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Familicide: The Killing of Spouse and Children

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A familicide is a multiple-victim homicide incident in which the killer's spouse and one or more children are slain. National archives of Canadian and British homicides, containing 109 familicide incidents, permit some elucidation of the characteristic and epidemiology of this crime. Familicides were almost exclusively perpetrated by men, unlike other spouse-killings and other filicides. Half the familicidal men killed themselves as well, a much higher rate of suicide than among other uxoricidal or filicidal men. De facto unions were overrepresented, compared to their prevalence in the populations-at-large, but to a much lesser extent in familicides than in other uxoricides. Stepchildren were overrepresented as familicide victims, compared to their numbers in the populations-at-large, but to a much lesser extent than in other filicides; unlike killers of their genetic offspring, men who killed their stepchildren were rarely suicidal. An initial binary categorization of familicides as accusatory versus despondent is tentatively proposed. © 1995 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Familicide is defined as a multiple-victim homicide incident in which the killer's spouse or ex-spouse and one or more children are slain [Daly and Wilson, 1988b]. Familicides are regularly reported in the press and are familiar to all students of homicide, but their epidemiology remains virtually unstudied. Individual familicide cases have been described by psychiatrists and others [e.g., Bénézech, 1991; Goldney, 1977; Graser, 1992a,b; Guttmacher, 1960; Hirose, 1979; MacDonald, 1961; Malmquist, 1980; McGinnis, 1983; Morris and Blom-Cooper, 1979; Scott, 1973; West, 1965], often with considerable clinical and narrative detail. A reader of this literature is likely to detect

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recurring themes and situational elements, but the scattered case descriptions have not been synthesized, and generalizations are not yet warranted. With the exception of a brief treatment of Canadian cases [Daly and Wilson, 1988b], researchers have not yet assembled information on any substantial sample of unselected cases, nor has anyone systematically compared familicides with other killings. In this paper, we compare demographic risk patterns of familicide cases with uxoricides (killing of wives) and with filicides (killing of children by parents; as used in this paper the term encompasses genetic, adoptive and stepparental relationships, but not foster parents) in order to identify similarities and differences between the two kinds of victim-killer categories of homicides which make up the familicide cases.

Homicide is not a unitary phenomenon. It thus behooves the researcher to identify conceptually coherent categories of cases in order to understand the causal dynamics and risks associated with different kinds of lethal conflict situations. Daly and Wilson [1988b] have argued that the relationship between the victim and the killer is a useful basis for categorizing violent interpersonal conflicts. One can also categorize with respect to context and "motive," with results that might in principle be orthogonal to victim-killer relationship, but in practice often group the cases similarly. Men who have killed their wives, for example, may typically have been moved by sexual jealousy [Wilson, 1989; Wilson and Daly, 1992a], a state of mind that is unlikely to characterize, say, infanticide cases, in which the mother's circumstances and future options as well as the infant's health status are more relevant to risk [Daly and Wilson, 1984, 1988b]. Thus, risk of uxoricide is associated with marital separation, type of union, and the age of the woman, factors of predictable relevance to male sexual jealousy and possessiveness [Wilson and Daly, 1993a,b; Wilson et al., 1993], whereas the risk of filicide is associated with factors of predictable relevance to parental solicitude, such as genetic relatedness of parent and child [Daly and Wilson, 1988a,b, 1994a,b].

Particular hypotheses about factors exacerbating or mitigating violent interpersonal conflict can be derived from an evolutionary psychological perspective on human emotions, motives, and information-processing mechanisms. Psychological science is a quest to describe hypothesized mechanisms and processes at a species-typical (or at least sex-typical and lifestage-typical) level of abstraction. Such theorizing generally entails "if-then" accounts of (sex- and lifestage-specific) contingent responsiveness to variable environmental cues. Evolutionary psychology is the label for the pursuit of psychological science with explicit attention to contemporary theory and knowledge in evolutionary biology.

Using homicides as a sort of "assay" of the evolved psychology of interpersonal conflict does not presuppose that killing per se is or ever was adaptive. Regardless of whether specifically homicidal adaptations exist, homicide may be viewed as an unusually extreme manifestation of conflicts that are usually not lethal. Homicides provide a particularly valuable window on the psychology of interpersonal conflict, both because of their ecological validity as manifestations of strong emotions and of conflict, and because a complete sample of homicide cases does not suffer from the reporting biases that plague records of lesser manifestations of interpersonal conflict. The factors which exacerbate or mitigate conflict may thus be expected to raise or lower the likelihood of homicide, respectively, regardless of whether homicide itself serves the killer's interests or is an over-reactive "mistake."

We assume that the circumstances and demographic risk patterns of particular categories of homicides such as uxoricides and filicides can be predicted and illuminated

by considering the homicides to be the outcomes of the simultaneous activation of relationship-specific and conflictual psychological processes. Uxoricides and filicides, for example, are interpretable as "epiphenomenal" products of psychological processes which evolved by Darwinian selection by virtue of other nonlethal effects, but we suggest that even if these types of homicides are epiphenomena rather than behavioural adaptations, evolutionary reasoning remains a powerful tool for understanding where, why and when these events occur. For example, recognizing that natural selection will favour parental psyches which discriminate in favour of the parent's own offspring, and that the available cues of parenthood are different for the two sexes, suggests numerous testable hypotheses about sex differences in parental feelings and motivation [Daly and Wilson, 1987, 1994a,b; Wilson and Daly, 1994a]. A mother's valuation of a child relative to her valuation of herself, for example, is likely to rise more steeply with time after the child's birth than is the corresponding "quantity" for the father because of sexual asymmetries in a) postpartum reproductive opportunity costs, b) reproductive lifespans, and c) "confidence" of relatedness to child. If filicides may be considered a sort of reverse assay of parental solicitude, it follows that, on average, filicide rate would be expected to decline more steeply for mothers than for fathers, and it does [Daly and Wilson, 1988a; Wilson and Daly, 1994a].

