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PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE POLICE OFFICER USE OF FORCE:
STEREOTYPES AND GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of South Dakota, 2010

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

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May
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This thesis, submitted by Jamie Jensen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Dr. Cheryl Terrance

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Dr. Wayne Swisher

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Title Perceptions of Female Police Officer Use of Force: Stereotypes and Gender Role Expectations

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Jamie Lee Jensen
4-12-2012

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To Mom and Dad

ABSTRACT

Although the representation of women has steadily increased over the past couple of decades, law enforcement remains a predominantly male profession. Given the salience of gender, gender-based expectations may be especially pervasive and as such may influence perceptions of the behaviors and competency of female officers. More specifically, those expectations that serve to support normative roles for men and women, may impact the disparate perceptions of the use of force engaged in by male and female officers. This study will examine the extent to which gender-based stereotypes and expectations guide perceptions of the use of force engaged in by male and female law enforcement officers.

To this end, 170 undergraduate participants (men, $n = 61$, women, $n = 109$) read a fictional newspaper account describing an incident between an officer and assailant, varying the gender of both individuals. Additionally, participants were asked to answer a series of questions in response to the scenarios in order to examine their perceptions of the use of force relayed in the scenario. Overall, participants viewed the male officer more negatively than the female officer. Moreover, the police officer's behavior was judged more harshly when directed toward the female assailant. Implications are discussed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, women within law enforcement fulfilled such roles as matrons and secretaries. As women increasingly became represented within law enforcement, they gradually assumed the traditional male-dominated roles as police officers (Lonsway et al., 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Despite this fact, law enforcement remains a predominantly male institution. As a result, female officers face a workplace dominated by masculine values and serve in a police culture that has been molded by the “macho-ism” that male officers represent, or are seen as representing.

Working in a male-dominated profession such as law enforcement makes women targets for negative attention. Perceptions of female officers as violating gender-based norms and expectations may give rise to prejudicial attitudes and discrimination particularly among those who value traditional gender roles. These stereotyped expectations may also distort perceived competency of female officers to effectively uphold and enforce the law. Competency engenders multiple domains such as community policing, skills, leadership and communication. However, one domain of particular interest in the current study concerns use of force. Although use of force by police officers remains a topic of continued debate in a general sense, the purpose of the current study is to examine whether the gender of the officer and/or the offender influences acceptance of such force by laypersons.

Women in Law Enforcement

As women began entering the field of law enforcement, they met a great barrier of adversity. Most male officers and chiefs, for example, objected to women joining the police ranks (Brown & Heidensohn, 2000; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). During the 1920's, the majority of men within law enforcement believed that this transition was simply a fad and restricted women to traditional female roles such as clerical, guard duty, and vice work to maintain the masculine integrity of policing (Bell, 1982). Indeed, women entering the police force encountered significant resistance from male officers who preferred women to not "walk the beat." There was a general agreement that women should be denied access to this male dominated career because women were considered physically and emotionally weak, and the prospect of having a female partner was extremely offensive for many male officers (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007).

In the mid-1940s, when police administrators realized women entering law enforcement was not merely a fad, departments started to require female applicants to have a college degree, be upper middle class and religious in an effort to make the qualifications more stringent for women to enter the field. Before these restrictions were put in place, female officers who began the trend as matrons were immigrant, working-class women (Bell, 1982; La Rantz, 2008). By the early 1970s, women made up 2% of law enforcement and increased to 13% by 2001 (Lonsway et al., 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007).

With the increasing number of women taking on law enforcement roles at present,

training procedures have changed in ways that benefit women. Physical training has improved so that regardless of gender, police officers will be able to take on any size or weight of an assailant when executing the appropriate technique (Brown, 1994; La Rantz, 2008). Although progressive improvements have been made in regards to the physical training required of police officers, women in law enforcement still encounter challenges within this male dominated field.

Powered by the rules of tradition, women police officers are given directives not to wear excessive makeup, provocative clothing, or use harsh language; a female officer must be assertive while maintaining her femininity, not just for the sake of the department but to reduce negative feelings among the public as well (Anderson, 1973; Bell, 1982; Daum & Johns, 1994; Fletcher, 1995; La Rantz, 2008). Moreover, as the minority, women subsequently face intimidation, discrimination, and harassment from their male counterparts, especially as they move up the ranks (Lonsway et al., 2002). Female officers' morale is also adversely impacted due to feeling as if their job performance is not being critiqued on equal grounds as male officers (Daum & Johns, 1994; La Rantz, 2008).

Although female officers face many challenges, they bring with them their own favorable traits that benefit the law enforcement community. Female police officers appear to possess a more service-oriented obligation to policing than their male counterparts, and as a result may be more successful interacting with the community, be better equipped to solve problems, and gain support from citizens (La Rantz, 2008). Literature also suggests that women are actually more capable at handling violent

situations. Considering that women present a less aggressive policing style, they may be more effective at de-escalating explosive situations (Belknap & Shelly, 1992; Foster, 2006; La Rantz, 2008). Furthermore, studies also indicate that female officers are more effectual at communicating with rape victims and abused women and children than male officers (Belknap & Shelly, 1992; Foster, 2006; La Rantz, 2008).

With its traditional masculine reputation, there is coveted status with being a police officer. However, the presence of women within law enforcement has encountered much resistance. Undeniably, some have argued that the presence of women in law enforcement and female officers in particular, diminishes the status of male officers and the reputation of the profession. Whether this is actually the case remains equivocal. Nonetheless, as a male-dominated institution, female officers may no doubt encounter skepticism regarding their abilities. Given the stereotypical masculine characteristics associated with the use of physical force, the current study is particularly interested in perceptions of the use of force engaged in by female police officers.

