ABSTRACT


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When it comes to the topic of physical force traditional images of femininity and masculinity remain very vivid. The image of women using physical force, especially as members of the armed forces and police, is still problematic in our culture. The image of the peaceable woman can even be found in feminist discourses.

In Germany, women were long excluded from police service and are still in the minority there. Physical force is a central topic in public and internal discourses about whether women should be police officers: Their capability to use force is questioned and there is hope that they support de-escalation. Now that the police forces are undergoing reform, and avoiding violence is becoming a more important issue, it seems to be an appropriate time to improve the situation of female police officers. There are many police women trying to support their female colleagues by emphasising their ascribed greater social skills for de-escalation.

In my presentation I will speak about the results of my own research in a German police station. As a sociologist I based my study on feminist theories of organisations and gender. My thesis is that hierarchical social arrangements between men and women are improved by using the argument of different abilities of female and male officers and the image of the peaceable woman.

My analysis of the interviews with female and male police officers shows that the ascription of de-escalation to women can both help avoid violence and also make use of physical force possible.

However, the concept of de-escalation does not improve the situation of police women: They are assigned unpleasant work, have less authority and power than their male colleagues, and are often seen as second class officers.