Gender in First Response
How Biology and Physiology Shape Male and Female Responders

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Abstract
Gender politics project a considerable presence in most of the working world. So too do ills associated with gender, like sexual harassment and discrimination. The resultant effect is especially pronounced in historically male-dominated fields such as first response, where biases in hiring and testing practices have contributed to an ongoing, undeniable gender gap. Physiological, mental, and societal differences between males and females may further contribute, as can the broad, often volatile range of opinions surrounding gender issues. This paper will explore the biological and societal aspect of first response's gender gap, reflecting on scientific research, statistical analysis, and real-world examples to provide context and factual basis; it will then discuss the benefits of a gender-aware approach to the hiring and continued employment of first responders of both genders.

Introduction

Accounting for gender differences throughout the hiring, training, and career of recruits is a topic of high concern and contentious disagreement in first response. Though they make up 47 percent of the nation's workforce[1] , women comprise a disproportionately small percentage of active employees in fire[2] and law enforcement[3] , and fare only slightly better in emergency medical services.[4] The implied challenge and source of debate come down to the acceptance and inclusion of female employees in fields like firefighting, law enforcement, and (to a lesser degree) EMS, where men tend to represent an overwhelming majority of employees.

1. In all, approximately 58.6 of eligible females in the US had jobs or were looking for work as of 2010 (US Department of Labor, 2010).

2. Some 8.9 percent of volunteer firefighters are female; only 3.7 percent of career firefighters are women. In all, women make up 7.3 percent of all firefighters (National Fire Protection Association, 2017).

3. Figures from 2010 claim women comprise 13 percent of US police rosters (National Center for Women & Policing, 2010).

4. Estimates for women in EMS work range between 30 and 35 percent, depending on source — significantly closer to full representation than fire and police work, but still lower than the workforce average (Severson, 2016).

As with all aspects of gender politics—described here as the actions, behaviors, and outcomes that stem from gender differences—the factors behind the figures are innumerable and endlessly complex. It would be easy to say a lack of interest from women has created such a lopsided first responder workforce or chalk the gap up to latent and active sexism. While these issues undoubtedly contribute to some part of the disparity, attempting to assign one cause to the issue is too simplistic.

Concerns surrounding gender equality also risk another sort of simplification, however. The idea that perfect parity overrides all other needs or concerns is a potentially dangerous thought in a field where physical exertion is a common need and saving lives is a core goal. The fear of litigation or similar trouble keeping organizations from hiring the most qualified[5] personnel is frequently presented as a concern on the "other side" of the gender gap because of this—though this thought must be balanced against the extreme gender gap and unfair screening practices female applicants face.

Considerations like the above suggest the need for a gender-aware approach to solving the divide, specifically a responder field that takes into account the skills, abilities, and inherent talents popularly ascribed to the genders in its roster. Offering hiring, training, and qualification practices that more closely mirror the realities of the job at hand could result in gender distribution closer to the national average and a broader base of available talent for first responder organizations across the country. Currently most public safety organizations require a physical fitness test that is pass or fail for applicants prior to reviewing softer skills such as life experiences and perspectives, which may bring greater value than sheer physical fitness.

Physiological differences between male, female responders are deeper than meets the eye

Men and women do not bring the same biological and physiological qualities to a given first response job. As a sexually dimorphic species, men and women display several notable differences at even the quickest glance, many of which have little or nothing to do with their reproductive roles.

5. In one recent, controversial move, a New York Fire Department cadet was elevated to probationary firefighter status despite "[failing] a crucial fitness exam." Proponents say this is a victory over unfair test design, while others outside and within the department have expressed concerns about working alongside any cadet who can't pass the fitness exam. Numerous other cadets were removed from consideration for failing the same exam (Ford, 2015).

Men are generally taller than women are, their physiology boasts greater upper-body muscle mass,[6] and they tend to have larger hands and feet.

