body. On another occasion, Bob "knocked her out" and left her locked in his van for days. Vera's sister noted that Vera "was scared stiff of him."
>
> Bob bought a caravan and a four wheel drive. He allowed Martin to remain in the house with a friend, but took Vera and Karen for a "holiday" against their will. Shortly after, in January, just before noon, the charred remains of two large and one small body were discovered inside a burnt out caravan. Bob had apparently shot Vera and Karen in the head, had poured petrol over the vehicle and caravan, set fire to them, entered the caravan and shot himself in the mouth. (Case 1274-86)

This scenario shares much with the patterns of the Intimate Sexual control pattern identified by Polk (1994a) in his study of homicides committed by men. A history of physical violence towards the mother of the children and jealousy are common features of these cases.

In all of these cases separation, or the threat of separation, appear to be important issues for the father. In the previous narrative (Case 1274-86), the wife had left on several occasions but her husbands threats of violence contributed to her returning and he threatened further violence against the children if she left again. In two other cases (Cases 558-559-88 and 3903-89) the wife had left and there were ongoing battles over her return and the custody of the children.

It is even more apparent in these cases than in the cases involving attempted suicides described above, that the father killed the children at least in part as a way of punishing the mother for leaving him. It is the relationship to the wife/partner, rather than to the children which is the focus for these men. The children become a vehicle for causing pain to the mother or they are killed as a consequence of the murder of their mother. If there were indication of emotions of pain and loss in regard to the children in the cases of attempted suicide discussed above, most of the filicide/suicide scenarios ring more with sounds of anger and possessive jealousy. While themes of control and possession of the female partner are evident in these cases, we have to address the fact that in all but one of these cases the perpetrator also killed himself. It is not simply that he lost or was in fear of losing a possession: there is something here about the "possession" of wife and family that is so important to the man that he also kills himself.

Conclusion

The overwhelming conclusion from this analysis is that there is not a simple relationship between masculinity and child murder. The complexity and diversity of the situations and the men described defy unitary understandings of masculinity, violence or the relationship between the two.

Whatever conclusions are drawn must be considered in light of the forms of homicide being considered here. These are the child murders that are investigated in the Coroners Court. Not being considered here, for example, are the children who are killed as a result of the decisions of male executives to promote the use of infant formulae in the third world, or the men responsible for children who die in the "sweat shops" around the world. Thus it is not possible on the basis of this research to consider the relationship between masculinity and these forms of child murder. Such analysis is called for given that it is consistently postulated in the literature that masculinity will be variable across class and cultural boundaries. The variability observed in this study was within categories of race, class, and culture: the men in this study are, with rare exception, unemployed or working class, white/anglo men in western

society. The findings are thus contrary to some discussions of masculinity which assume, for example, a homgeneity within class and talk of "working class masculinty".

Children are killed by men in a number of different situations: in confrontations with other youth, by male carers who try to stop them crying, by fathers who are angry at the child's mothers, by fathers who are losing custody, male sexual partners who do not want their women to leave, and by men who have been engaging in illegal sexual conduct with them. Different men speak of different emotions: anger, pain, loss, frustration, fear and revenge. Their explanations defy the categorisation of "instrumental" as suggested by Campbell (1993): some explanations are purposive, others claim losing control, other explanations combine the two.

The child homicides described as Fatal Physical Assaults illustrate some particular complexities in terms of differing expectations of appropriate male behaviour and the different ways in which they are achieved. On the one hand, these men present themselves as particularly capable and willing carers of children to their partners and to the public environment in which they participate with the children. These men and their partners frequently vehemently deny violence towards the children and indicate in their statements that they find such behaviour objectionable - it is not "manly," it is not being the responsible parent, to physically abuse children.

On the other hand, the autopsy reports indicate that these men have been violent towards the children on more than one occasion. Their private actions with the child differ from their public actions - and yet both are masculine affirming, but affirming of different masculinities. In private the child's actions may have been interpreted as challenging masculine authority, the violence reaffirms control of the situation. But these same actions cannot be part of a public affirmation of masculinity, in fact they are actions which if made public might be used to question masculinity. These scenarios in particular reveal both the complex and sometimes contradictory understandings of masculinity and the ways in which they are achieved differently in different situations.

