

BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This study aims to identify and analyze the barriers that exist for women in law enforcement. Information obtained for this study was based on a literary review of research conducted in the field. My approach will be to present each barrier as having a significant and equal influence on the success of women in law enforcement so that I may provide recommendations that will enable women to achieve their objectives with greatest success.

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**To be successful, a woman has to be much better at her job than a man.**  
**Golda Meir**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Female police officers have come a long way since their inclusion into the field of law enforcement in the 1800s. However, the employment of women in the police force is gradually increasing, “women are still underutilized by law enforcement agencies” (Natarajan, 1996). Even though there have been significant strides made through federal legislation, female officers still face “barriers” that hinder their career advancement opportunities. Is the scarcity of women in the police profession a function of years of bias within this male dominated profession? Or does this under-representation simply reveal a conscious decision to avoid the profession altogether? The literature on this subject reveals that a woman’s ability to excel in law enforcement is indicative of the critical mass of female employees. This under representation of female officers is a clear indication that women continue to struggle in achieving success in a male dominated profession. According to Berg and Budnick (1986), “Women in policing have increased steadily in the past 15 to 20 years; however, the struggle by female police officers to be accepted in law enforcement parallels and, at the same time, represents an exacerbation of the difficulties experienced by women as they have made their way into the labour force in general”. Despite laws forbidding discrimination, women in the workforce continue to be discriminated against and under-represented (Blum, Fields, & Goodman, 1994). Several researchers have concluded that, “women have gradually acculturated into the police subculture while still experiencing varying degrees of sexual discrimination, and harassment (Heidensohn, 1992; Gossett & Williams, 1998; Martin, 1980; Martin, 1990; Morash and Green, 1986; Remington, 1983). Many departments, often under court order, have eliminated discriminatory personnel policies, yet according to Martin (1990), “women working in law enforcement continue to face myriad barriers to full occupation integration”. Police departments have come under increasing pressure from community groups, professional organizations, and their constituents to hire more female and minority officers (Raganella & White, 2004). As law enforcement is a male-dominated profession, gender stereotypes and inferior attitudes about women by men hamstring the professions ability to recruit and retain talented women. “As a whole, female officers have made very slow progress toward full integration in policing due to barriers such as the attitudes of male officers...” (Gossett & Williams, 1998). Martin (1980) conducted a seminal study of women in policing and found that occupational culture had a decidedly masculine tone with women who were able to break the occupational threshold. This masculine tone has created an environment where women are expected to fit within a certain mould. While this mould is not formally established, there is a common belief within police organizations that only women who exhibit masculine traits, such as being physically tough, are capable of being “good” police officers. When women achieve success within police organizations, “policemen feel threatened and reduced in status due to the fact that women can do the same job that male officers have been doing for many years (Gossett & Williams, 1998). According to Hughes (1958), female officer success demystifies the masculine persona associated with policing and indeed, with the primary male role of protector. The success of women in policing has created a new image of the profession and the role of a police officer. Traditionally, law enforcement has been regarded as a ‘man’s job,’ and, now that women have proven that they are more than capable; policemen fear they are losing their competitive edge. Research on policemen’s views of policewomen indicate that policemen are still resistant to acknowledge that women are capable of performing all the functions of this position. Some view policewomen as, “physically incapable, insufficiently aggressive, too emotional, mentally weak, naïve, and incapable of gaining the respect of citizens’ (Balkin, 1988; Bell, 1982; Charles, 1982; Martin 1980 & 1990; Martin & Jurik, 1996; Palombo, 1992). Barriers for women in law enforcement exist not only due to officers attitudes towards women, but also from the patriarchal way of organizing that exist within law enforcement agencies and the societal gender roles that have been adopted within the policing organizational culture. This paper will discuss how such barriers affect women and their ability to achieve career success as well as provide suggestions on how women may overcome such barriers.

**I believe women still face a glass ceiling that must be shattered.**  
**Andrew Cuomo**

### *Statement of the Research Problem*

According to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act women obtained the right to enter the market place in professions traditionally reserved for men. They have yet however, to obtain and secure equal opportunities in the field of law enforcement. While these changes in law and policy appeared to be advancements for women and

indeed provided them with 'paper equality', in reality Title VII did not bring about much advancement for women or minorities in law enforcement (Brown, 2000). Although, times have changed and there has been an increase of women in law enforcement, the percentage of women in law enforcement and career advancement has remained constant for nearly 60 years. Not until the 1960's, when legislation and judicial involvement began to support women's demands for equality, did their duties and responsibilities begin to expand. Since then, opportunities for women in policing have improved, but female police officers continue to progress slowly through the ranks (Martin, 1991). While women have attained the right to take on the role of police officer within a patrol capacity, they struggled to make progress in specialized units such as K9 and Emergency Response. Furthermore, higher ranking management positions within law enforcement are still held predominately by men making the under representation of women in law enforcement a problem that exist within all levels of the police organization. In a 1991 academic article, Martin revealed that while both court-ordered and voluntary affirmative action policies have had a significant impact on the hiring of female officers, they have not affected the promotion and advancement of women into the higher ranks of law enforcement. An analysis of gender inequality in the workplace determined that women face major obstacles in male-dominated areas such as law enforcement (Martin, 1991). Similarly, Harry More (1992) concluded that the primary obstacle women must overcome concerns male officers' attitudes and the need to break the frequently invisible glass ceiling that limits employment opportunities.