Male and Female Police Officers: Use of Force

In recent years, the use of force by police officers has received considerable attention due to the significant impact it can have within the community. Controversy often surrounds the legitimacy of the use of force by police officers because it raises the fundamental question as to exactly how much force is justified (Rappert, 2007). Whenever there is an incident that involves the use of force by police, there is undeniably attention from the media, courts, and legislators (Alpert & Dunham, 1997; La Rantz, 2008). Use of force incidents are heavily scrutinized for possibly being excessive

because both the law and public opinion condemn such acts of using more force than is necessary (Alpert & Dunham, 1997; La Rantz, 2008; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007).

Realistically, use of force by police officers has been comparatively rare, occurring in fewer than 3% of all police-citizen encounters. Recent studies have suggested that when force is used by law enforcement officers, it often intensifies into an excessive force incident (La Rantz, 2008). Though the majority of use of force instances involves male police officers, female police officers also encounter instances where it is necessary to use force.

Regardless of their gender, by looking at any given situation and related factors, a police officer's level of force should be predictable based on how and when officers are trained to use force (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). However, other variables including an officer's size, demeanor or gender have been suggested to contribute to the amount of force used (Foster, 2006; La Rantz, 2008). Other research argues that officers' characteristics are not in fact strong indicators of use of force (Geller & Toch, 1995; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993). Though the role of a police officer's gender remains equivocal as a factor that influences the actual amount of force used, it remains a possibility that an officer's gender may influence how justified the use of force is perceived as being.

When compared to female officers, male officers were 1.5 times more likely to use physical force in police-citizen encounters (Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002). Though this is slightly more force than female officers use, the difference was not statistically significant (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002).

Male officers tend to be more aggressive, are more likely to resort to physical violence, and more likely to hold strong to tradition than their female counterparts (Brown, 1994; La Rantz, 2008). Due to these aggressive behaviors, male police officers tend to receive more citizen complaints than female officers. Complaints and confrontations within the community have more often than not been attributed to male officers and their ‘masculine’ style of policing (La Rantz, 2008; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Policemen believe that the nature of police work entails having control through authority and they present this authority by relying on their physical domination to resolve conflicts even when lesser options are available (Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002; La Rantz, 2008).

On the other hand, it has been suggested that, in general, female officers make fewer arrests and issue less traffic citations than their male counterparts (La Rantz, 2008; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Of course, there are some female officers who may be predisposed to using more force than other women as would be the case with male officers (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Whether women police officers in fact use less force, or are less aggressive than their male colleagues remains a matter of debate. Undeniably, community members and male police officers tend to endorse the view that female officers are less powerful, less trained and ill-equipped to deal with hostile situations and are too “soft” for policing (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982; Charles, 1982; Lonsway et al., 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Such biases may in turn influence the reporting of complaints and whether the use of physical force is perceived as excessive or not.

Taken together, as Balkin (1988) notes, “Law enforcement officers are expected

to be reflections of their communities and responsive to the needs of all community residents; including consistently resolving conflict without any use of force (p. 15).” At the same time, given the male-dominated culture of law enforcement, gender-based expectations may be especially salient and thus be influential in guiding perceptions of how competent an officer is perceived as being. People within the community who hold traditional attitudes about women’s roles will most likely be the ones to have unfavorable opinions towards female officers; especially towards female officers who are seen as violating gender roles by engaging in ‘masculine’ police behavior (Etaugh & Riley, 1983; Lenney, Mitchell, & Browning, 1983; Paludi & Bauer, 1983).

While laypeople have overall generally endorsed similar levels of respect and satisfaction for male and female officers, they consistently support beliefs that men are more capable of handling violent situations than women, and that male/male officer teams are superior to male/female teams (Bell, 1982; Block, Anderson, & Gervais, 1973). Moreover, it appears that the presence of female police officers serves to create doubt among the community as to how strenuous police work actually is (Balkin, 1988; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Such beliefs, rooted as they are in traditional gender based stereotypes may no doubt impact perceptions of the use of force engaged in by police officers.

Stereotypes and Law Enforcement

Starting in the late 1970’s and 80’s, researchers had begun using framework of social cognition to analyze structure, processes, and assumptions about stereotypes.

“Stereotypes are believed to be internalized early in socialization rather than emerging

from current conditions” (Deaux, 1995, p.12). Oftentimes, stereotypes automatically stem within our thoughts prior to conscious processing and become a routine process for categorizing and judging others (Basow, 1992). Historical, cultural, and psychological processes are credited for shaping the construction of gender roles and society holds certain expectations concerning how each gender should behave (Basow, 1992).

Typical stereotypes and expectations regarding male and females include hardworking men who are proactive and competent and women as the expressive, communal housewife (Basow, 1992). Males need to be strong, rational, and aggressive while women are expected to be weak and compliant. Stereotypes and gender roles not only extremely limit individual function, but they also have a damaging effect on society. In fact, they have repercussions for a variety of domains including the workforce where they serve to establish what are deemed as gender-appropriate jobs such as nursing or law enforcement.

