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Michael Lalli

Stanley H. Turner

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SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BY RACE AND OCCUPATIONAL LEVELS

MICHAEL LALLI AND STANLEY H. TURNER

Michael Lalli received his Ph.D. (Sociology) from the University of Pennsylvania in 1958. Since then, he has taught at Temple University, Philadelphia, where he is an Associate Professor. His area of major interest has been the sociological and demographic aspects of minority groups.

Stanley Turner received his M.A. (Sociology) from the University of Pennsylvania in 1958 and is now a candidate for the Ph.D. (Sociology) degree at Temple University, Philadelphia. He has worked in Operations Research for the University of Pennsylvania and the United States Government and is now a Lecturer in Sociology at Temple University.

Data on suicide and homicide deaths of white and non-white males are analyzed for five socio-economic levels. Several explanatory sociological theories of suicide, homicide and their relationships to each other are critically examined. Finally, a series of empirical generalizations are presented.

Presented here are data on 9,709 suicides and 5,183 deaths by homicide for white and non-white males ages 20 to 64 according to occupational levels. These occupational levels have been refined and are similar to those of the Office of the Registrar-General in England. Using these levels as simple indicators of class the findings are that suicide and homicide among whites is inversely related to class and the lowest class (class V) has the highest rate. Among non-whites the same is true for homicide; suicide rates however are low and vary very little by class.

The publication *Mortality by Occupational Level and Cause of Death* permits an analysis of suicide and homicide, 1950, in such a way as to present evidence for or against selected aspects of theoretical positions for which only limited or indirect evidence has been available, particularly in regard to socio-economic status.¹ The data in *Mortality*

¹ NATIONAL VITAL STATISTICS DIVISION, MORTALITY BY OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL AND CAUSE OF DEATH AMONG MEN 20 TO 64 YEARS OF AGE: *United States, 1950*, Guralnick, *Vital Statistics, Special Reports, Vol. 53, No. 5* (1963). It must be emphasized that the abbreviated occupation classification used here is not the same as the Intermediate Occupational Classification. The complete list for Occupational Level I, Professional Workers is as follows: accountants and auditors; architects, authors, editors, and reporters; chemists, college presidents, professors, and instructors (n.e.c.); dentists, engineers, aeronautical engineers, electrical; other technical engineers; lawyers and judges; natural scientists (n.e.c.); physicians and surgeons; social scientists. Notice that categories such as artists, clergymen, musicians and pharmacists are omitted; these are placed in Level II. For more details see pp. 439-440 in MORTALITY BY OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL as cited above. The basic data with extensive adjustments were based on death certificates of males who died during 1950. The adjustments because of omitted or incomplete

by *Occupational Level* are presented and analyzed for 26 groups of occupations classified further into five socio-economic or occupation levels. Data are tabulated for farmers and farm laborers, but because of ambiguities these data are excluded in the analysis by occupational level. These levels are similar to those used in England in the Registrar-General's reports rather than the usual classification based on Alba Edwards' work. Deaths of males between 20 and 64 years old who were reported as students, Armed Forces members, inmates of institutions or "never worked" were omitted. The abbreviated classification is as follows: I, Professional workers; II, Technical, administrative and managerial workers, except farm; III, Clerical, sales and skilled workers; IV, Semiskilled workers; V, Laborers except farm; and finally in addition to these five socio-economic groups, VI, Agricultural workers which includes farmers and farm laborers. The occupational bases and incidence of mortality by cause, color and age are presented as well as standardized mortality ratios for an occupation-cause-color group. The population bases and incidence were used to compute conventional rates which are reported here in addition to the standard mortality ratios.

The data in the present study show that for American white males suicide and homicide rates are highest among the unskilled. And both suicide and homicide tend to decrease as occupational level

entries are described in *Special Reports, Vol. 53, No. 2*. This report also reviews some of the difficulties, past and present, of collecting and collating these kinds of data. For other methodological problems see Vol. 53, No. 1 and No. 2.

