



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

FAMILY VIOLENCE

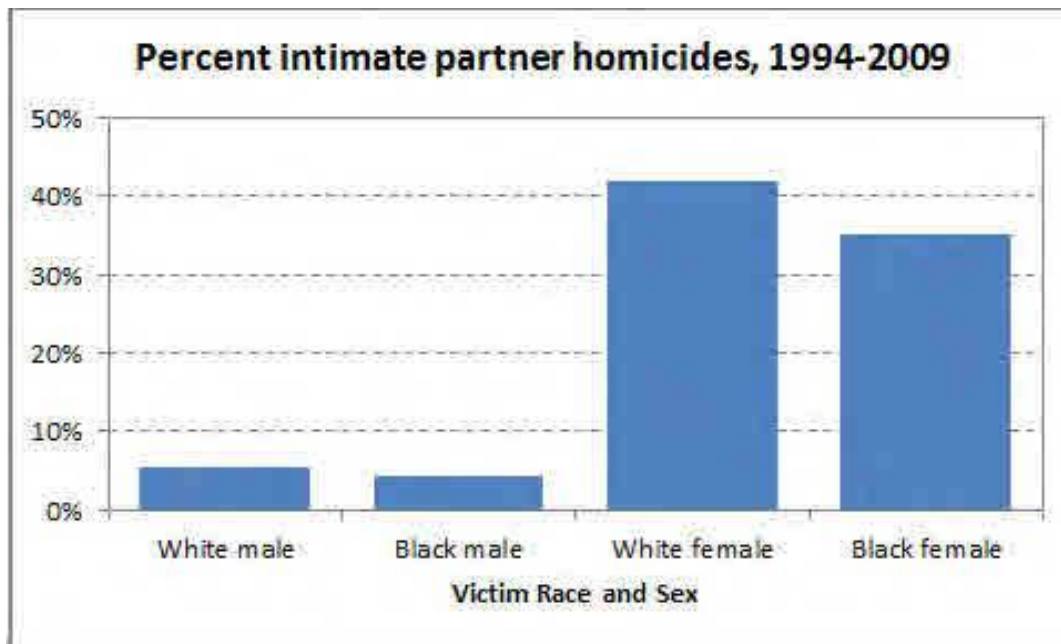
Lauren Astley's murder -- An all-too-familiar story?

Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment July 5, 2011 06:00 PM

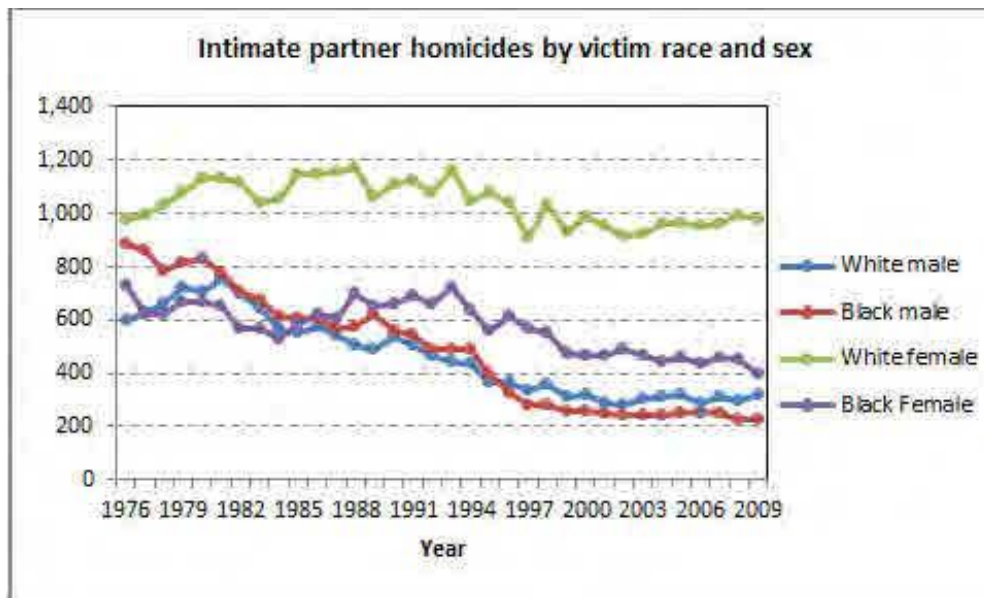
The murder of Lauren Astley, a popular, pretty and promising 18-year-old from well-to-do Wayland, came as a shock to residents of this typically safe suburb, but especially, of course, to her family and close friends. Today's arrest of Nathaniel Fujita, also 18, for suspicion of killing Astley was hardly surprising, except perhaps to his family and close friends.

At this stage, we know very little about Fujita, other than that he apparently had dated Astley for several years -- that is, until their recent break-up. But given what we do know about usual homicide patterns, the teenage boy kills former-girlfriend is an all too familiar story. Time -- and the investigation/trial -- will tell if the story was repeated here.

As shown in the figure below, white female murder victims are particularly likely to have died at the hands of a current or former intimate partner (husband or boyfriend). Since 1994 (when the federal "Violence Against Women Act" was enacted), an estimated 42% of white female murder victims have been the targets of angry, jealous, depressed or spiteful intimate partners, higher than any other victim group. The percentage of white female homicides that implicate an intimate partner increases even more, exceeding 45%, in suburban communities, like Wayland. Conversely, less than 10% of such crimes are committed by strangers.



Besides the relatively high percentage of white female murder victims who are killed by their current or former husbands or boyfriends, the incidence of such crimes has been particularly resistant to social and legal prevention efforts. Such initiatives as shelters for abuse victims and restraining orders may have had some impact in recent years in reducing the overall rate of intimate partner homicide, this is not the case for white females (and especially those killed by boyfriends). As shown in the figure below, white females are the only demographic group for whom the incidence of intimate partner homicide has remained impervious to change.



So what is it about males in and out of relationships that explains why so many are not getting the message?