

Are White Men Personae Non-Gratae?

By Philip Carl Salzman

In contemporary British and Canadian television programs, women dominate the police forces. Any men officers are often men of colour. In older police dramas, the police were predominantly men.¹ Even in a few current programs, there are more male police, although the female police officers play major parts.²

The current trend in British and Canadian police shows is for women to be portrayed as the prominent police officers, with men of colour as their main complements, with white men presented in demeaning ways, or absent altogether. This can be seen in the following examples:

Scott and Bailey (British, 2010-2016³), both produced and directed by women, features two white female detectives, both constables at first, then one is promoted to sergeant. Their supervisor, the Detective Chief Inspector (DCI), is a white female; her boss, a Detective Superintendent (DSI), is a white female; and her white female boss is Chief Superintendent or Assistant Chief Constable. In this show, the white men are presented as clumsy, incompetent, or corrupt, and those are only the other police officers; white men, in general, are shown as sexual abusers, kidnappers, and murderers. The only impressive male is a black police Superintendent.

Vera (2011-present⁴) features an older white woman as Detective Chief Inspector in Northumberland, England. She has a sharp tongue, and regularly makes demeaning, insulting, and humiliating remarks to her white male subordinates.

In *Silent Witness* (British, 1994-present⁵), the central character is a white female pathologist and medical examiner. Her boss and other members of the examiner's office are all white males, except for a white female researcher in a wheelchair; however, her boss's boss is a tall, imposing black man.

In *Happy Valley* (British, 2014-present⁶), the main character is a white, female Sergeant, working in a small and run-down Yorkshire town. Her constable is Shafiq Shah, a man of colour with a Middle Eastern or South Asian family background. Her superior is a white male, as is the detective superintendent.

In *Rookie Blue* (Canadian, set in Toronto, 2010-2015⁷), although the main character is a white female rookie police officer, there is close to an even balance of white women and white men, plus several black male and female officers.

Unforgotten (British, 2015-present⁸), stars a white female DCI, assisted by a brown, South Asian male DI. A white male

¹ In *Hill Street Blues*, (American, 1981-87, <https://imdb.com/title/tt0081873>), there were 26 male police and 5 female police; in *Homicide: Life on the Streets*, (American, 1993-1999, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106028/>), the main police characters were six males and two females; in *The Wire*, (American, 2002-2008, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0306414/>), the police were all male, except for Shakima Griggs, and mostly African-American.

² In *Blue Bloods*, (American, 2010-present, https://www.cbs.com/shows/blue_bloods/; <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1595859/>), the male/female ratio is three male to one female, although in April 2018 a female African-American supervisor, whether lieutenant or captain is not clear, was added to the cast; in *Chicago PD*, (American, 2014-present, <https://www.nbc.com/chicago-pd>; <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2805096/>), the ratio is 2 male to 1 female, although the female police play prominent roles.

³ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1843678/fullcredits>

⁴ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1693592/>

⁵ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115355/>

⁶ <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3428912/>

⁷ <https://www.globaltv.com/rookieblue/>

⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/shows/unforgotten/>

DS and a white male DC are marginal characters and rarely seen.

The Detail (Canadian, 2018⁹), features two female detectives, one white and one black, and their white female Staff Inspector supervisor. Their white female medical examiner is a proud lesbian. The Crown Attorney is a black woman. There are a few white and brown male detectives, but they rarely appear, and are largely marginal to the action. Typical dialogue: female Staff Inspector to white male Sargent: "If I wanted your opinion, I would have asked for it." The female detectives tackle a large white male, and exchange blows until he is vanquished and shackled. Most of the rapists and murderers sought by the detectives are, of course, white males.

All of the programs listed above are well-done and entertaining. I often enjoy watching them. But I note the trend of downgrading men in favour of women, and white men in favour of men of colour. How can this be explained?

One possibility is marketing targeting women and visible minorities. Men are known to favour watching sports: football, hockey, cricket, basketball, rugby, baseball, even golf. Perhaps transforming police programs into "chick flicks" is a strategy to draw more viewers, particularly female viewers.