#### *Purpose of this Study*

The purpose of this study is to identify barriers that exist for women in law enforcement as well as provide suggestions on how women may overcome some of these barriers. Additionally, identification of such barriers could encourage members of a police organization to create a dialogue on how women are treated within police organizations and perhaps foster an environment that could change attitudes towards women. Given the fact that research on this issue is very limited, adding to the literature could prompt police personnel to bring awareness to the issue and hopefully continue to build a knowledge base for future research and discussion.

#### *Significance of this Study*

The findings of this study could provide police organizations with a framework for how its members can work together to not only bring attention to the issue, but also cause a change in culture to one that is more inclusive. If women are to become successful in policing, they will need the help of their male co-workers. Therefore, it is important that women have co operation in creating an occupational strategy that can incorporate all players within the organization. Furthermore, the analysis of male officer's perceptions of female officers will guide members on how they can create solutions to overcome the barriers that such perceptions have created. Finally, the findings of this study will raise awareness of women who are interested in entering the field of law enforcement about the limitations that they may encounter and provide them with guidance and suggestions so that they may be better prepared to overcome the barriers.

#### *Research Questions*

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How are women perceived within the field of law enforcement?
2. What barriers exist for women within the career field of law enforcement?
3. What can women do to overcome these barriers?
4. Is the success of women in law enforcement a combination of several of these barriers?
5. What have women done thus far to break down some of these barriers?

#### *Plan of Presentation*

This study will begin with a history of women in policing followed by the current status of women in policing. A comparison between the past and present status of women in policing is intended to assist the reader in understanding how women continue to struggle to achieve career success in law enforcement. To provide further clarity on how barriers have become engrained within police organizations, this study will then address external influences that exist within society. Societal influences on gender roles have become a major obstacle for women in any organization as they establish what is acceptable for both men and women in regards to the kind of careers they should pursue. Like other organizations throughout the world, law enforcement agencies have adopted these societal norms and beliefs into their organizational culture which influences their approach to women in the profession. Next, this study will present barriers for women in law enforcement, beginning with a discussion on gender roles and followed by attention to police sub culture, police personality and males' attitudes towards police women. Then the patriarchal style of organizing will be analyzed, followed by discrimination and sexual

harassment. All five barriers represent the political, social and psychological influences that exist within the police organization, thus providing an interdisciplinary analysis on the research topic. Finally, this study will provide suggestions for how women can overcome these barriers by detailing suggestions and strategies that could enable women to create an action plan for the future.

**The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says: It's a girl.**

**Shirley Chisholm**

*Historical Overview of Women in Policing*

Sir Robert Peel is recognized for his success in passing the Metropolitan Police Act in 1829 in London, England when he served as Home Secretary which led to the creation of the first “modern police force.” According to Peel, the purpose of police is to enforce laws, maintain peace, and ensure individual liberties in the process. For Peel, the police were the public and the public were the police; the police at that time being only members of the public who were paid to conduct duties that were incumbent on every citizen in the interests of the community welfare (Langworthy and Travis III, 2003). The irony of Peel’s statement about the “public are the police” is that the public consists of approximately fifty percent women, but during the creation of the first “modern police force”, women were not permitted to participate. It was not until the mid 1800’s that women were permitted to work within policing in any capacity. In fact, initial roles of women within policing consisted primarily of administrative duties such as clerical and various supportive roles. The following timeline will provide a clear picture of how women have progressed within policing.

*1840-1880s*

Women were first employed within the policing profession in the mid 1800’s. With industrialization, the United States experienced a sharp increase in crime, due in no small part to the influx of millions into cities throughout the nation and with crime came increased rates of poverty, juvenile delinquency, homelessness, and social disorganization (Price & Gavin, 1981). These social ills triggered the rise of organized women’s groups that in turn, laid the foundation for future women’s movements. While this puts a somewhat rose-tinted view on the conditions of many work environments, this period was arguably the first instance in American history where young women began to look outside of their homes for work (Price & Gavin, 1981). Those entering law enforcement found themselves tasked as prison matrons serving female or juvenile offenders (Garcia, 2003; Grennan, 2000). Other duties were custodial in nature. The lack of advancement or change within this time period gave the impression that women would remain forever mired in the position of prison matron (Price & Gavin, 1981). In fact, women did remain a rarity within the field and by 1888 were employed as matrons in only sixteen cities (Price & Gavin, 1981).

*1890s*

By the 1890s women began to take on greater responsibilities within police organizations. For example, in the City of Chicago, Marie Owen was hired by the city police department to assist investigators with cases involving women and children (Grennan, 2000). As the wife of an officer killed while on duty, Owen’s appointment was more than a kind favour to a widow; it crystallized the notion that women could serve in police departments (Grennan, 2000).

*1900s*

In Portland, Oregon in 1905, the first female police officer was hired to serve for the duration of the Lewis and Clark Exposition (Garcia, 2003; Grennan, 2000; Price & Gavin, 1981). For Lola Baldwin and other female officers, their work was similar in nature to the work done by prison matrons in previous decades where they focused primarily on female and juvenile offenders, and conducted social and clerical duties (Grennan, 2000). These duties were in keeping with the burgeoning progressive movements of supporting women’s rights and the humane treatment of juveniles - that occurred throughout this and the following decade (Price & Gavin, 1981).