TABLE 1
DEATH BY SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE FOR WHITE AND NON-WHITE MALES, AGES 20-64, BY
OCCUPATIONAL LEVELS, 1950

Color and Occupational Level	Population	Suicide Rate			Homicide Rate			Sum of Homicide-Suicide Rates
		No.	per 100,000	SMR*	No.	per 100,000	SMR	
White								
I	1,548,213	333	21.5	—	36	2.3	—	23.8
II	3,677,454	822	22.4	86	132	3.6	29	25.9
III	14,341,794	3480	24.3	99	652	4.5	35	28.8
IV	8,690,181	1984	22.8	102	532	6.1	46	29.0
V	2,877,923	1035	36.0	147	310	10.8	85	46.7
VI	4,573,957	1625	35.5	136	401	8.8	71	44.3
Total	35,709,522	9279	26.0	105	2063	5.8	44	
Non-White								
I	19,851	5	—	—	1	—	—	—
II	118,508	12	10.1	—	43	36.3	307	46.4
III	556,243	65	11.7	51	227	40.8	311	52.5
IV	1,168,891	104	8.9	41	555	47.5	354	56.4
V	1,233,419	139	11.3	50	1666	135.1	1022	146.3
VI	742,361	501	14.1	59	629	84.7	662	98.9
Total	3,839,273	430	11.2	48	3121	81.3	603	
Grand Total	39,548,795	9709	24.5	100	5184	13.1	100	

* The standardized mortality ratio (S.M.R.) is the ratio of tabulated to the expected deaths for an occupation-color group. The expected deaths are calculated by using the age-specified death rates by cause for the entire population, in this case all males, all occupations, 20-64, and applying them to the age distribution of the color-occupation group.

risers, but the differences among levels are small except for the unskilled. In contrast, the suicide rates for Negro males are low, about half the comparative white rates, and vary very little among levels. On the other hand, Negro homicide rates are very high among the other occupational levels analyzed, with a tendency to decrease with rise in occupational level. In this paper the professional Negro male rates are eliminated or analyzed with caution because of the small population base.

Although the attempts to explain homicide vary a great deal, observation as to the frequency among the socio-economic classes are in general agreement: homicide in America is more common in the lower classes and more frequent among Negroes as compared to whites. By and large the incidence of death by homicide stands in close relationship to the incidence of murderers by class and race; that is, the offender and the victim usually belong to the

same race and class.² Looking at Table 1 for homicide, it is apparent that the greatest variation among Negroes is between class V Negro males and the other classes. Class V has a rate of 135.1, which is nearly three times that of the next highest rate, 47.5 for class IV Negro males. Only one homicide death occurred among the 19,851 Negro males at the professional level. Omitting this group, the homicide rate decreases as occupational levels increase. The white homicide rate is also highest, 10.8, among class V unskilled laborers, and decreases by occupational level to a rate of 2.3 among class I, professionals. The lowest Negro rate of class II is about three and a half times

²In this discussion the rates presented are for homicide victims yet we are also trying to characterize the offender. There are both difficulties and hazards in doing this. The race, sex and class distribution of offenders is not necessarily that of victims and probably the greatest variation is for sex; in contrast, the race of victims and offender is usually the same.

greater than the highest white rate as found in class V.

Examining the suicide rates in Table 1, one finds that the highest rate is 36.0 for class V, white male unskilled workers. Rates for the other occupational levels for white males range from 21.5 to 24.3. Among Negro males the rates vary from 8.9 for class IV, semiskilled workers, to 11.7 for class III, clerical, sales and skilled workers; in class I, 5 suicides were recorded. In general, high suicide rates characterize white males, especially the class V laborers. In comparative terms, suicide is a white male phenomenon and homicide a Negro male phenomenon, and in each instance the highest rate is in class V. For all occupational levels I to V, the white suicide rate per 100,000 was 24.6 compared to the Negro rate of 10.5 and the white homicide rate was 5.3 compared to 80.5 for Negroes.

EXPLANATORY THEORIES

Whatever conceptual or theoretical framework is used to explain these data it must explain why in general and by occupational level the Negro suicide rate is low compared to the white and why the suicide rate is dramatically highest among unskilled white males combined. Slight deviations in the data contrary to this statement can probably be eliminated by further refinement of the occupational levels, classification of suicide and homicide cases. Considering the races separately, the white suicide and homicide rates vary together and inversely with occupational level. For Negro males, although the homicide rates decrease with an increase of occupational status, the suicide rates show very little variation.

