

WHO IS MORE VIOLENT: THE MALE OR FEMALE POLICE OFFICER

BY

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The use of force by police officers has become a major media issue in recent weeks because of the brutal assault of Rodney King by four male members of the Los Angeles Police Department. The assault of King became a prominent news story because it was videotaped by a witness and then shown on almost every television station in the United States. People who had previously read or heard of police brutality were actually able to observe the malicious beating of King by uniformed police officers. This battering of King became even more repulsive to the public because they were also able to observe at least a dozen other police officers standing in the background observing this brutal beating and not doing anything to stop it. This incident has led to a call for more controls on the police use of force and a review and reinvestigation of all prior police brutality complaints by the Department of Justice (FBI).

Although at this time we don't know all of the circumstances surrounding the King assault, we do know that four male officers have been indicted by a Los Angeles Grand Jury. The New York City Police Department (NYCPD) has

also come under fire recently over the death of Federico Pereira who was allegedly beaten to death by five male police officers. The five officers were recently indicted for murder by a Queens Grand Jury.

When both of these cases are reviewed, it becomes evident that there were no female officers involved in either the assault or murder case. Although one female officer was on the scene during the Los Angeles incident, she did not partake in the beating. In fact, the woman officer was at the scene because she was one of the officers that initiated the chase of King for his alleged violation of Vehicle and Traffic Laws.

A review of the King, Pereira and numerous other cases involving the use of excessive force by the police shows that female officers neither use unnecessary force at the same rate as nor are they as violent as their male colleagues. This becomes more apparent when we compare the number of civilian complaints made against members of the NYCPD and equate the percentage of complaints to the proportion of male and female officers in NYCPD. In 1989, the total number of civilian complaints filed against

members of the NYCPD was 3515. Male and female representation in the department in 1989 was 87.4 percent and 12.6 percent respectively. Yet, female officers received only 5.1 percent (178) of the 3515 complaints filed against all officers. Another area for review is the use of deadly force by officers. In 1990, there was a total of 757 police officers involved in 425 shooting incidents but only 5.8 percent (44) of the officers involved were female while the proportion of women officers in the NYCPD in 1990 was 13.4 percent. Within the purview of shooting incidents are the accidental discharging of weapons and animal shootings by police officers. What becomes apparent from my review of shooting incidents, between 1983 and 1990, is that female officers neither accidentally fire their weapons nor discharge their guns at animals. My observations of female officers responding to calls where a dog, vicious or not, is present show that female officers will use some type of diversionary tactic to distract the dog and then trap the dog in a closet, basement or enclosed room. This is, of course, a far better procedure than the one used by male officers, which usually results in the firing of a gun at

the dog. The technique of isolating an animal that is used by female officers prevents the possibility of a randomly fired bullet hitting an innocent person and indicates that the preference of female officers is to avoid the use of violence whenever possible.

The reality of the information related to the proportion of shooting incidents involving female officers and the number of civilian complaints against female officers is that these figures have remained, consistently, at the same levels for the past seven years. This, of course, seems to indicate that female officers have not accepted the overly aggressive style of policing that has become the trademark of most male officers.

One would be inclined to think, from all the previously mentioned information, that women officers avoid violent encounters with citizens but, once again, this is far from the truth. A study of 3,701 violent incidents involving members of the NYCPD completed in 1987 indicated that injuries to female officers, participating in violent confrontations with citizens, are equivalent to the number

of injuries sustained by male officers in the same types of situations. In fact, it was found that female officers participated in a greater percentage of confrontations while working with partners and working alone than would have been anticipated from their representation in the NYCPD population. These findings contradicted most prior research related to how women would handle the violence related to police work. All of these facts are indicators that women are handling police work as well as and in some instances probably better than their male counterparts.

During my 21 year tenure with the NYCPD, I observed numerous situations where female officers responded to what could be considered highly volatile incident scenes. In just about every situation female officers maintained their self composure and proceeded to placate the participants without escalating encounters into violent confrontations. In one instance a female officer diminished the possibility of a domestic violence call escalating into a street altercation by speaking courteously to the participants. I have, also, observed male officers in the same type of circumstances heighten the probability of violence by