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“I Took the Blue Pill” The Effect of the Hegemonic Masculine Police Culture on Canadian  
Policewomen’s Identities

by

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## ABSTRACT

There are varied opinions as to whether the subculture of policing continues to reproduce traditional gender roles and stereotypes in order to maintain male dominance, leaving policewomen at a distinct disadvantage. In an effort to understand this phenomenon from policewomen's own experiences, this study utilized qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 policewomen from varied police forces in Southwestern Ontario, Canada. The role of police culture and hegemonic masculinity is explored in relation to the identity formation of policewomen both on and off-duty. Drawing on the work of Dorothy Smith (1987), the findings reveal that policewomen have a bifurcated consciousness, dividing the world as they actually experience it from the hegemonic masculine view they adopt as officers. Since the latter viewpoint strongly devalues the former, women are frequently conflicted, and at times at war with themselves and each other. The results confirm that the hegemonic masculine values perpetuated by the institution of policing influences the way policewomen see themselves, the world, and each other.

**Keywords:** Policewomen, Southwestern Ontario, Canadian Police, Identity, Police Culture, Hegemonic Masculinity, Bifurcation of Consciousness

In 2012, the Government of Canada commissioned the Status of Women to conduct a gender audit within Canadian police forces. The resulting report found that “although women have been serving as police officers in Canada for over 40 years, on average only 20% of Canadian police officers are women” (Montgomery 2013:3). The report questions why the numbers of policewomen are so low compared to men, why so few women officers are promoted, and why police forces seem unable to recruit and retain female officers, despite organizational mission statements aimed at welcoming diversity within their departments (Montgomery 2013). This report adds to the empirical evidence that female officers continue to be excluded by the subculture of policing, both formally and informally, due to their gender (Agocs, Langan, and Sanders 2014; Kurtz, Linneman, and Williams 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Selecki and Paynich 2007).

Policing appears to conform to hegemonic masculinity, which R.W. Connell (1995:77) described as a “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy in patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women.” Police forces maintain hegemonic masculinity by the “use of authority, heterosexism, the ability to display force, and the subordination of women” (Rabe-Hemp 2009:3). These practices have a profound impact on the work of men and women police officers. Studies agree that the police subculture is hypermasculine, reproducing traditional gender roles and stereotypes in order to maintain male dominance, leaving women at a distinct disadvantage (Agocs et al. 2014; Kurtz et al. 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Seklecki and Paynich 2007).

How do women police officers’ experience this masculine environment? How does this environment affect their identity formation? Although many studies have explored the challenges policewomen face, studies have largely failed to examine how women view

themselves and other female officers within the male-dominated institution of policing. This study addresses this gap in the literature, through an analysis of in-depth interviews with fifteen policewomen from five separate police forces in Southwestern Ontario. Study findings illustrate that the “old boys club” is still alive within Canadian police forces. Drawing on the work of Dorothy Smith (1987), I find that policewomen have a bifurcated consciousness, dividing the world as they actually experience it from the hegemonic masculine view they adopt as officers. Since the latter viewpoint strongly devalues the former, women are constantly conflicted, and at times at war with themselves and each other. Understanding women’s identity conflicts not only sheds new light on women’s participation (and lack thereof) in policing, but also has powerful implications for policy change to promote greater equality, equity, and a positive work environment for all officers.

### ***Literature Review***

Past research has revealed the struggles of women police officers to achieve equality within the male-dominated police subculture (Agocs et al. 2014; Kurtz et al. 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). Research has documented women’s disadvantage drawing on concepts such as tokenism, stereotyping, sexual harassment, and discrimination to identify the barriers policewomen face within the male-dominated sphere of policing (Carlan 2009; Kanter 1977; Martin 1990; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Van der Lipp et al. 2004; Wertsch 1998; Dick and Cassell 2004; Kurtz et al. 2012; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). Recent research suggests little has changed over the last 40 years, although some identify improvements including increased promotional activity, reduced harassment, and a feeling of increased social acceptance (Rabe-Hemp 2009). Although the demographics of police forces are changing, with more female, minority, and sexual minority officers, the traditional white, male, hypermasculine policing culture that has dominated police departments since the

1950s, persists (Sklansky 2006). The changes reported are often incremental, surface changes meant to appease human rights legislation and quiet dissension from the public. Informal mechanisms continue to maintain the hegemonic masculine culture (Kurtz et al. 2012; Sklansky 2006). Further, police forces change at an individual pace, making some more progressive than others (Sklansky 2006). Research based in the United States and European countries reveal similar trends (Dick and Cassell 2004; Garcia 2003; Karunanidhi and Chitra 2013; Van der Lipp et. al 2004; Wertsch 1998).