*1910s*

The Los Angeles City Council and Police Department was petitioned in 1910 regarding the need for female officers to handle the increase in juvenile and female-related crime (Grennan, 2000; Price & Gavin, 1981; Lehtinen, 1976). Alice Stebbins Wells, a theological student and social worker, was successful in her petition and became the first female officer hired by the Los Angeles Police Department that year (Garcia, 2003; Grennan, 2000; Lehtinen, 1976). As per her petition, she handled cases involving young women and juveniles (Lehtinen, 1976). Wells served on the Los Angeles Police Department for several years before conducting a two-year tour through North America where

she informed other police departments of the benefits of hiring female officers (Price & Gavin, 1981). The tour was an unmitigated success and throughout the country, female officers became more prevalent. Instead of only sixteen cities with female officers in 1915, the number increased to thirty cities in the following year (Garcia, 2003; Price & Gavin, 1981). It was at this time in 1914, that the first female police chief in the United States, Dolly Spencer was hired in Milford, Ohio (Grennan, 2000). Just five years after she became the first female police officer in the country, Alice Stebbins Wells was elected the first president of the International Association of Police Women in May, 1915 (Price & Gavin, 1981).

#### *1920s*

Twelve years after Alice Stebbins Wells was hired by the Los Angeles Police Department, the International Association of Chiefs of Police declared female officers to be a wholly indispensable portion of the modern police department (Price & Gavin, 1981). The establishment of being an indispensable portion of the modern police department gave women validity and recognition within the profession, creating an established position for other women to pursue. In spite of this acceptance however, women remained segregated – sequestered into a bureau they could not be promoted out of, held to higher standards in employment, and received less pay than their male counterparts (Price & Gavin, 1981).

#### *1930s*

With the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression that followed, gains made by women in the prior decade largely disappeared (Grennan, 2000). Many female officers were laid off and the International Association of Policewomen dissolved less than two decades after its creation. Both events were largely attributed to a lack of funds (Price & Gavin, 1981). At the same time, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's policy designed to pull America up by its bootstraps and out of the depression, supported a vision in which widowed women would receive financial aid and men would support their families. This vision largely neglected the idea of women in the workforce (Grennan, 2000; Price & Gavin, 1981). For women who did pursue a career in law enforcement, they were once again as in the previous two decades held to different standards than their male counterparts. They were expected to have formal social work training and experience, an education, and an amicable personality (Garcia, 2003). These different standards not only created inequality between men and women within the profession but also secluded many women as they did not have the required qualifications.

#### *1940s*

World War II created a booming economy and the need for women to fill vacancies within police organizations. During the War, women acted as auxiliary officers (Price & Gavin, 1981) but with the baby boom that occurred soon after World War Two's end, many women were forced back into the confines of the home (Price & Gavin, 1981). For those women who did engage in policing or others who wished to pursue a career in the field, they were often required to be college graduates. Although the idea was rather perplexingly, these women would be considered for policing positions as long as they were not overly feminine or masculine (Garcia, 2003). In spite of the drawbacks, the 1940s did see an increase in the number of women in traffic control and parking enforcement among Southern police departments. In fact, female traffic enforcers proved so successful that they began to be hired in this capacity throughout the United States (Grennan, 2000).

#### *1950s*

During this decade, over twenty-five hundred women were employed as officers. For their appointment, these women were required to be attractive, empathetic, selfless, well-adjusted, dignified, tactful, and sensible (Garcia, 2003). Despite having higher qualifications than their male counterparts, female officers were made well aware of the fact that they were in no way replacing men, but rather aiding and assisting them to the best of their womanly capacity (Garcia, 2003).

#### *1960s*

At the start of the 1960s there were more than five thousand female officers serving across the country (Garcia, 2003). The 60's was a decade marked by protesting youth that demanded equality for women and minority groups. Women, long aware of the sub-standard status they received as members of Women's Bureaus, demanded promotions equal to their level of experience and performance. Departments fought these demands stating that, as women had not participated in the "full police experience" of being on patrol, they could only be promoted within their own Bureau. As women continued to be systematically denied patrol opportunities, and the Bureau offered



limited opportunities for promotion, it became clear that women needed to fight to obtain that “full police experience” (Price & Gavin, 1981).

It was during this period and the general availability of contraceptives, such as birth control, that young women could hold off on having children until they were ready and instead pursue a career (Price & Gavin, 1981). Then with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the second organized women’s movement gained footing. Unlike its predecessor that largely rested on women’s suffrage, this movement was based on the desire for equal opportunities in work (Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2006; Price & Gavin, 1981). It was during the 60’s that women were finally able to achieve the full police experience and work as a patrol officer. The first female officers to be assigned to patrol were in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1968 (Grennan, 2000). As the decade came to a close, many departments were required to show that the lack of women on their workforce was not the result of discrimination or systematic prejudice (Price & Gavin, 1981).

#### *1970s*

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established equal opportunities for work, it was not until the 1970’s that these established rights were tested. In 1971, the Supreme Court abolished gender discrimination within the hiring practices in the landmark case *Reed v. Reed* (Grennan, 2000; Reed v. Reed, 1971). The Court’s stance on the matter was further driven home the following year, when the 1964 Civil Rights Act was amended to include the Equal Opportunity Act and Title VII, which prohibited the use of discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, creed, race, color, or national origin in both the public and private sectors (Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Rabe-Hemp, 2008a; Rabe-Hemp, 2008b; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Grennan, 2000; Price & Gavin, 1981; Lehtinen, 1976). Many police organizations now altered their hiring practices to ensure that both men and women had to undergo the same set of testing regulations. New York State became the first state to test police officer applicants with a single, non gender-specific Civil Service Exam. By 1974 this practice was ubiquitous and every state was required to give a single exam for all applicants, regardless of gender (Grennan, 2000; Gould & Volbrecht, 1999).

