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## ***Assessing the Impact of Gender Inequality on Female Homicide Victimization Across U.S. Cities***

### ***A Racially Disaggregated Analysis***

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#### ***Abstract:***

*To expand our understanding of gender inequality and violent crime, this study provides an assessment of the relationship between gender inequality and lethal violence against women. The authors use a cross-sectional design with racially disaggregated census data for 158 large U.S. cities in 1990 to assess the degree to which women's absolute status and their status relative to men affect their risk of homicide victimization. Overall, the findings suggest that although certain measures of women's absolute and relative socioeconomic status are related to female homicide victimization rates, when race-specific measures are used, the effects hold only for White women.*

*During the past three decades, researchers have produced a substantial number of studies examining the link between inequality and homicide (for reviews, see Land, McCall, & Cohen, 1990; Vieraitis, 2000). Although this body of literature has considered the relationships between homicide and income inequality, racial inequality, and to a lesser extent, gender inequality, studies have overlooked the intersection of race, class, and gender. To extend our understanding of homicide and inequality, this study assesses the relationship between gender inequality and female homicide victimization for both White and Black women.*

The empirical research is extremely limited with regard to gender inequality and female homicide victimization. A review of the literature reveals only seven studies that focus on homicide, none of which examine the impact of race on these relationships. The importance of examining the impact of economic conditions on disaggregated homicide is highlighted by the varying circumstances of female and male homicide victimization. Women are more likely to be victimized by intimates (e.g., spouses or boyfriends), whereas men are typically killed by strangers or acquaintances (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). Consistent with total homicide is the finding that female victims are disproportionately Black. The rate of victimization for Black women is more than one and a half times the rate of victimization for White women. In

addition, recent research by Ousey (1999) highlighted the importance of examining the impact of race on the relationship between structural conditions and homicide rates. For example, research demonstrates that income inequality and poverty are positively related to total homicide rates, but when the data are disaggregated by race, the effects hold only for Whites (Harer & Steffensmeier, 1992; Ousey, 1999; Peterson & Krivo, 1993).

Most gender inequality research has ignored the interplay between race and gender. Black women are often forgotten in research on racial inequality, which focuses on Black and White males, and gender inequality, which focuses on women as a homogenous group (Daly & Tonry, 1997). Until research focuses on race and gender, inequality can never be fully understood (Collins, 1990). As a result, this study focuses on both gender and race to determine the relationship between gender inequality and female homicide victimization across races.

Racially disaggregated sociodemographic and socioeconomic census data for the largest 158 U.S. cities in 1990 are examined to assess the degree to which women's absolute status and their status relative to men affect their risk of victimization. Status is measured along economic, educational, and occupational dimensions. It is hypothesized that women's absolute and relative status affects their risk of victimization and that these impacts differ for women of different race groups. A review of previous theory and research suggests that the link between women's status and their victimization may work in one of the following ways: (a) either greater inequality between men and women may make women "suitable targets" for male violence; or (b) greater equality between men and women may threaten the system of patriarchy, and men may respond to the "threat" of women's advancement with violence; or (c) women's absolute socioeconomic status may affect their ability to reside in an environment less conducive to crime.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Although there is no one feminist theory of female victimization, feminist literature is teeming with perspectives on violence against women (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988; Simpson, 1989). These approaches include liberal, radical, Marxist, and socialist feminist perspectives (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Typically, these perspectives concentrate on the power relations between men and women and on how society perpetuates violence against women by maintaining a system of patriarchy.

### **GENDER INEQUALITY**

Historically, men have made up the majority of the workforce, thus becoming the sole breadwinners in many households. Women have been largely relegated to the home, caring for children and their husbands, which typically is not considered "real work" (Benston, 1969). As a result, the breadwinner status is associated with masculinity, whereas caring for children and the household is associated with femininity. Due to men's perceived power (by virtue of being the sole providers) and women's powerlessness (having to depend on men), men have developed a system of control or authority over those in the household. According to this perspective, violence against women is characterized as an extension of the division of labor: lower class men, who struggle to maintain the breadwinner status due to the nature of their jobs, may hope to maintain control over their lives by victimizing their partners. In other words, the lack of power felt by men in the workplace is replaced by a high degree of power that men can attain in the household (Messerschmidt, 1986, 1993).

A related perspective of female victimization centers on male supremacy (patriarchy)

and maintenance of control over women. This theory states that men use violence to maintain control over women (Millett, 1970). Patriarchy is learned behavior, and socialization ensures that society will remain a patriarchal system. MacKinnon (1989) argued that patriarchy is maintained through violence (rape, wife beating, harassment, and homicide). Some theorists consider rape to be the ultimate form of social control over women. Although most men do not engage in rape, the fact that some do creates a climate of fear that inhibits women from challenging male supremacy (Griffin, 1971).