An evolutionary psychological perspective also suggests hypotheses about qualitative sex differences in the psychology of sexual jealousy [Buss et al., 1992; Wilson and Daly, 1992a]. Men take a proprietary view of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity, and a sexually proprietary male mindset can plausibly be interpreted as an evolved response to the adaptive problems of male reproductive competition and potential misdirection of paternal investments in species with mistakeable paternity [Daly et al., 1982; Wilson and Daly, 1992a]. One may then predict that sexually proprietary attentions and actions should have evolved to be allocated in response to cues of expected utility in ancestral environments [e.g., Wilson and Daly, 1993b]. Thus, for example, many male birds guard their mates closely during their fertile phase, but cease once the last egg is laid [e.g., Birkhead and Møller, 1992]. In a study of human mate-guarding, Flinn [1988] found that men indeed appear to be sensitive to correlates of cuckoldry risk.

The degree of coercive constraint of wives, including violence, may thus be predicted to vary in response to social cues of intrasexual competition and risk of cuckoldry, as a result of the contingent activation of sexually proprietary psychological mechanisms, and uxoricide may then be deemed the relatively rare product of violent motives and emotions which more often function to control and limit a wife's autonomy without seriously harming her. As this interpretation suggests, lethal and nonlethal violence against wives exhibit many similarities in risk patterns [Wilson et al., 1995], and uxoricide risk is indeed associated with situational and demographic variables expected to be correlated with risk of infidelity and desertion. The use of violence by men against wives is ubiquitous, but the contexts in which most such violence occurs are evidently few. Men assault their wives and sometimes kill them in response to suspected or actual sexual infidelity, in response to the woman's efforts (and/or to cues of intent) to leave, in order to "discipline" an "overly independent" wife, and in response to other factors (perhaps his own infidelity or paranoid delusions) that activate male sexual jealousy [e.g., Campbell, 1992; Counts, 1990; Counts et al., 1992; Daly and Wilson, 1988b; Daly et al., 1982; Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Polk and Ranson, 1991; Wilson and Daly, 1992a,b, 1993a,b; Wilson et al., 1995].

It is relatively uncommon for a man to kill his wife and children in the same incident. And yet, from an evolutionary psychological perspective it might be anticipated that in the circumstances in which a husband's sexually proprietary mindset is activated, the children may be at risk, too. This seems especially likely when there are cues of his nonpaternity, for if cues of nonpaternity were directly linked to the arousal of sexual jealousy, the wife and children together are the source of his grievance and hostility. In addition, risks to children may be elevated if the children were sired by a predecessor, since children of former unions incur greatly elevated risk of lethal assault by stepfathers [e.g., Daly and Wilson, 1988a], and the presence of such children is a major risk factor for assaults against their mothers, too [Daly et al., 1993].

Familicide cases are therefore of interest in the analysis of the psychological processes underlying marital conflict, parent-child conflict, and their overlap. In this paper, we consider the circumstances and demographic risk factors characteristic of familicide cases in contrast to those characteristic of uxoricide alone and those characteristic of filicide alone, in order to assess whether the underlying mindset of the killer is more like that of uxoricide cases or more like that of filicide cases.

There are at least two considerations which might increase the attendant risk to children in cases in which the children are not themselves primary objects of the assailant's hostility. One is the circumstance in which a teen-aged or older child is defending one parent from the other's violence. (And of course, a familicide might also ensue when one parent is defending a child from violence.) The second circumstance is that in which a child is assaulted or killed to spite or terrorize a spouse who will also be attacked; the converse situation of a familicide in which the parent was killed to spite or terrorize the child seems unlikely. For these reasons and because of the hypothesized masculine proprietary mindset in which women's sexuality and reproductive capacity are inextricably linked, we anticipated that familicide cases would prove to be more similar to uxoricides than to filicides. Finally, we anticipated that familicide perpetrators would be especially often suicidal. Daly and Wilson [1988b] argued that killers who perpetrate the sorts of homicides which are especially damaging to their "fitness interests" are especially likely to be suicidal or insane. In particular, the lethal destruction of one's family would seem to attest to a state of mind in which one no longer perceives what is in one's interests (as an evolutionist would define "interests") and/or is disinclined to pursue them, hence is either insane or so despondent as to be suicidal.

The present analyses use national archives of Canadian and British homicide cases, containing a total of 19,562 homicide victims and 109 familicide incidents involving 279 victims, in an attempt to identify some of the recurring and distinctive characteristics of this crime. (Unfortunately, the national homicide archive for the United States, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Supplementary Homicide Reports," does not include the requisite information for comparable analyses; in multiple-victim homicides, only one victim's relationship to the killer is coded, precluding identification of familicide cases.)

HOMICIDE DATA

Analyses are based on case-by-case data files of all homicides known to police forces in Canada (1974–1990) and in England and Wales (1977–1990). These two data files have been constructed and maintained by Statistics Canada and the British Home Of-

fice, respectively, on the basis of legally mandated reports from all police departments. (Statistics Canada's homicide archive was begun in 1961, but prior to 1974, any homicide which the police initially categorized as a "manslaughter" or "infanticide" rather than a "murder" was excluded. Many nonfamilicidal spousal homicides and filicides are likely to have been excluded on this basis.)

