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## Women in Policing: In Relation to Female Police Officers' Level of Motivation Toward the Career, Level of Stress, and Attitude of Misconduct

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***Women in Policing:***

***In Relation to Female Police Officers' Level of Motivation Toward the Career,***

***Level of Stress, and Attitude of Misconduct***

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Journal Editor: ***Kyle Carmelo Militello***

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**Abstraction**

*The number of female police officers has increased rapidly in the last two decades. Since policing is traditionally a male-dominated environment, female police officers could face potential gender-based barriers in the workforce. Despite this, the number of female police officers continues to increase. This paper will prove that due to the psychological differences between men and women, gender stereotypes, and police workplace culture, higher levels of stress exist for women than men. Female police officers are also less likely than men to engage in misconduct due to the barriers they encounter in the workplace. The findings match the hypothesis that though female police officers have the same starting motivations as male police officers, their motivation will fade away over time. In addition, even though female police officers engage less frequently in misconduct, they tend to assimilate into the environment after they spend some time in the field.*

***Women in Policing:  
In Relation to Female Police Officers' Level of Motivation Toward the Career, Level of  
Stress, and Attitude of Misconduct***

ROXANNE HUIMIN CHEN

Due to life threatening and stressful working environments, police officers have been considered a group at high-risk for suicide in recent years (Hem, Berg, and Ekeberg 2001). Studies claim that the suicide rate of law enforcement officers is two or three times higher than those of the general population (Mohandie and Hatcher 1999). Although policing is traditionally a male-dominated occupation, the number of female police officers has increased significantly in recent years. For instance, in the United States female police officers constituted 9% of the police force in the early 1990s (Brown and Fielding 1993). By 2001, the proportion of female police officers in the United States had reached up to 12.7% (Brodeur 2010). Data shows that there is an increased amount of women who have joined the police force despite the fact that officers on the job are frequently exposed to danger and stress. Even though the proportion of female police officers has increased considerably, they still encounter barriers due to gender stereotypes. As a result, female police officers generally have more difficulties than male police officers in the workplace. This paper will prove that despite female police officers having the same level of motivation as their male counterparts, they experience higher levels of stress due to: the psychological differences between men and women, gender stereotypes, and police working culture. However, female officers are less likely to engage in misconduct than men due to the barriers they encounter in the workplace.

***Psychological Differences Between Men and Women***

Carol Gilligan focuses on young women's psychological development as moral beings. Men and women have different moral development and Gilligan proposes that female ethics is based on caring and is linked to the understanding of responsibilities and relations, whereas male ethics are rooted in justice and is connected to the understanding of rights and rules (Mann 2008). Men and women speak in different moral voices. Compared to men, women care about relationships and values more than rules and principles. Women care more about how others think because young girls develop a greater sense of empathy with others than do boys (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan concludes that women care for others by taking a variety of

voices into account (1982). Responsibilities to others are of paramount importance to women. Females' approach to morality is that people have responsibilities toward others. In addition, the female voice speaks with an 'ethics of care' (Gilligan 1982). Women value relationships, connectedness, and intimacy, but they are scared of abandonment and detachment. Women tend to have more emotional depth than men. They are reluctant to "judge according to a strict hierarchy of rules (which is a simple-minded moral relativism), [rather they] attempt to take into account the intricacies of individuals' lives and experiences in moral decision-making" (Mann 2008:338).

Men have different moral voices than women. Men fear intimacy because masculinity is often linked to toughness and independence. The male voice speaks with an 'ethics of justice', which is the language of rules and respect for individual rights (Gilligan 1982). Men "learn independence, fair play, and organizational skills in the rough-and-tumble competitive games" from their peers since they are little (Mann 2008:338). As a result, they abide by the hierarchies of these rules and principles when they become adults (Mann 2008). Therefore, men also believe that all rules must equally apply to everyone, anywhere, regardless of context (Mann 2008).