These perspectives translate into two different hypotheses regarding violent female victimization. The first hypothesis—the gender inequality-violence hypothesis—suggests that female victimization is an outcome of men’s advantaged position in society. In effect, this hypothesis is based on the idea that female partners, who are disadvantaged economically, politically, and occupationally, are suitable targets for male rage. Thus, women are targets because their status makes them vulnerable and they are not in a position of power to resist violence. Moreover, violence against women functions as an instrument of control through which women are kept “in their place.” However, the second hypothesis, commonly referred to as the backlash hypothesis, suggests that as women gain more power in occupational, educational, and political spheres, violence against them increases because men will attempt to control the strides made by women. In effect, there is a “backlash” against women because women’s advancement is seen as a threat to male dominance, and violence is used to remove that threat. As women and men become more equal, women’s advancement is viewed as a challenge to men’s structural position in society; that is, men lose their breadwinner status.

Another plausible hypothesis is that women’s economic status makes them more vulnerable and thus less powerful to resist male control, including violence. As Bailey (1999) suggested, women’s absolute status may affect their ability to live in safer environments. Women of lower socioeconomic status are often unable to afford to live in safer communities and are thus more likely to be victimized than women of higher status (Bailey, 1999). Moreover, lower status women often reside with or near men suffering from the anger and frustration produced by severe economic deprivation, which can be expressed through violence (Bernard, 1990).

## **GENDER INEQUALITY AND RACE**

The research on the link between gender inequality and violence against women has treated women as a homogenous group and has failed to consider the interplay between race and gender. Black women are often forgotten in research on racial inequality, which focuses on Black and White males, but the research on gender inequality has often omitted race altogether (Daly & Tonry, 1997). Overall, there has been little research conducted on the experiences of Black women in our society. According to Huey and Lynch (1996), Black women are largely ignored by academics whose research into race and/or gender focuses mainly on Blacks and women as two homogenous groups. This is unfortunate, as Black women face what Martin (1994) called a “double whammy”—being female and Black. As a result, according to Huey and Lynch (1996), “Black women are disadvantaged and excluded from power as a consequence of their race and gender” (p. 72). Thus, Black women may face an increased risk of homicide victimization compared with White women because they are disadvantaged not only by their gender but also by their race.

Blacks, in general, are disproportionately disadvantaged in the economic system due to their race, and many Black males are forced to work for low wages or are unemployed (Messerschmidt, 1993). Because of this, according to Messerschmidt, Black males have

largely been unable to create a breadwinner presence in the household. In addition, Black women face a lot of hostility from Black men, who feel that Black women are taking away “their jobs”; “Black men appear to display less hostility to White than Black women with whom they compete for positions and promotions earmarked ‘Black’ by affirmative action programs” (Martin, 1994, p. 394). As a result, Black males may feel that any power they held over the women in their lives has disappeared, and violence may be one method by which these men exercise their “masculinity” to maintain a sense of power.

As more Black women are employed and achieve at higher rates than Black men, their status is equal to or exceeds that of men in several areas. When compared with the relative status of White women, Black women are better off overall relative to Black men. Along two dimensions—the percentage of Blacks who have completed a bachelor’s degree and the percentage of Blacks employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions—Black women have exceeded Black men (see Table 2). Considering these differences, it is interesting to note that a finding of a positive association between relative gender inequality and Black female homicide rates would provide further empirical support of the backlash theory.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is strong theoretical support for both a positive and negative relationship between gender inequality and female homicide victimization, the empirical evidence has been less convincing. A review of the literature reveals only seven studies that look specifically at homicide. Consequently, studies that have examined other forms of violence against women—rape and wife beating—are included here. These studies are presented in Table 1. The first three columns of the table identify the author(s), time period(s) and level(s) of aggregation, and the dependent variable examined. The last column specifies whether the findings generally support the gender inequality-violence or backlash hypotheses, as indicated by “yes” or “no.”

Research by Yllö (1983) and Yllö and Straus (1984) found that in states with higher levels of gender inequality, as measured along educational, employment, occupational, political, and legal dimensions, rates of wife beating were higher. These findings were supported by Straus (1994), whose results showed that the higher the relative status of women in states, the lower was the probability of the state having a high rate of wife assault. In other words, gender equality was linked to lower rates of violence against wives. Baron and Straus (1987) also found that rape rates were lower in states where the status of women was higher. The findings of Bailey’s (1999) analysis of rape rates across cities were mixed. The results for 1980 and 1990 for rape and the absolute status of women indicated that in cities where the female median income was higher, the rape rates were lower; however, the effects were not significant in the 1980 to 1990 change analysis. Analysis of the relative status of women provided some evidence for the backlash hypothesis. Analysis of 1980 data showed that the greater the percentage of male managers and professionals, the lower was the rape rate. Similarly, the results for 1990 indicated that greater gender inequality in education and income was associated with lower levels of rape. Studies showed little to no support for the gender inequality-violence link with regard to rape rates across states (Baron & Straus, 1984), standard metropolitan

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Findings for Studies of Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women**