A case was deemed solved, and killer characteristics were recorded, if police had identified the killer to their own satisfaction. Police investigations, rather than court proceedings, provide the appropriate case criterion, since many familicide perpetrators commit suicide and are thus never prosecuted, while others may be found unfit to stand trial. Police continue to close unsolved cases even years later; both data files were current as of 1992.

RESULTS

Familicide's Toll

The numbers of homicide victims and familicide incidents in the two homicide archives are presented in Table I, along with conversion of these numbers to rates per million persons per annum. Familicide rates, like total homicide rates, are about twice as high in Canada as in England and Wales. Since both the total homicide rate and the filicide rate were twice as high in Canada as in England and Wales, the proportions of all homicides that were familicides are very similar: In Canada, one out of every 69 homicide victims was killed in a familicide, and in England and Wales, one out of every 72 homicide victims.

In Canada, there were 33 two-victim cases, 19 three-victim cases, 7 four-victim cases, and 2 five-victim cases. The 161 familicide victims consisted of 61 spouses and 94 children or stepchildren of the killers, plus 2 parents-in-law, 1 cousin, and 3 unrelated persons.

In England and Wales, there were 31 two-victim cases, 14 three-victim cases, 1 four-victim case, and 2 five-victim cases. The 118 familicide victims consisted of 48 spouses and 68 children or stepchildren of the killers, plus an additional coresiding woman, and one killer's mother.

Familicide Is Virtually a Male Monopoly

Table II presents the numbers of persons slain by men versus women in familicides and in other spousal homicides and other filicides.

Familicide perpetration is strikingly and highly significantly more male-dominated

TABLE I. Familicide Victimization as a Component of Total Homicide Victimization

	Total homicides (victims)	Homicides per million persons per annum (victims)	Total familicides		Familicides per million perons per annum	
			Incidents	Victims	Incidents	Victims
Canada 1974–1990	11,037	26.5	61	161	0.15	0.39
England and Wales 1977–1990	8,525	12.3	48	118	0.07	0.17

TABLE II. Sex Differential Perpetration of Familicides Versus Other Spousal Homicides and Filicides*

	Killed by men	Killed by women	Chi-square	SROK
Canada 1974–1990				
Spouses killed in familicides	57	4	$\chi^2 = 10.3$	7
Other spouse-killings	1,276	412	$P < .001$	32
Children killed in familicides	88	6	$\chi^2 = 57.3$	7
Other filicide victims[a]	343	312	$P < .001$	91
England and Wales 1977–1990				
Spouses killed in familicides	46	2	$\chi^2 = 6.99$	4
Other spouse-killings	1,298	311	$P < 0.01$	24
Children killed in familicides	66	2	$\chi^2 = 60.1$	3
Other filicide victims[a]	418.5	448.5	$P < .001$	107

*SROK is the "sex ratio of killing": the number of persons killed by women per 100 killed by men.
[a]Where both parents were deemed co-offenders, a half victim was allocated to each sex-of-killer column.

than nonfamilicidal spouse-killing and filicide. Men were the killers in 57 of 61 Canadian familicide incidents (93%), and in 46 of 48 cases in England and Wales (96%). By contrast, men perpetrated only 76% of nonfamilicidal spouse killings in Canada and 81% in England and Wales; and only 52% of nonfamilicidal filicides in Canada and 48% in England and Wales.

In a study of familicides in the Statistics Canada homicide file for 1961–1983, Daly and Wilson [1988b] found 61 cases perpetrated by men and none by women. Thirty-eight of these cases occurred before 1974 and are therefore not included in the data portrayed in Table II; if these 38 indeed represent all Canadian familicides in 1961–1973, then men were the killers in 95 of 99 cases (96%) in 1961–1990.

We have elsewhere [Wilson and Daly, 1992b] examined variations in sex-differential homicide perpetration (sex ratios of killing, SROK: the number of persons killed by women per 100 killed by men), according to the victim-killer relationship category. Canada and England and Wales have similar SROK values according to different victim-killer categories. Furthermore, Canada and England and Wales are similar in the SROK values to those for Chicago, Illinois, with the striking exception of the spousal SROK value for Chicago which was 102.

Familicides and Other Filicides

i. Sex of child. Table III presents the numbers of sons and daughters killed by familicidal men in each sample, as well as the numbers of sons and daughters slain by other filicidal men (i.e., those who did not kill wives). In both samples, nonfamilicidal filicide was significantly biased toward victimization of sons ($P < .001$ by binomial test in both cases), whereas familicide victims included virtually identical numbers of sons and daughters. However, direct comparison of victim sex ratios in familicides versus other filicides did not yield a significant contrast in either sample.

ii. Age of child. The age distributions of the children slain by familicidal men are portrayed in Figure 1, and the mean ages of these victims and of familicidal and filicidal men are presented in Table III.

Here, unlike the preceding analyses, there are some large differences between the two national samples. Both the slain children and their killers averaged much older in