Alongside the extra mass, thicker fibers allow men to derive more pound-for-pound strength from the muscle they have.[7] The comparative advantages of the male cardiovascular and circulatory systems are similarly notable. On average, men can achieve higher heart rates, deliver more oxygen to active muscles, pump more blood, and inhale and hold more air than females.[8]

The respective amounts of testosterone and estrogen the male and female body generate go a long way towards explaining these differences. At a very high level, the male body's enhanced production of testosterone helps it create more muscle mass. On the inverse, the female body's higher estrogen levels equate to more fat production, smaller size, and less muscle-building efficiency—though physiological differences could also result in enhanced performance for women and relative weaknesses for men, both of which will be discussed later in this paper.

Finally, it is worth noting that these ideas, while commonly known and are generally true, are just that: generalities. There are undoubtedly many women with better, stronger musculature than the average male, particularly fitness-minded women who spend the time and effort required to train.

The inherent biases of physical fitness screens

The above factors contribute to a common line of reasoning: In a job where physical performance is paramount, people with a natural predisposition toward it are arguably best suited for the job. From the firefighter kicking down a door to the police officer chasing a fleeing suspect to the EMT professionals team lifting a hefty patient, many tasks responders carry out are presumably aligned to the strengths, advantages, and efficiencies of the male body.

However, the above argument often falls flat when considering the broad range of tools already used by responders today. Every time an officer uses OC spray to incapacitate a stronger

6. Testosterone, the same hormone that allows for greater muscle mass, also gives the average man greater bone density than the average woman (8fit, 2016).

7. The European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology attributes this added efficiency to thicker muscle fiber. However, the same research notes that the size discrepancy can come from lifestyle and fitness factors as well as biological ones, suggesting fitness-minded female recruits may be able to bridge at least some of the gap (Miller et. al, 1993).

8. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the male heart is also able to deliver more blood per pump. This, along with the oxygen-delivery benefits, adds to the enhanced male ability to build muscle and efficiency thereof (Niedziocha, 2015).

suspect, an EMS team uses a stretcher to move a patient that'd otherwise be too heavy to carry, or a firefighter breaches the door of a burning building with a Halligan (among numerous other examples), a responder is, in effect, overcoming a physical deficit with the help of tools. Similarly, fitness training and policies are designed to make any size body or body type more strength-efficient.

Other objectors routinely raise the idea that standards are standards. If all applicants are required to carry out the same tasks, shouldn't they be required to meet the same fitness performance goals?

Recent events in Corpus Christi, Texas, during which the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) investigated and eventually sued the local police department for testing practices that violated the Civil Rights Act, call attention to the issue's many complexities.[9] Some 63 percent of male applicants cleared the department's physical fitness screen, while only 19 percent of females did the same. All told, women accounted for only 9.6 percent of Corpus Christi's police hires during the four-year period the noncompliant test was in place, lower than the already-slim national average for female police. Similar legal actions were filed against the Pennsylvania State Police in 2014, when a biased testing program unfairly excluded 119 women from a chance to compete for open roles.[10]

In both situations, the term business necessity comes into play. The USDOJ determined the tests did not reflect a legitimate need—that is to say, the inability to complete a 300-meter run or scale a 5'6" wall would not seriously diminish a recruit's capacity to perform in the role. Combined with an unnaturally low pass rate for female recruits, these concerns ultimately meant the screening practices violated the Civil Rights Act. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger noted in his opinion on Griggs v. Duke Power Co., the Supreme Court case that gave the "business necessity" language its legal teeth: "Tests are useful servants, but [...] they are not to become masters of reality."[11]

To this end, skewed results and USDOJ findings lead one to wonder whether the noncompliant tests were geared towards

9. The city eventually agreed to extend $700,000 in back pay to female applicants who should've been accepted into the ranks, but were cut due to illegal testing standards (US Department of Justice, 2013).

10. In this instance, applicants were required to complete a "300-meter run, sit-ups, push-ups, a vertical jump and a 1.5-mile run," each with a cut-off score (Associated Press, 2014).