<i>Study</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Support for Hypothesis<sup>a</sup></i>	
				<i>Inequality</i>	<i>Backlash</i>
Ellis and Beattie (1983)	26 Cities	1970	Rape	No	No
	25 SMSAs	1970	Rape	No	No
Baron and Straus (1984)	50 states	1970	Rape	No	Yes
Baron and Straus (1987)	50 states	1980	Rape	Yes	No
Peterson and Bailey (1992)	263 SMSAs	1980	Rape	No <sup>b</sup>	Yes
Bailey (1999)	192 cities	1980	Rape	No	Yes
	192 cities	1990	Rape	No	Yes
	192 cities	Chg. 80-90	Rape	Yes	No
Yllö (1983)	30 states	1976	Wife beating	Yes	Yes
Yllö and Straus (1984)	50 states	1980	Wife beating	Yes	Yes
Straus (1994)	50 states	1980	Wife beating	Yes	No
Stout (1992)	50 states	1980	Homicide	Yes	Yes
Gartner, Baker, and Pampel, (1990)	18 nations	1950-1985	Homicide	Yes	Yes
Bailey and Peterson (1995)	138 cities	1980	Homicide	No	Yes
Brewer and Smith (1995)	177 cities	1980	Homicide	No	No
Brewer (1995)	233 cities	1990	Homicide	No	No
Davies (1996)	131 cities	1980	Homicide	Yes	No
	179 Cities	1990	Homicide	No	Yes
Gauthier and Bankston (1997)	191 cities	1990	Homicide	No	Yes

NOTE: SMSA = standard metropolitan statistical area; Chg. 80-90 = the change variables computed by subtracting 1980 values from 1990 values for each status and control factor, reflecting the changes from 1980 to 1990 in women's absolute and relative status (Bailey, 1990).

a. Were the results generally supportive of the gender inequality-violence hypothesis or of the backlash hypothesis?

b. Peterson and Bailey (1992) found only one measure—the male-female income gap—that supported the gender inequality-violence hypothesis.

statistical areas (Ellis & Beattie, 1983; Peterson & Bailey, 1992), and cities (Ellis & Beattie, 1983).<sup>1</sup>

With respect to female homicide victimization specifically, only one study (Gartner, Baker, & Pampel, 1990) demonstrated positive and significant effects of gender inequality on female homicide. This study explored the gap between female and male homicide rates in 18 nations for the time period from 1950 to 1980. The analysis included three variables relevant to the status of women: female share of the labor force, occupational segregation of females, and female share of college enrollments. Results indicated that in nations where women participate more in the labor force and where occupations are less segregated by gender, the proportion of female homicide victims is higher. The level of female victims relative to male victims was also lower when the female share of college enrollments was higher. Further analysis revealed that in nations with low female college participation, the male-female homicide gap continued to be associated positively and significantly with the level of female involvement in the labor force and gender occupational segregation. For nations with a higher level of women in college, the association between the homicide gap and the two gender status variables was not

significant.

The results of three studies were mixed. Stout's (1992) analysis indicated that in states in which women are disproportionately unemployed relative to men, female homicide rates are higher. In addition, there was a positive correlation between women in management and administrative positions and female homicide rates, suggesting that as women's status in a state rises, violence against women may also rise. This lends support to the backlash theory. Only two political variables were significant—percentage female state house representatives and combined state house and senate representatives—but they were in the unexpected negative direction.

Using both absolute and relative measures of women's status, Bailey and Peterson (1995) found that gender inequality was not associated with rates of homicide across U.S. cities, with a few exceptions. Specifically, the greater the male-female gaps in college attainment and female-male unemployment, the higher were the rates of wife killing. In addition, the greater the gender gap in income, the higher was the rate of women killed by acquaintances and in "argument" situations.

In Davies's (1996) unpublished study of 131 U.S. cities, women's homicide victimization varied depending on the relationship of the victim and offender. Results indicated that (a) women's homicide victimization was not lower where women's economic and educational opportunities were greater, except for intimate homicide. In cities where larger percentages of women had completed 4 years or more of college, fewer women were killed by their intimate partners. And (b) in cities where women's labor force participation was more similar to men's, family homicide victimization rates of women were lower; (c) where there were greater differences between the proportion of women and men with a college education, killings of women by acquaintances were greater; and finally, (d) where women were more like men in professional status, killing of women by acquaintances was greater. The analyses with 1990 data revealed that in cities where women were more similar to men with regard to college attainment, more women were killed by their intimate partners, acquaintances, or family members during an argument.

The results of the final three studies, however, failed to find evidence that inequality between men and women along a variety of dimensions increased rates of female homicide victimization. Brewer and Smith's (1995) examination of cities with 1980 census data indicated that gender differences in income, education, employment, and poverty were not associated with female homicide rates when they controlled for several social-structural factors that have been previously linked to total homicide rates. Their findings suggest that female homicide rates are predicted by the same variables as male homicide rates. Similar results were obtained by Brewer's (1995) unpublished analysis of cities with 1990 census data.