Men tend to think of citizen rights in formulas, like math problems, and that there is only one answer to the problem (Mann 2008). As for women, they are more uncomfortable dealing with the ethical problems because of their consideration for relationships (Mann 2008). When solving problems, men usually force themselves to choose the most correct answer, whereas women attempt to solve problems without hurting anyone. Men and women have different approaches to solving problems. In relation to police officers, it is believed that women's emotions would affect their work performance because they are more sympathetic. Female police officers' decision-making is constrained by their sentimentality because they care about how others are affected by their decisions. If a female police officer knows why a thief steals money—perhaps because he/she needs the money for food— then she might try to be more lenient on the thief than on other thieves due to his/her special circumstances. The decisions they make are based on mutual consensus because they want to maintain peace and they care for those in need. They consider morality as contextual and tied to individual stories, rather than as abstract and inflexible moral principles (Mann 2008). Under the same

circumstances, male police officers would punish the thief the same way as he punishes other thieves regardless of his/her motivations for committing the crime. It is thought that male police officers can make neutral decisions because there are no other factors that interfere with their decision-making. A male officer tends to care less about how other staff would be affected by their decisions because a strict priority is given to rules in maintaining a peaceful environment.

### ***Gender Ideologies and Stereotypes***

Radical feminism proposes that people live in a patriarchal society. The general public falsely takes male social development as the norm (Mann 2008). The power of patriarchy is present in all aspects of our society. Patriarchy promotes that men are more dominate than women. Radical feminists believe that there is a biological division between both genders and there are innate sexual characteristics (Mann 2008). One study demonstrates that “strong-gender based differences exist such that men are expected to be relatively more aggressive and autonomous than women” (Babin and Boles, 1998:80). This study shows that the biological differences between men and women indeed exist and thus further lead to gender differences. According to Mann, “This is called sexual essentialism, the notion that all psychological gender traits are constructed by culture” (Mann 2008:325).

These gender differences are socially constructed in which men are assumed to be superior and stronger than women because they are seen as intrinsically more cold-blooded, aggressive, and violent. Due to social stereotyping, women are thought to be weaker than men and always require more help and protection from others. In addition, femininity is often associated with nurturing, caring and non-violence. Gilligan found that the qualities of responsible action, autonomous thinking, and clear decision-making are deemed to be desirable in men and considered undesirable in women (1982). These stereotypes categorize work, confining work that requires emotion to women and more instrumentally-based work to men (Mann 2008). Some radical feminists also argue that the use of attractive women in media strengthens men’s position in the patriarchal society and construct the female body as an object of desire. Collectively, all of these put women at a disadvantaged position in society. Socialist feminists believe that capitalist societies create patriarchal oppression by promoting male domination in the family and in the economy through a division of labour

(Barrett 2014). As a result, women are pressured to be mothers and housewives within the confines of the home instead of joining the paid labour market.

Gender stereotyping is frequently associated with some occupations such as the military and nursing professions (Williams 1989). For example, it is “assume[d] that the Marine Corps demands of its soldiers certain “masculine” traits – strength, aggressiveness, emotional detachment; [it is also] assumed that nursing requires “feminine” qualities – nurturing, caring, and passivity” (Williams 1989:1). The military is a male-dominated environment, whereas nursing is a female-dominated environment. Thus, many people believe that while men possess the instincts required to become soldiers, women are more suited for the duties required of nurses. People morally believe that only men can have masculine qualities and only women can have feminine qualities. If a man is nurturing and passive, and a woman is strong and aggressive, they are thought to be anomalous and deviant in society because they do not follow the norms of gender construction. They are, thus, considered “cross-gender ‘freaks’: masculine women and feminine men” (Williams, 1989:1). It is unusual to encounter male nurses or female soldiers. The public doubts that neither male nurses nor female soldiers are appropriate because they do not fit into these specific gender-dominated occupations. Generally speaking, men have more physical strength than women. There is no doubt that some people would prefer male soldiers over female soldiers. However, many people still prefer female nurses than male nurses even though men have more physical strength, which indicates that gender stereotyping indeed exists in society.