11. The same case confirms that motivation has little to do with whether a given test is discriminatory. Though the people who designed the entrance exams in Texas and Pennsylvania likely did not have discriminatory practices in mind, the result was still gender discrimination—putting them in violation of the Civil Rights Act (Findlaw, accessed 2017).

the actual physical rigors of first response work or arbitrary figures designed to gauge some equally arbitrary, idealized level of fitness. Moreover, one wonders if tests designed in a male-dominated field might feature challenges designed for relatively fit men, even if the bias is unintentional. Former state and federal prosecutor Val Van Brocklin also raises an interesting point about the fluid nature of many tasks within the first responder world. If "there's always going to be a bigger, stronger bad guy" than a given officer and numerous tools are available to level the playing field, is there any valid reason for standards to favor the lower end of male performance and the high end of female capability?[12]

12. To negate this problem, Van Brocklin recommends a mandatory pre-application fitness regimen for all cadets, with those who complete it to satisfaction and pass the application process going into a more in-depth series of job skills trainings (Van Brocklin, 2013).

These questions are at the heart of a debate that has gone on for decades, particularly where the idea of dual or double standards are involved. In the military, for instance, disparate physical training (PT) standards for male and female recruits have long been the subject of ire. Proponents say the dual standards account for ideal fitness levels for the two genders, while detractors claim the dichotomy provides a convenient, arguably cynical way for leadership to hit important quotas or maliciously comply with gender-based requirements. The idea that lower physical training standards result in personnel being less equipped or worthy for the job may also create unfair division in the ranks. The officer or firefighter who feels he has more right to say he earned the job due to a harder training or acceptance regimen, for instance, may make comments or otherwise contribute to a culture that makes equally qualified female colleagues feel unwelcome.

This debate has only gained nuance since the Pentagon opened combat positions to female recruits in 2015. One female Marine writing for the New York Times says dual PT standards and single combat integration tests, "allows the Marine Corps to say that women aren't up to the challenges of combat," for one example of the complex opinions this situation generates. The Marine goes on to say that PT standards should be identical because of this concern.[13]

13. The Marine Lt. Col. says effecting a unified standard would cause more female recruits to wash out earlier, but give the Marine Corps and other branches of the service a more qualified group of potential combat service members (Germano, 2015).

Women, like men, bring unique qualities to first responder roles

Discussion of training inequality aside, physical capability is only one trait a responder must bring to their role. Furthermore, women also have the potential to bring gender-specific traits—or at least gender-common traits—to responder organizations. Like the male tendency towards physical strength and agility, most of these traits are borne from documented physical and biological differences, and many align with emergent needs of current-day police stations and firehouses. This underscores both the changing nature of first response and the growing impracticality of the gender gap within it.

The "hardwired difference between male and female brains" noted in one Independent article explains many such skills. Connections in the typical woman's brain are "more likely to run from side to side between the left and right hemispheres of the brain," than a man's, a bit of neural wiring that results in better aptitude for verbal, intuition, and memory-focused tasks.[15] These traits could be quite helpful in a field like law enforcement, where perceptions and emotions color one's ability to read the truth behind a situation or gauge a suspect's trustworthiness. Combined with inherent verbal intelligence, these skills have left female officers in high demand in locations like Upper Allen Township, Pennsylvania, where leadership laments a "local void" of female recruits.[16]

However, it is also important to note that thinking only women can handle a given task is a dangerous line of thinking. Placing male and female recruits in exclusive boxes in terms of the skills and traits they bring is unfair to people on both sides of the gender divide, considering the diverse lot of capabilities responders of both genders offer individually.

Beyond the obvious benefits to a police officer, an above-average ability to retain information is a highly desirable trait in firehouses. Competent firefighters must call back on an impressive array of job training including procedural info and technical information, and practical data (the number and location of exits on a given floor level, for instance).

These are not the only advantages female recruits hold over men, though. Many women have peripheral vision that

15. The difference in connection is also thought to be the source of a woman's (comparatively) stronger sense of "emotional intelligence," a trait that could be useful in numerous public interactions. (Connor, 2013).

16. Officers in other Pennsylvania police departments claim that women make up less than 10 percent of total applicants, but that those who have landed the job are some of the area's "top producers." Of the roughly 4500 police officers in areas covered by the article, less than six percent were female. (Miller, 2012).

extends to nearly 180°; men are generally incapable of the same peripheral range.[17] Women are more capable of parsing through aural clutter, which makes it easier to decipher specific sounds in a noisy environment. On the visual end, they have a higher number of cone-shaped eye cells, giving more scientific basis to the longstanding notion that women see more colors (and see the colors both genders can see) better than men.