Finally, Gauthier and Bankston's (1997) analysis failed to support the gender inequality increases female homicide hypothesis. However, their results did lend support to the argument that men exercise violence to maintain control over women when male status dominance is most threatened. In cities where women experienced relatively high economic advantage compared with men, sex ratios of killing intimate partners (calculated as intimate homicides perpetrated by women per 100 perpetrated by men) were biased in favor of men as killers. Bailey (1999), Bailey and Peterson (1995), Peterson and Bailey (1992), Stout (1992), Yllö (1983), and Yllö and Straus (1984) also found some evidence that supports the backlash theory.

In comparison with the substantial body of research examining the association between overall inequality and homicide rates, the studies we have discussed have failed to address the issue of race. There are significant racial differences in the status of women along economic, educational, and occupational dimensions as well as differences in their risk of

homicide victimization. In fact, compared with Black women, the rate of White women who have completed bachelor's degrees is higher, they have a higher median income, and they are employed at a higher rate in executive, managerial, and administrative positions. Furthermore, the rate of victimization for Black females is more than double the rate for White women (see Table 2). There are also racial differences in the status of women relative to men. When compared with Black men, Black women are better off along two dimensions—educational attainment and employment in executive, managerial, and administrative positions—than White women compared with White men (see Table 2).

This study seeks to add to the existing body of research by exploring racial differences in the link between gender inequality and rates of female homicide victimization for large cities. To examine the relationship between absolute status and female homicide victimization, we test the following models: (a) the impact of the absolute status of all women on total female victimization rates, (b) the impact of the absolute status of White women on White female victimization rates, and (c) the impact of the absolute status of Black women on Black female victimization rates. We test the following models to measure the impact of the relative status of women: (a) the relative status of all women on total female victimization rates, (b) the relative status of White women on White female victimization rates, and (c) the relative status of Black women on Black female victimization rates.

## **DATA AND METHOD**

Data for this study were collected for U.S. cities that had a population of 100,000 or more in 1990. Although there were 194 cities with populations of 100,000 or more, 36 cities were excluded due to lack of data. Our analysis is restricted to the 158 cities that met the following criteria: (a) population is at least 100,000, (b) number of cases in the Supplementary Homicide Report is at least 95% of the UCR homicide count, (c) the Black population is at least 2,000 persons (Parker & McCall, 1999), and (d) all relevant female homicide and socioeconomic data are available.

## **DEPENDENT VARIABLE**

Disaggregated homicide data were collected from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (1990, 1991, 1992) Supplementary Homicide Reports for 1989 to 1991. The average rates per a 100,000 female population were computed for a 3-year period to account for possible year-to-year fluctuations that may represent reporting variations or shifts in enforcement policies. Although numerous criticisms have been leveled against the use of Supplementary Homicide Reports data, there is no other national data set in existence that allows the examination of the gender and race of victims in homicides for a large sample of cities. Natural logarithmic transformations of the homicide rates were performed because they had skewed distributions.

**TABLE 2**  
**Descriptive Statistics for Gender Inequality and Female Homicide Rate Variables**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Women with bachelor's degree (%)	4.80	29.47	13.39	5.04
Female employment (%)	22.60	54.2	35.49	5.27
Female median income	14,479	30,451	20,097	2,927
Women employed in executive, management, & administrative positions (%)	5.93	26.17	11.77	2.87
Ratio of women to men with bachelor's degree	0.70	1.29	0.96	0.13
Ratio of female to male employment	0.56	0.82	0.69	0.05
Ratio of female to male median income	0.41	0.85	0.58	0.08
Ratio of women to men employed in executive, management, & administrative positions	0.50	1.46	.84	0.13
White women with bachelor's degree (%)	4.48	32.49	14.98	5.93
White female employment (%)	22.3	55.2	35.49	5.24
White female median income	15,642	34,325	21,170	3,416
White women employed in executive, management, & administrative positions (%)	3.88	29.14	13.27	3.34
Ratio of White women to White men with bachelor's degree	0.68	1.21	0.91	0.11
Ratio of White female to White male employment	0.53	0.80	0.66	0.05
Ratio of White female to White male median income	0.54	0.92	0.70	0.06
Ratio of White women to White men employed in executive, management, & administrative positions	0.49	1.36	.80	.12
Black women with bachelor's degree (%)	2.85	25.13	9.01	4.69
Black female employment (%)	20.3	59.1	36.22	7.66
Black female median income	12,338	28,487	18,794	3,445
Black women employed in executive, management, & administrative positions (%)	1.65	23.12	8.93	3.85
Ratio of Black women to Black men with bachelor's degree	0.25	2.32	1.17	0.39
Ratio of Black female to Black male employment	0.50	1.07	0.78	0.09
Ratio of Black female to Black male median income	0.60	1.06	0.81	0.07
Ratio of Black women to Black men employed in executive, management, & administrative positions	0.19	2.22	1.17	0.34
Total female homicide rate	0.000	23.48	7.23	4.67
White female homicide rate	0.000	20.66	4.60	3.10
Black female homicide rate	0.000	35.66	12.24	8.14



## GENDER INEQUALITY MEASURES

Consistent with previous research, we examine the absolute and relative status of women in three areas: economic, educational, and occupational. Data for the economic, educational, and occupational variables were collected from the *1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993). Measures of the absolute status of women include (a) percentage of women 25 years and older who have completed a bachelor's degree, (b) percentage of women 15 years and older who are employed full-time year-round, (c) median income for women 15 years and older employed full-time, and (d) percentage of women 16 years and older employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions. These measures were collected for total women, White women, and Black women. The measures of the relative status of women are the ratios (women to men) of the above variables. Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 2.