TABLE III. Demographic Characteristics of Killer and Victim in Familicidal Homicides and Other Filicide Cases (Data Are for Male-Perpetrated Cases Only)

i. Sex of child

	Sons	Daughters	Percent male	Chi-square
Canada 1974–1990				
Familicides	45	43	51.1	$\chi^2 = 1.87$
Other filicides	213	147	59.2	P = ns
England and Wales 1977–1990				
Familicides	33	33	50	$\chi^2 = 2.08$
Other filicides	269	184	59.4	P = ns

ii. Ages of children and their killers

	Age of child [Mean ± SE (N)]	Age of killer [Mean ± SE (N)]
Canada 1974–1990		
Familicides	7.2 ± 0.62 (88)	37.4 ± 1.28 (57)
Other filicides	7.1 ± 0.48 (360)	33.3 ± 0.71 (300)
	t (446 df) = 0.1	t (355 df) = 3.0
	P = ns	P = .003
England and Wales 1977–1990		
Familicides	11.8 ± 1.13 (66)	42.6 ± 1.76 (46)
Other filicides	3.7 ± 0.33 (453)	29.2 ± 0.52 (424)
	t (517 df) = 15.7	t (468 df) = 12.8
	$P < .001$	$P < .001$

iii. Relationship of children to male killers: Genetic vs. step-children

	Genetic children	Step-children	Percent step-children	Chi-square
Canada 1974–1990				
Familicides[a]	79	9	10.2	$\chi^2 = 12.44$
Other filicides[a]	258	102	28.3	$P < .001$
England and Wales 1977–1990				
Familicides[b]	54	11	16.9	$\chi^2 = 5.56$
Other filicides[c]	309	140	31.2	$P = .02$

[a]Adoptees are not discriminable from genetic offspring in Statistics Canada codings.
[b]Omits one adoptee.
[c]Omits two adoptees and two uncoded as regards genetic, step, or adoptive relationship.

familicides than in other filicides in England and Wales, whereas familicidal fathers were only slightly older than other filicidal fathers in Canada. The nearly identical mean ages of familicide and other filicide victims in the Canadian sample do not bespeak similar age distributions, however; familicide victims had a narrower age distribution than other filicide victims ($F_{359.87\ df} = 2.39$; $P < .001$), including lesser proportions of both very young children and adults (Fig. 1).

iii. Stepchildren. Table III divides the children slain by familicidal and other filicidal men into two categories: the killers' own genetic children vs. their stepchildren (the slain wives' children from previous unions).

Stepchildren constitute a much large proportion of filicide victims than their numbers in the relevant populations-at-large would lead one to expect [Daly and Wilson, 1988a,b]. According to a 1990 national probability survey of Canadian households with

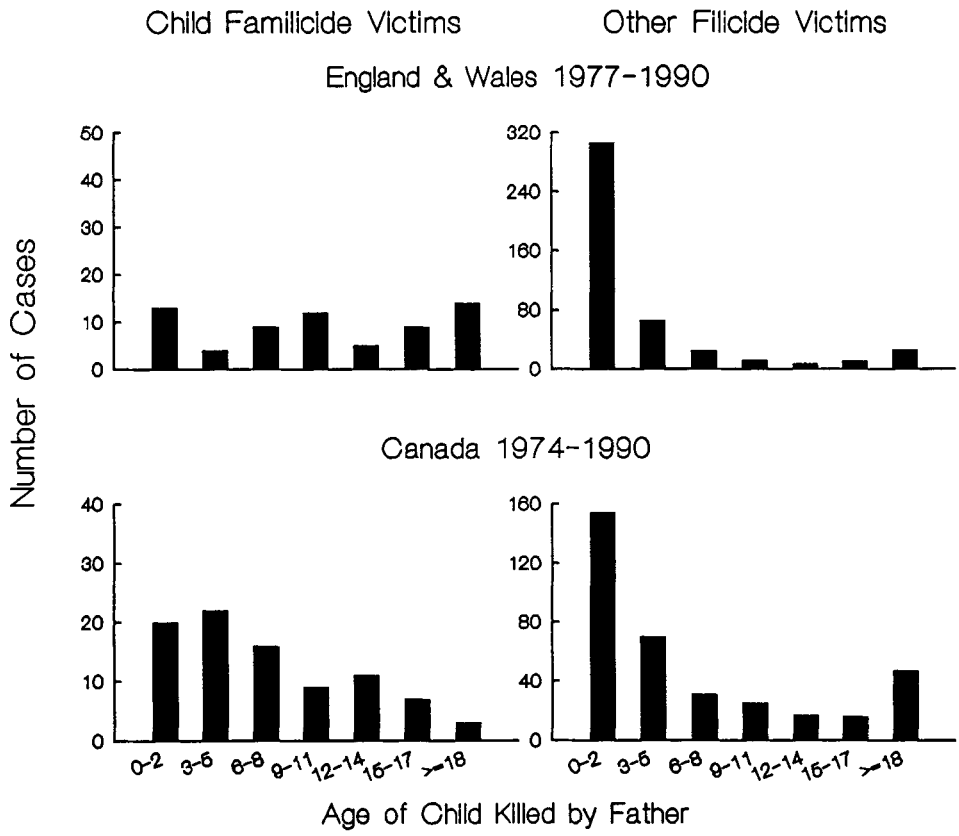

Fig. 1. Age distributions of the children killed by familicidal men and by other filicidal men.

children [Statistics Canada, 1991], for example, only about 6% of 7-year-olds (the mean age of filicide victims; see Table III) had stepfathers, compared with the 10.2% of familicide victims and the 28.3% of other filicide victims that were slain by stepfathers (Table III). Similarly, recent estimates of the living arrangements of children less than 16 years of age in England and Wales in 1979–1985 indicate that about 3–5% of children less than 5 years old, and 8–12% of 10 to 15-year-olds dwelt with stepfathers [Clarke, 1989]; both population-at-large estimates are far below the 16.9% of familicide victims and the 31.2% of other filicide victims who were slain by stepfathers (Table III).

In both Canadian and British samples, stepchildren constitute a significantly smaller proportion of familicide victims than of other filicide victims. This is especially remarkable in the British sample, given that the familicide victims' ages averaged substantially older (Table III); this age difference should have had an opposing effect since 12-year-olds (the mean age of familicide victims) are much more likely to have had stepfathers than 4-year-olds (the mean age of other filicide victims).