Despite considerable hardships, women's participation in Western police forces has continued to grow (Statistics Canada 2014). Yet, progress has been slow, and women continue to report harassment, discrimination, and incompatible work place policies that favour the traditional personal lives and careers typical of their male counterparts (Dick and Cassell 2004; Kurtz 2008; Garcia 2003; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Van der Lipp 2004). For example, in 2014 Statistics Canada reported that, on average, only 20 percent of police officers are female, only 17 percent of women are in middle-management positions, and less than 10 percent are in senior police management. Why are women still experiencing similar barriers 40 years after their entrance into the profession? Police culture is one area that researchers point to as problematic for gender equality in the workplace.

Police culture is based on a distinct set of norms and values that communicates to the members of a police force the acceptable attitudes and behaviours associated with being a member of an elite group (Brodeur 2010; Manning 1977; Reiner 2015; Westley 1970). Police culture fosters an *us versus them* attitude that embraces traditional masculine qualities such as physical strength, stoicism, and loyalty to the brotherhood (Kurtz et al. 2012; Manning 1977; Martin and Jurik 2006; Parnaby and Leyden 2011). The ideal is the crime-fighting police hero, and anything outside of this ideal is considered weak, ineffective, and a threat, including male or female officers who identify with traditionally feminine traits such as nurturing,

empathy, or emotional expression (Martin and Jurik 2006; O'Connor et al. 2011; Rabe-Hemp 2008; Seklecki and Paynich 2007).

Police culture is communicated to new recruits at the training academy, through training mentors, and the informal policies of the department (Liederbach and Travis 2008; Manning 1977; O'Connor et al. 2011; Provkos and Padavic 2002). Police forces use what has been termed a hidden curriculum to teach male officers how to segregate female officers from the dominant group. A hidden curriculum is an informal way to teach the values and norms of a subculture and is an important concept because its subtlety makes it hard to prove and combat (Kurtz et al. 2012; O'Connor et al. 2011; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). For example, uniforms designed to fit the male figure, sexual jokes and innuendo about female officers, and an emphasis on policewomen's lack of physical strength are all informal mechanisms designed to send the message that women are not equally competent employees (Kurtz et al. 2012; O'Connor et al. 2011; Rabe-Hemp 2008).

Policewomen are viewed as physically or emotionally incapable of "real" police work, and are informally pushed into roles such as caregivers and nurturers of women and children who are victims of crime (Dick and Cassell 2004; Martin 1990; Wertsch 1998). Female officers are frequently excluded from masculine social bonding events, further segregating women as "the other" and leaving them open to harassment (Kurtz et al. 2012; O'Connor et al. 2011; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). A successful career within the policing occupation requires group membership and social acceptance. Thus, female officers are socialized to conform to the police culture by accepting their status as "the other" and assimilating into the subculture in order to avoid isolation from the dominant group (Martin and Jurik 2006; O'Connor et al. 2011). This imbalance of power leaves policewomen few choices in terms of their professional identities.

In the police subculture there are only four roles available to female officers: “mother, sex object, kid sister, or women’s liberationist,” the last representing the outcast who is shunned for attempting to fight back against systemic discrimination (Selecki and Paynich 2007:20). Policewomen not only internalize the labels, but also appear to accept and embrace them as part of their professional identity and the gendered roles they are expected to perform (Agocs et al. 2014; Kurtz et al 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). For example, in Rabe-Hemp’s (2009) qualitative interviews, female officers revealed that they *outwardly* viewed the feminine stereotypes as accurate, stating that women officers are better at written reports, calls for service with children and women, and calming the situation – all qualities considered the “soft” side of policing by their male colleagues. Even though privately some female officer’s did not identify with such feminine qualities and were interested in the jobs viewed as masculine, for example SWAT teams, they still conformed to the role of “weak” female (Rabe-Hemp 2009).