17. The research also uses a common marriage trope to explain the differences in vision: Since men are better at what's seeing directly in front of them, it's entirely possible that they can see a clean room while a woman can look at the same space and — with her superior peripheral vision — see a cluttered mess (Parnell, 2015).

Physical differences between men, women may explain differences in policing styles

Speaking specifically to the gender gap in law enforcement, the dearth of female officers in states like Pennsylvania undoubtedly mirrors a larger need for police organizations around the country. This is of particular importance considering the needs, wants, and aspirations of many modern policing organizations. As a rule, departments large and small are under pressure to use less force, to spend fewer dollars on payouts to wronged suspects and civilians, and, increasingly, to implement methods that put use of force behind other, less violent, strategies.

Returning to another topic discussed earlier—namely, the basic biological differences between sexes—it is easy to see how the average woman's strengths might foster more desirable outcomes in these areas. However, discussing this topic also means dispelling the misconception that men and women tend to hold widely attributed personality traits because testosterone or estrogen made them that way.

Hormones do not directly influence behavior in that they do not tell the person producing them what to do. Instead, endocrine sciences believe they "change the probability that a particular behavior will be emitted in the appropriate situation."[18] The difference between these two perspectives is subtle but essential—it is comparable to the difference between knowing what someone is going to do in a situation and having a rough feel for how they may react from a range of possible behavioral outcomes. In a policing context, the female body's comparatively high levels of estrogen, oxytocin, and other hormones mean a woman might be more likely to emit behaviors that align with the changing face of law

18. By the same token, these hormones begin to influence behavior at a very young age. Girls are more likely to display nurturing behavior than boys from early development; boys, as anyone who has dealt with children of both genders has likely surmised, are more likely to "engage in rough-and-tumble play" (Nelson, 2017).

enforcement. For example, a female officer may be more adept at understanding a contentious situation from dual perspectives, or using verbal skills to talk down an angry suspect before resorting to use of force.

This idea is further reflected in the tend-and-befriend hypothesis of behavior. Where men are likely to survey a dangerous situation from a fight-or-flight perspective, research suggests women attempt to gain a better understanding of why they, as well as the people around them, are feeling such stress. In one study, females placed in a stressful situation and shown images of angry or scared faces saw increased coordination between the areas of the brain that regulate empathy and emotional understanding; males, on the other hand, saw reduced neural coordination in the same situation.[19]

Putting this another way, a surplus of estrogen doesn't mean a woman will take a nonviolent approach or avoid confrontation any more than a surplus of testosterone unilaterally makes men react to stress with violence. However, the hormones can influence both genders to approach situations with baseline behaviors in mind—both sides of which can prove valuable in different response situations.

Now consider modern law enforcement's stance towards aggression and use of force. Though force is unquestionably critical for officer and public safety in various situations, using it as a primary means of response has largely been left by the wayside as a practice and a philosophy. Training that emphasizes talk, de-escalation, and even understanding, on the other hand, has become increasingly common, a response to changing community standards, widespread availability of pocket-sized video recording devices (e.g. smartphones)[20] , and substantial payouts to victims of excessive force. The Chicago Police Department's nationally covered changes reflect a prime example of this. Reacting to local and national incidents, as well as pressure from the Department of Justice and the Chicago community, the City has required its 12,000-plus pool of officers to undergo intense training that emphasizes de-escalation and the "sanctity of life." Blows to the head and chokeholds—formerly considered basic defensive tactics—are now deemed as deadly force, and thus only allowable when "'all other reasonable alternatives have been exhausted.'"[21]

19. Ultimately, these stimuli could result in male responders being less likely to attempt understanding during tense situations, a diametric difference from the response a female officer in the same situation might emit (Mather et. al, 2010).