Gibbs and Martin state that "the suicide rate of a population varies inversely with the degree of status integration in that population."³ Furthermore two statuses with conflicting roles are less frequently occupied, for example, male-doctor compared to female-doctor or male-doctor compared to male-ditchdigger or female-pilot compared to male-pilot. For some status configurations the notion works out, for instance, the frequencies found in the marital status positions of single-married, widowed, divorced. The least occupied

³ GIBBS & MARTIN, *STATUS INTEGRATION AND SUICIDE, A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY*, 27 (1964). For a recent criticism and reply see: Chambliss and Steele, *Status Integration and Suicide: an Assessment* and Gibbs and Martin, *On Assessing the Theory of Status Integration and Suicide*, both in 31 *AMER. SOC. REV.* 524-541 (1966).

categories have the highest suicide rates. The authors recognize that if this method is applied to occupational integration, the differential frequencies as found are due to factors other than that of status incompatibility. In fact, several alternate methods are suggested: one, a measure of difference between observed and chance expectancies; the other, based on the proportion of, say, physicians in given configurations rather than the proportion of persons in a given configuration who are physicians. In short, they do recognize the limitations of their original measure for status integration for occupation. However, in Chapter IV, they use the occupation measures to obtain total weighted status integrations which include color, age and sex for status.⁴ These rates are then displayed for selected states with their mean annual suicide rate, and coefficients of correlation usually show an inverse relationship.

The authors feel that if more statuses were added to the total integration measure, for instance marital, parental and religious statuses, the total integration measure could be improved.⁵ Adding more statuses may yield a seemingly better measure merely because the additional status weights will finally mask the distorting effects of the occupation weights. It does seem more than plausible that people holding conflicting statuses are less numerous than those holding compatible statuses. But as they recognize, it is also true that some occupational statuses are less frequently occupied because of the degree of skill or talent needed, or because societal needs are easily satisfied by a few people. Low relative frequency of occupancy may be a necessary but not sufficient criterion to identify statuses which are incompatible.

Powell in 1958 presented one of the few studies directly relating occupation and suicide. Based on the male population of Tulsa, Oklahoma between 1937 and 1956, he made an analysis of 426 suicides for those over 14 years of age.⁶ A detailed analysis for 316 white males was made according to standard census occupational categories which are further classified into five occupational types from Class I, Professional-Managerial to Class V, Unskilled workers; Service occupations were excluded. Powell found that with the exception of

⁴ *Op. cit.*, 67-85.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 57.

⁶ Powell, *Occupation, Status and Suicide: Toward a Redefinition of Anomie*, 23 *AMER. SOC. REV.* 131-139 (1958).

Class I, the suicide rate increased as socio-economic occupation decreased. This finding is very similar to the one presented here, yet there is an important difference; the rates of Class I were the second highest, 35.4 compared to 38.7 for unskilled labor. The data for 9,279 white male suicides in the present study show that the differences by occupational level are small except for the unskilled, and the rates of occupational level I and II are the lowest.

Durkheim's assertion that poverty is a restraint on suicide is not verified by these data.⁷ Poverty does not restrain the poor white nor does affluence encourage the well-to-do. One could assert that poverty restrains the poor Negro but then what restrains those Negroes who are better off? Perhaps anomie, regarded as the participation in integrative institutions, may yield a more plausible explanation.⁸ If anomie is taken to mean family disorganization, and lack of being integrated into social life, then the Negro, especially in the lower socio-economic level, should be affected by a high suicide rate. However, if anomie is taken as the harmony of means and needs, a dilemma emerges. Perhaps the internalized means and needs of the Negro are in harmony; however, the commonly held view is that this is not the case. If it is not, then again the suicide rate should be higher and there should be some contrast between the poor and those who are well-off. It may well be that Negroes are not in an anomic condition and are participants in a strongly integrated subculture. In any case, if this sort of anomie prevails it does not explain the low incidence of suicide among Negroes.

There is, of course, the notion of anomie as a sudden status change. This, of course, has not generally occurred for most Negroes. If such cases exist they should be found more often among upper and middle class Negroes; but their rate varies little from that of the lower classes. In the case of the white suicide rates, anomie may be a useful concept but the attribution of anomie would have to be reversed from that of Durkheim, and it makes sense to assert that the poor suffer more from lack

of integrative institutions and a disharmony of needs and means. In contrast, those occupational levels which are more affluent are engaged in a socially patterned life which is more integrative and enjoy to a greater extent a harmony of needs and means. For whites, this point of view may be supported by the evidence of the greater prevalence of social pathologies among the lower classes compared to the middle and upper classes.