Thus, although stepchildren are over-represented in both victim categories, relative to their numbers in the populations-at-large, they are much less over-represented in the familicide cases than among the other filicides.

Familicides and Other Uxoricides

i. Age of wife. Uxoricide risk is strongly related to the wife's age; the age-specific uxoricide rates are highest for young wives in Canada, Britain, Australia, and the United States [Daly and Wilson, 1988a; Mercy and Saltzman, 1989; Wilson et al., 1993, in press]. Age distributions of the women killed by familicidal husbands are portrayed in Figure 2, as are the age distributions of other slain wives. (Note that Figure 2 includes the actual numbers of cases, and the computation of rates based on the numbers of wives in each age category in the population-at-large would result in a risk pattern skewed toward the youngest wives.) Mean ages of these victims and of familicidal and other uxoricidal men are presented in Table IV.

Both parties averaged significantly younger in familicides than in other uxoricides in Canada, but not in England and Wales. Perhaps more meaningful than these averages, however, are the distributions, which indicate that the wives killed in familicides were less variable in age than other uxoricide victims (Canada: $F_{1275,56\ df} = 2.81$, $P < .001$; England and Wales: $F_{1296,45\ df} = 1.59$, $P = .04$). This may reflect nothing more than that the oldest and youngest wives are relatively unlikely to have dependent children; unfortunately, available homicide archives do not include information on the parity of uxori-

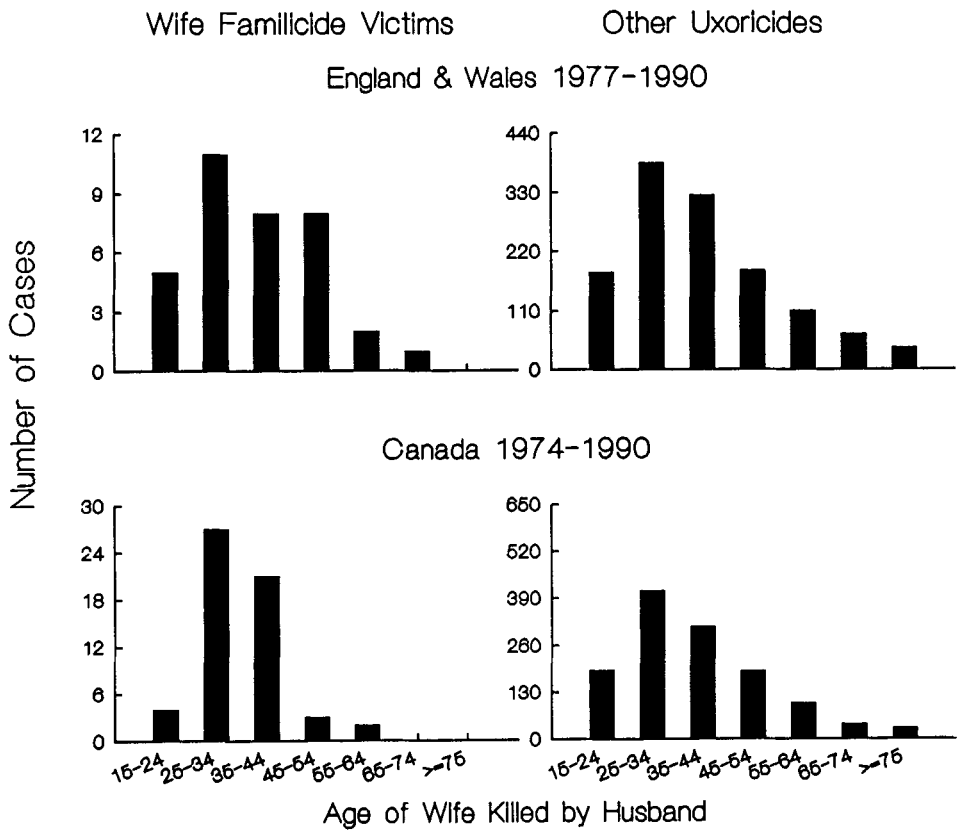

Fig. 2. Age distributions of the wives killed by familicidal men and by other uxoricidal men.

TABLE IV. Demographic Characteristics of Wife Victim and Killer in Familicidal Homicides and Other Uxoricides

i. Ages of wives and their killers

	Age of wife [mean ± SE (N)]	Age of husband [mean ± SE (N)]
Canada 1974–1990		
Familicides	34.5 ± 1.12 (57)	37.4 ± 1.28 (57)
Other uxoricides	38.3 ± 0.40 (1276)	42.1 ± 0.39 (1276)
	t (1,331 df) = 5.9	t (1,331 df) = 7.2
	$P < .001$	$P < .001$
England and Wales 1977–1990		
Familicides	39.3 ± 1.76 (46)	42.6 ± 1.76 (46)
Other uxoricides[a]	39.7 ± 0.42 (1297)	42.5 ± 0.41 (1296)
	t (1,341 df) = 0.7	t (1,340 df) = 0.2
	P = ns	P = ns

ii. Numbers of registered and de facto married wives

	Registered	De facto	Percent de facto	Chi-square
Canada 1974–1990				
Familicides	49	8	14.0	$\chi^2 = 12.11$
Other uxoricides	809	467	36.6	$P < .001$
England and Wales 1977–1990				
Familicides	41	5	10.9	$\chi^2 = 4.23$
Other uxoricides	987	311	24.0	$P = 0.04$

[a]Ages missing for one wife (victim) and two husbands (killers).

cide victims, and it is thus impossible to assess and compare demographic patterns of uxoricide versus familicide risk incurred specifically by mothers.

ii. Type of marital union. The marital union was registered, rather than de facto, in a substantially higher proportion of the familicide cases than of the other uxoricides, in both samples (Table IV). It should be noted, however, that this contrast might be considerably reduced if attention were confined to marriages with children. De facto unions are more likely to be childless than registered marriages [e.g., Statistics Canada, 1987], and an unknown proportion of nonfamilicidal uxoricide cases occurred in childless marriages. Thus, the greater proportion of registered marriages in familicides than in other uxoricides may be partly an artifact of their greater proportionate share of marriages with children than of childless marriages.

