

**The Bill Blackwood
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**Women -
Strength Not a Weakness**

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ABSTRACT

Law Enforcement has long been a male-dominated occupation. Female officers at times may deal with gender-based barriers including gender discrimination, judgement, peer pressure, and lack of female mentors in law enforcement. The image of law enforcement has changed over the years and throughout history because of social and cultural changes. After 1964, more women were able to enter law enforcement positions. The gender differences of women in law enforcement are positive to the department. Therefore, law enforcement agencies should hire and promote women, not for diversity, but for the gender differences that are a strength and not a weakness.

Women have instinctive traits and qualities that make them candidates for law enforcement. Women are now over half the population in the United States. This is significant because law enforcement agencies statewide need officers to fill open positions. The way men and women handle, and process stress and stressful situations differ. Women tend to look for non-physical solutions of de-escalation by way of communication and negotiating skills to make up for a possible lack of physical strength when outweighed and being over-shadowed by a non-compliant violator. The public's perception of female officers is better than that of the male officer because women use their softer skills. Women in law enforcement have been able to improve the police-community relationship. Although there are gender-based barriers and the age-old women are the weaker sex attitudes; women have proven to be influential in law enforcement. This paper will discuss the gender differences and show women in law enforcement are a strength, not a weakness.

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INTRODUCTION

The image embedded for law enforcement has been a strong male police officer. The copper statues in stores portray a male law enforcement officer kneeling towards a child. Toys being sold are police cars and male law enforcement officers for role play. Boys put on their cowboy hats and strap on their belts with their plastic guns as they play cops and robbers with their friends. Washrooms become jails and kitchens become mock crime scenes. Some children dream of becoming the masculine police officer they see on television and in movies. Along the way, law enforcement reshaped its image, and so has the public image of law enforcement.

Law enforcement has progressed and changed over time, and its adaptations have been documented throughout history. Policing in the United States has been influenced through social change and cultural change or diversity. Diversity (2018) is defined in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as an organization or group having people who are different races or who have different cultures. One major influence of diversity that created positive change in history was the induction of women into law enforcement. Past and present documentation show law enforcement has been a male dominated occupation. Women first began to influence law enforcement in the 1800s. However, it was in 1908 when Aurora 'Lola' Baldwin became the first full-time female officer in Portland, Oregon that transformed law enforcement even into present day and for the future of women in policing (Erstad, 2015). Throughout history, women have battled for the title of law enforcement officer or police officer. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employers from discriminating based on sex or gender,

thus paving the way without prejudice for women's entry into non-traditional occupations such as law enforcement.

Erstad (2015) wrote there were over 100,000 sworn female law enforcement officers in the United States alone. The National Center of Women and Policing stated 15% of state, municipal, and county law enforcement officers were women ("Women in law enforcement...", n.d.). This is a prodigious statement towards the cultural and social change, as law enforcement has long been known as a male dominated occupation. This paper will discuss the gender differences in law enforcement, and why female officers have been and are an irrefutable favorable change to law enforcement. Female law enforcement officers do not replace male officers; rather, female officers bring traits and qualities to the table that are instinctive to women. In the law enforcement environment, female officers can be overlooked, singled out, and misunderstood. It is the traits of female law enforcement officers that define them. As a result, law enforcement agencies should hire and promote women not for diversity, but because of their gender differences that are a strength, not a weakness.

POSITION

Although women make up a small percentage in law enforcement agencies today, studies show the percentage and numbers of women in law enforcement have increased throughout the years. In the 1970s women only made up 3% of law enforcement officers (University of San Diego, n.d.). In 2013, the percentage went up to 13% (Crooke, 2013). A more recent study showed women account for 20% of law enforcement officers ("Women in law...", n.d.). For 2018, the statistics show the female population is 50.6% to 49.4% male population ("United States...", n.d.). More women

are entering law enforcement and can have confidence because the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) prohibits the discrimination against someone based on gender by any employer for recruitment, application and hiring, job assignments and promotions, pay and benefits, and discipline and discharge (“Prohibited employment...,” n.d.). Hiring and promotions in law enforcement are beyond diversity of looks, color, and ethnicity. Women in law enforcement want the same respect the counter male officer receives for the job he does. Law enforcement is not gender-specific. No matter the gender; the job of law enforcement is the same, and the job pays the same within each law enforcement agency in its respective position. As a result, law enforcement agencies should expand on recruitment and promotion of women police officers not for the diversity, but for the gender differences.