Elaborating Durkheim's approach, Henry and Short make the statement that suicide is positively associated with status.⁹ As seen above, this proposition does not hold if occupational levels are used as a measure of status. In their study, the measures of status are largely ascriptive: male vs. female, married vs. single, young vs. old, etc., and the data with a few exceptions, of which they are aware, support their conceptual scheme. Among their conclusions they state: "We predict that Negroes who commit homicide are concentrated disproportionately in the lower classes of the Negro community while Negroes who commit suicide are disproportionately in the upper classes of the Negro community."¹⁰ The data as presented in the present study do not confirm this.

Henry and Short attempt to synthesize economic, sociological and psychological aspects of suicide and homicide. In doing this they make use of Durkheim's concepts and an aggression-frustration hypothesis for which the dynamics are explicated in relation to social constraints and child rearing. This frame of reference is used to explain differentials in the suicide and homicide rates which occur in association with changes in the business cycle or status positions in the social structure. In general, they suggest that those people who are of subordinate status and intensely involved in social relationships with others should have high homicide rates and low suicide rates. The direction of aggression, inwardly or outwardly, would be related to child training and whether the superego is adequate or inadequate. Strict or adequate superegos are developed in situations where the withdrawal of love techniques of discipline are used and the mother is the dominant disciplinary figure. Strict superegos lead to the inhibition of aggression and suicide rather than homicide.¹¹

⁷ DURKHEIM, SUICIDE (Translated by Spaulding and Simpson and Edited by Simpson (1951).) References to this classic work are extensive and if each were cited the number of footnotes would be overwhelming. Because most sociologists are very familiar with SUICIDE a minimum of footnotes are listed.

⁸ For an excellent review of the concept "anomie" and the difficulties of interpretation and use see, CLINARD, (ED.), ANOMIE AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR: A DISCUSSION AND CRITIQUE (1964). See the appendix for a classified inventory of empirical studies and an annotated bibliography of theoretical studies.

⁹ HENRY & SHORT, JR., SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE 16 (1954).

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, 123-124.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, 60-119. For another criticism see, RECKLESS, THE CRIME PROBLEM 138-140, 147-148 (3d ed. 1961).

Serious assumptions and elaborations must be made in this theory if it is to fit the present data. For our data, the simplest interpretation would assert that all whites regardless of class are more often characterized by adequate and strict superegos and evidenced by the fact that for any class the suicide rate is always higher than the homicide rate. For Negroes, the opposite would be true. For any class the homicide rate is always higher than the suicide rate and this would be explained by inadequate superegos.

However, to establish an interpretation of these rates on the differential distribution of strict superegos presents major difficulties in view of the meager evidence available. The sort of superego prevalent among lower class Negroes is problematical. For instance, it is asserted that a strict superego develops where the mother is the dominant disciplinary figure. If this is so, then lower class Negroes should have a high rather than low suicide rate, for very frequently mothers are the only, as well as dominant, disciplinary figure. Furthermore, the homicide rate should be low. For the lower class whites who, compared to other white males, have the highest homicide and suicide rates, one must assert that they have a disproportionate number of both strict and weak superegos.

It does, however, seem reasonable to regard suicide and homicide as forms of hostility which are the outcomes of the dynamics of frustration-aggression, and perhaps a simpler model would fit. One then might regard whites as less frustrated than Negroes and the upper classes as least frustrated. Applying this notion to the data, it seems to fit the homicide rates for both races; all Negro rates (except class I) are higher than any white rates, but decrease by class within the Negro social structure; furthermore, the white rates decrease by class. Applied to suicide, however, the scheme breaks down. A weak case may be made for white suicide, but the idea fails to explain the Negro suicide rates.

An approach which comes immediately to mind is to vary the targets of the hostility induced by the frustration-aggression according to cultural and social norms rather than superego structure. For example, it seems plausible that the white dominant social system encourages or at least condones the physical hostility of Negroes if it is directed toward other Negroes. If this were true for homicide it would also be consistent for the dominant whites to be indifferent to and perhaps even to encourage suicide among Negroes. In regard to

homicide, the suggestion would receive some support by an analysis of differential justice, but for suicide the barest hint of evidence is lacking. Other norms may, of course, be operating.