## CONTROL VARIABLES

The selection of control variables is based on their theoretical and empirical links to violent crime as reported in previous research (Blau & Blau, 1982; Fowles & Merva, 1996; Kovandzic, Vieraitis, & Yeisley, 1998; Land et al., 1990; Messner, 1982, 1983; Ousey, 1999; Parker, 1989; Williams & Flewelling, 1988). These variables include (a) a resource deprivation index, (b) population density, (c) percentage of the population aged 15 to 34 (percentage young), and (d) rate of divorce and separation. The resource deprivation index generated by principal components analysis is composed of income inequality, poverty, percentage Black, unemployment, and population change. These components are consistent with previous research examining structural conditions and urban homicide (Land et al., 1990; Messner & Golden, 1992; Parker & McCall, 1999).

Income inequality is measured as the Gini index of family income concentration.<sup>2</sup> Data on poverty are drawn from the *County and City Data Book* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1994), and data for the measure of unemployment are extracted from the *1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993). Data for percentage Black, population change, and population density are drawn from the *County and City Data Book* for 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1994). The percentage young variable is based on data from the *1990 Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1993). Data for the divorce and separation rate are collected from the *Supplements to the Monthly Vital Statistics Report: Advanced Reports, 1988* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990).

## RESULTS

The appendix contains the bivariate correlation matrices for all models in the analysis. Inspection of the correlation matrices reveals only two correlations that exceed 0.60: the ratio of women to men who have completed a bachelor's degree and the resource deprivation index, and the percentage of women employed fulltime and the resource deprivation index. To test for collinearity, we examined the variance inflation factor score; it did not exceed

2.0. Neter, Wasserman, and Kutner (1990) suggested that a variance inflation factor score greater than 10 is evidence of harmful collinearity. The results of the ordinary least

squares regression analyses are shown in Tables 3 through 8.

**TABLE 3**  
**Total Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against Absolute Status of Women Measures**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>			<i>Model 3</i>			<i>Model 4</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>
Resource deprivation	.373*	.627	8.573	.465*	.782	9.953	.443*	.745	9.616	.413*	.696	9.066
Population density	.000	.013	0.190	-.000	-.005	-0.084	-.000	-.011	-0.176	-.000	-.050	-0.677
Divorce rate	.000	.110	1.711	.000	.080	1.287	.000	.106	1.686	.000*	.129	2.006
Young (%)	-.017	-.114	-1.604	-.022*	-.145	-2.314	-.023*	-.153	-2.369	-.018	-.122	-1.901
Women with bachelor's degree (%)	.001	.006	0.081	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female employment (%)	—	—	—	.030*	.268	3.468	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female executives (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.044*	.216	2.847	—	—	—
Female median income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.000	.140	1.810
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	2.257			1.408			1.951			1.752		
Adjusted $R^2$	.398			.443			.429			.411		

\* $p = .05$ .

**TABLE 4**  
**White Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against Absolute Status of White Women Measures**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio
Resource deprivation	.256*	.474	6.186	.274*	.506	5.695	.278*	.514	6.487	.273*	.505	6.364
Population density	-.000	-.003	-0.042	.000	.003	0.045	-.000	-.012	-0.156	-.000	-.037	-0.458
Divorce rate	.001*	.174	2.372	.001*	.165	2.218	.001*	.168	2.299	.001*	.181	2.467
Young (%)	-.005	-.037	-0.458	-.008	-.055	-0.744	-.009	-.073	-0.970	-.008	-.060	-0.811
White women with bachelor's degree (%)	-.002	-.027	-0.336	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
White female employment (%)	—	—	—	.005	.055	0.620	—	—	—	—	—	—
White female executives (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	.018	.116	1.506	—	—	—
White female median income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	.000	.093	1.152
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	1.506			1.358			1.394			1.277		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.217			.219			.229			.224		

\*p = .05.