Perhaps the most glaring difference between the men and the different scenarios was the nature of the relationship between the man and the child in the filicides. Few children in this sample were beaten to death by their biological fathers: these cases involved men in the main who were in defacto relationships with the child's mother. Biological fathers who killed their children were likely to kill older children, and to either attempt, or successfully commit suicide. This difference is so strong that it calls out for further analysis of the meaning of parenthood to fathers, of the role of fatherhood in affirming masculinity, of the ways in which differing relationships to children relate to understandings of masculinity, and the relationship between these and the preparedness to use violence.

While the major thrust of these conclusions concerns the diversity of scenarios in which men kill children, and the masculinities they reveal, there are, nevertheless, some apparent convergences. Some forms of child homicide described in this research are distinctively male. For examples, teenage girls do not engage in the sort of honor contests that end in death; and women most often do not kill their husbands as well as their children. We cannot let our awareness of difference obscure that being "male' in our society, apparently has some consequences and understandings that are different from being "female", and we need to further explicate these and their relationship to violent behaviour.

Obviously when we are looking at a sample of men who have killed their children, we are looking at men who are willing to use violence to achieve certain ends. In many cases the men use violence as a response to a perceived threat, but the nature of these threats can vary in ways that again suggest that there is something quite different about some of these scenes that requires further elaboration. Children rarely represent a direct threat of personal violence to their killers. The threat may be indirect as in the cases where the perpetrator is concerned that the child is about to reveal criminal activity on his part (eg sexual assault). Or it may be a more direct threat to his standing or self-definition, his masculinity, as in the threat to authority posed by the crying child, or the name calling of male peers. But also in child murder cases, the ultimate victim may not be the source of the threat at all, children may be killed as a means of

punishing or responding to a threat posed by another person entirely, the child's mother. Or the threat to masculinity may be posed from right outside the immediate family, as in the case of the failed businessman, where the threat is not posed by the ultimate victim in other than an obscure notion of "threat". This diversity of scenarios and threats, calls for further consideration of the nature of the immediate event and the adequacy of descriptions in terms of predominant emotions of rage and anger in response to threats that feature in some accounts of homicide. There is complexity here that breaks along distinct vectors of gender of offender, age of victim, sometimes the gender of victim, and whether the homicide occurs inside or outside of the setting of the family.

If there is a common thread, it would appear to lie in the fact that for many of the men in this research, it is apparent that the willingness to resort to violence is related to establishing or maintaining power or control of situation and/or persons. This suggests the need to begin to question more closely the relationship between males, masculinity and power. As Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994:) note , "Though it is obvious that all men are not equally powerful, in the west being male is often associated with the power to dominate others". The scenarios of the different child homicides by men lend support to Messerschmidt's (1993:72) contention that ,"... authority and control become defining characteristics not only of gender relations, but of the social construction of masculinities." In this context, Hearn (1990:70) suggests that "Men may resort to violence when men's power and privilege are challenged, and other strategies have failed." Future analyses in terms of the convergence between the way some men affirm their masculinity and establish their power in relation to others in cases of child homicide, will need to consider the social construction of masculinity in relation to the social construction of "childhood"' in contemporary western society.

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Gender, Age and Non-Parental Child Murder

The purpose of this paper is to examine the topic of the killing of children, with a particular focus on those child homicides which occur outside of the family network. A major focus will be the role that age and gender play in these homicides, since the interplay of these appears to be distinctive when compared with other homicides. The analysis is exploratory and will utilise qualitative case study analysis to probe patterns of lethal violence which involve children as victim.

Child homicide accounts for an important proportion of all homicides. In Australia, individuals under the age of one year are more at risk of homicide than any other age group (Strang, 1993). The most recent Australian data indicate that the rate of homicide for children was well above the overall rate (Strang, 1992). Between 1968 and 1981 in New South Wales, child victims 5 years and under made up a total of 8.7% of all reported homicides (Wallace, 1986: 111). Consistent with Australian findings, US research has found that the risk of homicide was greater during the first day of life than at any other equivalent age span (Crittenden and Craig, 1990: 202). Christoffel (1984), also in the U.S., has observed that homicide is the only cause of death of those under the age of 15 to have increased in the last 30 years.

The available research suggests that close attention has to be paid to the age variable in examining child homicide. In general, there is a decreasing risk of child homicide with increasing age (Crittenden and Craig, 1990). Thus, the highest risk of lethal violence is close to birth, and the rates tend to fall off after that point. Equally important, however, is the suggestion that there are different causal factors at work with different age groups (Christoffel, 1983; Wilson, 1985; Crittenden and Craig, 1990). In the early years of life, the risk factors have more to do with tensions involving the child and one or both parents, while in the later years the deaths are more likely to be a function of supervision patterns. Crittenden and Craig, (1990) point out that "stranger danger" at any age is rare for children.