20. Though cameras don't provide a perfect contextual understanding of a situation, they are treated as such when video evidence of police wrongdoing is submitted. Whether a recording "tells the whole story" or not, any recorded behavior that could be taken as abuse is likely to be perceived that way, especially when framed as such (Envisage, 2017).

21. If anything, this change is so stunning because of the Chicago PD's sheer size, the cost of the added training, and the amount of emphasis they put on de-escalation. The training largely goes against the common police philosophy of defending oneself above all and instead places value in making small concessions to suspects and carrying out other behaviors that may lessen tensions in the moment (Jackman, 2017).

Naturally, changes that could hypothetically put officers in harm's way by emphasizing talk over action have drawn criticism from the policing community and other onlookers. However, the point is not to promote or dismiss the rising trend against force. Instead, it is to illustrate that the change is coming in some ways, and is already here in others. In the end, this may be what allows police departments to derive benefits from their female recruits. If reducing force incidents were a major area of focus, the inclusion of people with a biological predisposition for verbal skill and emotional empathy would be extremely beneficial.

Female officers in one study were responsible for only six percent of dollars paid out in excessive force judgments, where payouts for force cases involving male officers were likely to cost 2.5 to 5.5 times more. Other numbers follow a similar logical line. According to the same data, men are substantially more likely to be named in use of force complaints, and allegations against male officers are almost nine times more likely to be sustained.[22]

22. On the other hand, women are named in only two percent of sustained allegations for excessive force (National Center for Women & Policing, 2002).

Any statistical gulf this wide should be subject to scrutiny. First, it should be noted that much of this research comes from an organization with a stated desire to advance female interests in policing. This is hardly a bad thing on its face, but it is worthy of consideration where objective figures are concerned, especially when the language surrounding the numbers displays a clear gender-political bent. Second, the "newest" data on the subject is still over 15 years old, leaving one to wonder just how different newer figures might be with the day's focus on de-escalation. Third, and finally, while certain statistics (namely, the figures outlining how much force cases cost by gender) may need to figure in the relatively small number of female police officers to make a point, others fail to consider it when they arguably should. If women comprised a larger percentage of the overall police force, common sense and basic statistics dictate they would be party to a higher percentage of complaints.

A chicken-or-egg dilemma: Why potential female recruits may not wish to work in a male-dominated field

Figures like these, while undoubtedly helpful in proving the existence of a gender gap and instrumental in explaining how it could be harmful, do not necessarily point to the causes of the gap. Most reasonable decision-makers in hiring positions understand that an expanded female presence might be of value in their firehouse or EMS service, but getting to the point where qualified candidates are available is another challenge altogether.

Unfortunately, direct data beyond factors we have already discussed is far from abundant. In Corpus Christi and Pennsylvania—as well as other locations, including those in England[23] —retooling training standards to better meet the female physiology has, unsurprisingly, resulted in a more representative gender mix. Along with more females passing, more representative physical standards would presumably cause more women to apply in the first place. The woman who hears her physically fit workout partner failed a relatively grueling test may be less likely to apply herself. Meanwhile, the same woman may decide to attempt her lifelong dream of becoming a firefighter if she hears her fit friend passed: Since prior representation tells her it is, in fact, possible to achieve the goal, in other words, she is more likely to try.

Other factors undoubtedly contribute as well, though research has yet to link them directly to the gap. First is the notion that a male-dominated work culture carries with it traits a potential female recruit may find undesirable. Rumors alleging rampant sexual harassment in the firefighting industry, for example, have swirled for many years, with several high-profile cases surrounding well-known departments.[24] As in the above example, it is reasonable to assume a woman who would otherwise want to be a firefighter may not bother to apply after researching the topic and discovering endless search pages of unflattering information. Between the high-profile cases,[25] blogs from male firefighters exhorting their colleagues to cease the harmful behavior,[26] and industry blogs alluding to the field's "elephant in the room,"[27] there are no shortage

23. In the UK, relaxing standards led to a "surge" in the number of female firefighters, a change that naturally ended in praise from one side and discontent from the other (Daily Mail, 2011).