In the United States, there is no civilian occupation more recognized with masculine stereotypes than policing, and the duties associated with being a patrol officer (Schulz, 1995). Within the field of law enforcement, gender-based stereotypes support expectations regarding what is “appropriate” behavior for men and women, and may be particularly influential dictating the behavior for police officers (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1990). Violations of gender-appropriate behavior, even when carried out as a duty of a police officer, may be evaluated especially harsh. For women, traditional gender stereotypes support their characterizations as weak, vulnerable, and submissive (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz; 1972; Deaux, Winton,

Crowley, & Lewis, 1985). These qualities stand in stark contrast to those ascribed to police officers.

Indeed, some of the main stereotypes associated with police work include aggression, along with assertiveness, physical capability, and emotional toughness; all of which are traditionally believed to be male characteristics. If a female officer displays these characteristics, particularly aggressiveness, she is seen unfavorably by her peers and by the public (Daum & Johns, 1994). On a similar note, it has also been argued that women are overly emotional and irrational which makes them unable to uphold the authoritarian presence that is necessary to deal with hostile citizens and situations (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982; Lonsway et al., 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Viewed as less competent, the risk exists, according to Deaux (1995) that a woman's performance is less likely to be viewed positively, and likewise, her success is less likely to be attributed to her ability. Thus, despite wearing the same uniform, going through the same training and testing, female police officers continue to struggle to gain acceptance from their male counterparts and from the community.

Although some research has investigated the amount of force used as a function of police officer gender (La Rantz, 2008), little, if any research has examined community members' perceptions of the use of force engaged in by police officers in general, and female officers specifically. In light of pre-existing norms dictating appropriate female behaviors and stereotypical beliefs concerning female police officers, this study seeks to examine how gender-based expectations influence perceptions of the use of force engaged in by police officers as a function of officer gender. Assessment of community

members' perceptions are important because they may influence community outrage and how such incidences are reported in the media.

Purpose

Though many factors may enter into an officer's decision to use force, the role of the officer's gender may influence perceptions of the necessity of such force. Because female police officers may be viewed as violating "traditional" gender roles as a function of their occupation, their use of force may be viewed differently than that engaged in by their male counterparts. To this end, participants in the current study read a fictional newspaper account describing an incident between an officer and assailant that varies officer gender. As the gender of the assailant may impact perceptions of the use of force on its own and in combination with a police officer's gender, assailant gender was also varied within the police officer's gender condition.

It was hypothesized that a main effect would be found for officer gender, such that the female officer's use of force would be perceived as more unjustified and excessive than the male police officer's use of force. Moreover, an interaction between officer and assailant gender was anticipated. Given expectations concerning the rationality of men, it was anticipated that, irrespective of assailant gender, the male officer's use of force would be perceived as legitimate and viewed as a reflection of his abilities. However, while the female officers' use of force is expected to be perceived as excessive, it is also expected that this will particularly be the case when the force is acted upon against the female assailant.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 170 University of North Dakota undergraduate psychology students (men, $n = 61$; women, $n = 109$) recruited through volunteer sign-ups via SONA Systems. Participants were asked to participate in a study investigating perceptions of police-citizen interactions in exchange for course credit. No identifying information linking participants to study data and results was collected or retained. Identifying information was replaced with a system-generated random number. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 48 ($M = 20.51$, $SD = 4.34$), and were predominantly Caucasian ($n = 152$, 89.4%).

Materials

Software

SONA Systems

SONA Systems is a program users manage through the Internet. It keeps a log of all active and inactive studies, which includes sign-up rosters, participants who did or did not receive credit, and any data collected by the system. Participants signed up and completed the study via SONA systems. Data for each scenario in the SONA database was downloaded and saved in its corresponding folder.

Scenarios

Scenarios were created for this study and differed according to a 2 (officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) between subjects factorial design. All scenarios described the same incident in which a police officer used a taser on a citizen.

This fictional newspaper account described an incident in which a police officer responded to a disturbance at a local residence. The citizen aggressively approached and pushed the officer, which influenced the officer's decision to use force against the assailant in the form of a taser. Due to the event of being shocked by the taser, the citizen sought compensation and the officer was placed on administrative duty, pending the results of an investigation. The scenario also captured a neighboring witness's statement on the incident. All scenarios were identical with the exception of officer and assailant names and pronouns that reflected the gender manipulations of each (Appendix B).

Dependent Measures

Demographics

A demographic questionnaire was included for the participants to fill out (see Appendix C). The demographic questionnaire assessed several common demographic items such as age, gender, and ethnicity.

Manipulation Check

Participants were asked to identify the gender of both the police officer and the assailant. These questions were asked in order to be certain that participants were aware of the manipulations within the scenario they were randomly selected to read (Appendix C).

Perceptions of Scenario Questionnaire

Participants responded to 19 items that assessed their perceptions of the use of force used, the police officer and the assailant. The items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale; ranging from 1 to 7, with end-points (i.e.: strongly disagree, not at all) being defined by the question, and were developed specifically for the purpose of the current study. Five dimensions were assessed (Appendix C).

Excessiveness

Three items asked participants to rate the extent to which they viewed the police officer's behavior as being excessive in response to the situation. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they viewed the police officer as, a) using excessive force against the assailant, b) using appropriate force on the assailant, and, c) the amount of force used was excessive. Items were re-coded as necessary and a composite score derived (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). Higher scores reflect perceptions of the officer's behavior as being excessive.

Police Officer Mental Stability

One item asked participants to rate the extent to which they viewed the police officer as mentally stable. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they viewed the police officer as, a) being mentally unstable. Higher scores reflect perceptions of the officer as being mentally unstable.