The police force is a male-dominated environment. Even though the number of female police officers has increased, male officers continue to greatly outnumber them. The police force still presents a strong masculine image and thus law enforcement is an occupation that is believed to be most suitable for men. Female police officers should not be involved in the police force because they do not fit into the violent and cold-blooded environment. Crime prevention and crime solving are deemed to be masculine tasks (Parnaby and Leyden 2011). Female police officers are a burden in the police force because they are stereotypically thought to be weaker than men. They do not possess the skills and the abilities to fight crime. “While women perform as well as men in various patrol assignments and situations, they still face a significant amount of disapproval from the male police personnel population (Leger

1997:231). The gender viewpoint forces female police officers to adapt within a male hegemonic environment (Parnaby and Leyden 2011).

### ***Policing Workplace Culture/Environment***

The police culture leads to the oppression of female police officers. One study indicates that “[there is] a tendency for women to behave more consistently with voiced organizational policies and rules” (Babin and Boles 1998:80). Men tend to behave more aggressively and are more dominant than women in the workplace, whereas women tend to be submissive and obedient. Due to the nature of women’s instincts, women are more likely to obey and to accept the organization’s policies and rules regardless of whether they entirely agree with them or not, whereas men are more bold to express their opinions in the organizations. Therefore, their opinions are more frequently heard and accepted because they do not have as many constraints as women have. Additionally, feminine identity is grounded in attachment (Mann 2008). As a result, the organizations presumably make rules without taking their perspectives into consideration. Furthermore, young women always encounter “a sense of alienation from mainstream Western culture because they have to internalize or stifle their relationship-centered voices or opinions to avoid conflicts in the male-dominated culture” (Mann 2008:325). Women follow the rules because they want to avoid conflict. They also understand that they will not gain any help from their male colleagues in the patriarchal environment. Thus, women tend to be obedient and submissive to the rules. They need to sacrifice their feelings or adjust themselves internally in order to ingratiate themselves with the organization. Since the policing workforce happens to be a male-dominated environment, female police officers encounter the exact same problems as in any other patriarchal organizations. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to be situated in the male-dominated, high physical demanding and time demanding policing workplace environment (Parnaby and Leyden 2010:256-257). One study shows that a person’s stress level will increase if he or she feels restricted when attempting to express his or her opinions (Vartia 2001). Therefore, this could increase the level of stress on female police officers since they do not have an acceptable channel to properly express their concerns.

Parnaby and Leyden applies Merton’s Theory of Anomie to illustrate the deviance of policing (2011). They propose “ritualists accept the institutionalized means, but they scale

back the goals so as to render them more readily achievable” (Parnaby and Leyden 2011:256). The authors use female police officers as one example to illustrate that they seldom do extra work in order to fulfill the norm or expectations (Parnaby and Leyden 2011). Female officers have a difficult time finding their position in the patriarchal culture because they always need to define themselves either as “*policewoman* (officer first/female second) or a *policewoman* (female first/officer second)” (Parnaby and Leyden 2011:256), whereas male police officers do not necessarily have these problems. They do not need to define themselves as “*policemen*” or “*policemen*”. People automatically assume they are called “police”, but the gender differentiation always specifically focuses on female police officers.

In addition, female police officers have to confront the misconception by male police officers that women do not possess the abilities to do masculine work (Vega and Silverman 1982). Thus, women who “commit to the institutional means see rule adherence as instrumental in gaining male officers’ approval” (Parnaby and Leyden 2011:257), which explains why women tend to be more submissive and obedient to the organization’s rules because this is the best way to prove their capabilities to the male police officers. However, the environment does not provide any opportunity to female police officers to prove their abilities. “Male co-workers are known to assign the label ‘estrogen mafia’ to female officers who socialize with one another, thereby making it difficult for female officers to work collaboratively with one another” (Parnaby and Leyden 2011:257). Eventually, “social isolation is often the price women pay for joining the police service” (Parnaby and Leyden 2011:257). As a result of these attitudes, female officers have difficulty blending into this male-dominated working environment.

In addition, one study points out that “female officers are likely to encounter higher levels of harassment, overt hostility, and other negative social interactions on the job compared to their male counterparts” (Morash and Haarr 1995:689). The reason behind this is because the police organization culture is generally adversarial toward female police officers (Morash and Haarr 1995). Moreover, “the negative side of police work may bear its mark more on female police officers than their male counterparts” (Morash and Haarr 1995:689). This further proves that “both the internal organizational culture and external work environment are much less favourable to female officers” ((Morash and Haarr 1995:689).