Another possible explanation one may consider is egoistic suicide, which is, according to Durkheim, the most prevalent form. This condition is brought about by increasing individuation as the result of greater literacy, the autonomy of individual conscience, free inquiry, desire for learning, etc. Immunity increases with the size of the family and increased integration with political society. It does seem that Negroes would be affected slightly by these conditions, which may account for their low suicide rate. Most students would agree that egoistic conditions do not represent the most salient pattern in the Negro population, nor are Negroes integrated with the political-economic system. Durkheim assigns some but not a great effect to minority group status as conferring some immunity, which in order to protect and maintain itself practices the higher morality in regard to suicide. As objects of inescapable hostility minority members abandon the idea of conciliating the dominant group.¹² Furthermore, egoistic suicide and homicide are stated to be antagonistic, and accordingly an increase in egoistic homicide could keep suicide rates down. However, he does not characterize the egoistic state for homicide. If it is the same as outlined above for suicide it hardly applies to the Negro. Homicide and suicide which are egoistic will not flourish together, yet altruistic suicide and homicide may get along well together.

Durkheim does give examples of altruistic homicide which occur in defense of institutional life; for example, family life and family honor. This type of homicide is probably not prevalent among Negroes. Finally, anomic conditions are said to encourage both suicide and homicide. However, in the present instance the homicide rates are high and the suicide rates are low. The dramatic contrast of suicide-homicide rates for whites and Negroes may indicate that we are dealing with two separate cultural systems with some important differences in their collective sanctions, values and regulatory systems. It may well be that historically the American Negro has developed a different value system or morality in regard to suicide as compared to the general white community. Elkins notes, and others have

¹² DURKHEIM, *op. cit.*, 156-158.

pointed out, that the enslavement of Indians failed. They either escaped or died in captivity. The Negro experience is described as analogous to the concentration camp. New values are acquired in order to survive and "... to give up the struggle meant to commit 'passive suicide' ...". In the concentration camps suicides were relatively rare and "... tended to occur during the first days of internment, and only one mass suicide is known ...".¹³ Relative to survival and accommodation, Elkins explores the childlike situation of the slave and the concentration camp prisoner—one of abject dependency on a few significant others with no degree of independence, no competition, no privacy, unquestioning obedience to the masters. If personality is the set of roles the individual plays, then the slave was limited. Further explanation does not look to the cruelty of the father, master or system, but rather the abnormal dependency of the child, slave or prisoner.¹⁴

There was a difference between the typical slave in the United States and the typical slave in Latin American countries. Laws in Latin America facilitated manumission, and the slave could acquire money, marry in the church, buy his own freedom. Cruelties and brutalities were common enough but had a remedy at law and were punishable. In South America, "He remained a person even while he was a slave."¹⁵ In the United States the slave had a single, pervasive, nearly childlike role. It seems that as a tactic of resistance or rebellion, suicide, perhaps understandably, was never widespread among American Negro slaves, and when it did occur, Aptheker reports that, "planters tended to keep news of suicide from the other Negroes." He cites one occasion during which "... mass suicide occurred; in this case two boatloads of newly-arrived Negroes starved themselves to death."¹⁶ This report fits the analogy Elkins makes with concentration groups. It is difficult to prove, yet it does seem, that suicide was neither common nor encouraged among American slaves. The cultural history of the American Negro perhaps does not emphasize suicide as a resistant or rebellious tactic nor as a "way out". Stamppp mentions suicide to

say "... a few desperate slaves carried the form of resistance to the extreme of self-destruction ...". He further points out that this was true of those fresh from Africa or about to be sold away from friends or relatives.¹⁷

What are the general conditions presently for the Negroes of the lower classes? He is poor, uneducated, lives in slums. He has, if not a disorganized, at least a different sort of family life. He lives in a "closed society". Notions involved in a comparison of "open" and "closed" societies may be related to the incidence of suicide and homicide. An open society is made up of classes in which the achievement rather than the ascription of status is emphasized, rational solutions to problems are sought, personal decisions and personal freedom are prized. Carried to an extreme, the open society could become the "abstract" society which is depersonalized and social relationships are completely contractual.¹⁸ The open society is built to accept a certain amount of social change as well as dissension. In contrast, the closed society is a tribal, caste or estate social system in which taboos and conventions are held in high regard. Ascriptive status spells out nearly all the rights and duties of the people in the closed society; loyalty, fealty and honor are the important virtues.

Among open societies, and closed societies as well, there are important differences and one of these is the nature and role of the myths which help justify the normative system. In the United States, the lower classes are taught an egalitarian doctrine including equality of opportunity which leads to achievement and awards of status distinction. American society has been perhaps more open than most others but the myth has been used partially to contain and content the lower classes, and the Negroes have indeed been excluded from the open society. It is questionable whether they believe in the myth to the extent that lower class whites do. This statement is made in spite of the literature on comparison of Negroes and whites in regard to achievement, aspirations etc. Much of this literature shows the Negro sharing the myth but the measurement of these attitudes is somewhat primitive. American Negroes belong to a closed society held in tow and in a symbiotic relationship to quasi-open white society.