Rationality of Police Officer Behavior

Six items asked participants to rate the extent to which they viewed the police officer's behavior as a rational response to the situation. Specifically, participants were

asked to indicate the extent to which they viewed the police officer as, a) over-reacting, b) rational, c) having other alternatives to subdue the assailant, d) behavior as being under their control, e) as displaying unprofessional behavior, and, f) being irrational. Items were re-coded as necessary and a composite score derived ($\alpha = .87$). Higher scores reflect perceptions of the officer's behavior as being irrational.

Reasonableness

Five items asked participants to rate the extent to which they viewed the police officer's behavior as being reasonable in response to the situation. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they viewed the police officer as, a) justified in their use of force, b) their actions being reasonable, c) amount of force as acceptable, d) their actions were justified, and, e) the amount of force used as justified. A composite score was derived ($\alpha = .94$). Higher scores reflect perceptions of the officer's actions as being reasonable.

Assailant Responsibility

Four items asked participants to rate the extent to which they viewed the assailant's responsibility in response to the situation. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they viewed the assailant as, a) responsible for their injuries, b) responsible for escalating the incident, c) as being partly to blame for the actions of the police officer, and, d) as being solely to blame for the events that took place. A composite score was derived ($\alpha = .76$). Higher scores reflect perceptions of the assailant being responsible.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

Participants were asked a series of questions that examined hostile and benevolent sexism. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory is a 22-item self-report measure composed of two 11-item subscales. Participants rated each statement using a five-point Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Glick and Fiske's (1996) model is comprised of two subscales (Appendix D).

Benevolent Sexism. Eleven items asked participants to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism comprises the positive attitudes toward women in traditional roles such as protective paternalism, idealization of women, and desire for intimate relations (Glick & Fiske, 1997). For instance, items include, a) every man ought to have a woman whom he adores, b) women should be cherished and protected by men, c) men are complete without women, and, d) women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility. Items were re-coded as necessary and a composite score derived ($\alpha = .83$). Higher scores reflect greater benevolent sexism.

Hostile Sexism. Eleven items asked participants to rate how much they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding hostile sexism. Hostile sexism comprises the negative attitudes toward woman such as dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs, and heterosexual hostility (Glick & Fiske, 1997). For instance, items include, a) feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men, b) women exaggerate problems they have at work, c) women seek to gain power by getting control over men, and, d) women are too easily offended. Items were re coded as necessary and a composite score derived ($\alpha =$

.85). Higher scores reflect greater hostile sexism.

Just World Scale

Participants were asked to respond to the Just World Scale developed by Rubin and Peplau (1975). This scale measures one's belief in a just world in all domains of life (e.g. for both the self and for others) (Appendix E).

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding a belief in a just world. For example, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed to statements such as, a) people who find money in the street have often done a good deed earlier that day, b) movies in which good triumphs over evil are unrealistic, and, c) although there may be some exceptions, good people often lead lives of suffering. Items were re-coded as necessary and a composite score derived ($\alpha = .66$). Higher scores reflect higher just world beliefs.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions stemming from a 2 (police gender) x 2 (assailant gender) between-subjects factorial design. Participants completed the study via SONA Systems to read the scenario and completed the questionnaires. After reading the scenario, questionnaires were randomly presented to participants. All items for each measure were presented simultaneously, rather than sequentially, with instructions at the beginning of each section identified the nature of the items.

To proceed through the questionnaire, the system required participants to select a response for each item before loading the next measure. A system-formatted option that

includes a check box and text that reads, “Check this box if you do not want to provide an answer for this question,” was in place. Also, there is a “Withdraw” button at the top of each section, so participants were able to leave the study at any time. In the event that a participant withdrew, SONA Systems automatically sent a notification to the listed e-mail address for the study administrator. Participants were not able to revert back to the scenario during the course of the survey. Data collected was saved in an Excel spreadsheet and was transferred to PASW for analysis.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Of the 198 participants that initially completed the study, 19 of them incorrectly indicated the officer and/or assailant gender of the scenario they read. These 19 were removed from the analyses for a final total of 179 participants who all answered both questions in accord with the scenario they read. 9 participants misidentified the weapon that was used in the scenarios and were dropped from the study. Subsequent analyses were performed on the remaining 170 participants (men, $n = 61$, women, $n = 109$).

Univariate Analysis of Variance

Excessiveness

A 2 (police officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) x 2 (participant gender) analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted on perceptions of police officer excessiveness yielded main effects for officer gender, $F(1,162) = 4.93, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, assailant gender, $F(1,162) = 5.41, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$, and participant gender $F(1,162) = 7.62, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$. Overall, the male officer ($M = 3.31, SD = 1.52$) was perceived as being more excessive than the female officer ($M = 2.78, SD = 1.37$). The officer's behavior was also viewed as more excessive when used against the female assailant ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.52$) than the male assailant ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.37$). Finally, women ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.42$) rated the officer as more excessive than did men ($M = 2.59, SD = 1.44$).

Police Officer Mental Stability

A 2 (police officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA conducted on perceptions of police officer mental stability failed to yield main effect significance for police officer, $F(1,161)=1.70$, *ns*, assailant gender $F<1$, and participant gender, $F(1,161)=1.13$, *ns*. All interactions failed to yield significance. Overall, participants viewed the officer as mentally stable, $t(168)=21.134$, $p<.001$, ($M=2.11$, $SD=1.30$).

