

**SCOTS-IRISH WOMEN AND THE SOUTHERN CULTURE OF
VIOLENCE: THE INFLUENCE OF SCOTS-IRISH FEMALES ON HIGH
RATES OF SOUTHERN VIOLENCE**

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has documented a higher rate of violent crime within the South relative to other U.S. regions. Some scholars argue that higher rates of violence in the South are due to the lasting effect of the unique culture of the Scots-Irish immigrants that came into the U.S. in the mid-1700's. Though there is a large body of literature examining the link between culture and violence in the South, an implicit assumption of this line of study is that the cultural effect occurs largely within the white male population in rural Southern areas. No study, to our knowledge, has extended this thesis to females. We address this omission in prior analyses by empirically testing the Southern Culture of Violence thesis using female arrest rates. Drawing on county-level ancestry data from the 2000 Census and UCR Supplementary Homicide Report data, we estimate a series of negative binomial regression models. A conclusion and discussion of the results follow.

Over the past two decades scholars have devoted a great deal of effort to understanding the role of culture in rates of homicide in the Southern region of the U.S. (Ellison 1991; Huff-Corzine, Corzine, and Moore 1986; Lofton and Hill 1974; Messner 1983a). Historically, the South has always exhibited higher rates of violence since the late 1700's (Gastil 1971; Hackney 1969). When seeking to explain this enduring regional difference, many scholars attribute high rates of violence to the lingering effects of a unique culture that the Scots-Irish immigrants brought with them when they migrated to the Southern United States (McWhiney 1988; Sowell 2005; Webb 2005).

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Scholars arguing for the Southern culture of violence believe that the high violence rates in the South are due to a culture of violence that is maintaining itself in the South through the socialization process (Gastil 1971; Hackney 1969; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). Researchers have garnered substantial evidence that the degree of 'Southernness' in the culture is a more powerful predictor of rates of homicide and violence than socioeconomic factors, such as educations, age, or economic status (Gastil 1971).

Despite the strength of the 'Southern' effect on homicide, researchers have identified several important exceptions to the culture of violence thesis. First, regional differences in rates of homicide attributed to cultural differences are limited to the non-Hispanic white population (Cohen and Nisbett 1998). Second, researchers have also noted that the Southern culture effect is more pronounced in rural rather than urban areas (Ayers 1991). When tested in empirical analyses, scholars have tested the culture of violence thesis using statistics on all homicides for all white residents or for white males exclusively.

Interestingly, little is known about female homicide and no study to our knowledge has formally evaluated the lasting effects of the Scots-Irish on the Southern culture of violence among females. What we do know from prior studies is that the strongest predictor of female homicide rates is region indicating that Southern female homicide rates are substantially higher than those in the non-South (DeWees and Parker 2003). In addition, other scholars have suggested that structural processes that influence homicide rates may not be equivalent for men and women (Haynie and Armstrong 2006; Lee and Stevenson 2006).

These findings regarding cultural effects on female homicide rates suggest two theoretical expectations. First, although prior research suggests that structural processes influencing female homicide rates may be different, the influence of culture may be uniform. Thus, the Southern culture of violence may exert a similar effect on both men and women. Alternatively, cultural influences on homicide may not uniformly affect men and women. The role of the 'Southern woman' is believed to be/have been instrumentally different from the role of women in other regions of the United States. The patriarchal hierarchy of Southern families (Glass 1988) and belief in more traditional sex roles place women into more subordinate positions in the South (Lynxwiler and Wilson 1988). Steffensmeier and Terry (1986) find that there are beliefs that crime is typically considered the man's work and women are not suited for criminal behavior.

To address this research question, we test these two competing explanations of the effect of Southern culture on female homicide rates. We begin by reviewing

literature on the Southern culture of violence and refine this approach to develop a gender specific macro explanation of female violent crime. Drawing on data from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing and 1998-2002 Uniform Crime Reports Supplementary Homicide Reports, we empirically test our hypotheses. Our findings suggest that cultural processes have inconsistent effects by gender and contribute to the growing body of literature on gender specific explanations of violent crime.

THE SOUTHERN CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

Several interpretations locate the roots of the Southern culture of violence in the antebellum frontier heritage of the South. The argument stipulates that the South remained a frontier society for much longer than the North, and the historical elements particular to the frontier days such as dueling to settle arguments, a love for military, and better skills with a rifle or knife, have fostered a culture within the South that condones violence (Cash 1941; Gastil 1971; Redfield 1880). This condoning of violence, however, has been documented to be selective in nature. Historically, it is associated with an exaggerated code of honor among white Southerners (Franklin 1956), and was distributed across the class structure as observed in the tradition of the “duel” among elites (cf. Cooney 1997). The Scots-Irish may have played a unique role in the formation of this culture.