24. Much research has been undertaken on the topic of sexual harassment in firefighting over the years. However, efforts have been stymied by hugely variable definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment, fear of professional retribution, and other problems common to research of unpleasant facts. That said, there is evidence that women in male-dominated industries are more likely to be subject to harassment, such as sexual advances and exposure to pornography (Russo, 2013).

25. In other instances, male firefighters are the subject of sexual harassment: Hazing rituals involving nude colleagues, for instance, led a male rookie to sue the FDNY (Balsamini and Edelman, 2017).

26. Though more passionate than most, Avsec's blog is far from the only firefighter-written post expressing upset at sexual harassment — and a perceived culture that allows it — in firefighting (Avsec, 2017).

27. Among other concerns, many such industry sources are upset that the actions of a few give the industry a bad name — a fair position for any firefighter to hold alongside their concern for female colleagues (Murphy, 2013).

of secondary data sources to prove firefighting's gender politics aren't always friendly to females. Similar rumors and reputational issues also surround policing to varying degrees.[28]

Note here that overt sexual harassment is not the only uncomfortable artifact of a male-heavy field. For the woman with general concerns about working in an office comprised primarily of men, reluctance to apply becomes a sort of chicken-or-egg quandary. On a more abstract level, it is easy to see how marketing and recruitment materials geared towards a primarily male audience could potentially alienate women. Images featuring teams of men decked out in tactical fire- or crime-fighting gear may not provide the most persuasive argument to female onlookers.[29]

Of course, considering that the longstanding view of firefighting and law enforcement as men's fields may be enough to curb interest from many women on its face, before the potential recruit considers office gender politics or biased hiring practices. In much the same way women see disproportionate representation in fields like teaching and nursing—and in the same way some men see these fields as for women—a variety of field-specific concerns may further the gap, but individual perceptions like these also have a hand.

28. In one study, 80 percent of female Dallas police said sexual harassment occurred in their department, and 50 percent said they'd personally experienced it (Segrave, 2014).

29. To curb this complaint, it has been recommended that departments locate good female recruitment sources and send custom-created fliers with images of female employees on them (Milgram, 2005).

How can police, fire, and EMS leaders create more gender-aware workplaces?

Even if we exclude all the issues listed throughout this paper, however, it is fair to assume some level of gender disproportion (and complaints about the factors behind it) would exist in first response. While the industry is undoubtedly making strides, drawing and retaining one gender to any field generally run by another will be fraught with the complexities, challenges, and realities of gender politics and stereotypes.

Considering all the factors in this paper then, we can come to three conclusions:

1. In our current culture, men and women are fundamentally different on physical and biological levels, and social conventions make those differences even more pronounced

2. Because of this, first response organizations should make gender awareness the goal—not an arbitrary focus on gender equality at all costs

3. In order to address the gender imbalance in all first response fields, leadership must make significant alterations that touch every aspect of a recruit's career: Initial and ongoing training standards, cultural reflections of a male-dominated workplace, and unfair assumptions about what female recruits can and cannot do, for just three examples.

This is not to say that gender equality is a bad thing, or that first response should not strive for such equality. Instead, this paper proposes that more awareness of the difference between genders may help organizations add more females to their rosters and play to the strengths of every person, male and female, on the payroll.

To this end, it may seem that a paper on the topic of gender equity should put more focus on men and the issues they face in the workplace. While men do undoubtedly face unique challenges based on their gender, consider the following quote:

> "When it comes to gender issues [in the workplace], men generally don't feel the impact. For women, gender issues have full impact, affecting their lives constantly. Our gender identities shape what hurts and helps us, knowingly or unknowingly."[30]

This quote is especially poignant as applied to first response. It bears repeating that, because the field is primarily inhabited by males, things that seem normal (for instance, physical training screens) may actually be restrictive to or biased against female recruits and employees. The common example of harmless banter becoming sexual harassment or an unwanted advance after falling on the wrong ears illustrates this point. Following that logic, it is easy to understand how male colleagues and onlookers may heap scorn or derision on new or existing female employees when they feel rules are being unfairly bent for nothing more than the sake of

30. The article also cites a survey in which 72 percent of male respondents claimed "much progress had been made towards women's empowerment and career progression"; female executives — a group who ostensibly already enjoyed a great deal of career progression — disagreed with the idea at a rate of 71 percent. It's another take on the power of perception in the workplace, and how seemingly innocuous policies and behaviors can carry an unintentional-yet-harmful slant (Liswood 2015).

inclusion—when often, the changes are more in the name of levelling the playing field.