Rationality of Police Officer

A 2 (police officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA conducted on perceptions of the police officer's behavior yielded significant main effects for police officer gender, $F(1,162)=5.14$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.03$, and for assailant gender, $F(1,162)=4.94$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.03$. Overall, participants rated the male officer's behavior ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.24$) as being more irrational than the female officer ($M=3.17$, $SD=1.13$). Moreover, participants were more likely to rate the police officer behaviors as irrational in response to the female assailant ($M=3.60$, $SD=1.18$) as opposed to the male assailant ($M=3.13$, $SD=1.18$).

Reasonableness

A 2 (police officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on perceptions of how reasonable the police officer was perceived as being. Results included a significant main effect for officer gender, $F(1,162)=4.68$, $p=.032$, $\eta^2=.03$. Surprisingly, the female officer ($M=5.21$, $SD=1.22$) was rated as more reasonable than the male officer ($M=4.77$, $SD=1.32$). Results also

included a significant main effect for participant gender, $F(1,162) = 5.31, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$. Moreover, male participants ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.33$) rated the officer as more reasonable than female participants ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.23$). Neither the main effect of assailant gender, $F(1, 162) = 2.56, ns$, nor the interactions attained significance.

Assailant Responsibility

A 2 (police officer gender) x 2 (assailant gender) x 2 (participant gender) ANOVA was conducted on perceptions of how responsible the assailant was perceived as being in regards to the incident. Results included a significant main effect for participant gender, $F(1,162) = 4.05, p = .046, \eta^2 = .02$. Overall, male participants ($M = 5.72, SD = 1.06$) rated the assailant as having more responsibility over the incident than female participants ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.16$). Neither the main effect of assailant gender, $F < 1$, the main effect of officer gender $F(1,162) = 2.56, ns$, nor the interactions attained significance.

Regression Analyses

Predicting Excessiveness and Irrationality of Police Officer Behavior

Ordinary least squares regression analyses were conducted to assess perceptions of officer excessiveness and behavior as predicted by sexist attitudes and belief in a just world. In addition to scores from the Ambivalent Sexism and Belief in a Just World scales, officer gender and assailant gender were also included as predictors in the regression models. The inclusion of these independent variables served to account for the predictive power due to manipulated condition, allowing examination of sexist attitudes

and belief in a just world as unique predictors of the dependent variables.

Using the enter method, the regression model significantly predicted perceptions of police officer excessiveness, $R^2 = .13$, $F(5,164) = 5.04$, $p < .001$. (See Table 1.) Just World Beliefs scale significantly predicted how excessive the police officer was perceived as ($\beta = -.72$, $p < .01$). Higher just world beliefs indicated that participants were less likely to rate the police officer's behavior as excessive. Also, the female police officer was less likely to be viewed as excessive in her behavior, ($\beta = -.61$, $p < .01$). When the assailant was female, participants were more likely to rate the police officer's behavior as excessive, ($\beta = .62$, $p < .01$). No other predictors were significant at the $p < .05$ levels.

A second regression analysis using the above model significantly predicted perceptions of how irrational the police officer was perceived as being, $R^2 = .19$, $F(5,164) = 7.54$, $p < .001$. (See Table 2.) Higher scores on the Just World Beliefs scale predicted how irrational the police officer was perceived as being ($\beta = -.89$, $p < .01$). That is, participants who endorsed higher just world beliefs were less likely to view the police officer as irrational in their behavior as participants who endorsed beliefs in an unjust, unfair world. Officer gender also significantly predicted perceptions of irrationality of the officer behavior ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .01$). Participants were more inclined to view the male officer as more irrational than the female officer.

Finally, assailant gender significantly predicted assignment of police officer irrationality ($\beta = .45, p < .01$). (See Table 2.) When the assailant was female, participants viewed the officer's behavior as more irrational than when the assailant was male. No other predictors were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to evaluate the extent to which gender-based stereotypes and expectations influence perceptions of the use of force engaged in by male and female law enforcement officers. It was anticipated that the female officer would be perceived as violating gender-based norms and expectations and therefore be judged more harshly than the male officer. Moreover, in light of expectations concerning the rationality of men, it was anticipated that, the male officer's use of force would be perceived as legitimate and viewed as a reflection of his abilities. Overall, however, the female police officer was viewed more favorably than the male police officer.

In regards to level of excessiveness, participants viewed the male officer as being more excessive than the female officer. Though it was anticipated that the female officer's behavior would be perceived as more excessive because it violates gender-based expectations concerning women, this finding still suggests that participants responded in accordance to gender-based norms. Indeed, participants may have assumed that the male police officer, by virtue of his gender, has an advantage of physical size and strength. That is, it may have been assumed that, as men, male officers are stronger and already possessing the physical strength necessary to protect themselves in an attack without having to exert their strength. As a consequence, participants may believe that he had other options available to him. Moreover, firearm media coverage of excessive force by

predominantly, if not all, male police officers may have led participants to be skeptical of any force used by male officers. Future research could disentangle these issues by incorporating pictures of the officers and assailants, asking participants what other options could have been used and by assessing attitudes towards police officers.

Participants also tended to view the police officer's behavior as more excessive when used against the female assailant. Participants are possibly viewing the female assailant as weaker due to gender stereotypes and not capable of posing much resistance toward the male or female officers. This is not surprising considering research that has held that women are less threatening and therefore perceived to be not as intimidating and dangerous as men (Holmes, Reynolds, Holmes, & Faulkner, 1998).

Participants viewed the male police officer's behavior as being more irrational and less reasonable than the female officer's. Since assertiveness and emotional strength are main stereotypes associated with police work, which are traditionally believed to be male characteristics, one would have assumed that participants would have perceived the male officer as more reasonable. Moreover, participants rated the police officer behaviors as more irrational in response to the female assailant as opposed to the male assailant. Again, participants are may be assuming that the female assailant is weaker and as such, may be subdued in a less aggressive manner.

