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## **BLOWS TO THE HEAD WERE *NEVER* O.K.**

*Cameras are everywhere, yet an abhorrent practice continues*



*For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel.* It was Sunday, October 16, 2022. Just outside the “Good Batch Hookah Lounge,” a nightclub in Inglewood, California, two Los Angeles County Sheriff’s deputies wrestle a violently resisting man to the ground. They clearly have the upper hand. But within moments one of the deputies pushes the man’s head to the ground (first and second graphics). He then forcefully punches it (third graphic).



And the cop isn’t done. He promptly jerks the man’s head back up (fourth graphic) and viciously – that’s the word that best fits – slams it to the ground, face-first (fifth graphic). (Click [here](#) for our brief clip and [here](#) for the full bystander video from which it was sourced.)



No, we’re not suggesting that Blake Luran Anderson, the 24-year old victim of this abuse, was harmless. His booking photo (see left) depicts a bevy of gang-related facial tattoos, including a prominent “CK” (Crip Killer) on the left cheek. [According to the Sheriff Department](#), Mr. Anderson was carrying a loaded pistol in a satchel, and that’s something a parolee, as he supposedly is, must not have. In the heat of the tangle,

its discovery was apparently so disconcerting that a deputy drew his pistol and activated its light to check whether their quarry was hiding anything else.

An online review of [L.A. County Superior Court files](#) confirmed that Mr. Anderson is a felon:

- In 2017, Mr. Anderson was convicted of one count of felony carrying a concealed firearm and three counts of misdemeanor resisting arrest (case no. MA 070417). He was sentenced to a prison term of four years and eight months. (His conviction of CCW as a felony may have been due to gang membership or to a prior felony conviction of which we are unaware.)
- In 2021, Mr. Anderson was convicted of possessing drugs in a correctional institution, a felony (case no. MA 082124). No sentencing information was available.

Actually, the deputies' encounter seemed purposeful from the start. An external store video camera depicts a Sheriff's patrol car turning into a commercial strip as Mr. Anderson walks with a female companion (click [here](#) for our brief clip). For reasons that remain undisclosed, a deputy promptly jumps out of the passenger side, runs up to Mr. Anderson and seeks to physically detain him. His quarry resists, and the deputy's partner soon joins the fray.

What initially drew the deputies' interest hasn't been disclosed. [Mr. Anderson's sister](#) claimed that her brother worked as a security guard for the lounge and was chatting with a customer when the deputies piled on for no reason. [She organized a GoFundMe campaign](#) to help cover the cost of medical treatment. Beset by a prior injury, Mr. Anderson's right eye was supposedly on the road to recovery. However, the deputies' brutal attack supposedly caused irreparable damage, and the eye will have to be removed and replaced with a prosthetic. (Note that Mr. Anderson's facial image on the GoFundMe webpage lacks tattoos.)

It's all somewhat puzzling. On the one hand, the Sheriff's Department is yet to explain why Mr. Anderson was stopped. On the other, [California requires that security guards be licensed](#) and [forbids them from having felony convictions](#). State and Federal laws also prohibit felons, such as Mr. Anderson apparently is, from possessing firearms. Curiously, a lawyer who represents Mr. Anderson told a reporter that his client was employed by a security company and "[was given that firearm to do his job.](#)"

Whatever Mr. Anderson's legal exposure might be – for the present, he faces charges of being an ex-con with a gun and assaulting a deputy – that inexplicable episode of

head bashing puts the County in bad shape, liability-wise. Mr. Anderson has filed a claim, and more litigation is surely on the way. As another member of his legal team pointed out (click [here](#) for his Twitter feed), “if you can’t get accountability for what we saw on that videotape, what can Black people get accountability for against the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department?”

In your blogger’s law enforcement experience, punching a suspect – especially, striking their head – was never considered acceptable. Yet both continue to take place with some frequency. Consider the notorious 2020 episode where an LAPD officer delivered a prolonged beating, including a series of head blows, to a homeless trespasser (this still depicts one of several wind-ups). That cop, who’s no longer on the force, recently pled no contest to assault. [He was sentenced to probation](#) and must attend anger management classes. (Click [here](#) for our brief video and [here](#) for the full-length version.)