Wilson et al. [1993] estimated that de facto unions constituted an average of just 7.9% of Canadian marital unions over the 1974–1990 period, and that the uxoricide rate in de facto unions exceeded that in registered marriages eightfold. Since de facto unions are more often childless than registered unions, they presumably constituted something less than 7.9% of Canadian marriages with children, and it is this (unspecifiably) lesser percentage against which Table IV's figure of 14% should be compared. Thus, although excess risk associated with de facto marital unions is apparently much less extreme for familicides than for other uxoricides, it is still substantial.

The British data in Table IV are similar to Canada's but with fewer de facto unions. Haskey and Kelly [1991] estimated that de facto unions comprised only about 7% of marital unions in England and Wales in 1989, and the 1991 census indicated that 8.9% of marital unions were de facto marriages (unpublished census tabulations). The impli-

cation, by analogous argument to that made above for the Canadian data, is that in Britain, too, de facto unions are somewhat over-represented in familicide cases but much more strongly over-represented in other uxoricides.

Method of Killing

In both homicide samples, shootings constituted a substantially and significantly larger proportion of familicides than of other filicides (Canada: 49% in familicides vs. 27.3% in other filicides, $\chi^2 = 10.6$, $P < .01$; England and Wales: 28.3% vs. 2.1%, respectively, $\chi^2 = 62.1$, $P < .001$). Gun use was also proportionately more prevalent in familicides than in other uxoricides, but this contrast was significant only in the British sample (Canada: 49% in familicides vs. 42.2% of other uxoricides, $\chi^2 = 1.1$, P = ns; England and Wales; 28.3% vs. 7.9%, respectively, $\chi^2 = 23.6$, $P < .001$).

Incidence of Suicide

In both homicide samples, half of the male perpetrators committed suicide (Table V). This incidence of suicide substantially and significantly exceeds that in nonfamilicidal uxoricides and filicides. (Suicide by men who had killed persons other than wives or children was very much rarer still, occurring in just 3% of 5,655 such cases in Canada, and 2% of 4,755 in England and Wales.)

The suicides in Table V are of course only those that were successfully completed. If fully half of the familicidal men killed themselves, one must wonder how many of the remainder made suicide attempts. However, it seems clear from available newspaper accounts that at least some of the familicide perpetrators lacked suicidal inclinations. Some familicidal men attempt to disguise the killings as the deeds of strangers [see, e.g., McGinniss, 1983], occasionally with evident premeditation.

One of the four familicidal Canadian women committed suicide, as did one of the two familicidal British women. These cases are of course too few to compare to nonfamilicidal spouse-killings and filicides, but it may be noted that women who kill husbands are very rarely suicidal [Daly and Wilson, 1988b]. The only category of homicidal women with any substantial likelihood of suicide are those who have killed their own, non-infant children [Daly and Wilson, 1988b].

Familicides involving stepchildren were significantly less often suicidal than those involving genetic children, in both samples (Table VI). Similarly, suicide is much rarer

TABLE V. Incidents of Suicide by Familicidal Men Versus Other Filicidal Men and Other Uxoricidal Men

	Suicides	Not suicide	Percent suicide
Canada 1974–1990			
Familicides	29	28	50.9
Other uxoricides	323	953	25.3
Other filicides	76	224	25.3
England and Wales 1977–1990[b]			
Familicides	23	23	50.0
Other uxoricides	198	1100	15.3
Other filicides	45	379	10.6

[a]Familicides vs. other uxoricides: $\chi^2 = 18.35$, $P < .001$; familicides vs. other filicides: $\chi^2 = 15.05$, $P < .001$.
[b]Familicides vs. other uxoricides: $\chi^2 = 39.04$, $P < .001$; familicides vs. other filicides: $\chi^2 = 52.02$ $P < .001$.

TABLE VI. Suicide in Relation to Genetic Versus Steprelationship, by Familicidal Versus Other Filicidal Men

	Suicides	Not suicide	Percent suicide	
Canada 1974–1990				
Familicide incidents				
Genetic offspring only	28	21	57.1	Fisher exact test:
Stepchildren only	1	7	12.5	$P = .023$
Other filicide incidents[a]				
Genetic offspring only	70	137	33.8	$\chi^2 = 27.30$
Stepchildren only	5	87	5.4	$P < .001$
England and Wales 1977–1990				
Familicide incidents[b]				
Genetic offspring only	20	15	57.1	Fisher exact test:
Stepchildren only	2	7	22.2	$P = .066$
Other filicide incidents[c]				
Genetic offspring only	43	238	15.3	$\chi^2 = 18.68$
Stepchildren only	2	137	1.4	$P < .001$

[a]Omitted is one suicidal case in which the victims were one stepchild and one genetic child of the killer.
[b]Omitted are one suicidal case in which the victims were two step- and two genetic children of the killer, and one non-suicide case in which the victim was an adoptee.
[c]Omitted are four non-suicide cases: 2 where victims were adoptees, and 2 where precise parental relatedness not known.

after nonfamilicidal killings of stepchildren than after nonfamilicidal killings of one's genetic offspring [Daly and Wilson, 1994b].