**TABLE 5**  
**Black Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against Absolute Status of Black Women Measures**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio
Resource deprivation	.548*	.489	5.536	.660*	.589	6.242	.585*	.523	5.929	.533*	.476	5.330
Population density	-.000	-.088	-1.216	-.000	-.102	-1.347	-.000	-.075	-0.985	-.000	-.022	-0.254
Divorce rate	.001	.122	1.713	.001	.121	1.700	.001	.116	1.614	.001	.087	1.167
Young (%)	.005	.019	0.262	-.003	-.011	-0.157	-.001	-.003	-0.046	-.004	-.013	-0.188
Black women with bachelor's degree (%)	-.026	-.112	-1.279	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black female employment (%)	—	—	—	.009	.058	0.634	—	—	—	—	—	—
Black female executives (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.015	-.051	-0.605	—	—	—
Black female median income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.000	-.136	-1.488
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	1.965			1.699			2.055			2.858		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.266			.260			.260			.269		

\*p = .05.

**TABLE 6**  
**Total Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against Gender Equality Measures**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio
Resource deprivation	.371*	.624	7.553	0.372*	.625	9.886	.335*	.564	8.243	0.358*	.602	9.594
Population density	.000	.012	0.181	-0.000	-.046	-0.721	-.000	-.035	-0.523	-0.000	-.089	-1.357
Divorce rate	.000	.110	1.696	0.000	.089	1.462	.000*	.126	1.998	0.000	.100	1.660
Young (%)	-.017	-.112	-1.708	-0.029*	-.200	-3.082	-.020*	-.135	-2.126	-0.042*	-.281	-3.950
Ratio of women to men with bachelor's degree	.006	.001	0.016	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio female to male employment	—	—	—	2.862*	.265	4.072	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio female to male executives	—	—	—	—	—	—	.849*	.196	2.834	—	—	—
Ratio female to male median income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.606*	.335	4.499
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	2.250			.774			1.660			1.631		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.398			.458			.429			.470		

\*p = .05.

**TABLE 7**  
**White Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against White Gender Equality Measures**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio	b	Beta	t Ratio
Resource deprivation	.278*	.515	6.370	0.273*	.505	6.622	.256*	.474	6.238	0.234*	.432	5.763
Population density	-.000	-.001	-0.014	-0.000	-.010	-0.135	-.000	-.009	-0.116	-0.000	-.137	-1.620
Divorce rate	.000*	.161	2.189	0.000*	.152	2.071	.001*	.175	2.395	0.001*	.181	2.548
Young (%)	-.002	-.019	-0.249	-0.014	-.108	-1.378	-.008	-.059	-0.795	-0.022*	-.169	-2.084
Ratio of White women to White men with bachelor's degree	-.493	-.104	-1.301	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio of White female to White male employment	—	—	—	1.588*	.158	2.002	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio of White female to White male executives	—	—	—	—	—	—	.280	.063	0.861	—	—	—
Ratio White female to White male income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.594*	.298	3.150
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	1.856			.760			1.346			.308		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.226			.237			.221			.266		

\*p = .05.

**TABLE 8**  
**Black Female Homicide Rates Regressed Against Black Gender Equality Measures**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>			<i>Model 3</i>			<i>Model 4</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t Ratio</i>
Resource deprivation	.617*	.551	6.443	.621*	.555	7.497	.602*	.538	7.049	0.641*	.572	7.729
Population density	-.000	-.089	-1.201	-.000	-.099	-1.340	-.000	-.094	-1.289	-0.000	-.120	-1.617
Divorce rate	.001	.121	1.697	.001	.122	1.708	.001	.120	1.689	0.001	.116	1.635
Young (%)	-.001	-.005	-0.069	-.004	-.014	-0.193	-.002	-.007	-0.104	-0.015	-.055	-0.728
Ratio of Black women to Black men with bachelor's degree	.133	.043	0.573	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio Black female to Black male employment	—	—	—	.643	.054	0.751	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ratio Black female to Black male executives	—	—	—	—	—	—	.182	.055	0.753	—	—	—
Ratio Black female to Black male income	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.158	.141	1.835
Degrees of freedom	154			154			154			154		
Constant	1.933			1.529			1.759			.707		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.258			.261			.261			.275		

\**p* = .05.

## THE ABSOLUTE STATUS OF WOMEN

### TOTAL FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION

Examination of the total female homicide model in Table 3 reveals that only two measures of the absolute status of women are positive and statistically significant (two-tailed test): the percentage of women employed full-time (Model 2) and the percentage of women employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions (Model 3). Both measures are in the positive direction, meaning that homicide victimization rates are higher in cities where a higher percentage of women are employed and employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions. In addition, the resource deprivation index is a statistically significant predictor of female homicide victimization rates. The coefficients indicate that the resource deprivation index is the strongest predictor of total female victimization rates. The amount of variance explained by the models ranges from .398 to .443. Therefore, in cities with higher percentages of employed women; higher percentages of women employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions; and higher levels of resource deprivation, female homicide victimization rates are higher. We also note that although not statistically significant at the .05 level, all of the absolute status measures are in the positive direction and female median income achieves statistical significance at the .10 level.