Male participants rated the officer as more reasonable than the female participants. This was surprising considering past research has supported that women are usually more likely to perceive the police favorably (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Correia, Reisig, & Lovrich, 1996; Reisig & Giacomazzi, 1998). Finally, male participants rated

the assailant as having more responsibility over the incident than female participants. Men may see the assailant, as “getting what they deserve” and the police officer wouldn’t have had to come if the assailant had not caused a disturbance in the first place. Males have been traditionally been raised to be strong and independent (Basow, 1992), which may mean that male participants believed that the assailant should have been in more control, or strong, in regards to the incident.

In regards to the role that just world beliefs played in predicting excessiveness and rationality of police officer’s behavior, the scale did obtain significance for each. Higher scores for just world beliefs indicated that participants were less likely to rate the police officer’s behavior as excessive. Moreover, higher scores for just world beliefs indicated that participants were less likely to rate the police officer as irrational. These results are not surprising since those who score higher in just world beliefs tend to endorse more traditional views of those who hold authority. Future research examining other attitudes that may be related to perceptions of police officers is warranted. More specifically, previous research has shown that individuals who have a strong sense of involvement in the political system (Albrecht & Green, 1977; Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Sampson & Barusch, 1998) or those who feel general approval of the government (Bridenball & Jesilow, 2008; Brown & Coulter, 1983; Chackerian & Barrett, 1973) will typically have more positive assessments of the police.

It was surprising to find that ambivalent sexism was not predictive of perceptions of police officer excessiveness. With the increase of women being represented within the police work force, it may be the case that participants do not view her in an ill favored

light. One possibility could be that the participants may not subscribe to sexist attitudes towards female police officers. However, at the same time, there was a disproportional number of female participants in the current study. Future research that includes more men is warranted.

Further exploration of factors that influence community perceptions of female police officer use of force would be helpful. A future study could evaluate participants' reasons for why the officer was seen as being excessive. To better investigate this area, future research should include multiple examples of force as well as varying degrees of resistance. This would help determine at what point participants would perceive that the amount of force used was justified by both the male and female police officers as well as identifying how much resistance is required for participants to perceive the use of force as being needed to control the situation. An additional direction for future research would be exploration of the use of photos for the officers, and assailants to see how physical characteristics may interact with gender on perceptions of police officer use of force. It may be the case that feminine-appearing police officers would be seen more favorably than masculine police officers irrespective of gender. Also, feminine-appearing assailants may be perceived as non-aggressive and therefore would induce more sympathy from participants.

The findings may be limited in that participants read a brief newspaper account of an incident in a newspaper as opposed to a videotaped account. A videotaped account would have the advantage of added complexity, not to mention providing a visual representation of the officer and assailant, which could vastly alter participants'

responses. However, by limiting the complexity of the information presented, we were able to isolate police officer and assailant characteristics that may be relevant in the decision making process. Future research should consider employing the use of a videotaped account of the incident in question.

As with any research, there are limitations that may stem from the demographic make-up of the sample. Participants in the current study represented a fairly homogenous group of college students whose attitudes are likely to differ from the general population. At the same time however, college students' attitudes have been reported as being more liberal than those of the general public, and yet they too were influenced by the gender of police officer and assailant (Schuller & Vidmar, 1992). Whether a more heterogeneous group would respond differently, or whether other gender-related stereotypes would be even more salient is worthy of future consideration.

Conclusion

Controversy has surrounded the use of force by police officers and has received considerable attention due to the significant impact it can have within the community. Clearly, use of force by police officers remains a topic of continued debate in a general sense; and with the representation of women steadily increasing in this occupation, it would be beneficial to investigate why male and female police officers are being perceived so differently even though they are performing the same actions. Since there is no single definition of excessive force, determining when a police officer is using excessive force is a difficult task (Garner, Maxwell, & Heraux, 2002; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Although some research has investigated the amount of

force used as a function of police officer gender (La Rantz, 2008), little, if any research has examined community members' perceptions of the use of force engaged in by police officers in general, and female officers specifically.

Taken together, it is evident that certain aspects about gender roles and stereotypes can influence the way that the community perceives male and female police officers, particularly female officers. More specifically, it appears that gender-based beliefs are influential in guiding perceptions of use of force instances. The differences in use of force instances concerning male and female police officers are minimal, but gender stereotypes may exaggerate these insignificant differences (South Richardson & Hammock, 2007). When considering male and female police officer use of force, there appears to be traditional stereotypes in play that continue to dictate community perceptions. Overall, results of the current study support the notion that people endorse stereotypes that situate women as weak, and therefore more justified in their use of force, and men as aggressive, and therefore automatically excessive in their actions in regards to use of force situations.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Consent Form
INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE: Perceptions of Police-Citizen interactions

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Jamie Jensen; Jamie.jensen@my.und.edu

PHONE#: 701-777-3212

DEPARTMENT: Psychology

You are invited to participate in a study investigating perceptions of police officer behavior. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not impact your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota. Your consent to participate in this study will be proven by your willingness to continue participation. Approximately 140 people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota and will last approximately 45 minutes.

During the first part of the study you will be asked to read a vignette describing an interaction between a police officer and a citizen. After reading the vignette, you will be asked to complete a number of questionnaires asking about your opinions regarding the vignette as well as other social issues.