It is unclear if policewomen are aware of the fact that they are “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman 1987), by performing gendered expectations and contributing to the survival of hegemonic masculinity in the institution (Kurtz et al. 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2009). Further, policewomen seem to internally justify these imposed roles by claiming that the stereotypes have merit, despite evidence from their testimonies that some did not enjoy or excel at the empathetic, nurturing side of the job (Kurtz et al. 2012; Rabe-Hemp 2009; Seklecki and Paynich 2007). Rather than support each other, which could mean cultural reform within the institution, female officers often label and stigmatize members of their own group and actively buy into the “cop culture” (Kurtz et al 2012: 244). Female officers expressed respect for the policewomen who used a physical, masculine approach to policing, and contempt for female officers who expressed their femininity, labelling them “badge bunnies” (Rabe-Hemp 2009:10) and critiquing their effectiveness as police officers.



Overall, the literature points to many barriers to women's involvement in policing. To succeed in policing, women officers must adapt to, and adopt, the masculine policing culture. This creates conflicts for women and appears to encourage women to devalue the feminine and denigrate their female colleagues. To understand this identity conflict, it is helpful to draw on the work of feminist scholar Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990).

*Dorothy Smith, Standpoint Theory, and Gendered Organizations*

Standpoint theory holds that we know our world subjectively, from the standpoint of our position within society and our social relations (Smith 1987). Dorothy Smith advances this theory to explain the oppression of women within modern society, and also to challenge it. Smith argues that the 'relations of ruling' are embedded within so-called neutral and impersonal social institutions such as bureaucracy, administration, management and discourses, which result in cultural domination (Smith 1990). The relations of ruling within social institutions and practices perpetuate masculine supremacy; they support the views and privileges of the dominant while subordinating the rest. It is through these relations of ruling that social inequality is reproduced, by both the oppressors and the oppressed. Speaking personally, Smith discusses the impact of these relations of ruling on her own experience, especially in academia. She became aware there were two ways of knowing the world. One was the version she was taught through academic texts and the relations of ruling; an apparently objective perspective on reality that was not her own. Another was generated from her personal experience – her own standpoint. The two did not mix. Indeed, Smith argues the two tend not to mix for most women who are embedded within masculine institutions. Smith labelled this experience 'the bifurcation of consciousness.' The bifurcation of consciousness is the separation between the world one experiences and the dominant view one must adopt (Smith 1987).

For Smith (1987, 2005), then, the dominant standpoint of our institutions reflects the perspectives of white, middle/upper class males, effectively silencing the lived experiences of women. In a similar vein, Joan Acker (1992), in her work on gendered institutions, shows how organizations are gendered in a manner that disadvantages women and subordinates them. Feminist sociologists have built on these insights to document discrimination, blocked mobility, work-family conflict, and many other barriers facing women in the workforce, especially in male-dominated jobs (Bruening and Dixon 2008; Debois et al. 2012; Dick and Cassell 2004). These organizations reproduce hegemonic masculinity, originally defined by Goffman (1963) as an unattainable ideal of what it means to be masculine within our western culture. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been elaborated by Connell and colleagues (1987, 1995, 2005) to identify practices that maintain and institutionalize men's dominance over women. While few men may actually live up to the hegemonic ideal, it is the most visible and respected form of masculinity in a given social context (Connell 2005).

Policing institutions are part of the relations of ruling identified by Smith, and they are very much gendered organizations, in which hegemonic masculinity has been institutionalized. Research has found, as we have seen, that women are disadvantaged in policing: "police organizations marginalize female officers through the use of images, symbols, and general ideologies that legitimize and promote hegemonic masculinity" (Swan 2016:3; Acker 1992). To succeed in these organizations, women have to adapt to, and adopt, these perspectives and ideologies. In doing so, they may experience the bifurcation of consciousness identified by Smith – seeing the world as a man and a woman simultaneously. Do police women experience such a bifurcation? And if they do, what is the impact on their identity?

Sheldon Stryker's (1980) theory of identity states that identity is formed through the interactions between the social structure and the self. In order to conduct ourselves in society,

we create many roles through our interactions. An identity is one part of the self that emerges during interactions with others, depending on who the interaction is with. The number of identities one holds depends on the number of role relationships one has. Individuals may have many identities such as parent, spouse, employee, friend, and so on (Stryker 1980). Given that policewomen hold many – sometimes contradictory – roles, Stryker’s approach to identity is a useful one to draw on. It enables us to explore the cyclical processes of identity formation as identities are structured through interaction in specific social contexts and relationships, and in turn reproduce and structure these social relationships and contexts. Not only does the policing culture, then, structure police officers’ relationships, and thereby structure their identities, but officers would inhabit other roles which also contribute to identity formation. Combining Stryker’s identity approach with Smith’s standpoint theory opens up opportunities to explore how policewomen’s competing roles and social locations affects their perspectives and their identities.