A further feature of these killings is the gender of the offenders. As a general matter, homicide is committed by men. Most research indicates that the proportion of male offenders in homicide ranges from 85 to 90 percent (Wolfgang, 1958, Strang, 1992, Silverman and Kennedy, 1993, Polk, 1994). Child homicide, however, stands in contrast to other forms of homicide since women are as likely as men to be perpetrators. This seems to be particularly true where a parent is responsible for the death, that is, in cases of filicide. Of 36 parent killers in Detroit between 1982-86, 53% were female and 47% male (Goetting, 1988:341). Of the 395 parents suspected of the murder of their child in the UK between 1982-89, 48% were mothers (Wilczynski and Morris, 1993). Comparable sex ratios were observed in Canadian national data, where 48% of filicide offenders were female (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993). Even more striking was the early study of filicide in the US conducted by Resnick

(1969), in which 67% of the offenders were mothers of the victims. Looking more widely at at all child homicides, in New South Wales it was found that women made up a majority (55%) of all offenders (Wallace, 1986: 112). One important exception to this general finding are the recent national 1989-1992 data in Australia, where Strang (1994) reports that 80 per cent of offenders involved in child homicide were male.

A further distinctive feature of child homicides is that it is much more likely than other forms of homicide to occur within the family network. In Australia, a great majority of child homicides were committed by parents or de-facto (non-biological) parents (Strang, 1994). Pre-school age children are almost never the victims of stranger homicide (Crittenden and Craig, 1990). In a study of 112 homicides involving child victims in New York, it was reported that over two-thirds of the perpetrators were either natural or common law parents of the victim (Kaplun and Reich, 1976). A Canadian study found that parents were the suspects in almost three-fourths (74%) of child homicides (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993:185).

As children age, however, the pattern of victimisation begins to change. Drawing upon notions of "routine activities," Silverman and Kennedy comment on the nature of this shift:

> Homicide against younger children mainly occurs in the victim's home, as does homicide against older children; however, the probability of becoming a victim of homicide outside of the home is much greater for older than younger children. (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993: 187)

These writers go on to point out that homicide rates tend to decline after the age of 5, and this may in fact reflect their removal from parents as a source of violence:

> Children over 5 spend large parts of their day in school and out of the house. If they are, indeed, at risk from those with whom they live, then being away from those people alleviates stress or tension in the home. The new daily activity of school takes children away from those whom we like to think are most likely to love and protect them, but in these instances are the most likely to harm them. (Silverman and Kennedy, 1993: 188)

While moving beyond the home decreases the likelihood of victimisation by parents, at the same time there is an increased rate of victimisation from those outside the network of the family. It is the purpose of the present investigation to examine specifically these homicides of children which occur outside of the family network. The general weight of the available literature suggests that these non-family child homicides will involve older children who become victimised as they engaged in the

various forms of "routine activities" involved in moving into theyears of late adolescence and early adulthood. It is suggested that it is crucial to explore the specific gender based character of the dynamic relationships which link victims with offenders, and that these events can be described by a number of distinct scenarios.

The Method

The data are drawn from the files of the Office of the Coroner of Victoria, Australia. These files contain a number of reports which are collected for the purpose of carrying out the coronial inquest, and include an initial police report of the incident, an autopsy report regarding the cause of death, a toxicology report (if such is relevant), a police prosecutor's brief, and the report of the inquest itself. The most helpful of these documents is the prosecutor's brief, which typically contains lengthy witness statements as well as transcripts of interview with defendants where these have been taken. For each homicide a lengthy case history was prepared drawing upon the material in the coronial files. These case studies were then subjected to a qualitative analysis of the themes which characterised the relationship between the victim and the offender.