Women in law enforcement are a strength because they are committed. Smith (2011, August) stated successful women are long term employees. They are committed to the profession of law enforcement, their co-workers, the community, and their mission (Smith, 2011, August). Not only can their commitment be seen in law enforcement, but it can be seen through research concerning secondary higher education. Men are being labeled the new college minority. Marcus (2017) wrote, “This fall, women will comprise more than 56% of students on campuses nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Education” (para.6). For 2017, 2.2 million fewer men than women enrolled in college (Marcus, 2017). The numbers are astounding and present evidence that women can be a strength because of their commitment and pursuit of knowledge through secondary higher education. By attending a college or a university, students better prepare themselves for employment in the workplace such as law enforcement.

For instance, college students have a schedule and workload, deadlines, computer skills with up to date software, grammar and writing, mathematical skills, and social skills. The female law enforcement officer who has graduated with a degree from a college or university will have an accomplished skillset that can be used later during promotions and leadership roles.

Studies show female law enforcement officers are less likely to use excessive force in similar situations and circumstances than male officers. Women in law enforcement tend to look for non-physical solutions of de-escalation by way of officer presence and communication (Newton-Small, 2016). Studies show male law enforcement officers draw their weapon more than female officers. Newton-Small (2016) cited though the same amount of force is used by women in law enforcement, women almost never use excessive force. Therefore, women law enforcement officers save their municipalities money in comparison to male law enforcement officers.

Because of payouts to settle civil lawsuits, taxpayers pay between two and a half and five and a half more for male law enforcement officers than female law enforcement officers. For example, between 1990-1999, the City of Los Angeles paid \$64.3 million dollars for cases of excessive force involving male law enforcement officers. On the other hand, \$2.8 million dollars was paid for similar cases, however not excessive force on behalf of female law enforcement officers (Paquette, 2016). A more recent case was a settlement paid by the city of Austin for excessive force used by a male officer from a 2015 arrest of a black female school teacher. Austin city council unanimously approved a \$425,000 settlement payout in the Breiaon King excessive force case ("City of Austin...", 2018). Another example was in 2018, when a settlement was reached for

\$1.6 million dollars in federal court in relation to excessive force by male law enforcement officers from the Bloomfield Police Department (Toutant, 2018). In 2015 Sean Courter and Orlando Trinidad, who were the two Bloomfield arresting officers, were convicted of official misconduct by a jury for the traffic arrest of Marcus Jeter in 2012 (Toutant, 2018). A fourth example of excessive force is of a former Las Vegas metropolitan police officer, Richard Scavone who in 2015 used excessive force and violated the civil rights of a 24-year-old female, while handcuffed for littering and loitering. Scavone was indicted, later arrested, and plead guilty to deprivation of rights and can no longer be a police officer as a plea deal with the prosecution (Ferrara, 2018). The woman, Amanda Ortiz filed a civil lawsuit on February 5, 2018 against Richard Scavone, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, and other officers on scene. It is not to say that women in law enforcement do not use force; because female officers have been documented using force, just not commonly excessive force.

One additional benefit to law enforcement agencies hiring and promoting women for their gender differences, and not for diversity is female law enforcement officers can improve police-community relations. Over the years, law enforcement's behavior has been covered by the media. It is not the heroic acts of law enforcement that have grabbed the attention of civil rights activist nor the public's perception of law enforcement. The media's breaking news of unpleasant, careless, and negligent police officers have captured city, state, and national headline news. The depictions of law enforcement by the media, whether true or not have crippled the relationship between law enforcement and the public. The importance of law enforcement understanding how the public perceives officers, why law enforcement is perceived in that manner, and

what law enforcement can do to change the mind set or perspective of local communities is key to achieving community support. Female law enforcement officers excel at community building because of their “softer skills” and community outreach (Newton-Small, 2016). Articles on the internet state hiring more female officers will reduce police violence (Stringer, 2016).

Women in law enforcement use more communication skills defusing situations, which in turn gains community trust with the less authoritarian approach (“Why we need...,” n.d.). Use of force can heighten tensions between the law enforcement agency and the public. Take the examples of the more recent, high profile cases of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile. The difference between genders is how the situation is handled. This has been seen time and time again through the decades. If there is one thing that does not change in law enforcement agencies, it is use of force on person(s) in varying circumstances. How these high stress situations are handled can be the difference between a de-escalation or a lawsuit.