DISCUSSION

Familicide is a peculiarly male crime. Just 12 of the 249 familicide victims in these two national archives were killed by women. Men were responsible for 95% of all familicidal killings, compared to 78% of other spouse killings and 49% of other filicides.

The data suggest that familicides have more in common with other uxoricides than with other filicides. For example, the ages of familicidal men were more similar to those of other uxoricidal men than to those of other filicidal men. Familicides were also somewhat more like other uxoricides than other filicides with respect to the method of killing, although gun use was more prevalent in familicides than in either of the other categories. The children were older in familicides than in other filicide cases in England and Wales, though not in Canada. Moreover, both the even sex ratio of child victims in familicide and the lesser over-representation of stepchildren in familicides as compared to other filicides could be interpreted as evidence that the children themselves are rarely the objects of the familicidal man's grievance or hostility, a suggestion that appears to gain credence from the available case descriptions. All of these considerations reinforce the impression that risk factors associated with uxoricide may be more relevant to familicide than those associated with filicide.

This interpretation is consistent with an evolutionary psychological perspective on male sexual proprietariness which hypothesizes that the adaptive problems ("selection pressures") of intrasexual competition and risk of misdirected paternal investment se-

lected for masculine psychological processes which value women's sexuality and reproductive capacity, so that under certain circumstances the risks of fatal violence for wives and children are linked. An obvious expectation that follows is that revelations of nonpaternity (or probabilistic cues of nonpaternity) will likely engender marital conflict and hostility toward the woman and her child. Accusatory anger and nonlethal violence are effective means of coercive control and in circumstances where a wife intends to desert the marriage temporarily or permanently (or the man responds to cues of likely desertion) coercion may deter the woman from leaving. (Again, we remind the reader that the fatal outcome in these homicides is hypothesized to be an epiphenomenal product of psychological processes that were selected for their nonlethal outcomes.) There are many circumstantial factors which increase the risk of activating a hostile masculine proprietary mindset and which could account for variations in the frequency and intensity of violence against wives [e.g., Wilson and Daly, 1993b]. There has been remarkably little research on factors which may exacerbate or mitigate the risk to children as well as their mothers. One hypothesis is that DNA-fingerprinting would reveal a higher incidence of nonpaternity of one's putative offspring in the familicides than in the filicides.

Published case descriptions suggest that two rather different sorts of familicide scenario recur, differing with respect to the killer's motivation, yet both reflecting a masculine uxorial proprietariness.

In the first variety the killer professes a grievance against his wife, usually with respect to alleged infidelities and/or her intending or acting to terminate the marriage. Overt and even public expressions of his aggrieved hostility are often conspicuous, and a history of violence may be noted. In a 1984 Canadian example, a man killed his estranged wife, his 5-year-old daughter, his infant son, his wife's parents, and himself. The couple had been residing apart for several months after a 10-year marriage; the wife had launched divorce proceedings. During the separation the killer had assaulted and threatened his wife repeatedly. One neighbor volunteered that "one minute he'd have a knife at her throat and the next he'd be at her feet asking for forgiveness"; another neighbor described him as "bitterly jealous" about his wife's having found part-time employment outside the home (*Calgary Herald,* March 2, 1984, p. A3). In another Canadian case, a man killed his wife, his two daughters aged 6 and 4, and then himself. Close friends said the marriage was rife with violence and the killer was obsessed with controlling his wife. The friend alleged the killer had once said to his wife "I'll kill you and the kids if you ever leave me" as he couldn't picture her with anyone else. Apparently, he had shown no signs of depression (*Winnipeg Free Press,* Dec. 27, 1989, p. 10). In a 1986 British example, an ex-policeman killed his wife and her four sons (the elder two his stepsons, the younger two his own), then shot himself, upon his wife's return from a rendezvous at which she and a lover had been working out her divorce plans (*The Times,* Aug. 21, 1986, p. 3). In an Australian case described by Goldney (1977, pp. 18–19), a man shot his wife, his sons aged 8 and 6, and his daughter aged 4, but spared his 15-month-old son, then drove to a nearby quarry and shot himself, after making a series of public (and apparently delusional) accusations of his wife's infidelity. These cases appear similar to many nonfamilicidal uxoricides [Campbell, 1992; Crawford and Gartner, 1992; Wilson and Daly, 1992a, 1993a].

Apparently rather different are cases in which the killer is a depressed and brooding man, who may apprehend impending disaster for himself and his family, and who sees

familicide followed by suicide as "the only way out." Expressions of hostility toward the victims are generally absent (or at most ambiguous) in such cases, and the despondent killer may even characterize his deed as an act of mercy or rescue. In a 1984 Canadian case, for example, a man drove his wife and two daughters, ages 9 and 1, to a quiet creekside "lover's lane," where he strangled all three, set fire to his car, and shot himself. In this case, no previous assaults or expressions of hostility were noted in newspaper reports; on the contrary, neighbours and relatives alike affirmed that the killer had been a loving husband and father. He had, however, become increasingly depressed about having lost a series of jobs (*Toronto Star,* June 2, 1984, p. A1, A4). Similarly, a 55-year-old American man who killed his wife and son in their beds with a hammer, and then bungled a suicide attempt, gave this account: "I kept thinking about the bills coming, the house taxes. Piling up, piling up in my mind . . . I thought everything was going to fall around my head. I know it could be a catastrophe in a short time. My son wouldn't be able to stand the stigma, my wife wouldn't have the things she was used to" [MacDonald, 1961, p. 222]. Similar cases have been described by Guttmacher [1960, p. 105]; West [1965, pp. 53, 71], Scott [1973, p. 122], Hirose [1979, pp. 212–213], and Bénézech [1991, pp. 159–162]. The prevalence of these despondent/depressive cases in the psychiatric literature is especially striking when one considers that the many successful suicides escape psychiatric scrutiny.