### ***Methods***

The police subculture is notoriously challenging to research due to the cultural norms of secrecy and loyalty. Consequently, we know little of Canadian policewomen’s experiences in the institution of policing. In order to understand their situation, we must talk to policewomen, and learn about the world from their standpoint. To do this, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen policewomen employed within 5 police forces across Southwestern Ontario, Canada. All interviews were conducted by the author, a former police officer. The researcher’s insider status facilitated recruitment. Some previous research on women in policing recruited participants through police administration. With the latter recruitment method, women may be unwilling to participate, or to reveal problems, for fear of job-related reprisals.

The sample was selected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods. First, several participants known to the researcher were contacted via email and invited to participate in a study about policewomen's identity formation. Then the women who agreed to participate were asked to forward the recruitment email to policewomen they believed might be interested in taking part. Those participants who were interested were asked to contact the researcher via email or phone.

The participants were all Caucasian between 25 and 50 years of age. They were employed as police officers for periods ranging from 2-22 years, and had a varied background of work experience in different units. Most participants were at the rank of constable, but two women were staff sergeants, one was a sergeant, and three were detective constables. Nine of the participants were employed in large police forces, classified in this study as those having more than 1000 sworn members. The rest were employed within medium-sized forces, classified as under 1000 sworn members. Marital status varied amongst the women, as did sexual orientation. Some women had children and some did not. The lack of variance within my sample in terms of race, ethnicity, and rank reflects the lack of diversity amongst police forces in general. In Canada, less than 12 percent of police personnel identified as members of a visible minority (Statistics Canada 2012). On average, less than 10 percent of the upper ranks of Canadian police forces are women (Statistics Canada 2014).

My insider status as a former officer had both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, it afforded me not only contact, but also rapport and trust with participants. My knowledge of the argot, norms, and values of the subculture allowed my participants to relax and speak freely for the most part. However, interpretation of interview findings is unavoidably influenced by my own experiences. To minimize bias, nine neutral, open-ended questions were created to encourage participants to discuss whichever topics they felt were

pertinent to understanding their experiences. For example, “Tell me about your daily work environment” and “Tell me about your entry into law enforcement” were open questions that did not steer responses in a particular direction.

The interview guide began with demographic questions. Prompting questions were included in the event that the participants required further probing. However, flexibility within the interviews was used to allow the conversation to occur organically. Many prompts were situational depending on the topic the participant wished to discuss. The interview guide provided enough structure to ensure that certain topics were covered with all participants, but control was given to the participants to reveal their experiences from their standpoint. The format of the questions allowed for individual interpretation by the participants, and indeed, they often took different approaches in their responses. Immediately following the interviews, field notes of my observations of the setting, verbal and nonverbal communication of participants, and my own thoughts on emerging themes were written.

The interviews were conducted in locations of the participants’ choosing for their comfort and for confidentiality purposes. All interviews but two were recorded with participants’ consent. Notes were taken to collect data from the participants who did not want to be recorded. This study was approved by a university research ethics board. All efforts have been made to protect the identity of participants. Specifics of events, names, or places are not included for confidentiality purposes.

Following the principles of grounded theory, the analysis of the data was an ongoing process. Theory and data were constantly assessed and emerging themes monitored throughout the process of data collection. The final stages of data analysis included open and focused coding. During the open coding stage, I examined the data in its entirety and found the overarching themes of hegemonic masculinity, identity formation, and police culture.

Through the process of focus coding, I was able to refine the data further into subthemes of on-duty identity, off-duty identity, bifurcation, discrimination/harassment, gender, deviance, and justification. The data I collected are robust and required ongoing refinement to identify the dominant themes of the interviews, of which there are many. This paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are women's experiences in policing?
- 2) How does police culture affect policewomen, their relationships with others, and their identities?