A first decision made concerned the age period used to define the period of childhood. While there is a large body of literature now available on the topic of child homicide, it is clear from looking at the age definitions employed that there is exceptional diversity in the specific referent for the crucial term "childhood." Some investigators focused their examination on those deaths which occur within the first 24 hours of life, for which the term "neonaticide" has been suggested (Resnick, 1970: 58). Others conform to the legal definition of infanticide, and restrict study to where the victims age is under the age of 12 months (Wilczynski, 1991). From that point, there is a rather striking array of age cutting points used in the study of child homicides, including examination of deaths of individuals under age 4 (de Silva and Oates, 1993), under 5 years of age (Scott, 1973: 197; Wilkey, et. al, 1982; Christoffel and Liu, 1983), under the age of 8 (Hoffer and Hull, 1981), under age 13 (Copeland, 1985; Crittenden and Craig, 1990), under age 14 (Myers, 1967, Silverman, Reidel and Kennedy, 1990) under the age of 15 (Kaplun and Reich, 1976; Strang, 1993), under the age of 18 (Jason and Andereck, 1983) and even up to the age of 20 (Resnick, 1969).

Silverman, Reidel and Kennedy (1988: 405), in fact, have observed that "most previous research has indicated neither theoretical nor empirical reasons for the age 'cut-offs' used." There are at play, of course, a number of rationales for using a particular conception of age. For some, there is an interest in the particular mixture of legal, social and psychological issues that arise in the study of infanticide as defined by the law, which commonly in Australia refers to deaths of children under the age of 12 months. Others have drawn upon specific rationales, as for an example Wallace (1986) who observed that the age of victimisation were greatest for pre-school children and therefore elected to focus on child homicides of persons 5 years and under. For others the issues was the nature of the social

relationship, for example Resnick (1969) was interested in filicides whatever age of the victims, and therefore included the killing of children up to the age of 20.

For present purposes, given that the focus is on non-family child homicides, it is important that the age grouping be wide. Here the definition will be that consistent with the general legal standard for Victoria where the state assumes responsibility for the "care and protection" of minors, and will include as children for present purposes those individuals under that age of 18. Employing this definition, there were a total of 82 homicides involving child victims reported in the years 1985-1993. Within this group of child homicides, 54 of the 82 (or 66%) were filicides, that is, the offender was either the parent or step-parent (including de facto relationships) of the child victim, with the remaining one-third (28 of the 82, or 34%)) constituting the non-family homicides that are the focus of the present study.

In the five year period 1985-1989 for which a total homicide sample is available (Polk, 1984), there were 380 homicides recorded in Victoria, of which 51 (or 13.4%) involved victims below age 18. The fact that these child killings make up a larger proportion than observed in the report on homicide in New South Wales (8.7% in Wallace, 1986) is to be expected, since the age band is drawn wider.

As would be anticipated from the previous research, there were sharp differences in demographic age and gender variables between family and non-family homicides. One of these concerns the age of the victim. The great majority of the family child homicides involved victims under the age of six (43 of the 54, or 80%), with only one case falling in the 14-17 age grouping. In contrast, none of the non-family homicides involved victims under age six, and the large majority (20 of 28, or 71 %) were between the ages 14 to 17.

The second marked difference concerned gender of the offender. Whereas women were the offenders in roughly half of the family homicides (23 of 47, or 49%), in the non-family homicides men were the offenders in all but one case (27 of 28, or 96 %). Child homicide outside of the family network is definitively a male crime.

Up to this point, then, these data are consistent with a "routine activities" hypothesis, which argues that with the changing and expanding social world that children are exposed to as they move into the school years there also comes widened risk of victimisation at the hands of non-family members. While essentially correct, this idea in fact needs expansion in order to discuss the various forms of victimisation to which young people are vulnerable. For this, attention needs to focus on the specific sub-themes of the homicides. What the present data suggest is the observation that as young people age they become progressively more likely to be caught up in various adult and masculine scenarios of violence. That is, a large proportion of the non-family child homicide are youthful variants of adult masculine themes of violence.

Previous work on general patterns of homicide involving adult victims has lead to the identification of four masculine themes or scenarios of violence which run through adult homicide, including (a) homicide in situations of sexual intimacy; (b) homicide as a result of an "honor contest" between males which leads to confrontational violence which in most cases is spontaneous so that the death is not what was initially intended; (c) homicide which arises out of the commission of another crime, such as armed robbery, burglary or rape; and (d) homicide which results from the planned and intentional use of violence as a way of setlling a dispute which has been ongoing, generally between indivduals deeply involved in lives of criminality and drug use (Polk, 1994).