The Scots-Irish settled in the United States in three phases of migration, mostly from the Scottish highlands, the English borderlands, and Ulster County, Ireland. They began to migrate in the 1690's, and especially between 1717 and 1775, before the American Revolution. They initially settled in Pennsylvania, and throughout the years, they settled in the Appalachian mountain region and swiftly trickled throughout the South.

These immigrants were characterized as a culture of filthy and rowdy people. In fact, a “rough and tumble” style of fighting often occurred in the Scottish highlands. They were considered backwards, with their different religious traditions and herding lifestyles that are frequently considered to have a ‘culture of honor’ with which intimidation or threat is usually dealt with by violence. This herding lifestyle included an idea of individualism, personal honor, and distrust of formal social control mechanisms and their authority figures because individuals and the communities in which they live typically had to deal with their enemies on their own (Nisbett and Cohen 1996).

Ethnic and personal honor and family loyalty were imperative among the Scots-Irish even after they settled in the Southern United States (Webb 2005). “Most Southerners believed just as did their Celtic ancestors that under certain

circumstances to kill was honorable; to steal was dishonorable” (McWhiney 1988:166-67). These men would act as the sole protectors of what they considered theirs at any cost. The Scots-Irish often participated in ‘renegade justice’ techniques to protect what was theirs (Webb 2005).

The Scots-Irish in the South believed that they had the special skill of adapting to any battleground on which they found themselves. Every healthy man was part of the militia and the women knew that they could run the farm and household when the men left to fight. Children grew up learning how to hunt, fight and use weapons to defend their families. After the Civil War, Southerners, including the Scots-Irish, showed strong participation in the military (Webb 2005).

The religious beliefs of the Scots-Irish immigrants also played a role in their high rates of violence. They were the predecessors of the fundamentalist Christians of today, they were considered the first radicals in America (Webb 2005) Some research suggests the favorable attitudes toward violence may have its historical and contemporary roots in the fundamentalist, Protestant religious culture of the South. It has been argued this religious world view lends support to the legitimization of both formal violence, e.g., capital punishment, and informal justice done by the hands of the populace due to low levels of formal social control agencies that, though perhaps illegal, has, or at least had historically, a source of legitimization in the religious culture (Borg 1977; Ellison, Burr, and McCall 2003; Ellison and Sherkat 1993).

This evangelical Protestantism brings along with it a tradition of specified gender roles. For many Evangelical Protestant women are relegated to ‘feminine’ roles centered on the private sphere of the home and caregiver for children (Bartkowski and Xu 2000). While men are given the role of domestic authority and afforded distinctively masculine traits such as strength and assertiveness, women are prescribed to differ willingly to their husband’s household leadership and show a submissive orientation (Ellison and Bartkowski 2002). In combination with the male dominated crime of homicide these gender roles may produce a unique situation where Southern women accept the cultural values of the Southern culture of violence yet are not permitted to act on them.

FEMALE HOMICIDE

Little extant literature exists regarding female involvement in homicide and even less research on the subject of the influence of females on the Southern culture of violence. Although men are most likely to be both the victim and the offender of homicide, females are the perpetrators in around 10% to 20% of all homicides in the

United States (Belknap 2001: 115). Previous literature points to similarities in the effects of social disorganization on both male and female homicide rates. Steffensmeier and Haynie (2000) conclude that female disadvantage variables (e.g., family disruption, poverty, racial composition, joblessness, and income inequality) are robust predictors of female homicide offending as well as male homicide offending. Furthermore, they show that female offending rates are higher in cities with higher rates of disadvantage. Education has also been linked to female homicide where higher levels of female education are associated with lowered rates of female spousal homicide (Dugan, Nagan and Rosenfeld 1999). Lastly, Whaley and Messner (2002) find that economic disadvantage is a positive and significant indicator of female homicide rates. They find this is true for both Southern and non-Southern cities.

While findings are inconsistent regarding regional variations of female homicide, several studies indicate that regional differences are in fact apparent regarding female homicide. DeWees and Parker (2003) and Smith and Brewer (1992) find that female homicide victimization is higher in the Southern region of the United States than in non-Southern regions. Lee and Stevenson (2006) examine rural female homicide rates and find percent black, male homicide offending, and a Southern region dummy to be the only significant predictors.