¹³ ELKINS, *SLAVERY. A PROBLEM IN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE*. See 110-111, 114 (1963).

¹⁴ ELKINS, *op. cit.*, 122 and 126-132.

¹⁵ TANNENBAUM, *SLAVE AND CITIZEN: THE NEGRO IN THE AMERICAS* 92-93, 98 (1963).

¹⁶ APTHEKER, *AMERICAN NEGRO SLAVE REVOLTS* 142-143 (1963).

¹⁷ STAMP, *THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION, SLAVERY IN THE ANTE-BELLUM SOUTH* 128-129, 203 (1956).

¹⁸ POPPER, *THE OPEN SOCIETY AND ITS ENEMIES* (2 Vols., 1963). See Vol. 1, p. 174.

Earlier the closed society was described as a tribal one or one made up of castes or estates in which taboos and conventions ruled. Modern totalitarian societies are "arrested closed societies". They have developed from feudal estate systems. They seem to accept several of the criteria of the open society such as rationality and social change.¹⁹ However, rationality is for the elite who consciously create myths so that the masses may recapture the folk or tribal spirit, and social change is planned on the basis of a secular eschatology. Regimentation of beliefs and behavior are part of the system.

It may be that in closed autonomous societies, suicides are infrequent and altruistic; in open societies they are more frequent and fit Durkheim's notion of egoism characterized by individuation, superficially held shared beliefs and secularism. Open societies also may vary in how closely the myths describe the reality of the social system and how deeply and widely the pertinent aspects of the belief system are held.²⁰ The history and origins of closed societies or strata may differ. For instance, some of those which originated from conquest or slavery may on examination manifest lack of cohesion and loss of family ties. In the United States, the low suicide rate of the Negro may be due to historical circumstances which led to the development of a negative attitude toward suicide as a way out and a social position in which egoism is nearly lacking and altruism barely emerges. It is a community of despair and anger, resentment, apathy and resignation.

General sociological theories of murder and death by homicide are rare.²¹ Cultural and sub-cultural aspects have in recent years received from sociologists the most attention. Wolfgang delineates the subcultures of violence in the lower social classes and especially among the lower class Negroes.²² The violence of the subculture

may, however, not be limited to the lower class white and Negroes, for the rates are also quite high among class II, III, and IV Negro males. In brief, Negroes of whatever class, not only the lower class, cannot entirely escape the subculture of violence because they live and work largely in a closed society. It has already been asserted that suicide rates in the closed-autonomous society would be low and indeed the same may be said of homicide. The closed society, however, presents itself in one condition where homicide may be high; this is especially true when the closed society is held in tow, held in a caste-like position. This is the condition of the Negro in America. The closed society for them is not autonomous but a caste arrangement. This is not the condition of all other minority groups. Those groups which voluntarily maintain their own system and are permitted by the dominant culture to achieve some positions would not be characterized by high homicide rates. Yet, some Negroes do get out of the lower class and still have a high homicide rate. They are segregated and cannot escape the subculture of violence.

It seems that most homicides are committed where there is a close relationship between the victims and offenders and involves family, relatives, friends and acquaintances. In sociological terms homicide occurs largely within primary groups. In view of the fact that in the United States most homicides occur among the Negro classes, it seems that a sociological theory of homicides may be developed if there were more data on the functions and meaning of primary group relationships within the Negro social structure. Primary groups for some strata, especially the closed society held in tow, in which associational relationships are comparatively lacking, may function more intensely because they encompass nearly all of the social relationships from which personality extensions and social satisfactions can be derived. The material base of these relationships is known and difficult to maintain, and when the minimum manifestation of manliness and individuality are threatened, homicide is the final defense, the final assertion, the final claim.

A positive change, relative to the white social system, in material and economic conditions of Negroes should decrease their homicide rate if the structure and significance of primary group

of Violence: An Integrated Conceptualization in WOLFGANG & FERRACUTI, *THE SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE* (1967).