#### *1980s*

By the mid-1980s women made up approximately 8.8% of all officers in municipal departments (Rabe-Hemp, 2008a). However, the residual effects of unequal hiring practices, coupled with the lack of childcare or pregnancy policies, made the representation of women in this decade a slow climb (Rabe-Hemp, 2008a; Rabe-Hemp, 2008b). Throughout the decade women faced substantial discrimination, sexual harassment, and a glass ceiling in their attempts to gain administrative or other highly desired positions (Rabe-Hemp, 2008a; Raganella & White, 2004).

#### *1990s*

While women made significant progress in the 1970’s and 1980’s, they still struggled to achieve success in obtaining promotions to higher ranking positions. In many departments, they were denied work in plain clothes, canine, radio motor vehicle patrol, criminal investigations, riot and firearms training. Instead, they were largely placed in-house or on routine or communication duties (Grennan, 2000; Brown & Campbell, 1991). Many found themselves charged with the care of youths and female victims and offenders, tasks almost identical in nature to those performed decades earlier in Women’s Bureaus (Grennan, 2000; Brown & Campbell, 1991).

As women were denied opportunities to enter desired positions or pick up additional training, they were subsequently denied promotional opportunities (Brown & Campbell, 1991). This “glass ceiling” not only denied women the ability to engage in administrative positions, it had a trickle-down effect where the representation of women in administrative positions remains minimal at best (Schreiber, Price, & Morrison, 1993; Brown & Campbell, 1991). Despite the recorded levels of sexism within departments, many posited that the lack of female representation was not because of discrimination, but rather that policing was an unattractive career path for women (Dantzker & Kubin, 1998). Representation remained a slow process throughout the decade, with an overall miniscule increase in the percentage of female officers. In 1995, the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s annual Uniform Crime Report indicated that the average representation of female officers in departments throughout the United States was 9.8% then four years later the number was 10.7% (Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2006; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1995). Regardless of the harsh resistance they faced, by the early 1990s women had clearly demonstrated that they were as capable as men in performing police duties (Dantzker & Kubin, 1998).

2000s

Women represented 11% of all sworn officers in 2000 and by 2009, that number had only risen to 11.7%, peaking at 11.9% in 2008 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Grennan, 2006; Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2006; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000). While the percentage of women within policing has increased exponentially from their integration into patrol in 1972, there remains great variation between departments and women remain largely sequestered within the lower ranks of the field (Sklansky, 2006). Some departments have few or no women serving, while others, including large cities, have as many as 25% of the total sworn officers (Rabe-Hemp, 2008a; Sklansky, 2006). One field women are well-represented in, however, is the civilian police workforce where they occupy such positions as records clerk and communicator. This timeline clearly demonstrates that women have made significant progress within the field of policing, however while they have been provided the opportunity to serve on all levels within the organization, they are still highly under-represented in terms of numbers of officers employed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The No. 1 impediment to women succeeding in the workforce is now in the home.**

**Sheryl Sandberg**

#### *Gender Roles and Their Effect on the Workplace*

Barriers to women in policing emanate from the structural characteristic of the occupation work organization. They are also derived from the ways that cultural mandates and behavioural norms related to gender shape interpersonal interaction in specific occupational contexts (Martin, 1993). One such cultural mandate and behavioural norm that presents a huge barrier for women in policing has been the transcendence of societal gender roles into police organizations. According to the World Health Organization, gender roles are a set of social and behavioral norms that are generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship. There are differences of opinion as to which observed differences in behavior and personality between genders are entirely due to innate personality of the person and which are due to cultural or social factors, and are therefore the product of socialization, or to what extent gender differences are due to biological and physiological differences.

Gender roles within Canadian society identify what is acceptable for men and women in terms of career choices. Women have traditionally been viewed as the caregiver and their role is to take care of the home and their children, while the role of the man is to be the “breadwinner” and earn an income that will support the family. In addition to establishing the role of home worker, gender roles also identify what is acceptable in terms of employment for women. Prior to 1970, approximately two out of every five female workers were employed in ten occupations that society traditionally labelled for women (Chavis, 2001). According to Kolde (1985) the number one occupation for women was that of secretary, followed by bookkeeper, salesclerk, cashier, waitress, registered nurse, teacher (elementary), domestic worker, typist, and nurse’s aide. Women felt this influence early on in policing as can be seen from the above historical timeline when women were first employed as matrons and support networks for women and children affected by crime. During the mid 1980’s women began to break down some of these barriers and make inroads into occupations that were deemed more appropriate for men. Non-traditional occupations for women included law, medicine, dentistry, engineering, accounting, insurance, brokering, underwriting, sales in manufacturing industries, and law enforcement (Kolde, 1985). Occupational norms established by gender roles create a huge barrier for women as they can affect the number of women applying for careers in law enforcement. Some Middle Eastern cultures prohibit women from working entirely or even having the access to education. Limitations within these cultures make it extremely difficult for women of certain groups to obtain employment within law enforcement where their involvement is seen as a violation of their cultural beliefs and norms. In order for women to achieve greater success in breaking down barriers within law enforcement, there needs to be a greater representation of women within the occupation. As the saying goes, “there is strength in numbers”. In addition to affecting the number of women who apply for policing positions, gender roles also affect women once they are on the job. Policing has been described as one of the most ‘gendered’ professions in the United States where the percentage of female employees is far below that of general labour force (Sass, 1999). Policewomen remain a marginalized, unaccepted minority (Heidensohn, 1992). Research shows that occupational norms have been linked to work segregation by sex (Coser & Rockoff 1971). This segregation occurs as occupational norms stipulate that men and women should be doing different things. Despite the significant changes that are occurring in our society, gender related norms maintain their dominance (Pogrebin, 1986). Of all the male dominated occupations, police work ranks among the highest in the public’s perception of gender related tasks (Pogrebin,