Furthermore, the results of an empirical study of the career aspirations of 71 female police officers show that “serving policewomen do aspire to specialists duties in the first instance or believe they are thwarted from being appointed because of perceived prejudice” (Coffey, Brown, and Savage 1992:13). One study interviews two high-ranking female officers in Massachusetts and California, and the results determine that women in the profession have overcome many obstacles but have not achieved complete equality (Steel and Lovrich 1987). This further indicates that female police officers face many difficulties due to gender barriers.

### **Research Questions**

Although female police officers are oppressed by the patriarchal police environment, it is undeniable that the number of female police officers has significantly increased. This indicates that women could have the same level of motivation as male police officers when they first join the police force, but women could have different reasons for joining the forces than their male counterparts. In order to address the inequality issues in the male-dominated environment, it is important to figure out what factors inspire them to join and whether these factors are the reasons to encourage them to stay in the police force. After female police officers join the police force, they inevitably encounter pressure due to gender barriers. However, are there any other factors, besides gender, that cause stress among female police officers? In addition, misconduct commonly exists in policing due to peer support (Parnaby and Leyden 2011). Even though female police officers tend to follow the organizational rules, it would be interesting to investigate whether there is a change that female police officers engage in misconduct as a result of the pressure of blending into the policing environment. Therefore, I attempt to answer three research questions in this essay, including:

1. Do female police officers have the same level of motivation as male police officers toward their career?
2. Do female police officers have higher levels of stress than male police officers?
3. Are female police officers less likely to engage in misconduct than male police officers even when they are under pressure?

Three hypotheses are set up including:

1. Female police officers have the same level of motivation as male police officers to join the police force.

2. Female police officers have a higher stress level than male police officers.
3. Female police officers are less likely to engage in misconduct than male police officers even when they are under pressure.

### **Analytical / Critical Review**

#### ***Female Police Officers and Occupation Motivation***

Female police officers have the same level of motivation to join the police force as male police officers, but they have different reasons for joining. One study conducted in 2002 examined motivations for entering police work among a sample of 278 academy recruits in the New York City Police Department (Raganella and White 2004). The results indicate that the motivations for becoming a police officer were similar regardless of race or gender. The most influential factors are “the opportunity to help others, job benefits, and security” (Raganella and White 2004:501). However, minor differences exist between male and female police officers. Women were more likely to indicate that they pursued law enforcement due to a desire to help people (Todak 2012). Another study conducted among twenty-six female and fifty-two male officers in two Midwestern US police agencies indicated that both males and females have similar motivations, the most prevalent being a desire to help people and the security associated with the job (Meagher and Yentes 1986).

Research consistently found common motivations among men and women when seeking employment in policing. Scholars who assess the motivations of female officers similarly found that the desire to help people and the unpredictability of the job attracted them to the field (Seklecki and Paynich 2007; Todak 2012). Findings show that “past experiences with law enforcement influence the accuracy of recruits’ perceptions, their motivation to seek additional information about law enforcement and their future occupational experiences” (Todak 2012:46). These factors are essential for purposes of recruiting females. The disparities between male and female policing styles lie within their motivations for joining law enforcement.

For the majority of female police officers, the primary motivation for entering law enforcement appears to be the desire to help people (Raganella and White 2004). This finding matches with the earlier research suggesting that women often have a nurturing or helping

approach to the profession. The second reason is that the job is different everyday (Raganella and White 2004). The primary motivation for continuing a career in law enforcement was job security (Raganella and White 2004). The desire to help people came in second (Raganella and White 2004). This matches the previous research that women are eager to prove their abilities in the police force. However, because the male-dominated environment often oppresses them, this consequently takes away the opportunity to prove their abilities and thus their motivation level decreases overtime.