For many departments, the first step in fostering a more gender-aware workplace will naturally involve recruitment and screening processes. Though existing recruitment materials may not have been explicitly designed with males in mind, does it appear that way when examined from a more neutral perspective? Are there insights into the split between male and female pass-rates on your physical fitness screens (and subsequent continuing-fitness training programs)? Do female employees who are otherwise good at their jobs struggle with the physical training and testing aspects of the work? Taking an objective look at these factors may help a department add more females to their ranks if the existing employee base is onboard.

Further, departments must strive to give women a more active role in deciding how to make first response fields more receptive to female recruits: Just as men do not experience the inherent biases in training and other aspects of the field; it may be hard for them to see every aspect of the job that carries unfair assumptions or expectations.

Returning to the topic of training, changes that highlight the subtle differences between men and women can reap benefits. For one example, an author notes, offering female recruits incremental feedback instead of long lists might be useful: Because many women are natural multitaskers, they may otherwise be inclined to address every point of improvement an instructor offers at once, leaving them frazzled and their attempts at learning less effective.[31] Meanwhile, firearm training and carry rules that account for discrepancies in hand size may lead to better performance on the range and more accuracy in high-stakes, real-life situations.

There is also some evidence that fitness-minded women derive more enjoyment and better results from holistic mind-body exercise regimens, as well as programs that emphasize a balance of improvements and health benefits[32] —explaining to some degree why yoga courses and similar classes often market themselves to women. Organizations may be able to

31. The author also suggests using team-based exercises, in which recruits work towards a shared goal, instead of direct competition when working with females: Because they tend to value social connection more and competition less, women may be more likely to engage with challenges that promote a group task (Ellifritz, 2016).

32. Experts also note that women, being more flexible, tend to enjoy flexibility-focused exercises and risk injury when attempting upper-body strength training courses designed for men (Soren, 2015).

parlay this info into training regimens that incorporate role realities into exercise.

There is also the culture of the workplace itself. While sexual harassment, unwanted advancements, and other unwanted sexual expressions are obviously unacceptable regardless of which gender receives them, keeping an eye out for smaller cultural rifts that alienate one gender or another can promote better awareness. Leadership should look for informal practices and policies that put women on less-important tasks (or punish things women might be less likely to achieve at by diminishing their role). Here, even behaviors borne from good intentions can be perceived as negatives: In police stations, for instance, a strong protector's urge may lead male officers to look after female recruits in ways that make them feel uncomfortable and singled-out, this despite the male officer's earnest attempts to be helpful. These misunderstandings can breed hostilities that feel perfectly valid on both sides.

Conclusion

To some point, issues in gender politics remain one of first response's biggest challenges. From the unique skills and perspectives females bring to the workplace to fear of state and federal intervention, there are numerous reasons to implement programs and policies that support female participation—and very few reasons to maintain the status quo.

This point may carry extra weight in policing, considering the challenges law enforcement organizations face in the wake of changing societal demands. It would be disingenuous to say males are not better suited to certain physical aspects of the job, but saying the challenges and roles require physical skill and little else does a great disservice to the field and the men and women working within it. Women are just as capable of fulfilling the job's duties, and they bring natural skills and talents that make them better at some aspects of the work, just like men do.

In other words, even forward-thinking organizations may benefit from revisiting their approach to the gender divide.

Though the common refrain in fixing issues like these revolves around the idea of equality, a better description of the need would be enhanced gender awareness. By taking the way men and women experience the world into account and altering policy, practice, and hiring doctrine to better match the perspectives, organizations can offer a more level playing field and perhaps even glean better performance from their employees. In a field where the split between genders comes nowhere close to the national average, it's more than a good idea — it's critical, and will only grow in importance as departments strive towards greater gender diversification.

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