HYPOTHESIS

Based on our review of the literature, we identify two theoretical expectations regarding the link between the Southern culture of violence and female homicide rates. One perspective suggests that structural covariates of homicide may have similar effects for men and women (Haynie and Armstrong 2006; Steffensmeier and Haynie 2000). Following this line of thought, we would expect that the Southern culture of violence should have a uniform effect for both men and women. That is, a strong Southern cultural influence will yield a high female homicide rate.

DIFFERENTIAL ASSOCIATION/LEARNING THEORY

In contrast, an alternative perspective might suggest that the Southern culture of violence is unrelated to female violent crime. Prior research finds that the South possesses distinct gender based cultural traits and the role of the 'Southern woman' is instrumentally different from the role of women in other regions of the United States. (Glass 1988; Lynxwiler and Wilson 1988). In addition, the religious environment of the South, an overlooked component of Southern culture, is characterized by a strong conservative protestant theological tradition that

promotes highly gender specific roles (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002). This cultural context fits well with prior studies that suggest that crime is 'man's work' (Steffensmeier and Terry 1986). Based on this characterization of Southern culture, we hypothesize that a strong Southern culture should result in lower rates of female homicide because women are segregated from violent activity.

DATA AND METHODS

To test our hypotheses regarding the Southern Culture of Violence and white female homicide rates, we examine data from the 2000 Census Summary File 4 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2005) and crime data in the Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) for 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. We follow recent analyses of rural crime and utilize counties as the unit of analysis (Lee and Bartkowski 2004; Lee, Maume, and Ousey 2003; Lee and Ousey 2001; Lee and Stevenson 2006; Osgood 2000; Petee and Kowalski, 1993). The units of analysis for our analysis are all counties in the South with no more than 20,000 residents. We select counties rather than towns or Census Designated Places because some small towns rely on county-based law enforcement agencies.

Dependent Variable

Homicide is measured using counts of white female homicide offending from the Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) offender data of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). The UCR program is a voluntary city, county, state, tribal and federal law enforcement program that provides a nationwide view of crime based on the submission of statistics by law enforcement agencies throughout the country (Dept. of Justice 2005).

The white female homicide offending counts are averaged over a five-year period, 1998-2002 to dampen the year-to-year fluctuations that may arise in rare events like homicide. This is convention in the extant literature and is especially important in rural communities that experience lower rates of homicide than their metropolitan. Homicide is often cited as one of the best indicators for violent crime because nearly all homicides are reported to the police (Fox and Piquero 2003).

Independent Variables

Given our hypotheses linking Southern culture to rates of homicide offense among white females, our key independent variable is an index that captures two aspects of Southern culture. These measures include the percent of females

identifying a Scots-Irish ancestry and the percent females born in the South. The percent Scots-Irish is calculated by the sum of whites who claimed Scots-Irish as their first ancestry, those who claimed Scots-Irish as their second ancestry, and those who claimed Scots-Irish as one of several ancestries divided by the total population multiplied by one hundred. The Southern Culture index also includes the percent of the population born in the South. Huff-Corzine et al. (1986) recommend the use of percent born in the South as a measure of regional influences on homicide rates. This variable is calculated by whites who were born in a Southern county divided by the total population multiplied by one hundred. To obtain our Southern Culture Index, we created a factor score derived from these two variables using principal components analysis.

We also include several control variables in our analysis. We control for the level of socioeconomic disadvantage using three measures: female headed households with children under the age of eighteen, percent in poverty, and the percent unemployed. Due to the high level of correlation among these three measures, we introduce these measures into our model using a composite factor score using principle components analysis. We also control for sociodemographic characteristics, such as the percent of the population age 15-25, the percent black, and the natural logarithm of the number of white females in the county. Age is controlled for because crime rates are highest for those between the ages 15 and 25. The percent of the county that is black is controlled for because prior studies link rate of violent crime to racial heterogeneity (Blau and Blau 1982). Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for these variables, including the individual elements of the indices.

RESULTS

In Table 2, we report Maximum Likelihood Estimates of our negative binomial regression model of white female homicide rates. In Model 1, we assess the relationship between our Southern Culture Index and the homicide rate while controlling for population size. In this model we test the hypothesis that a high level of Southern culture is associated with a high homicide rate. Surprisingly, we find that a strong score on the Southern Culture Index is associated with a lower homicide rate among white females. This finding is unique because cultural explanations of crime utilized in prior research would suggest an opposite effect.

In Model 2, we examine the effect of Southern culture while controlling for several key covariates of homicide suggested by prior studies (Lee et al. 2003; Messner 1983a, 1983b; Sampson and Groves 1989). This model yields two

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS.