### ***Female Police Officers and Occupational Stress***

Within a patriarchal environment female police officers become stressed at work. One study indicates that “to the extent that occupations were female dominated, feminine personality or physical attributes were thought more essential for success; to the extent that occupations were male dominated, masculine personality or physical attributes were thought more essential” (Cejka and Eagly 1999:413). “Female-dominated occupations, such as the domestic role, may be thought to require attributes that are stereotypically feminine, and male-dominated occupations may be thought to require attributes that are stereotypically masculine” (Cejka and Eagly 1999:414). Therefore, masculine attributes help male police officers succeed in a patriarchal workplace as this environment naturally favours them. Other studies show that female police officers suffer more from external stressors such as negative public attitude, media, courts/criminal justice system, organizational stressors, task-related stressors, personal stressors, and female-related stressors. Eighty percent of the respondents frequently felt that “the department doesn't want women” even though they had already attained at least six years of experience on patrol and feel like they are being ignored, harassed, watched, gossiped about, and viewed as sexual objects (Wexler and Logan 1983:46). For male police officers, it is much easier to achieve success than for female police officers in the male-dominated environment of policing. These studies indicate that, at least to some extent, women will encounter more challenges and difficulties to achieve the same level of success that men have in the male-dominated police force.

In addition, “given the traditional division of labor by gender in the family, women tend to accumulate less labor market experience than men” (Blau and Kahn 2000:6). It is challenging for women to maintain the balance between work and family. They frequently

have to sacrifice their jobs for their families. Therefore, most of them only work part-time jobs because the flexibility afforded by part-time schedules allow for them to take care of their children and their families. It is presumably thought that the more time women spend on housework, the less commitment they put into their jobs (Coffey, Brown, and Savage 1992). Moreover, most of the police officers do shift work and thus they do not have a fixed working schedule. They might be required to work early in the morning or late at night. Furthermore, discrimination in the workplace also affects women's occupations. According to one article, "In models of "statistical discrimination," differences in the treatment of men and women arise from average differences between the two groups in the expected value of productivity" (Blau and Kahn 2000:6).

Men are more productive than women because they have less family constraints and thus they are able to put more effort into their work. This leads to discrimination from employers. Many employers hesitate to hire female employees based on the assumption that women tend to have low commitment to the workplace due to familial obligations, whereas men can fully devote their time to their work without worrying about family issues. All of these studies indicate that one of the reasons causing stress to female police officers is the negative effects of gender stereotyping. Furthermore, another study provides evidence that supports "a more positive (negative) role stress performance relationship among men (women)" (Babin and Boles 1998:87). Other studies have investigated the impact of the work environment, work-family conflict, and coping mechanisms on physical and psychological stresses of police officers. The findings show that work-family conflicts and destructive coping mechanisms are the strongest and most consistent causes of stress in female police officers (He et al. 2002). Moreover, it was found that "the exposures to negative work environment, camaraderie, and constructive coping mechanism on different measures of work related stresses" among females (He et al. 2002:687). This indicates that the policing structure itself causes female officers to encounter more stress than their male colleagues.

Some studies have indicated that both male and female police officers have stress, but the causes of this stress are varied and differ by gender. Stressors can be divided into police operational duties, organizational issues and management issues (Brown and Fielding 1993). Female uniformed constables are less likely to be exposed to police operational stress

involving the potential for violence, but they report more severe adverse reactions than uniformed policemen if they are exposed. Moreover, female uniformed officers and detectives are more likely to be involved with victims of violence or sexual offences than male police officers. There are relatively few differences in exposure to organizational stressors other than the fact that women detectives and uniformed officers report higher rates of gender-based discrimination and prejudice compared to their male coworkers (Brown and Fielding 1993).

However, some people challenge the idea that female police officers have higher levels of stress than male police officers. One study investigates the link between workplace stress and gender differences within police departments. Although women and men experience many of the same work-related problems and such problems account for a high proportion of workplace stress in both groups, the gendered nature of police organizations causes unique stressors for women. However, female police officers do not report a higher level of stress than male police officers (Morash and Haarr 1995). Another study also supports that the stress level of both genders are similar. Its findings indicate that although female officers may experience unique stressors in the police organization, male and female officers did not report significantly different levels of occupational stress (McCarty and Garland 2007).