As previously mentioned, female law enforcement officers use the same amount of force, but almost never use excessive force. Therefore, female law enforcement officers get notably less citizen complaints (Newton-Small, 2016). The use of communication, strategy and good planning play a vital role for the female law enforcement officer. Moreover, the traits and qualities of women in law enforcement have helped them to excel with the community and their respective organizations or law enforcement agencies.

More female law enforcement officers are taking leadership roles in their administration as sergeants, detectives, lieutenants, captains, and even chiefs of police. Take for example Dallas Police Chief U. Renee Hall. Hall is the first woman in the history of the Dallas Police Department appointed as chief of police. Hall was known for community policing in Detroit, where she was born and raised. Hall brought police and community together by creating a neighborhood program during her tenure at Detroit. Hall said in an interview after becoming chief of police for Dallas; that she wants to continue working on building a bridge between the police and the community (Lopez & Owens, 2017).

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Opponents of women in law enforcement that are hired and promoted have negative attitudes and discriminate against female officers for various reasons (Price, 1996). There were artificial barriers discriminating women in the 1960s that challenged women because of a height requirement (Department..., n.d.). A Supreme Court decision in 1971 changed hiring for women and even men in law enforcement thereafter (Department..., n.d.). The six-foot rule was no longer the requirement. Additionally, female police officers could face gender-based barriers in policing where law enforcement is traditionally a male-dominated occupation (Chen, 2015). For example, a female officer may call out or not show up for work due to a sick child. The male officer in a similar position is dependent upon his spouse to care for his child; therefore, he is subjective versus objective. The trait of nurturing may be looked at as a negative on the male officer's perspective, but it is a strength. Nurturing can be positive if a female law enforcement officer responds to a child abuse or a sexual assault incident. In times of

crisis, victims of crime need a patient, calm, and nurturing individual they can relate and relay personal and necessary information to in a timely manner. However, because a woman can be nurturing does not mean there is not a warrior mentality inside the female law enforcement officer.

Research supports that in law enforcement agencies, female officers battle discrimination of gender, language harassment, and a lack of female mentors (Woolsey, 2010). One of the greatest pressures according to Woolsey (2010) within law enforcement is peer acceptance. Males and females respond to stress and stressful situations differently. Female law enforcement officers do not respond mentally the same as male officers. Thus, the conversations are at times conflicting or incompatible between the two; which could cause women in law enforcement to either disengage or “go along” just for the sake of peer pressure. Female officers deal with discrimination within their respective departments. For example, in 2016 a female police officer filed a one million-dollar discrimination lawsuit against the city of Dallas (Tsiaperas, 2016). Michelle Herczeg filed the civil suit claiming she was treated less favorably and targeted for being a female officer. Herczeg claims the Dallas Police Department has a male-centric culture, and she is an example of broader gender discrimination that carries within the department (Tsiaperas, 2016). Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) administers and enforces civil rights laws against discrimination in the workplace. EEOC investigates cases of sex (gender), retaliation for reporting, participation in or opposing a discriminatory practice (“Women in law enforcement,” n.d.).

Opponents of law enforcement agencies hiring and promoting women for gender differences feel women are the weaker sex. The image of law enforcement from the beginning has been physical strength and a male dominated occupation. On average, women are not as physically strong as men. In law enforcement, officer presence can deflect the mindset of an aggressive violator. Therefore, it is vital to examine studies and make applications for law enforcement purposes. A study revealed the average male had more skeletal muscle mass than women by 26 pounds (Ghose, 2015). On average women have 40% less upper body strength, and 33% less lower body strength (Ghose, 2015). Having the physical strength to gain control of an escalated confrontation on the street alone can be the difference between life and death.

