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Police Use of Force in America

In today's society it is what seems like an often occurrence that a news story comes out about an innocent young man killed by a police officer in a standoff. These incidents cause huge uproars by citizens and in some cases big protests and rallies which lead to even more violence. Then police again acquire even more of a bad reputation when they have to intervene, sometimes with force in order to keep the situation under control. Big news cases including the case of Walter Scott of North Charleston, South Carolina and the Michael Brown case of Ferguson Missouri caused a divide, distrust, and hate within America which is something this country didn't need then and doesn't need now. Whenever someone is hurt whether it be a citizen or an officer it is a tragic situation, an officers job is to protect the public including all the citizens in it and the officer themselves. When a situation is threatening the officer, the public, and the certain individual posing the threat, force, whether it be lethal or just extreme force, must be used in order to eliminate the threat.

Now police often use force throughout a weeks' work, however, police force and police brutality are two different things. Starting out simple, the definition of police use of force by the Association of Chiefs of Police is the "amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject" (ACP). So generally we can assume that police force is anything an officer must use in order to protect themselves and everyone around. This situation gets tricky when personal judgement comes into play. What one person thinks is adequate and appropriate to the situation, another person, perhaps the person the officer is using force on might see it as unnecessary and brutal. This is where the issue of brutality comes into the equation; police brutality is described as "The use of any force exceeding that reasonably necessary to accomplish a lawful police purpose" (Encyclopedia). Day to day police use their best judgement in situations

where force may be needed and they use this judgement based off of the training they received

and with the public judging their every move it can be difficult for them to do their jobs. Not

every police officer is true to the job but that does not mean the whole force should be blamed.

What qualifies as police use of force

In general terms, force is permitted under certain circumstances including self-defense

or in defense of another individual. But according to the *Institute of Justice* there is no one

decided definition or clear description of force. That is because no situation is the same and

every police officer is different with their judgement and every civilian they deal with is

different and act certain ways towards situations. "Law enforcement officers should use only

the amount of force necessary to mitigate an incident, make an arrest, or protect themselves

from harm. The levels or continuum, of force police use include basic verbal and physical

restraint, less lethal force, and more lethal force" (institute of justice 1). This states that force is

taught and necessary for the officers to do their jobs. However, this also varies based on an

officer's level of training and experience. An officer who is less experienced may use force more

often or in certain situations that an experienced officer may not because of lack of knowledge

and experience of knowing what should be done and how to handle this. But this should not be

looked at as an issue, either way the situation is being taken care of and the officers are doing

what they see fit.

Police Training

As stated already, there is no universal idea of what force is and what is too much, there

is also no nationally set requirements for officer training. It is up to the states how and what the

officers are trained to do. With that being said, nothing involving police brutality or unnecessary

force is a national problem as people claim it to be. According to an NPR podcast with a police

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officer, "We know that the single largest block training relates to use of force- an average of just over 120 hours. Officer safety or officer survival training often starts on the first day of the academy where police cadets see very gripping and horrifying videos of other officers being severely beaten or killed. The lessons that start early on in the police academy really revolve around one basic principle- policing is dangerous and if you get complacent, you will die" (Stoughton). Said by a police officer himself who as well is head of a police training academy this is a man with real knowledge on the realities of police work. Officers know from the day they begin training that this is a dangerous field and they put their lives at risk every day so force being used is a way for them to do their jobs and protect themselves. Police get beaten by civilians, there is no reason why this happens or no logical cause but maybe if the police officer used force, rater it be lethal or just brutal force, they could have avoided the danger.

Contributions to police hate

The next problem within the equation is eliminating the stereotype of racism within the police force. Although yes, racism does exist it is not something the public needs to hold against the police force it hurts more than it helps. According to the Washington Post tally, only sixteen unarmed black men were fatally shot by police and the year before that, the number was thirty-six, there is about the same chance that a black man will be struck by lightning. According to the Police Public Contact Survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics it is also a misleading fact that black men are more likely to get brutalized or stopped by police, white men run into police in a given year with 17.5 percent versus 20.7 percent also a black man has an average of 0.35 contacts with police in a given year. As well as only 1.5 percent of black men have more than three contacts with police within a year. When it comes to force only 0.6 percent of black men experience force while 0.2 percent of white do. So although it does show that it is higher

with blacks than whites the percent for both of them is still very small. These statistics put a lot

into perspective, if force is as rare as they claim it to be then when it is used it is obviously for

good reason and necessary. It is very tragic when news of a fatal shooting comes out but is it

necessary to riot and cause even more pain and tension in the society when this is not something

that is occurring all the time or as often as the news portrays it to?

Counter

If anything is going to show that police brutality is a problem in America it is the big

cases that caused the most uproar from communities all over the country. The case involving

police officer Darren Wilson and teenager Michael Brown caused riots in the streets, violence,

and hate within the community which is still a discussed issue up to this day. There were many

witnesses who came forward and gave their side to the situation, however, a lot of them were

different but with one thing being the same and that is that officer Wilson fatally shot Brown.

Most of the witnesses say Brown was shot as he was moving towards Wilson but Wilson claims

Brown was reaching into his vehicle for a gun when he shot him. Which brings up the question

of how Wilson knew he was reaching for a gun without seeing it? Witnesses also claim that

Brown was never near his vehicle or that he never moved towards officer Wilson. So if this case

is anything, it is unknown with so many different witness testimonies and with Brown being

dead there is no way to know exactly what happened. The grand jury decided not to indict officer

Wilson which caused even more anger within the surrounding community and within the country

(NY times).

Yes, there are situations involving police officers being in the wrong and using wrongful

force and brutality against citizens. However, on a day to day basis officers are just out in the

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field doing their jobs and protecting the community around them and sometimes in order to do so, force is needed and that should not be frowned upon. Police are trained what to do and what not to do but it comes down to the moment and the decisions they make then and most of them make the decisions they see necessary to protect everyone even if force is needed. A few bad officers that make wrong decisions should not bring the whole police community within the country causing divide and hate. People must think of police officers as people like them instead of the enemy, when force is being used, looking at it as them protecting their own lives will show it to be less brutal and more understandable. The public will never truly understand what it is like to be an officer in the line of duty facing dangerous situations trying to protect society and therefore police officers should be given respect, understanding, and trust in order to eliminate hate and distrust.

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