### ***Female Police Officers and Misconduct***

Since women are considered more obedient and submissive to the organizational rules, they tend to look more ethical than their male counterparts. It is often asserted that female police officers are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in misconduct or to approve of such behaviours by fellow officers. One study maintains this assumption and uses the case of Queensland police as evidence. The study looks at three sources of data including attitudinal surveys administered to serving police officers, police-initiated complaints, and public complaints against police. The results of the attitudinal data show that there are few differences between male and female police officers in their views of ethical conduct (Waugh, Ede, and Alley 1998). Even though female police officers are less likely to engage in misconduct, “regardless of gender, only a small number of officers below the rank of Sergeant were willing to initiate complaints of misconduct against a fellow police officer” (Waugh and Alley 1998:288).

Additionally, it is found that female police officers are as likely as male police officers to modify their attitude of misconduct once they have spent some time ‘in the field’ (Waugh, Ede, and Alley 1998). While female police officers may not be inherently more ethical, “their employment has some important organizational advantages, such as enabling a reduction in complaints, particularly those relating to the use of force, and a reinforcement of the principles of community policing” (Waugh, Ede, and Alley 1998:288). Gerber and Mendelson conducted another study relating to misconduct in 2008 focusing on officer misconduct among Russian police officers. The authors’ findings support previous investigations that female police officers are less likely to engage to misconduct than their male counterparts (Gerber and Mendelson 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Policing involves a stressful and life-threatening work environment. It is also a male-dominated occupation. Police officers are more frequently exposed to danger and stress than other occupations. The number of female officers has significantly increased in recent years. Although the proportion of female police officers has increased, they still encounter some barriers due to gender stereotypes. As a result, female police officers generally have more difficulties than male police officers in the workplace, but what causes the differences between both genders? The psychological differences between men and women, gender stereotypes, and the police working culture are possible factors that cause the differences between male and female police officers. This paper aims to uncover whether female police officers have the same level of motivation as men, whether they have higher levels of stress than men, and whether they are less likely to engage in misconduct in the workplace. Therefore, three research questions were posed in this essay including:

1. Do female police officers have the same level of motivation as male police officers toward their career?
2. Do female police officers have higher levels of stress than male police officers?
3. Are female police officers less likely to engage in misconduct than male police officers even when they are under pressure?

The findings match the hypothesis that female police officers have the same motivation as male police officers. Both males and females have passion when they consider

employment in the field of policing, but female police officers hope that they can help more people through this position. This matches the idea that women are more nurturing and caring. Female police officers abide by the organizational rules because they want to avoid conflicts within the patriarchal workplace. They do not want to cause any more “trouble” that would further isolate them in this environment. This idea also matches the theory that women speak the voice of “ethics of care” because they value other people’s thoughts and opinions more than their own, whereas men speak the voice of “ethics of justice”. However, female police officers’ motivations will eventually fade away due to the oppression in the patriarchal workplace. They are stereotypically thought to be weaker than male police officers although they are just as capable as males. This limits their opportunities in regards to crime fighting and prevention. Female officers also frequently feel a sense of alienation in the environment because they feel as though they are unwelcome due to the disapproval of their male coworkers. It has been found that most male police officers discriminate against female police officers. Furthermore, women also have family-work conflicts that cause stress, which also put them at a disadvantage.

However, while some studies conclude that female police officers have higher levels of stress than male police officers, other studies assert that males and females have the same level of stress but for different reasons. Even though female police officers engage less frequently in misconduct, they tend to assimilate into the environment after they spend some time in the field. They neither agree nor disagree with the misconduct of their male counterparts, but they just try to avoid being involved in potential trouble. Therefore, even though they are less likely to engage in misconduct, thereby appearing more ethical than male police officers, female officers simply try to avoid conflicts since they are not favoured in this environment. There are some limitations in this paper. Most of the data is slightly outdated and the studies are from the eighties and nineties, but this outdated data can still apply to current society. However, it is important for future research to be conducted to allow a more accurate understanding of the current situation. Hopefully, further research will allow us to address the current policies to help change the root problems within these patriarchal organizations and in society more generally.

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