1986). Restated, policing is heavily influenced by gender (Acker, 1990). Within the field of law enforcement, women are seen as more suitable for positions that involve administrative tasks rather than those that involve high levels of danger and require certain physical ability, such as patrol and specialized units like the Emergency Response Unit and K9. Obtaining positions within units that are deemed to be “more suitable for men” can create a barrier for women in that they have to prove to the organization that they are capable of performing the required functions of the position. Due to norms and expectations of ‘appropriate’ behaviour, women entering these occupations encounter challenges on the job (Martin, 1993). One of those dilemmas is to accept the personality of the police sub culture and adapt to this way of thinking in order to achieve career success. Those who do choose to accept their assigned attributes must then decide when and how to “act like a cop”, yet still “act like a lady” on the job (Martin, 1993). The necessity to change one’s beliefs and perceptions can be in violation of one’s values. For example, some women feel that they should be treated fairly and shown respect based on their work performance. If a woman is not willing to change her values in order to “fit in” within the organization, she could face discriminatory treatment. With an expectation for women police officers to be a team player and act like, “one of the guys”, those who fail to understand this necessity and act accordingly may encounter barriers with respect to achieving acceptance and being viewed as being a “good cop”. Although departments have opened doors to the station house, they have resisted changes to ease women’s integration (Martin, 1996). Gender roles have created barriers for women by affecting the number of women that apply for policing positions, additionally they affect women’s’ success while on the job as gender roles determine the police personality and sub culture.

### *Police Sub Culture*

One area of policing that has created a great deal of barriers for women involves police personality and sub culture. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) stated that organizational culture is a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations. At the same time, even though a company may have its "own unique culture", there are diverse and sometimes conflicting cultures in larger organizations that co-exist due to different characteristics of the management team. The organizational culture may also have negative and positive aspects. The police organizational culture is often referred to as the complex system of attitudes that defines the normative and behavioural social world of police officers. However, police form a distinctive subculture of their own and are able to form such an exclusive subculture “because of characteristics of their particular vocation: law enforcement” (Thibault, Lynch & McBride, 2004). A subculture is “a group that shares in the overall culture of the society but also has its own distinctive values, norms, and lifestyle” (Thibault, Lynch & McBride, 2004). Police culture is shaped by the authority that their job provides them, the code of silence, as well as the danger that is associated with their work (Skolnick, 1966; Hale, 1989). One such danger associated with policing is the requirement for officers to apprehend suspects. During some apprehensions, suspects can be uncooperative and officers may have to use physical force to subdue the suspect. The necessity to use physical force for non compliance has created an atmosphere where officers desire certain occupational characteristics such as conformity and/or solidarity, loyalty, secrecy, autonomy, authority, uncertainty, danger, suspicion, and an “us versus them mentality” (Birzer and Tannerhill, 2001). The “us versus them mentality” has created specific values that are inherit to policing, such as the necessity for secrecy and the need for officers to protect one another. Police officers regard this secrecy as essential to maintaining their advantage over “the bad guy” and to ensure officer safety, all members must play by the same rules.

Policing is an occupation where circumstances can change at the drop of a hat and require officers to make immediate decisions. This can create a work environment that is filled with taking risks as well as a great deal of uncertainty. What is important to remember is that police officers are human beings and while they are well trained to handle various situations, human error can occur. Any mistakes made by officers can result in a drastic outcome where a member of the public or even an officer can die. According to Manning (1990), autonomy, authority, and uncertainty are the main occupational themes for the police and these determine their social world. This social world is one that is highly guarded by police officers and holds a great deal of value within the organization. For this reason, existing officers feel that any new recruits must adhere to this code of conduct and value system so that officers can maintain their advantage over those that wish to harm them. The officer is part of a police family where the children are police children and the spouse is a police wife or a police husband. The operating norm is “You are never alone” (Thiabtult, Lynch & McBride, 2004). Female officers must present themselves as loyal and trustworthy in order to be seen as “one of the guys”. Otherwise, they will not fit within the organizational culture. Those that do not fit within the culture will not be given fair consideration when applying for promotions or other duties. For example, a female officer that may be interested in the Emergency Response Unit but may be overlooked or seen as not desirable if that officer is one who primarily keeps to themselves. In this instance, female officers have to make

an extra effort to be seen as “one of the boys”, an officer that can be trusted and will be loyal to the team. This may prove difficult for female officers if they do not have the time or desire to make themselves appear as “one of the guys”. McLean (1997) asserts that many female officers adopt the language, the mannerisms, and/or the roles of male colleagues in order to become integrated into the organization and culture and be accepted. In other words, for many women it is a “survival tactic.” Even though some officers like not to keep their personal lives and business to themselves, they may appear not to be a team player. Officers generally have a very small social circle outside of work and instead tend to socialize primarily with other officers as they feel that their co workers understand the stress and dangers associated with the occupation. Female officers that have difficulty becoming part of such a social group can become alienated. Those who do not make it into the “old boys club”, a term often used to describe this social group, could face a barrier that results in them not being given fair recognition for their work and accomplishments. Many promotions come from members of this “old boys club” as the members feel it necessary to take care of their own and show respect to those that are seen as being their closest friend and partner.