Punches to the head aren’t just a big-city thing. Last year [Westminster, Calif. police were alerted](#) to an assaultive woman running around the street. Officers encountered 34-year old Ciomara Garcia and arrested her on an outstanding warrant for vandalism (left image). As usual, a passer-by captured everything on a cell phone. Ms. Garcia seemed to be under the influence and medics were called. But she kept resisting even after handcuffs were applied, and officers lowered her to the ground. (Click on the news story for the full video and [here](#) for our edited version.)



This sequence depicts the key moments. It begins as a punch-happy cop (circled, first graphic) helps set the woman down. In the process, he unexpectedly delivers two quick blows to her face (second graphic.) His obviously shocked colleague instantly shoos him

away (third graphic). The third cop then steps in and uses his arm to keep his evil colleague away as the distraught woman is helped to her feet (fourth graphic).

NIJ's [use-of-force continuum](#) has five steps, ordered by severity. Here's an abridged version:

1. Officer Presence: Situation resolved by simply showing up.
2. Verbalization: Situation resolved through “calm, nonthreatening commands” or, if necessary, by issuing orders.
3. Empty-Hand Control: Aggressive persons are restrained with bodily force. A “soft” version involves grabs, holds and joint locks. A “hard” version includes “punches and kicks”.
4. Less-Lethal Methods: Should the above not suffice, officers can use batons, fire projectiles, and deploy chemical sprays and conducted energy devices (i.e., Tasers).
5. Lethal Force: As a last option, and only “if a suspect poses a serious threat to the officer or another individual,” police can turn to lethal weapons, generally meaning firearms.

Note that “punches and kicks” are considered “intermediate measures,” not lethal force. But in our measly opinion, the cranium *is* special. Whether blows to the head are delivered through punches, strikes by a baton, or by causing someone to hit their head against a hard object (e.g., a wall or the ground), they can prove crippling or even lethal. Yet our survey of police use-of-force policies revealed an absence of mention about such things. In fact, neither [LAPD](#) nor [NYPD](#) policies on the use of force mention “punch,” “strike,” “blow” or “head.” Punches to the head are absent from outside guidelines as well. For example, NYU School of Law's “[Police Use of Force Policy Guidelines](#)” only mentions the head when it cautions that striking it with a baton must be limited to circumstances that justify the use of deadly force.

It's not that blows to the head can't occasionally prove effective. Dr. Wayne Fisher, a Rutgers criminal justice professor and use-of-force consultant, [cautions that head punches can cause serious harm](#). But he also feels that they “can be sometimes necessary if an officer is in serious risk of being injured.” Indeed, in the hurly-burly of everyday policing, where cops repeatedly tangle with noncompliant citizens, simple



blows to the face can be useful. Consider, for example, [a recent fracas in New York City](#), where a young woman lunged at uniformed officers who had a murder suspect in tow.



How did one of the cops respond? He “decked” her. (Click [here](#) for the full video and [here](#) for our edited version). [His actions were defended by Mayor Eric Adams](#), a former cop. Citizens lined up on both sides. Our position is a bit nuanced. While we applaud the arrest – the suspect *was* packing a “ghost gun” – the cop who delivered the blow (supposedly, with an “open hand”) had an angry look on his face. That led us to wonder: did he act as he did because he got mad?

That’s why punching is questionable from the start. Making a fist is a conditioned reflex developed in childhood. Even if a “knuckle sandwich” is occasionally useful, decisions to punch are inextricably linked to our emotional selves. That’s a shaky foundation for making good choices about virtually *anything* in policing, and especially the use of force. Check out all that punching of restrained subjects in “[What Were They Thinking? \(Part II\)](#)”. We really, *really* don’t need to transform any more lawbreakers into urban “heroes.” And it’s not just criminal-types who can fall victim. When a riot formation of Buffalo cops roughly pushed a 75-year old intruder aside, he lost his balance and his head sharply struck the ground (“[Gold Badges](#)”).



Martin Gugino [wound up hospitalized](#) in “serious but stable condition.” He *could* have been killed.

So what do we suggest? *No* blows to the head, *period*. And to the extent reasonably possible, no body blows. Officers should also try to avoid causing someone to strike their head against a hard object, such as pavement or a wall. Admittedly, our “rules” fall far short of the highly detailed, paragraphs-long prescriptions that have become *de rigueur* in police rulemaking (see, for example, “[Regulate](#)”). But we’ve already grouched plenty about *that*.