These four scenarios accounted for 17 of the 28 (61 %) present non-family homicides. One of these (involving 4 of the 28 non-family homicides) is that where the male offender employed the violence as an ultimate device of control over the behaviour of his female sexual partner, most often following an attempt of the young woman to separate. Jealousy often featured centrally in this scenario. That young women can be caught up in the violence of this scenario is demonstrated in the following case:

> George Samms (age 18) boarded in the house of the family of Kelly Truro (age 16). For some months in 1985, Kelly had been George's boyfriend. At Christmas time, however, Kelly decided that she no longer wanted to maintain that relationship, although she still wanted to be "friends" with George. George then went through a difficult period, alternating from highs when Kelly would treat him well, to deep lows when she would assert her independence, especially in terms of making clear her interest in going out with other boys.
>
> After several months the matter suddenly came to head, with no warning in terms of any forms of previous violence. One evening George, Kelly and Kelly's parents went together to a local party. Kelly made clear her interest in another boy at the party, a boy whom she had seen previously. This threw George into a moody tailspin. Upon returning with the family group from the party, he stayed up brooding after the rest of the family went to bed. After a couple of hours, he went out into the back yard and picked up a piece of moulded concrete lawn edging. He returned to the house, and by his account he then went into Kelly's bedroom. He looked at her for some time as she slept. Then the pent up emotions burst. He hit her twice in the head with the piece of concrete. Afterwards, when he began to realise the enormity of what he had done, he tried to set fire to Kelly's bedroom in an attempt to coverup what he had done. The deception was unsuccessful, and George readily admitted causing the death when interviewed by police later that morning. (Case No. 4396-86)

This account has much in common with accounts of homicide among older males that involved possessive rage, including the attempt of the female partner to withdraw from the relationship, the jealousy as she attracts the attention of other males, and the brooding rage that spills into violence.

One difference in this account is the absence of previous violence (commonly found in older male offenders) which might serve as a warning of the ultimate rage of this young male.

The remaining three scenarios involve male-on-male violence. The most frequently occuring among these (involving 6 of the 28 non-family homicides) what appeared to be an honour contest, a "confrontational" scenario in which males who are in some kind of leisure scene (in or around a pub, at a party or BBQ, in a park or reserve, or perhaps in public streets) begin an altercation, which then leads to a fight, which in turn results in the lethal violence. Central to these is the notion of masculinity and the defense of honour, as can be seen in the following illustrative case study:

> Milton's brothers and some friends were sitting drinking in the Bill Turner Reserve, Glenroy, on New Year's Eve, at about 8 pm, when a small Datsun pulled up and its driver started abusing them. The car then drove off. Milton (age 16) arrived at about 9.30 pm with some others. Fifteen minutes later, the same Datsun drove up again, its passengers abusing and taunting the group in the park. The driver, Ralph (age 19) yelled out "You fuckin dogs" over and over, then drove off, only to return ten minutes later to repeat the abuse. One witness from the car says; "They all started laughing at him. This seemed to upset Ralph." This happened one more time and the car stopped about ten feet from Milton's group, the passengers yelling "dogs" and "fuckwits" to the group outside. The whole group rushed at the car and one threw a can of beer which went through the open window at the front. Several members of the group began kicking the car, and John (Milton's brother) did `elbow drops' on the roof. According to John, Milton was not involved at this stage, but was observing from the sidelines. John said later that Milton "...just doesn't like getting into fights". There was much shouting and swearing, but according to John, no punches were thrown at this stage, and no-one got out of the car (a passenger in the front seat of the car, however, claimed that he was punched about four times).
>
> The car once again drove off, with Ralph shouting "We'll be back". According to one of the passengers in the Datsun, Ralph was drunk, and seemed to be "spinning out". Ralph drove back to his house, where a group of his friends came out to inspect the damage to the car. According to one witness, they were so drunk that they could hardly walk. One of them asked, "Who done it?" and Ralph answered, "It was the guys in Justin Avenue". The group became very aggressive at this and started yelling things like, "whoever done this is gunna pay for it" . One of Ralph's friends ran to the back yard and came back with four cricket bats. Others joined him from the yard, where there was a party in progress. In all, some 15 or 16 of them got into Ralph's car or sat on the bonnet and they drove off.
>
> At about 11.30 pm, the car stopped twenty feet from the group in the park and yelled out, "Come on you cunts", and "Don't fuck with us" . A couple of Milton's group (but not Milton,

apparently)had armed themselves with garden stakes in preparation for the attack. The people in and on the car climbed out and charged, one of Ralph's group shouting, "There's the cunts that got me brother". Witnesses stated that three of them were carrying stakes and another three had steel rubbish bins.