### ***Findings***

The policewomen interviewed use impression management in both their on and off-duty lives (see also Rabe-Hemp 2009). They embrace and portray behaviours traditionally sex-typed masculine including stoicism, aggression, and competition. The overarching theme is, "I'm tough; I can take it." When recounting traumatic experiences at the hands of supervisors or co-workers, their tone was often flat; their demeanour mechanical. Yet, body language and contradictory statements suggesting emotional distress was evident. They brushed these experiences off as "part of the job," "just the way it is." They claimed, "I'm fine. I'm over it." Most went to great lengths to impress upon me that they were unaffected by these incidents. At the same time, body language, lack of eye contact, nervous laughter, or statements made later in the interview indicated that there was more going on behind the stoic "mask" most of my participants presented. Some participants admitted outright that they had willingly assimilated into the police culture in order to "have a quiet life" and "obtain career goals." These women felt it was imperative to be liked by male colleagues and "play the game" in order to get ahead. Comments such as, "You ingest it, you take it in, and assimilate

because you have to - you're in the club, so you need to take it or you're out” were used to describe their experiences from early on in their careers.

Professionally, most of the participants conformed to the masculine performance expected of them, despite their criticism of it. Many of the policewomen interviewed admitted that they hesitated to call for back up, worried that they would be perceived as “weak” by their male co-workers. One participant described feeling that “if you call for assistance, there's that whole split-second pause of ‘will they think I can't handle this on my own’ kinda thing.” These women were willing to consider or actually put their physical safety at risk, in order to maintain the outward image of being “tough.” Their stories revealed that tough really meant “just as good as the men.”

The women spoke at length about professional opportunities that were not available to them due to their gender. The Canine or SWAT units were mentioned as particularly hard to enter; for the most part, women need not apply, even those that met the physical requirements. When asked why, participants stated that policing was still “an old boys club” and many felt the men were “threatened by female officers” taking over their masculine image. As one participant put it, “You cannot get in, even if you are the best. They want to maintain that closed-knit, dominant male structure like a fortress.” There were several women who could think of one or two women throughout their careers who had “made it” into these elite units, but these were a rarity. Most participants spoke about how female officers were channeled into “house cat” jobs, such as courts, domestic violence, sexual assault units, and deskwork. These positions are viewed as less prestigious than the “real” police officer who works the beat with physical prowess. Some participants were not against working in these units, in fact some of them wished to. The problem, as they saw it, was that these positions are devalued in an institution that still promotes physical, enforcement-style policing as the

work of the “real cop.” As one participant stated, the entrenched ideology of the institution is that “policing is still all about men catching the bad guys.”

All of the participants had heard of other female officers being labelled, and some had experienced it themselves. “Kid sister,” “tomboy,” “lesbian,” “gas can,” “badge bunny,” “bitch,” and “crazy” were terms used to describe policewomen. The participants who identified themselves as “one of the guys” who “fit in” were much more positive about their work experiences. They tended to distance themselves from the other women stating that they “prefer to hang with the guys, the women are too much drama.” That is not to say they all had negative relationships with the other women, some identified close ties with fellow police women. Despite this, many admitted they distanced themselves from the other policewomen, especially those women deemed as “trouble makers” who had pushed back against the institution. The women who aligned with the male officers often reported more success in their careers, such as promotions, lateral movement, training opportunities, and more lax supervisors who allowed them time off for family or commitments without consequence. These women were also frequently invited to “guys night out” or social engagements that many policewomen report being excluded from, although there were still some social events they identified as “boys only” and therefore not available to them either. It is important to note that although these women felt they were treated better than some, most did not feel they were as valued as their male co-workers. When asked why they felt they were treated differently than other policewomen, they responded that they were “respected as good police officers”, but felt the main difference was that they were well liked by the dominant male group.

There was a price to pay for entry into this group however. Some women reported overt, disturbing acts of harassment, while others reported more covert harassment in the form



of jokes they felt were “part of the initiation into the group.” These women were expected to perform their roles carefully. They had to adopt some masculine characteristics, but not too many or they would be “butch” or a “crazy bitch” and rejected by the men. It was also imperative that they accept the behaviour of the men, including sexist and racist jokes, sexual stories, and physical displays of masculinity, such as farting, belching, and crotch grabbing. Many women reported this behaviour as a test by the men early in their careers to see if “they were cool and wouldn’t rat on them.” They told stories of other women who challenged the behaviour of the men and suffered both socially and professionally because of it. The women reported that although “less than before,” there are still a lot of “old dinosaurs” around that conduct themselves in this manner. Many of the women felt that their working environment would improve, including instances of harassment, discrimination, work/family balance, and career opportunities as “the younger constables move up and the old guard moves out.” Conversely, most of the same women expressed frustration at younger men embodying the old norms of the hypermasculine police culture, such as ignoring the women’s seniority and therefore elevated rank. The women felt this was based on their gender as the younger male constables always deferred to the seniority and rank of other male officers.