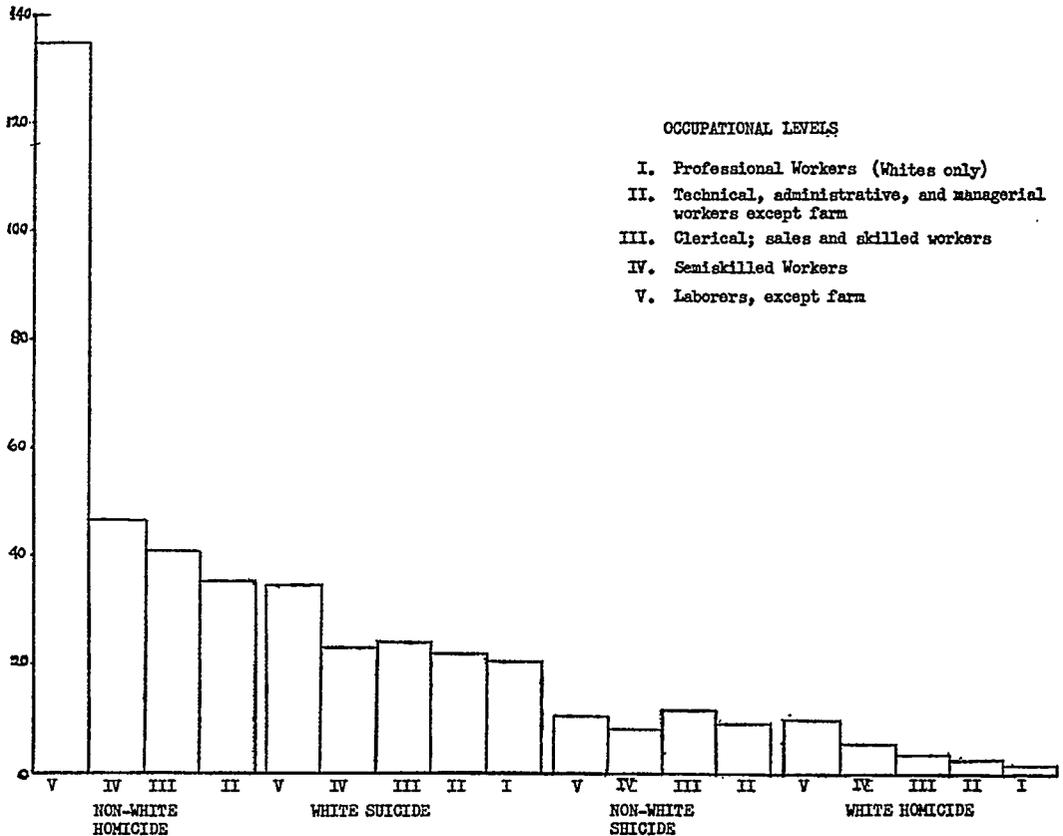
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 10, *passim*.

²⁰ These remarks on the role of myth are perhaps too brief but of course could be elaborated, especially in relation to the many suggestions in Merton's classical essay *Social Structure and Anomie*. See for example footnotes 4, 21, 29, and 35 to Ch. IV in MERTON, *SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE* (1949).

²¹ BOHANNAN, EDITOR, *AFRICAN HOMICIDE AND SUICIDE* (1960). For a quick review see Ch. I, *Theories of Homicide and Suicide*. Ch. IX on *Patterns of Murder and Suicide* has a number of analytical and theoretical suggestions. Both chapters are by Bohannan. Also see, WEST, *MURDER FOLLOWED BY SUICIDE* (1965) Ch. X, *Social Determinants of Murder or Suicide*.

²² WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* 188-189, 329-330 (1958). Also see Ch. III, *Subculture*

CHART I
 SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE DEATH RATES PER 100,000, WHITE AND NON-WHITE MALES AGES 20-64, BY OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL, 1950.



relationships became less tenuous and secondary relationships increased. Briefly, the Negro homicide rate would decrease if they became part of the open society. This also would be true of lower class whites. The open society has a high suicide rate because the social relationships become increasingly impersonal and contractual and the social system tends toward the "abstract society", which Popper purposely illustrates with exaggeration as one in which people seldom meet face to face, go about in closed cars, communicate by mechanical means and life in isolation.²³ Such a society, of course, would have a low homicide rate.

Generally, the position taken in this paper has been that in the open society suicide rates are comparatively higher than homicide rates and that the rates vary together and decrease with

an increase in class. In the closed society in a dependent caste position, homicide rates are comparatively much higher than suicide rates and decrease as class increases; suicide is low and should decrease as class increases. The data here show this as a tendency for Negro male suicide but the variation is slight which suggests that the social conditions leading to suicide do not differ much among the several strata within the Negro closed system. Finally, in the case of the autonomous closed societies, homicide and suicide rates would be comparatively low, homicide always being higher, although both may be equal where rates are quite low.