### *Police Personality and Male's Attitudes*

Various job requirements associated with policing have created what is known as the police personality. Typically, the police personality is thought to be a combination of characteristics and behaviours that are commonly used to stereotype police officers (Berg and Budnick, 1986). There are numerous behaviours and characteristics of the police personality that have created barriers for women in policing. One such behaviour occurs when male officers feel the need to protect their female partners because they believe the female is inferior when it comes to physical strength and ability. Women may also experience hostility and isolation from their male co-workers (Wexler and Logan, 1983). According to Weisheit (1986), “the literature suggests that the greatest barriers to utilizing women in police patrol positions are not from the performance of the women themselves but from resistance of their male counterparts. While the literature has suggested that male officers are concerned about safety, some researchers have asserted that male officers are uneager to accept women officers because of the masculine-oriented police subculture (Gossett & Williams, 1998; Morash and Haar, 1995). Male officers “feel reduced in status because if a woman can do the same job that male officers have been doing for many years, that takes away from their social status and standing in society” (Gossett & Williams, 1998). Martin (1993) notes an underlying reason why men are opposed to women entering policing. According to Martin (1993), women threaten to disrupt the division of labour, the work norms, the work group's solidarity, the insecure occupational status and public image, and the sexist ideology that under grades the men's definition of the work as “men's work” and their identity as masculine men. While working within the Communication Bureau for an Ontario Police Service, the author of this paper has observed males' perception that policing requires a masculine approach. For example, when calls received involve suspects that are large in stature (i.e., six foot four and two hundred and thirty pounds), staff sergeants request specific officers be placed on the call, specifically officers who are also large in stature and seen to be more capable of handling the suspect. What is interesting to note in this situation is the fact that all officers receive the same level of training and are provided with equipment to assist them with personal protection. In addition, even though police work is often thought to be about fighting, the need for physical aggression is misleading. Contrary to what officers are taught in the police academy (in the US), or the police college (in Canada), approximately 80 percent of police work involves activities typically associated with social work. Hence, it is believed that the majority of police work reflects issues in which women have been largely socialized to be more efficient at resolving (Garcia, 2003).

As can be seen from the aforementioned example, women face barriers due to the attitude of male officers. In fact, research shows that female officers list the negative attitude of male officers as being the most significant problem for them (Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, 1991). The attitude that women are inferior has created a great deal of stress for female officers in that they feel the necessity to prove themselves as being capable of performing all aspects of the job. Women officers also tend to be subjected to more job-related pressure due to their gender and experience these both on and off the job (Bass 1982). According to Jackson (1997), of the female officers in the Atlantic Canada region, 72 percent felt the pressure to prove themselves as police officers because of their gender. Interestingly, 44 percent believed that as more women are hired to work as police officers, acceptance by male officers will increase. Corsianos (2007a) found that when there was an obvious and visible presence of female officers resulting in several female partnerships “on the road” and/or “on the beat,” women were less likely to experience the kind of pressure to prove themselves and be accepted into the “brotherhood of policing”. Unfortunately, male officers feel that their masculinity is tested when “forced” to share power and dominance, especially with a female officer (Leger, 1997). As a result, women will not get the experience necessary to obtain promotions or move within other departments if male officers continue to push them aside in an effort to be their protector.

Another attitude of male officers that has presented barriers for women is the attitude that women are emotionally weak and can not handle the pressure of uncertainty and danger that the occupation presents. Male officers may feel that their female colleagues are more suited for areas of policing that require minimal emotional control such as the community safety village, media relations, school liaison officer and the collision reporting centre. With such an attitude, women are not given serious consideration for areas of policing that require strong emotional control. Furthermore, women may believe or buy into this male attitude and not completely understand the requirements for certain positions. As a result, male officers may be afforded more control over who will be selected for positions and female officers may not even apply because they believe that they are not suited for the position.

#### *The Para militaristic Hierarchal Structure*

Under patriarchal social systems and structures, work becomes gendered. The police organizational structure is very similar to that of the military where personnel are placed into a ranking system with members in the higher ranks of the hierarchy have increasing authority and influence. Officers occupying high ranking positions such as chief, deputy chief, captain, and lieutenant (as seen in some US police departments), or chief, deputy chief, superintendents and inspectors (as seen in some Canadian police services), can have a significant impact on women within the organization and create barriers for female officers. One example of how this structure may create barriers for women involves how communication is sent and received. Within the rank and file system, there is an expectation that officers report to their immediate supervisor and not “break rank” by going above someone’s head. Should a female officer not have a good working relationship with her supervisor, her ability to be promoted or acquire specific skills on the job may be inhibited. The mere fact that one person can control an officers ability to advance presents a huge barrier and possible negative consequences where a woman could be cited, disciplined for insubordination, and possibly ostracized by other officers for being disrespectful and not following protocol.

Within a hierarchical way of organizing, there can exist a “think-do” dichotomy, where management “think” and workers “do”. If this attitude prevails, officers are expected to be good soldiers, follow orders and not ask questions. Such an approach to organizing can leave women feeling that they have no voice and instead must fit into a particular mould that involves following orders and doing things so as not to “rock the boat”. In order for women to break down barriers, they need to feel empowered and be empowered through having a voice. Without voice, it is impossible for women to become leaders, bring about change, and influence policy decisions.

#### *Additional barriers*

In addition to gender roles, police sub culture, male attitudes, and a patriarchal style of management, women in policing also face barriers related to sexual harassment and discrimination. Although gender discrimination is against the law, it is still a major concern in the workplace (Smith, 2003). According to Carmen and Greene (2002) “discrimination and sexual harassment are pervasive in police departments and that supervisors and commanders not only tolerate such practices by others, but also are frequently perpetrators themselves.” In Los Angeles, male officers formed a clandestine organization within the LAPD called “Men against Women” whose purpose is to wage an orchestrated campaign of ritual harassment, intimidation and criminal activity against women officers – just one example of the kind of organized harassment women experience in law enforcement (Equality Denied, 1998). Women also face discrimination during their annual reviews, which are a crucial tool in determining candidates for promotion. Many female officers believe they are subjected to unfair evaluations due to their gender. They are frequently viewed as “weak”, or as token hires and this results in unfair performance evaluations by their supervisors and a barrier to seeking promotion (Schulz, 2004a).