Many participants spoke about social barriers to policewomen, particularly for those who had been promoted or given career opportunities in units desired by male officers. Many were labelled by the male officers as promiscuous who had “slept their way to the top,” or got the job “because the white shirts [administration] needed to put a woman in.” These women had to work extra hard to earn the respect of their male subordinates. Similarly, many participants described female supervisors as “way worse than the male superiors,” in terms of fairness of treatment. One of the female supervisors interviewed readily accepted her role as “tougher” on female subordinates, stating “I was harder on the women underneath me. That was how I helped them, toughen them up for the reality.” This participant later admitted that

she felt a lot of pressure as a female supervisor and this contributed to her tough stance in order to prove herself to the male supervisors. On the contrary, several participants spoke about female supervisors who “went the extra mile” for them and “encouraged and supported other women to move up the ranks.” These participants were in the minority however, with the negative experiences far outweighing the good. For example, most of the participants retold accounts of female supervisors who had warned them early in their careers against being “too slutty” or “too feminine,” with the not- so-subtle implication that it was up to them to control the men’s behaviours or “suffer irreparable damage to [their] reputation.”

A somewhat troubling feature of the hegemonic masculine influence was the admission “we eat our own.” Rather than engage in comradery, female officers often isolated their peers. Many participants spoke of the problem of female-on-female bullying rather than the comradery the men enjoyed. When asked why they thought this was the case, they stated things like female officers are “bitches who hold on to grudges.” Participants described other female officers using the same stereotypes and labels that the men used to describe them: “weak,” “crazy,” “slutty,” “not a real cop.” Several women did not feel female officer comradery was a problem and enjoyed what they called “close connections” to other female officers, but even these participants admitted that there were women who struggled to fit in. Many participants commented that male officers who did not “fit the man’s man” hypermasculine persona also experienced barriers to social and career mobility due to negative reputations as “nerds,” “losers,” and worst of all, “soft.”

Reputation was a prominent theme in the interviews as particularly important in a culture that is based on trust and loyalty. As one woman recounted, “everything in policing is based on trust and your reputation, if you lose that you may as well quit – no one will work with you.” This suggests that social position plays a key role in the professional lives of

police officers. Participants spoke about male officers who “could get away with anything and still be chief” merely based on the level of their popularity and gender. Meanwhile, they spoke about women’s damaged reputations for “speaking out” against discriminatory practices, or “going off on maternity leave” because “the guys hate that and the women are always talked about negatively.” As one participant explained, “It doesn’t matter how many degrees, how good you are at your job, and how many lives you’ve saved. If they don’t like you, it’s over.” Many participants also spoke about male officers policing female officers’ sexuality and the double standard that accompanied it. Male officers frequently encouraged each other to “take a run” at the “rookie females” and exaggerated displays of heterosexual prowess was considered a positive attribute. Conversely, female officers were held to a higher standard by both supervisors and co-workers with many participants reporting ruined reputations of female officers who were rumoured to have “slept around.” Participants indicated that a female officer’s reputation could be destroyed by just one sexual relationship with another officer, especially if the relationship ended badly. Indeed, many of the women interviewed had experienced some version of negative repercussions linked to their sexuality at some point in their careers. As a result, social position was frequently talked about as the most important predictor of social and career mobility with policewomen, in particular, needing social acceptance to experience success.

A notable finding in this study was that some participants seemed aware of their role in the reproduction of their own oppression, yet they had found ways to justify the behaviour. This included instances of isolation from their own group, in effect “othering” fellow policewomen in order to align themselves with the dominant group. For example, most participants provided examples of women who had tried to fight back against sexual harassment or discrimination. Some of the participants had done so themselves. Those who had retold accounts of isolation from peers, administrative corruption, their mental health

status questioned, and their “reputation as a good cop destroyed.” All participants stated that to “take on the administration” would end your career, both personally and professionally. Most identified times that they had thought about speaking out, but decided that it was “not worth it, nothing would come of it anyway.” After seeing several women try, they indicated they did not fight back because “to fight back was useless.” As one participant put it, “stay out of it, keep your head down, and just do your work” was the way to have a successful career or at least to avoid being a target. Many participants talked about the women who had pushed back in a negative way, stating things like, “she deserved it”; “she was a slut”; “she was crazy, everybody knew it”; “she just couldn’t handle the job” and “she was too sensitive and blew everything out of proportion.” These comments were generally justified with statements like, “you knew what you were signing up for”; “we have to deal with it, so suck it up”; “you get used to it, it’s just the guys being the guys” and “it makes it so much worse for the rest of us.” Most of the same participants later expressed guilt for shunning those women, but explained that they “didn’t have a choice.” As one participant stated “I don’t want to be painted with the same brush, and that’s what happens if you associate with them.”