### WHITE FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION

Table 4 shows the results for White females. When using race-specific measures of women's absolute status, the results are contrary to theoretical expectations. None of the absolute status of White women variables is statistically significant. Examination of the White female model indicates that two variables—resource deprivation index and divorce rate—are statistically significant. Thus, in cities where there are higher levels of resource deprivation and divorce rates, White female homicide victimizations are greater. The amount of variance explained by the models ranges from .217 to .229.

#### **BLACK FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION**

In the Black female model (see Table 5), only the resource deprivation index achieved statistical significance. Black female homicide victimization rates are higher in cities where resource deprivation is greater. None of the measures of the absolute status of Black women is significant. However, it is interesting that three out of four measures of Black women's status are in the negative direction, meaning that as their status decreases, victimization increases. This is contrary to the findings of the models previously discussed. The adjusted  $R^2$  values range from .26 to .269.

Overall, the results indicate that the absolute status of women is significant for total female victimization rates only. When race-specific measures of the status of women are used, the effects disappear. Furthermore, the only variable that is consistently significant across all models is the resource deprivation index.

#### **THE RELATIVE STATUS OF WOMEN**

##### **TOTAL FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION**

Results for the impact of the relative status of women for total females, White females, and Black females are presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8, respectively. Results indicate that for total female victimization rates, three measures of gender equality—the ratio of women to men employed full-time; the ratio of women to men employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions; and the ratio of female to male median income—are statistically significant and in the positive direction. These findings indicate that in cities where women and men are more equal in terms of employment, occupational status, and income, female homicide victimization rates are higher. Consistent with the previous analyses, the resource deprivation index is positive and statistically significant. In addition, percentage young is negative and significant in Models 2, 3, and 4.

##### **WHITE FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION**

When race-specific measures of the relative status of women are used, the effects remain only for White women (see Table 7). Results show that the ratio of White women to White men employed full-time and the ratio of White female to White male median income are statistically significant. Therefore, in cities in which White women and White men are more equal in terms of full-time employment and median income, White female homicide victimization rates are higher. In addition, the results for the resource deprivation index and the divorce rate are consistent with the model of the absolute status of White women. Both are predictors of White female victimization rates.

##### **BLACK FEMALE HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION**

For Black female victimization rates (see Table 8), the Black gender equality measures are all in the positive direction, but none is statistically significant at the .05 level (the ratio of Black female median income to Black male median income achieved statistical significance at the .10 level). In fact, only the resource deprivation index is positive and significant, meaning that Black female homicide victimization rates are higher in cities where resource deprivation is high. In summary, although the relative status of all women affects their risk of homicide victimization, when race-specific measures are used, the effects hold only for Whites.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although many theories attempt to explain the relationship between gender inequality and female homicide victimization, the empirical research exploring this relationship has been lacking. Moreover, none of these studies has considered the variable of race. Given that a disproportionate number of female homicide victims are Black, it is necessary to examine the role of race to fully understand its relationship with gender inequality and female homicide victimization. This study examined these relationships by including race-specific measures of the status of women along economic, educational, and occupational dimensions and female homicide victimization rates. It was hypothesized that women's absolute status and status relative to men affect women's risk of victimization and that this risk differs for women of different races. The findings of this analysis provide partial support for feminist arguments.

First, with regard to the absolute status of women, this study found that total female homicide victimization rates were higher in cities where a higher percentage of women are both employed and employed in executive, managerial, and administrative positions. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that men are threatened by women's advancement: Women residing in cities in which their status is higher experience a greater risk of lethal violence than women in cities where their status is lower. Two other variables in the model were significant as well. Overall, the resource deprivation index was the strongest predictor of total female homicide victimization rates. In effect, cities with higher levels of economic distress have higher female victimization rates. It is interesting that the effects of women's status disappeared in the race-specific models. For White and Black women, none of the measures of absolute status was significant. Nonetheless, for both races, the resource deprivation index was significant and in the positive direction. For White women, the divorce rate was also significant in that the higher the divorce rate, the higher was the victimization rate.

Analysis of the relative status of women indicated support for the backlash hypothesis. For total female victimization rates, the ratio of women to men employed full-time; the ratio of women to men employed in executive, administrative, and managerial positions; and the ratio of female to male median income were significant and in the positive direction. In other words, as women make more economic strides relative to men, their risk of victimization increases. Again, the resource deprivation index was significant and in the positive direction across all models.

In the race-specific models, the effects of the relative status of women differed for Whites and Blacks. For White women, among the four gender equality variables, two of them—the ratio of women to men employed full-time and the ratio of female to male median income—were statistically significant. For Black females, however, none of the gender equality variables was significant. Therefore, it appears that White women are more vulnerable to victimization as they “threaten” White men on the dimensions of full-

time employment and median income.

These findings raise the following question: Why do the effects of relative status affect the homicide victimization rates of White women but not Black women? One possibility is that the gender equality measures used in these analyses do not capture the dimension of Black male-female power relations that would explain Black women's victimization. Alternatively, regardless of the strides Black women make, the underlying structural conditions that contribute to homicide rates remain and thus may be masking the effects of gender inequality. As a result, Black women's risk of victimization remains high.