The data as plotted on Chart I barely suggest that ideally homicide and suicide vary together and the anomalous data for this ideal model are the Negro suicide rates. The "ideal model" argument suggests that Negro suicide rates, especially

²³ POPPER, *op. cit.*, 174, Vol. I.

in the lower class, should be higher. This indeed may be the case if there were a basis for adjusting the data, such as the notion of "victim precipitated homicide," as elaborated by Wolfgang who places in this category those cases in which the victim is the first to use physical force, use a deadly weapon, strike a blow etc. Infidelity, vile names etc. do not serve as criteria.²⁴

In his Philadelphia study, a third of the Negro male and a fourth of the white male victims were classified as victim-precipitated homicides. If these victim-precipitated homicides are classified as suicides, as Wolfgang suggested,²⁵ that is, as people who almost asked to be killed—then the adjusted rates would show that the white and non-white suicide rates move closer together and the variation among all classes, except lower class whites or non-whites, is negligible. Homicide would continue to follow a pattern that shows variation both by caste and class and increases as caste and class decrease. In brief, homicide fits the ideal model, but even with the assumed correction suicide does not, and appears to have a notably higher incidence in the lower class of either caste. At present, there are no other data that allow this correction to be applied differentially to the several social classes. However, the notion of victim precipitated homicide does point out that a large proportion of homicides may reasonably be classified as suicides.

Not having a rationale to apply the correction differentially to each class, an alternative would be to regard suicide and homicide as acts of violence and add them together rather than separate them. If this is done and the rates within each occupational level are summed, then a decrease in caste and class is paralleled by an increase in violence so that the upper class white males have the lowest summed rates and the Negro lower class the highest. The summed occupational level rates for the whites are: I, 23.8; II, 25.9; III, 28.8; IV, 29.0; V, 46.7. The summed rates for the non-whites are: II, 46.4; III, 52.5; IV, 56.4; V, 146.3. The constant increase in the rates as one decreases in caste and class has one small deviation, the move from level V for whites, 46.7 to level II for non-whites, 46.4.

²⁴ WOLFGANG, PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE 252. For the correction factor which follows see Table 28, p. 256.

²⁵ WOLFGANG, *Suicide by Means of Victim Precipitated Homicide*, 20 J. CLIN. & EXPER. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY & Q. REV. PSYCHIATRY & NEURO. 335-349 (1959).

EMPIRICALLY DERIVED HYPOTHESES

It must be conceded that perhaps all the theories examined or suggested here could be discarded, and that for the present, we should rely only on empirical descriptive generalizations yielded by the data to generate prediction.

There are two racial groups, two types of death and five social classes; the agricultural workers are omitted. The data are insufficient for computing Negro upper class suicide and homicide. Thus, 18 points may be plotted and these could possibly have 18! arrangements ($18 \times 17 \times 16, \dots \times 2 \times 1$), but the observed points do fall into a pattern and do not make up a random collection.

A set of assumptions may be made in order to explain the observed pattern:

I. In a social system made up of an open society with a closed society in tow, the open one will direct violence inwardly, the closed one outwardly.

Implication: for whites, suicide rates will be higher than homicide rates, and for non-whites, homicide rates will be higher than suicide rates.

II. The rate of the typical form of violence in the closed group is higher than the typical form of violence in the open group. Furthermore, the rate of the atypical form of violence in the closed group is higher than the rate of the atypical form of violence in the open groups.

Implication: The rate of non-white homicide is higher than the rate of white suicide, and the non-white suicide rate is higher than the white homicide rate.

III. The rates of violence will increase as class decreases.

Implication: Homicide and suicide rates within both societies will increase as social class decreases.

Combining Assumptions I and II, there are only two possible outcomes:

$$(1) \quad NH > NS > WS > WH$$

$$(2) \quad NH > WS > NS > WH$$

The second outcome fits a graph constructed with the original data not modified by the notion of victim-precipitated homicide. Explicated, this means that non-white homicide rates of any

occupational level are always higher than any occupational level rate in the other three color-cause-of-death categories. Furthermore, the same is true of the white suicides in relation to non-white suicides and white homicides; and, finally, the same is true of the occupational levels for

non-white suicides compared to white homicides.

Admittedly this is in no sense either an explanation or a prediction of results. However, the assumptions may be regarded as generating some predictions which could be tested by some other set of data than those displayed here.