The risks of this study are minimal. Due to the evaluative nature of completing questionnaires, some participants may feel uneasy. If you become upset by questions, you may stop answering them at any time or choose to not answer a question. You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, your participation in this study will add to further research concerning perceptions of police behavior within the field of psychology.

You will not have any costs for being in this research study. You will be compensated with extra credit for your time for the psychology course of your choice in which you are currently enrolled. The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. Your record may be reviewed by Government agencies, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. No identifying information about participants will be reported or kept and there will be no identifying information necessary in participating using SONA System. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of randomly assigned numerical codes.

The researcher conducting this study is Jamie Jensen, a graduate student in the forensic psychology master's program at the University of North Dakota. The study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cheryl Terrance. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Jamie at Jamie.jensen@my.und.edu or the research advisor, Dr. Cheryl Terrance at (701) 777-3921. If you have questions regarding your right as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or if you wish to talk with someone else.

If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact UND's Student Counseling Center at 701-777-2127.

Appendix B Scenarios

*Scenarios are identical with the exception of the names and pronouns used to describe the officer and assailant. These variations reflect the following conditions:

A) **Female officer, Male assailant**

Man Tased after Fighting with Officer
Friday, October 22, 2011
Minneapolis, MN

Anthony Erickson is seeking compensation alleging excessive force was used by the arresting officer. Police were called to a disturbance at the residence of Anthony Erickson who was injured by Officer Donna Johnson Friday while responding to the disturbance call. Officer Donna Johnson was the first officer to respond. She encountered Erickson in the front yard of his home and immediately called for backup. Anthony Erickson stepped off the porch toward Officer Johnson and she commanded him to stop. He then came at her aggressively, causing her to back up. Johnson ordered Erickson to stop. He pushed her and continued toward her drawing his fists together. According to witnesses, as Officer Donna Johnson regained her footing, Erickson continued toward Johnson despite being told to stop. Donna Johnson then pulled her taser and proceeded to shock Erickson until he was incapacitated. The entire incident happened in less than two minutes. Anthony Erickson's lawyer is claiming that the officer had

other options like waiting for backup or simply putting him in handcuffs and that a taser was excessive force. A neighboring witness said he saw a female officer arrive and heard yelling between her and Erickson. He said he saw Erickson hit the female officer, knocking her back. "Immediately, when the officer got her bearings, she pulled her taser and Erickson was taken down. It all happened so fast." The neighbor said he understands that the officer was protecting herself but thought the use of taser was excessive. Officer Donna Johnson has been placed on administrative duty, pending the results of an investigation.

B) Female officer, Female assailant

Woman Tased after Fighting with Officer
Friday, October 22, 2011
Minneapolis, MN

Sandra Erickson is seeking compensation alleging excessive force was used by the arresting officer. Police were called to a disturbance at the residence of Sandra Erickson who was injured by Officer Donna Johnson Friday while responding to the disturbance call. Officer Donna Johnson was the first officer to respond. She encountered Erickson in the front yard of her home and immediately called for backup. Sandra Erickson stepped off the porch toward Officer Johnson and she commanded her to stop. Erickson then came at her aggressively, causing Johnson to back up. Johnson ordered Erickson to stop. She pushed Johnson and continued toward her drawing her fists together.

According to witnesses, as Officer Donna Johnson regained her footing, Erickson continued toward Johnson despite being told to stop. Donna Johnson then pulled her taser and proceeded to shock Erickson until she was incapacitated. The entire incident happened in less than two minutes. Sandra Erickson's lawyer is claiming that the officer had other options like waiting for backup or simply putting her in handcuffs and that a taser was excessive force. A neighboring witness said he saw a female officer arrive and heard yelling between her and Erickson. He said he saw Erickson hit the female officer, knocking her back. "Immediately, when the officer got her bearings, she pulled her taser and Erickson was taken down. It all happened so fast." The neighbor said he understands that the officer was protecting herself but thought the use of taser was excessive. Officer Donna Johnson has been placed on administrative duty, pending the results of an investigation.

C) Male officer, Male assailant

Man Tased after Fighting with Officer
Friday, October 22, 2011
Minneapolis, MN

Anthony Erickson is seeking compensation alleging excessive force was used by the arresting officer. Police were called to a disturbance at the residence of Anthony Erickson who was injured by Officer Doug Johnson Friday while responding to the disturbance call. Officer Doug Johnson was the first officer to

respond. He encountered Erickson in the front yard of his home and immediately called for backup. Anthony Erickson stepped off the porch toward Officer Johnson and he commanded him to stop. Erickson then came at him aggressively, causing Johnson to back up. Johnson ordered Erickson to stop. He pushed Johnson and continued toward him drawing his fists together. According to witnesses, as Officer Doug Johnson regained his footing, Erickson continued toward Johnson despite being told to stop. Doug Johnson then pulled his taser and proceeded to shock Erickson until he was incapacitated. The entire incident happened in less than two minutes. Anthony Erickson's lawyer is claiming that the officer had other options like waiting for backup or simply putting him in handcuffs and that a taser was excessive force. A neighboring witness said he saw a male officer arrive and heard yelling between him and Erickson. He said he saw Erickson hit the male officer, knocking him back. "Immediately, when the officer got his bearings, he pulled his taser and Erickson was taken down. It all happened so fast." The neighbor said he understands that the officer was protecting himself but thought the use of taser was excessive. Officer Doug Johnson has been placed on administrative duty, pending the results of an investigation.