In summary, this analysis provided partial support for feminist arguments regarding the status of women and its affect on levels of female homicide victimization. In general, results indicate that as women make strides economically, their risk of victimization increases. Specifically, the following patterns demonstrated support for feminist hypotheses: (a) two dimensions of the absolute status of all women on total female homicide victimization rates were positive and significant, (b) three dimensions of the relative status of all women on total female homicide victimization were positive and significant, and (c) two dimensions of the relative status of White women on White female homicide victimization were positive and significant.

That a woman's absolute status can increase her risk of victimization supports the theory that women who make strides in the economic sphere are treading on territory typically reserved for men, thus threatening their "breadwinner" status. This loss of power felt by men is translated into lethal violence against women, who become suitable targets for the frustration produced by a sense of powerlessness. This supports the backlash theory of victimization in that as women's status relative to men increases, the threat to men increases the likelihood of female victimization in an effort to control the increase in status.

It is important to note, however, that the strongest predictor of female homicide victimization in all the models was the resource deprivation index. Despite strong feminist arguments that the structural relationship between men and women is also an important factor in explaining violence against women, the finding that cities with higher levels of economic distress also have higher rates of female homicide victimization indicates that traditional models of the structural covariates of homicide may best explain female victimization. Although the purpose of this study was to explore the effects of various measures of the status of women, further research should explore this issue in more depth.



## APPENDIX

### Bivariate Correlations for Variables Used in the Analyses

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Total Female Population Matrix</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Female homicide victimization	1.00				
Resource deprivation	.626**	1.00			
Population density	.156	.271**	1.00		
Divorce rate	.025	-.170*	-.117	1.00	
Young (%)	-.202*	-.117	.101	-.127	1.00
Women with bachelor's degrees (%)	-.330**	-.455**	-.169*	.024	.423**
Women employed (%)	-.221**	-.609**	-.095	.186*	.183*
Female executives (%)	-.227**	-.549**	-.025	.060	.255**
Female median income	-.176*	-.375**	.324**	-.123	.185*
Ratio women to men with bachelor's degree	.337**	.601**	.186*	-.233*	.100
Ratio women to men employed	.176*	-.012	.244**	.037	.339**
Ratio female to male executives	.352**	.368**	.345**	-.177*	.112
Ratio female to male median income	.182*	.067	.366**	-.053	.512**

  

<i>Variable</i>	<i>White Female Population Matrix</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
White female homicide victimization	1.00				
Resource deprivation	.451**	1.00			
Population density	.104	.271**	1.00		
Divorce rate	.102	-.170*	-.117	1.00	
Young (%)	-.135	-.117	.101	-.127	1.00
White women with bachelor's degrees (%)	-.150	-.202*	-.120	-.004	.405**
White women employed (%)	-.207**	-.576**	-.200*	.222**	.173*
White female executives (%)	-.058	-.310**	.036	.045	.250**
White female median income	-.043	-.187*	.346**	-.108	.212**
Ratio White women to White men with bachelor's degree	.023	.335**	.131	-.202*	.248**
Ratio White women to White men employed	.006	-.235**	.043	.132	.388**
Ratio White female to White male executives	.073	.074	.183*	-.085	.190*
Ratio White female to White male median income	.208**	.204**	.541**	-.125	.425**

Variable	Black Female Population Matrix				
	1	2	3	4	5
Black female homicide victimization	1.00				
Resource deprivation	.510**	1.00			
Population density	.045	.271**	1.00		
Divorce rate	.044	-.170*	-.117	1.00	
Young (%)	-.100	-.117	.101	-.127	1.00

Variable	Black Female Population Matrix				
	1	2	3	4	5
Black women with bachelor's degrees (%)	-.372**	-.563**	-.114	.009	.272**
Black women employed (%)	-.299**	-.586**	.065	.043	.191*
Black female executives (%)	-.316**	-.471**	.134	-.096	.126
Black female median income	-.337**	-.376**	.358**	-.218**	.076
Ratio Black women to Black men with bachelor's degrees	.266**	.489**	-.005	-.057	-.038
Ratio Black women to Black men employed	.008	-.044	.194*	-.004	.183*
Ratio Black female to Black male executives	.191*	.292**	.171*	-.102	.016
Ratio Black female to Black male median income	.015	-.141	.213**	-.003	.381**

\* $p = .05$  (two-tailed). \*\* $p = .01$  level (two-tailed).

## NOTES

1. Ellis and Beattie (1983) found a positive relationship between sex disparities and earnings and city rape rates. Similarly, Peterson and Bailey (1992) found that the greater the income gap is between men and women, the higher the rape rate is in standard metropolitan statistical areas.
2. The Gini index was calculated from grouped family income data (25 income intervals) using software designed to calculate Gini coefficients from grouped data. The software was provided to Kovandzic, Vieraitis, and Yeisley (1998) by the Income Branch Staff at the Bureau of the Census.

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