Even those who complete their suicides sometimes leave accounts of their motives, and these accounts often echo what the failed suicides tell the psychiatrists. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a letter left by a South African businessman who, facing bankruptcy and a probable prison term, shot his sleeping wife and children with a crossbow, set fire to his house, and then shot himself with a pistol [Graser, 1992a, p. 77]: "I lost the business due to a legal technicality, but, in the process, lost my house, my cars—just everything . . . I cannot let my family suffer the degradation of losing everything we possess and being thrown penniless onto the street." The killer's claim to be rescuing his victims may also invoke impending disasters of broader scope than the private consequences of the killer's own failures, as in this excerpt from a suicide note left by a 52-year-old English librarian who killed his wife, his daughter, and his mother, before shooting himself: "For some years now I have wished to die. However, this would have meant leaving the three persons dearest in the world to me without my protection. I can't leave them to the threat of death from radiation sickness after the coming atomic war . . . I have been dead professionally for 12 years, of which the last 10 have been a nightmare. More important, I have felt this more since reaching 50. I am a man who thought himself a poet and wished to be nothing more, yet I have not succeeded in having published as much as a single line" (*The Times,* April 28, 1984, p. 3).

The despondent nonhostile killer may constitute a reliably distinct category of familicide from the hostile accusatory familicidal killer. Unfortunately, data in the Canadian and British homicide archives do not permit any straightforward test of the general applicability or utility of a simple dichotomy between hostile, accusatory familicides and nonhostile, despondent ones. Suicide clearly cannot be treated as the defining criterion, both because accusatory killers can be suicidal, too, and because despondent killers' suicide attempts may fail. Nevertheless, suicide may be expected to be less prevalent in the hostile cases than in the despondent ones, and the rarity of suicide in cases involving stepchildren may be interpreted as supporting this idea, since the presence of

stepchildren is a strong correlate of hostile violence against both wives and the children themselves [Daly and Wilson, 1988a,b, 1994b; Daly et al., 1993].

In any event, as different as these two proposed categories of familicides appear, they have this in common: the killer's professed rationale for his actions invokes a proprietary conception of wife and family. The hostile, accusatory familicidal killer is often enraged at the alienation of his wife, and may declare that "If I can't have her, no one can." The despondent familicide perpetrator instead appears to believe that his victims could not persist or cope in his absence, and that their deaths are therefore necessary, perhaps even merciful, corollaries to his suicide. In either case, the killer apparently feels entitled to decide his victims' fates. Such proprietary constructions of the marital relationship are conspicuous and germane in a large proportion of nonfamilicidal uxoricides, too [Wilson and Daly, 1992a, 1994a,b], but what inspires a minority of these proprietary wife-killers to murder their children as well remains unknown.

We would expect that in hostile accusatory familicides the man lacks concern for his children as well as their mother, perhaps because he perceives them as allies or as appendages of his antagonist, their mother. The man's hostility to wife and children may also result from a suspicion of nonpaternity. Among despondent nonaccusatory perpetrators of familicide, by contrast, the issue of nonpaternity may be less often germane. A loving concern for the children and the wife may even be a part of the man's suicide project, so that they, like him, should not suffer a bleak future in an inhospitable world; a similar theme is found in cases of depressed mothers who kill their children and themselves [e.g., Daly and Wilson, 1988a].

Our statistical comparisons of familicides with other uxoricides and with other filicides were largely limited to cases involving male killers, since women so rarely committed this crime. Women do kill husbands [Wilson and Daly, 1992b], and women kill their children, too, but the circumstances and risk factors for these acts are largely distinct [Daly and Wilson, 1988a,b]. Women who kill may also commit suicide, although much less often than men and almost exclusively in cases in which the victims were children older than infants [Daly and Wilson, 1988b]. Some of these female-perpetrated filicide-suicides appear analogous to the despondent variety of male-perpetrated familicide. The mother may, for example, leave a note indicating that the homicide was conceived as a loving rescue [e.g., Daly and Wilson, 1988b, p. 79; Graser, 1992b, p. 375]. But whereas suicidal men not infrequently decide to take their wives and children with them, suicidal women almost never decide to "rescue" their husbands as well as their children. We hypothesize that this behavioral difference reflects a more general sex difference in proprietary constructions of the "family," with men feeling proprietary primarily about their wives and secondarily their children, while women have strongly proprietary feelings about the children alone [Daly and Wilson, 1988a; Wilson and Daly, 1992a].

Both male-perpetrated familicide and other uxoricide case descriptions suggest that accusatory jealousy may be especially often of relevance in cases with relatively young wives as victims [Daly and Wilson, 1988b; Wilson and Daly, 1992b]. The fact that wives slain in Canadian familicides were somewhat younger and less variable in age than those in England and Wales may then bespeak a relatively great proportion of the accusatory, jealous variety in the Canadian cases, and of the despondent "rescue" variety in the British cases. It is not the aim of this report to account for any national differences, but such a contrast might be hypothesized on the basis of greater marital instability

in Canada and/or more traditional marital sex roles in Britain. Whether there are indeed such national differences, and even whether the proposed binary categorization has validity, are questions for future research. What is most striking in the comparison of Canadian and British familicides is the similarity of risk patterns: the virtual absence of female-perpetrated cases, the prevalence of suicide, the reduced proportion of stepchildren in comparison with other filicides, and the rarity of additional extrafamilial victims.

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