Ralph was one of those with a stake, and he was doing most of the shouting. He was shouting things like, "Get back here you bastard and I'll knock shit out of you". John grabbed Milton and told him to "bolt". Realising that they were far outnumbered, the group in the park scattered. Milton and another brother, Roland, ran up a nearby street with about eight young men, all carrying tree stakes, chasing them. The brothers were separated in the chase. It was alleged that Milton threw a stake at Ralph and Ned. Ralph claims that Milton hit him with it, but a medical examination revealed only a small area of localised tenderness, which was "not consistent with recent injury". Ralph chased Milton up a driveway, and hit him on the head with a stake. Milton fell to the ground, and Ralph hit him once more before decamping the scene at 11.45 pm. Roland recalls hearing some screaming, followed by silence, when everyone dispersed and left. One of Milton's brothers found him lying in the bushes in the garden, semi-conscious, helped him home and put him to bed. Milton was found dead (from extradural haemorrhage) the next morning. His blood alcohol level was 0.02% . (Case No. 2-89).

This narrative contains many of the major elements of what Polk (1994) has called the "confrontational" scenario. The events took place in a public place, in this case a local reserve. It involved a group altercation, one in which the initial altercations take the form of an honour contest ("they all seemed to laugh at him") between males. Both groups had been drinking. In this particular narrative, as often happens in these scenes, the victim, initially in the social background, becomes swept to the centre of the action as the violence unfolds. What is important for the present purposes is that the victim was a minor.

Another of the masculine homicide scenarios involved males willing to take exceptional risks with either their lives or the lives of others in the course of some other crime such as armed robbery or burglary. This type of event accounted for 4 of the 28 non-family homicides. The following brief account is typical of those caught up in the situation of "double-victimisation" where what is first an armed robbery becomes a homicide:

A woman working in a hairdressing salon in Reservoir in August, 1993, heard shots coming from a gun shop located next door at 11.55 am. Shortly afterward, a fire broke out in the shop. After putting out the fire, firemen found the bodies of 2 adult males and a teenage girl, later identified as Sally Tolman (age 14). Medical examination revealed that the three had actually died of gunshot wounds to the head. Jim Lewis (age 24) was later charged with the

crime. It was presumed that the deaths resulted during a robbery of the shop (Case No. 2637-93)

As in many homicides which involved double victims, there were few facts available to round out the narrative. A crime took place, and the deaths result. There very character of these would dictate that children would not often be the victims in these crimes, since there is often an economic motive aimed at possessions and resources held by adults. Occasionally, as this narrative shows, a young person, often peripheral to the central actors and actions, does become pulled into the unfolding drama. In some of these homicides which are linked to other crime, the offender involved in the initial crime becomes the ultimate victim of the homicide. In one of these instances of "reverse victims," a teenage male was engaged in the act of burglary:

Late one evening in January, 1988, Kenny met some friends a take-away store, and asked one of them, Jim, to drive him "down High St" in Footscray. Kenny directed Jim to a dumpmaster, from which he retrieved several toys (models of some sort). They then went to another location where more models were stashed. They returned to take-away stores where Kenny tried unsuccessfully to sell the stolen models to his friends after which he and Jim dropped them at a friend's house in nearby suburb. Kenny requested that Jim drive him back to High Street as he wanted to obtain more toys from the shop, Battlemaster. They arrived there about 2.45 A.M., and Kenny kicked open the door. Jim tried to talk him out of stealing more toys, and when Kenny refused to listen, he walked away up to the post office. Jim states that about five seconds after Kenny had entered the shop, he heard a shot, and saw Kenny come running out, clutching his stomach and groaning.

The owner of Battlemaster, Mitchell Kingston, stated that he heard the break-in alarm, so loaded his gun (which he kept beside his bed) and went to investigate. He saw Kenny, who was flicking a cigarette lighter on and off, and told him not to move or he would be shot. When Kenny ran to the door, Kingston shot him. (Case No. 151-88)

Unlike the previous case, in this account the teenager was definitely a central player in the events which led to the death. As is the case of these homicides, the lethal violence was something which happened after an offender undertook the risky business of breaking into a store.