A large number of women across the country have been driven from their jobs in law enforcement due to unpunished, unchecked and unrelenting abuse. “Once on the job women are frequently intimidated, harassed, and maliciously thwarted, especially when they move up the ranks” (Carmen & Green, 2002). It comes as no surprise that female officers experience both gender and racial discrimination (Martin, 1991; Haarr, 1997; Carmen & Greene, 2002). Martin (1994) found that both black and white women reported discrimination based on either race or sex and most of the female officers believed that they were victims of discrimination. In a study conducted by Gossett (1989) 17 out of 27 women reported that they felt they were discriminated against, and those who reported that they did not feel discriminated against, knew of other female officers who had experienced discrimination. In addition, one of the female officers stated: “It is not the overt discrimination of the past. It is not the department hiring you and saying you are going to be put in juvenile or the only thing you can investigate is sexual assaults because that is where you can do that better than a male officer”. Because of legal injunctions and the threat of lawsuits, police

departments are prohibited from engaging in discrimination. However, non-blattant discrimination is often the core of why women feel that they have been discriminated against. Although recent literature and research has shown progress, female officers continue to perceive discrimination in law enforcement today. Women still face acts of discrimination when applying for jobs that are considered to be a male-dominated line of work. Although women have increased their presence in law enforcement, they have yet to find total acceptance in such a male-dominated field. Discrimination within police organizations has created barriers for women. Women cannot achieve success if they are not treated the same as their male co workers.

### *Sexual Harassment*

From a legal stance, sexual harassment can include quid pro quo harassment and hostile environment harassment. Quid pro quo harassment refers to the use of sexual threats/bribery as a condition of employment and/or employment decisions. Hostile environment harassment includes sexual behaviours, such as sexual comments, touching, etc., that interfere with an employee's ability to do her/his work (Dansky and Kilpatrick, 1997). According to a US National Women's Study conducted by the Crime Victims and Treatment Centre, 12 percent of women experienced some form of harassment in their lifetime. Canadian studies reveal that lifetime sexual harassment rates for women vary from 23 percent (Welsh and Nierobisz, 1997) to 51 percent (Gruber, 1998; 1992). Sexual harassment contributes to decreased job satisfaction (Gruber, 1992), decreased perception of equal opportunity (Newell, Rosenfeld, Culbertson 1995), damaged interpersonal work relationships (Culbertson et al., 1992), low morale and high absenteeism (USMSPB, 1981), and sometimes results in quitting the place of employment or being fired (USMSPB, 1987; Coles, 1986). Research also consistently shows there is a connection between sexual harassment and stress and health issues, including anxiety, depression, headaches, and problems sleeping (Fitzgerald, 1993; Gutek and Koss, 1993). It is clear that sexual harassment continues to be a source of stress for women (Haar and Morash, 2005; Texeira, 2002).

In a nationwide survey of major companies, 90 percent of female employees complained of sexual harassment, which involved a substantial number of women reporting unwanted attention from their male co-workers (More, 1992). Therefore, it comes to no surprise that these women felt most vulnerable in working environments dominated by men (More, 1992). Although women are steadily entering the career field of law enforcement there are still instances of sexual harassment. One example of sexual harassment (Corsianos, 2005; 1999b) occurred when a male detective in a drug unit discussed an undercover female detective's success in being able to "make a buy" with known drug dealers more readily than he was able to do. The detective maintained that it was much easier for women to buy drugs because "all they have to do is put a little paint on, show a little cleavage, a little leg or something like that, and the old story is these guys are thinking with their dicks so it was much easier to sell to the woman." The same detective claimed that women had to stop complaining about sexual harassment on the job and not be offended by comments, rumours, or jokes relating to their personal sexuality. Police women who find the courage to complain about sexual harassment often face severe consequences. Harington and Lonsway (2004: 505-506) list some of the most common types of retaliation that women filing sexual harassment complaints experience:

- shunning or ostracizing, in which officers refuse to talk to the woman who is being victimized or prevent the woman from receiving information that is important to her job performance or personal safety;
- stalking or harassing, in which the victim is subjected to obscene telephone calls, during which the caller says nothing; hang-up calls at all hours of the day and night; threatening or harassing letters or notes; damage to her automobile; articles left on her desk or in her work area; and other actions that are intended to intimidate or harass;
- spreading rumours about the woman's sexual activity or other demeaning information;
- holding the woman to a higher standard of performance than her colleagues, so her evaluation reports become more critical and limit her opportunities for advancement within the organization;
- filing baseless and harassing internal affairs complaints; this action is done either by other members of the organization or by citizens who have been enlisted to help the harasser;
- denying access to training opportunities
- denying request for transfer to specialty jobs;
- denying applications for promotions;
- failing to provide backup in emergency situations; this action is the ultimate form of retaliation.