Although these are valid points, women have traits and qualities that create an edge on physical tasks. For instance, a 2001 study in the *American Journal of Physiology, Endocrinology and Metabolism* cited because “women usually have more body fat and may be better at burning fat as energy early on in exertion, they could have better endurance than men” (as cited in Ghose, 2015, para. 6). Ghose (2015) stated according to a 2003 study in the *Journal of Applied Physiology* because women use more muscle groups, women do not fatigue as easily as men. Physical strength can be interpreted in different ways. Where men are on average physically stronger, women are survivors and described as being “robust”. Steven Austad, an international expert on ageing from the University of Alabama stated, “Pretty much at every age, women seem to survive better than men” (as cited in Saini, 2017, para.3). Kwan (2014) stated there are more female than male centenarians, persons past the age of 100. The statistics show 85% female to 15% male centenarians were living. Women can be a

strong asset to law enforcement agencies. For example, poor tactical decision making is not often compensated with brute strength; therefore, the gender differences such as communication, strategizing, planning, reasoning, and adjusting demeanor can resolve problems before having to rely on physical strength. Women in law enforcement, aside from their traits and qualities, have other non-lethal tools to use on non-compliant violators. Law enforcement officers are typically required to carry one to two non-lethal weapons such as pepper spray, asp batons, and tasers. All law enforcement officers are required to certify in each, which requires a classroom and practical training. In addition to non-lethal weapons, female officer survival classes are offered by law enforcement agencies and other businesses, such as Safariland Training Group, which concentrate on defensive tactics and weapons training (Doucette, 2010). With a combination of dynamic qualities and tactical training, female law enforcement officers have a lot to offer to their agencies. Consequently, law enforcement agencies should hire and promote women not for diversity, but for the gender differences that are a strength not a weakness.

RECOMMENDATION

It is the gender differences of women in law enforcement that are a strength, not a weakness. Therefore, law enforcement agencies should hire and promote female law enforcement officers for the gender differences because women are already a small but increasing percentage in law enforcement. In the 1970s women accounted for only 2% of law enforcement; however, a more recent study shows women account for 20% of law enforcement officers ("Women in law enforcement," n.d.). Female law enforcement officers use the same amount of force as male officers, but female officers are less

likely to use excessive force saving their law enforcement agencies money from civil law suits (Newton-Small, 2016). Because female law enforcement officers usually use less excessive force, women in law enforcement can improve police-community relations. The public observes the actions of law enforcement by means of the media. The media tends to show the most dramatic news, which can be excessive force cases, and whether the force is justified or not, the public have already perceived and concluded on the matter. Since law enforcement must rely on the public or community for information, law enforcement agencies must keep a positive police-community relationship. This can be accomplished by hiring female officers because female officers get notably less citizen complaints (Stringer, 2016).

Some women choose not to enter law enforcement because it is still a male-dominated occupation that brings internal gender-based barriers. Judgement and peer pressure can take a toll on the female law enforcement officer, along with a lack of female mentors within the law enforcement agency. Because women and men do not handle stress and stressful situations alike, the environment in law enforcement can be conflicting and incompatible. These attitudes can cause the female officer to disengage or “go along” for the sake of peer pressure. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigates and enforces civil rights laws against discrimination in the workplace (“Prohibited employment...,” n.d.). Therefore, with good supervision, a supportive administration, and the knowledge that a person is protected will ensure the hiring and promoting of the best candidate for the job.

Another opposition of law enforcement agencies hiring and promoting women because of the gender differences is the stigma that women are the “weaker sex”. On

average, women are not as physically strong as men. Women on average have 26 pounds less skeletal muscle mass than men (Ghose, 2015). Men have 40% more upper body strength on average than women and 33% more lower body strength (Ghose, 2015). The image of law enforcement has continually been masculine. Women in law enforcement can still be an asset and combat the gender difference by using communication, strategy, and reasoning to name a few before using force. Brute strength is not the answer to every de-escalation. If a situation escalates and use of force is needed, all law enforcement officers have non-lethal weapons they are required to carry on their duty-belts. Pepper spray, asp-batons, and tasers are all tools that have proven to be successful in the arrest of non-compliant violators. In addition to non-lethal weapons, there are specific female officer survival schools available to the women in law enforcement that want to improve their tactical skills. Law enforcement agencies should not hire for the diversity, but for the gender differences that are a strength, not a weakness. This will build stronger departments, enhanced public safety, and community trust by hiring the right candidate.

“The implications of not having a representative number of female officers is clear. The under-representation of women at all levels in the modern police agency negatively impacts the culture and operational efficiency of law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Given the many difficult challenges facing modern agencies, the need to hire more women has never been more urgent.” (as cited in Felperin, 2004).

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