A final of the four masculine homicide scenarios indentified by Polk involved situations where a dispute arises between two individuals which cannot be resolved through routine legitimate means, and violence then becomes a device for dealing with the situation, as illustrated in the following case:

> Peter S. (age 15, student) had been present when his older brother and Don C. (age 26) were involved in stealing a car. When Peter's older brother fled to Queensland, Peter became the key witness whose story would either convict or acquit Don. Don was greatly agitated by the prospect of going to prison, and offered to buy Peter a trail bike if he would change his story to protect him. This Peter apparently agreed to do, and Don bought him the trail bike.
>
> As the investigation developed, however, Peter's story became unstuck when he realised that if he continued with his story he would be tripped up in its inconsistency and also throw the whole blame onto his brother. For a while, Peter wavered between two different stories, but finally broke down and told the true story which implicated Don.
>
> Don was furious, telling a friend that 'the little bastard dobbed me in.' Don and George decided that the way that Don could avoid prison was to kill Peter. They approached a friend to borrow a dinghy which they would use to drown Peter, telling the friend what they intended to do. The friend refused the request.
>
> Their next plan was to take Peter on a hunting trip, and to shoot him. This was easy to arrange since Peter thought of Don as a good friend, and enjoyed their hunting trips together. They planned the trip for a weekday, saying to one of their friends: 'Peter is going on a one way trip on Thursday. It's all arranged because he is going to wag school and nobody will know where he went. His mother won't miss him because he's done it before.' The friend was unsuccessful in explaining that what was planned was 'stupid,' and that Don would at most be at risk of a good behaviour bond since the alleged offence was his first, but Don's reaction was: '...yeah .. but this way I would be sure.'
>
> Late on that Thursday, Don arrived back at his friends house, saying: 'Well, I'm glad that's over.' He then recounted in detail how he and his friend had carried out the shooting. There seems to be a strange sense of unreality in this case, since Don told other friends the story as well. The friends thought that Don was simply telling tall tales, until the TV news broadcasts reported the finding of Peter's body. (Case No. 1606-86)

These patterns suggest that much of the risk of homicide for children as they approach adulthood derives from the way in which older children, especially as they move into the middle and late teenage

years, can be pulled into routines of violence which in the main involve much older males. In this last case it is clear that the teenage victim was involved in a complex situation in which the other major actors were older males.

Pulling all of these observations together, these case study findings of non-family child killings suggest ways that the notion of "routine activities" advanced by Silverman and Kennedy (1993) need to be extended. Thus, while it is true that the movement of children away from the family and into wider social worlds as they move up and through the school years exposes them to wider ranging social worlds and routine activities, it becomes possible in fact to give more specificity to particular patterns of risk which are related to both age and gender. The developing sexuality of girls exposes them to masculine violence, either in an attempt to control their behaviour if they become sexually intimate with men, or simply as part of a pattern of aggressive and violent sexuality which takes as its target very young females. For young males, as they move into the later teenage years, they can easily become caught up in the masculine scenarios played out more commonly by older men.

Gender roles are central in the analysis of filicides as well, although these fall outside the framework of this paper. That is, there are important differences in between female and male offenders in filicides (for example, the if the offender is a woman she is virtually always the natural mother, whereas in many cases the male offender is a step-parent, often the de facto partner of the child's mother). It is difficult to conceive of an analysis of the wider patterns of child homicide, in other words, without giving careful attention to gender.

These findings support as well the observation of the importance of examining the age of the victim in the analysis of child homicide. Indeed, the very character of child homicide will be a function of how the age variable is defined. Studies of younger children are highly likely to find a concentration of family homicides, whereas the older the sample, the more likely it is that homicides will broaden out into the non-familial patterns observed among these present case studies.

There is evidence, further, that age of victim and gender of offender must be considered together in the discussion of child homicide. Family child homicides are distinctive in that they are the one major form of homicide where women are as likely to be involved as offenders as are men. Thus, studies which focus exclusively on filicides, or which focus on young offenders (which is almost the same thing), are likely to produce a gender distribution of offenders very different than one which includes or focuses on non-family homicides. As the analysis shifts to the upper bands of the age categories, the patterns increasingly take the shape defined by the vectors of masculinity which make young adults vulnerable to homicide. While the victims may be either male or female among these older victims, the offenders become increasingly masculine.

This research then is part of an emerging line of inquiry which underscores the crucial role played by gender in the theoretical analysis of violence. Various forms of masculine behaviour are clearly

involved in non-family homicide, which are overwhelmingly male in character. Even within family homicides, however, it seems that women offenders are in many instances operating with a different set of motives than are men.