D) Male officer, Female assailant

Woman Tased after Fighting with Officer
Friday, October 22, 2011
Minneapolis, MN

Sandra Erickson is seeking compensation alleging excessive force was used by the arresting officer. Police were called to a disturbance at the residence of Sandra Erickson who was injured by Officer Doug Johnson Friday while responding to the disturbance call. Officer Doug Johnson was the first officer to respond. He encountered Erickson in the front yard of her home and immediately called for backup. Sandra Erickson stepped off the porch toward Officer Johnson and he commanded her to stop. Erickson then came at him aggressively, causing Johnson to back up. Johnson ordered Erickson to stop. She pushed Johnson and continued toward him drawing her fists together. According to witnesses, as Officer Doug Johnson regained his footing, Erickson continued toward Johnson despite being told to stop. Doug Johnson then pulled his taser and proceeded to shock Erickson until she was incapacitated. The entire incident happened in less than two minutes. Sandra Erickson's lawyer is claiming that the officer had other options like waiting for backup or simply putting her in handcuffs and that a taser was excessive force. A neighboring witness said he saw a male officer arrive and heard yelling between him and Erickson. He said he saw Erickson hit the male officer, knocking him back.

“Immediately, when the officer got his bearings, he pulled his taser and Erickson was taken down. It all happened so fast.” The neighbor said he understands that the officer was protecting himself but thought the use of taser was excessive. Officer Doug Johnson has been placed on administrative duty, pending the results of an investigation.

21. What was the gender of the officer? M F

22. What was the gender of the assailant? M F

Please answer the following demographic information

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: (please check all that apply)

- _____ African American/Black
- _____ Asian American
- _____ European American/White
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ Native American
- _____ Other: _____

Level of Education:

- _____ First Year _____ Third Year _____ Fifth Year
- _____ Second Year _____ Fourth Year _____ Grad Student
- _____ Other/Prefer not to say

Political ideology

- _____ Extremely Liberal
- _____ Liberal
- _____ Slightly Liberal
- _____ Moderate
- _____ Slightly Conservative
- _____ Conservative
- _____ Extremely Conservative
- _____ Don't know
- _____ Prefer not to answer

Major: _____

Appendix D
Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

Directions: Below are a series of statements concerning men and women and their relationships in contemporary society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Somewhat	Slightly	Slightly	Somewhat	Strongly

___ 1. No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.

___ 2. Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."

___ 3. In a disaster, women ought not necessarily to be rescued before men.

___ 4. Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.

___ 5. Women are too easily offended.

___ 6. People are often truly happy in life without being romantically involved with a member of the other sex.

___ 7. Feminists are not seeking for women to have more power than men.

___ 8. Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess.

___ 9. Women should be cherished and protected by men.

___ 10. Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.

___ 11. Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.

___ 12. Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.

- ___ 13. Men are complete without women.
- ___ 14. Women exaggerate problems they have at work.
- ___ 15. Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.
- ___ 16. When women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against.
- ___ 17. A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.
- ___ 18. There are actually very few women who get a kick out of teasing men by seeming sexually available and then refusing male advances.
- ___ 19. Women, compared to men, tend to have a superior moral sensibility.
- ___ 20. Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.
- ___ 21. Feminists are making entirely reasonable demands of men.
- ___ 22. Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.

Appendix E
Just World Scale

Directions: Read each statement carefully and decide to what degree you believe that the world is generally fair and just. Then select one of the five answers that best describes your present agreement or disagreement with the statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree Somewhat	Strongly Agree

1. Basically, the world is a just place.

1 2 3 4 5

2. The political candidate who sticks up for his principles rarely gets elected.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I've found that a person rarely deserves the reputation he has.

1 2 3 4 5

4. People who find money in the street have often done a good deed earlier that day.

1 2 3 4 5

5. It is a common occurrence for a guilty person to get off free in American courts.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Movies in which good triumphs over evil are unrealistic

1 2 3 4 5

7. Students almost always deserve the grades they receive in school.

1 2 3 4 5

8. Crime doesn't pay.

1 2 3 4 5

9. When parents punish their children, it is almost always for good reasons.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Although there may be some exceptions, good people often lead lives of suffering.

1 2 3 4 5

11. It is often impossible for a person to receive a fair trial in the USA.

1 2 3 4 5

12. In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Although evil men may hold political power for a while, in the general course of history good wins out.

1 2 3 4 5

14. By and large, people deserve what they get.

1 2 3 4 5

15. American parents tend to overlook the things most to be admired in their children.

1 2 3 4 5

16. It is rare for an innocent man to be wrongly sent to jail.

1 2 3 4 5

Table 1. Predicting Excessiveness of Police Officer Behavior

	<u>Excessiveness</u>				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Constant	4.581	1.023	-	4.478	.000
Benevolent	.022	.151	.012	.148	.882
Hostile	.246	.145	.135	1.691	.093
Just World Belief	-.720	.264	-.203	-2.730	.007
Assailant Gender	.621	.214	.212	2.908	.004
Officer Gender	-.614	.215	-.210	-2.855	.005

Notes: alpha = .90

Table 2. Predicting Irrationality of Police Officer Behavior

	<u>Irrationality</u>				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Constant	5.389	.764	-	7.053	.000
Benevolent	.049	.112	.035	.440	.661
Hostile	.177	.109	.126	1.630	.105
Just World Belief	-.892	.197	-.326	-4.531	.000
Assailant Gender	.445	.160	.197	2.789	.006
Officer Gender	-.488	.161	-.216	-3.038	.003

Notes: alpha = .87

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