Although there are laws that forbid sexual harassment within the workplace and organizational procedures that stipulate tolerance for sexual harassment, it continues to be a major problem. As can be seen by the forms of retaliation, sexual harassment has become a barrier for women in policing where reporting sexual harassment could “kill” the career of a female officer. Furthermore, the fact that laws exist to combat this problem and it is still a major obstacle is an indicator of how the “old boys club” has found ways to get around legislation. Understandably, many women have quit the profession rather than deal with the back lash and negative stigmatism that is associated with filing a sexual harassment complaint. As more women leave policing for reasons such as sexual harassment, it becomes increasingly difficult for women to increase their influence through numbers.

**No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men.  
Muhammad Ali Jinnah**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous barriers that exist for women in policing. Therefore, strategies to overcome these barriers must be comprehensive and address the concerns of female officers. The following recommendations are intended to assist police organizations in increasing their number of female officers and ultimately create a work environment that is based on integrity and respect for all.

### *Institute an affirmative action policy that focuses on female applicants*

Affirmative action plans have received a great deal of scrutiny within the field of law enforcement as they are viewed to be a form of reverse discrimination. Some findings have shown that women who are hired as tokens in traditionally male-dominated fields like policing are at a disadvantage as their token status limits how much change they can bring to these jobs (Belknap and Shelley, 1993). The police must be representative of the communities they serve and as such have taken recruiting measures to ensure that they target members from ethnic and minority communities. This is a process that should also apply to recruiting women. After all, they make up approximately half of the population in most countries. Affirmative action lists do typically breed feelings of unequal treatment among patrol officers, but no data has indicated that individuals hired under such policies are poorer quality officers than their peers (Haarr, 1997). These policies have been linked however to an increase in female officers, indicating that one of the greatest determinants of the representation of females on a department is whether an affirmative action policy is currently in place (Rabe-Hemp, 2008a; Sklansky, 2006; Zhao, He, & Lovrich, 2006). An affirmative action plan could help police organizations to increase the number of female police officers which in turn could assist female officers in breaking down established barriers that exist within police organizations.

### *Improved day care options*

Many organizations throughout North America have their own day care centres that are located at the employee’s work place. Since many police positions consist of shift work, having the added support of day care would make it easier for women to pursue a career in law enforcement. The Toronto Police Service for example has an emergency hotline for daycare emergencies. Furthermore, by providing onsite day care, single mothers who are interested in pursuing a policing position may be more motivated to apply.

### *Ensure that female officers are provided equal access to equipment*

Policing equipment must be built to suit the physical characteristics of both men and women. One example of this is the size of hand grips for firearms. Given the fact that women generally have smaller hands than men, there should be a selection of different hand gun grips so that women can maintain proper control of their weapon. Given the fact that a typical duty belt can weigh up to 35 lbs, there is a need to make the items on a police officer’s duty belt out of lighter material. Creating lighter equipment would assist women physically as they would require less physical strength to carry the equipment.

### *Temporary assignments to the upper ranks*

Many police organizations offer officers the opportunity to work part time in units such as the Central Investigative Unit, Recruiting and Community Oriented Response Units. Police organizations could extend these temporary assignments to include upper rank positions such as Inspector and Superintendent and make them accessible to candidates who meet the requirements. Under the current rank and file system, officers obtain upper rank positions and typically stay in that position until retirement or move upward to another position. This limits female officers’ exposure to such upper positions because they have to wait until someone retires before that can apply. Perhaps a

solution to this dilemma would be to have temporary assignments that would create a pool of candidates for future openings, thereby providing more women with access to knowledge that could be used elsewhere within the organization.

#### *Women Mentors*

The process of mentoring can be a rewarding experience for both mentee and mentor. Women need to hear about success stories of other women so that they can build confidence and recognition that their goals are achievable. Perhaps if women who have made it into units where very few women have been placed were willing to take on a mentor role for others they could provide the mentee with inspiration and the necessary tools to achieve success.

#### *Education, Education, Education*

Finally, the single most important suggestion for breaking down barriers is the need for ongoing education for all members of the policing community. While attending the Ontario Women in Law Enforcement conference in November of 2012, I was surprised and somewhat troubled by the fact that only three males were in attendance as compared to approximately one hundred women attendees. Women will require the cooperation of men to overcome stereotypes and barriers that exist in policing. For this reason, ongoing education on this subject must continue with an emphasis on the cooperation and participation of men. Additionally, education regarding barriers for women must be incorporated in police recruit training so that attention is paid to men's attitudes towards women and how a change in attitude is needed to ensure that women are equally recognized. Presently, this type of training for new recruits consist of an add on, which is usually a one day course on how to be respectful of one another. Recruit training must be expanded so that male officers can understand the need to be cooperative and supportive to their female colleagues.

Women don't realize how powerful they are.  
Judith Light

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### *Summary*

Women enter law enforcement at a disadvantage, simply because of their gender. As law enforcement agencies create policies that aim to increase the number of women in policing, they must also remain aware of the existing barriers that remain within. As women have found throughout history, change takes time and only through their persistence will they be successful in changing attitudes. It is important for women to recognize and acknowledge small victories in their battle to achieve recognition and fairness within the policing profession. To achieve optimal success, women must incorporate various methods and strategies so that they can identify and approach problems with comprehensive and effective solutions. Research has shown that the greatest barrier for women in law enforcement is a male's attitude and perception of women. Since their introduction to policing back in the late 1800's, women have broken down some barriers and need to take pride in their accomplishments. Given the fact that there is little research on this topic, more research is needed. According to Berg and Budnick (1986), "a re-evaluation of how female officers are perceived by law enforcement agencies and of how defeminisation manifests itself must be seriously considered". Women are an invaluable asset to any police organization and with continued hard work and dedication to recognizing their contributions, female officers should be given the same respect that their male co workers have received throughout history.



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