	MEAN	S. D.
Southern culture index		
% White female born in the South.....	26.00	17.01
Socioeconomic disadvantage index		
% White female in poverty.....	7.81	2.95
% White female headed families with children.....	5.75	1.81
% White female unemployed, civilian labor force.....	2.53	1.54
Percent white females graduating high school, Age 25+.	36.26	5.07
Percent white females age 15-25.	11.08	3.49
Percent black.	16.05	19.97
Population size, white (Natural log).	9.18	0.66

important findings. First, the Southern Culture Index remains a significant predictor of white female homicide rates after controlling for other covariates. This finding indicates that the unexpected relationship between Southern culture and white female homicide is not accounted for other covariates.

A second important finding in our analysis is that the Disadvantage Index is negatively associated with homicide for white females. In contrast to non-gender disaggregated analyses of crime rates, our analysis suggests that communities with higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and female headed families experience lower rates of white female homicide (Lee et al. 2003; Parker and Pruitt 2000; Krivo and Peterson 1996). This suggests that current explanations of homicide and violent crime may not map directly onto crime patterns for white females.

TABLE 2. MLE ESTIMATES OF NEGATIVE BINOMIAL REGRESSION OF WHITE FEMALE HOMICIDE RATE, 2000.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Southern culture index.....	-0.50*	0.21	-0.44***	0.22
Socioeconomic disadvantage index.....			-1.02**	0.39
Percent white females graduating high school, age 25+.....			0.08	0.05
Percent white females age 15-25.....			0.00	0.00
Percent black.....			0.00	0.01
Population size, white (Natural log).....	0.67	0.42	1.02*	0.46
Intercept.....	-15.68***	3.86	-21.47***	4.52
Pseudo R ²	0.01		0.02	

NOTE: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

CONCLUSIONS

Prior studies have failed to come to a consensus on gender specific macro explanations of female violent crime. More specifically arguments based on the Southern culture of violence's influence on Southern female homicide rates have neglected to come to a conclusion. While some studies (DeWees and Parker 2003) have found region to be a strong predictor for female homicide, other scholars have stated differences between Southern men and women that may lead to non-uniform cultural effects on homicide (Steffensmeier and Terry 1986).

We aimed our research to address this question by disaggregating homicide rates based on region and more importantly gender. Our results demonstrate that the cultural effects of homicide concerning the South are not uniform regarding gender. We found that cultural variables often associated with higher male homicide rates in the South actually oppositely affect females. In other words, the Southern culture of violence thesis does not pertain to Southern women and areas with higher percentage Southern born Scots-Irish women will be more likely to show lowered rates of female homicide.

This finding may not be so surprising when one turns to research that suggests very distinct gender based cultural traits existing in the South (Glass 1988; Lynxwiler and Wilson 1988) along with highly gender specific roles found within evangelical Protestantism (Bartkowski and Xu 2000; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002). It may be possible that the Southern culture of violence is also gender differentiated. The Southern culture of violence may in fact be unsuitable for Southern women based on already standing gender roles determining violence to be an unfeminine trait. It may also be possible that Southern females may still believe in certain cultural characteristics of the Southern culture of violence but relegate the expression of it solely to men.

Previous research has also pointed to a possibility that structural processes that influence homicide rates may not be equivalent for men and women (Lee and Stevenson 2006; Haynie and Armstrong 2006). Through disaggregation by gender our analysis shows support for different structural processes affect on female homicide. We find that structural factors often crucial to heightening levels of male homicide in fact lower levels of female homicide. This was examined in our analysis through the surprising finding that higher levels of disadvantage are significantly negatively related to female homicide.

This result may call for a reexamination of female homicide based on structural factors. While disadvantage may negatively influence male homicide, it may have drastically different effects on female homicide. For instance, disadvantaged areas

may have higher proportions of males not connected to some form of institution such as schooling or work leading to a possibility of more motivated offenders. However, factors prevalent in disadvantaged areas that lead to more motivated male offenders may oppositely affect females. That is to say that correlates of poverty such as single female households while positively related to male offending will oppositely affect female offending rates. Previous economic disadvantage variables cited in criminological literature may not be conceptualized correctly when dealing with their effect on the female population. Perhaps a female “counterculture” of violence is present that dictates that females within disadvantaged areas have heightened pressures within the private sphere that buffer their possible engagement in criminal activity.

The effect of the Southern culture of violence on Southern women does not seem to be the key element in explaining heightened female crime rates located within the Southern region of the US. Interestingly common structural processes found key to male homicide in the South also do not seem to provide any more knowledge to this question. The implications of our research seem to point to finding new unique aspects particular to Southern females and their corresponding rates of homicide. We suggest further research into the possible correlates and causal mechanisms of female homicide calling for specific attention to be paid to Southern females.

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