The three film sequences in "Three Domestics show domestic arguments to which the police have been called.

In the first sequence, "A Domestic in Which a Warrant has been Served", the police have been called to a woman's apartment and arrive to find a loud argument in progress on the street between the woman, who is leaning out of an upstairs window, and her boyfriend down on the street. The man says they are married. The woman denies it. The man claims she wants to get rid of him because she has another boyfriend coming from VietNam. The police talk briefly with the man and ask him to wait outside while they go in to talk to the woman.

The woman wants them to arrest her boyfriend, who has been living with her, because he beats her and refuses to leave her alone. She claims he wants to take their two month old child away from her. She says she will kill him and go to jail before allowing him to take her baby. She says she has filed a complaint with an Alderman (the elected judges). The police calm her and ask to see the peace bond (a restraining order making it illegal for him to go near her). All she has is a receipt for constable services (constables are peace officers attached to an Alderman's court). The police say a receipt is inadequate and one of the policemen calls the Constable to check out her story. The Constable says he has a warrant for Assault and Battery against the man who agreed to appear at a hearing the following week. The police ask the Constable to come up and make the arrest.

While they wait, a policeman tells the woman that there have been too many calls to this address for the same problem and that she should not "make up" with her boyfriend and let him come back to live because they will fight. He tells her if the police are called one more time, everybody will go to jail. The Constable arrives, and will arrest the man.

In this sequence, the woman is very angry, making the potential violence inherent in the situation very real. The police are reluctant to take any action without the peace bond. They must attempt to calm the situation while also making some sense out of the legal solution to it.

Underlying the situation are questions of police role and police function in a sociological sense. The police are being used, as an institution, by the woman to rearrange her domestic situation (another institution). Clearly, with limited options and services available to them, the police will often act as a divisive influence in domestic situations. In this case, the cohesive forces in the household represented by the baby, sharing the rent, the fact that the man has a key are opposed by the police in the interest of public order and the man is taken away.
In the second sequence, "A Domestic in Which a Woman Expresses Fear for Her Life," a woman wants the police to arrest her husband whom she accuses of beating her. Her husband, who is somewhat drunk, denies it. He lies on the sofa and watches television throughout the entire dialogue between the woman and the police.

As the police question her and make out their report, she tells them that her husband knocked her down and "put his feet in my face." While she relates the story to the police, the husband occasionally argues with her, accuses her of drinking wine all day, and says that she is lying. He tells them that he has been on the sofa all day and could not have beaten her. He says that all he does is lie on the sofa.

She is upset and points to the mark on her face often. The police seem hesitant to arrest him, reminding her that she has called the police about him before and then refused to file charges against him. She assures them that this time she will. "Are you in fear of your life?" a policeman asks her. "Yes." The police tell the man to get ready. He grumbles about her lying, says, "I'm in fear of my life," and tells them to look at the sofa and see that he has been there all day. The police tell the woman that she must go down to the station and sign a complaint. She agrees. They take the man and leave.

In this sequence, the violence has occurred and the police are called in to arrest the husband.

However, the couple has argued and fought before, the police have been called in before and the woman consistently has refused to sign any complaints. After all, this man who hits her is also her husband, the man with whom she lives.

The police may have a legal reason for arresting the man. However, if they arrest him and she refuses once again to file charges, nothing has been accomplished, wasted time and effort.

The sequence raises related legal questions: Do the police have probable cause for an arrest? If so, does the arrest infringe on the rights of privacy in a house?

Also illustrated are common principles of small group and conflict dynamics. Throughout the episode, both the man and woman, avoiding direct communication, channel their argument with each other through the police. Experience has shown how rapidly this triadic structure can disintegrate producing dyadic violence between the man and woman or by the man and woman in combination against the police.
In the third sequence, "A Preventive Domestic," a woman has called the police to come and arrest her husband because he is drunk and loud and will not be quiet. They talk briefly with the old man and tell him to lie down, be quiet, and sleep it off. They say that they don't want to arrest him. He agrees to do as they say.

The police then talk to the wife, telling her that everything will be fine now. She angrily talks about her husband making trouble. The old man gets up and begins arguing with her again. The police ask her if she really wants him arrested, she hesitates, the old man gets louder, threatens his older son with juvenile court, and the police decide to take him to jail to sleep it off.

The younger son attempts to quiet his old father, telling him to get dressed. He tells his father that it will be just one night and that he will be fine in the morning. The boy helps his father put on his shoes. The old man says that the only person in the family who cares about him is the boy. He gives the boy his money to keep until he gets back from jail and tells him not to let the older son or the wife take it away. The boy agrees and helps the old man into his coat. The old man tells the wife and older son that he wishes they were dead and the police tell him to calm down because they don't want to arrest him for disorderly conduct. They take him away.

Obviously, this is a family relationship which is unhappy. The woman wants the police to solve the problem of her drunken husband by removing him. They know that taking him to the station to sleep it off will not solve the problem. The sequence illustrates the predicament inherent in using the solution of arrest as a purely preventive device. In this case, the wife has no thought of filing charges against the man, although the police, when they arrive at the station may have to create charges against the man of public drunkeness or disorderly conduct in order to protect themselves against charges of illegal arrest. The family combinations and dynamics illustrated are clear and poignant. In face, the man laments that his younger son, rather than his wife, sleeps in his bed.
In all three domestic situations, the knowledge that there might not be probable cause for arrest, or that once arrested, the individuals will not have charges filed against them does not alleviate the possibility of the situations getting out of hand, and possible violence erupting if nothing is done.

As individuals, the policemen can attempt to talk, to soothe, to cool the tempers. As police, the only way to solve the immediate problems, however temporarily, is to resort to their legal power of arrest.