Another possibility, not inconsistent with the prior one, is the feminist logic that men have run things and marginalized women for all of history and prehistory, and now it is time for women to run things. Furthermore, women police, who physically fight men and use firearms, are an excellent example of the feminist mantra of "strong" women.

Also consistent with the feminist motive is "social justice" theory, which classifies heterosexual white men as the oppressors of the world, and women along with men of colour as their victims. "Social justice" remedies involve suppressing the oppressors, heterosexual white males, and empowering females and men of colour. This may prove difficult in the world, but in fictional television programs "social justice" utopia can be achieved.

What does not explain this trend in police programs is the actual demography of real police forces. Women are a minority, less than 25% of police officers:

In Canada, according to Statistics Canada¹⁰, "More recently, women are accounting for an increasing proportion of those among the higher ranks of police. The proportion of senior officers who were female began increasing notably in 1995 at 1.6%, and has more than doubled from 5.5% in 2005 to 12.4% in 2015. The proportion of female non-commissioned officers, with a rank between that of a constable and lieutenant, has similarly increased from 9.7% in 2005 to 18.0% in 2015." Female constables have increased from 5% in 1986 to 22% in 2015.

Women have an even lower representation in American police forces, which have 88.4% male officers; 11.6% female officers.¹¹ Among detectives and criminal investigators, 73.8% are male, 26.2% female.¹² It is much the same story with forensic pathologists in the United States, most of whom work as, or work for, medical examiners: 79% were males and 21% were female.¹³

Among police officers in England and Wales as of 2017¹⁴, the gender ratio by rank was as follows:

Constable	69% male, 31% female
Sergeant	77.7% male, 22.3% female
Inspector	78.3% male, 21.7% female
Chief Inspector	74.9% male, 25.1% female
Superintendent	76.7% male, 23.3% female

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4192812/>

⁹ <https://www.ctv.ca/The-Detail>

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6882202/>

¹⁰ <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2016001/article/14323-eng.htm>

¹¹ <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2013/crime-in-the-u.s.-2013/tables/table-74>

¹² <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/333021/>

¹³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11394744>

¹⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/382525/share-of-police-officers-in-england-and-wales-gender-rank/>

Chief Superintendent 77.1% male, 22.9% female

Lest my account suggests that I object to female police officers, let me make it clear that I do not. As it happens, my daughter did her college degree in "Police Foundations," has worked in private security, and is currently applying for a post in public police agencies. Nor should it be imagined that I care only about whites; both my daughter and son are "visible minorities."

But should we not be concerned about an agenda for advancing women at the expense of men, and people of colour at the expense of whites? Should we not strive for universalistic criteria that select public servants and employees according to their abilities, capabilities, and merit? Is anti-male sexism and anti-white racism any more moral or socially desirable than the original versions?

The female dominated police offered by TV programs are fantasies, but the agenda of replacing men with women has succeeded beyond all feminist dreams in our universities.¹⁵ In 1971, 69% of 25-29 year old Canadian university graduates were men; by 2006, 60% were women. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2008001/article/10561-eng.htm>

Female students dominated in the social sciences at 68%, humanities, such as English, at 83%, law at 53%, and medicine at 59%.

During the last five years, the senior anthropology seminar I taught at McGill University consisted overwhelmingly of female students with only a handful of males. In the Fall term, 2017, there were 18 students in my seminar, all females.

Higher education in this regard is the same in the U.S.A.¹⁶ While in 2010 the national male-female ratio for 18-24 year olds was 51-49, the male-female ratio in public universities was 43.6-56.4, and in private colleges and universities, 42.5-57.5.

What I wonder about is whether a straight white male will be judged according to merit in university admittance, funding, and post appointment competitions, and in competitions for private industrial and public service jobs and promotion. Will female applicants be favoured, while your sons are blocked?

¹⁵ <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/female-university-enrolment-exceeds-male/>

¹⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ccap/2012/02/16/the-male-female-ratio-in-college/#47498713fa52>

About the Author



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