The women’s views on police culture itself was varied, often in the same interview. On one hand, most talked about the “old boys club” as “tedious” and “a battle faced every day.” They described their frustration at barriers to promotion, and their struggles with work-family balance due to workplace policies that are not inclusive of the needs of women with children. They also expressed their exhaustion at “having to set and re-set boundaries” with male officers who constantly test them, stating “it is like I have to prove and reprove my worth every shift.” Many stated they conformed to the expectations of the culture, such as loyalty to the point of covering up or at least “keeping [their] mouth shut” about unprofessional and potentially illegal activity.

On the other hand, most participants spoke proudly about their status of police officer, and felt the culture was “important for what we do, no one outside of us can understand what we go through.” The theme of “us” was an important one, with many women commenting how members of the public and even their own family members could not understand the demands of the profession. Comments such as “I know him better than his own wife does” in relation to a male-female co-worker relationship were frequent and speaks to the deep level of intimacy police officers experience within the culture. Many recounted moments of happiness and pride in their work, telling stories about deep friendships with male and female officers, successful investigations, or social bonding events that helped them through the “tough stuff we see and do every day in the job.” Most participants demonstrated moments of fierce loyalty to their male co-workers, frequently calling them “good guys” who “mean no harm” by their behaviour. Several women denied there were issues of sexual harassment, for example, “I’ve never been sexually harassed...well, I guess the guys do make a lot of sexual jokes and sometimes say sexually inappropriate stuff to me, but I don’t consider that real sexual harassment. I just tell them to shut up and they do.” They further rationalized the behaviour stating that it didn’t bother them, saying things like “That’s just how you fit in. And you have to fit in” or “That’s how the guys show you you’re one of them, that they trust you.” Several spoke about their own participation in the behaviour stating “I think the women sexually harass the men way more, we are not victims, policewomen are a strong bunch.”

Participants were asked about their off-duty lives and whether policing had changed their view of themselves from when they began their career. Most began by denying that their on-duty role affected their off-duty lives. As the interviews progressed a different story began to emerge. As one participant expressed, “You end up being a police officer 24/7 instead of being the person you are inside because to be yourself is a vulnerability.” As a result, most of

the participants had endured relationship troubles that they connected to their work at some point in their lives. A common theme was romantic relationships. Most participants felt they are expected to adopt hypermasculine identities to fit into the occupational norms, but outside of the profession they are expected to conform to society's expectation of femininity. Participants seemed to struggle with these contradictory identities as they described divorces, separations, and trouble finding partners who could accept their occupation. One participant recounted a male partner telling her to "stop acting like a cop, stop being so tough, be like a woman, you have too much testosterone." Another participant stated she did not tell prospective dates what she did for a living until she was sure she liked them because of the problems associated with the intimidation men outside of the force seemed to feel. Most participants had either dated, "hooked up with" or married fellow officers as a response to the problems they experienced dating "outside of the profession." Most of these relationships with fellow officers fell apart, however some participants expressed that "other emergency workers are the only relationships that work for cops because they get it."

Participants with children also struggled with identity conflict. One single-mother expressed her exhaustion as she attempted to juggle all the "masks" she was expected "to change" all the time. She stated, "My life is so hectic and changing so much that I can't keep up with which mask to put on." In a moment of vulnerability, she spoke of how she felt inadequate as a mother because she could not turn off her on-duty role as a macho, controlling police officer to become what she considered a good mother. Most participants with young children spoke of the sacrifice and tough choices they were forced to make when their on and off-duty roles clashed. Shift work, inflexible policies and supervisors, and the pressures of a male dominated institution made it difficult for many participants to reconcile their on and off-duty identities. Only a few women – those who identified as popular with the dominant group – had less difficulty with schedule accommodations. These women indicated

they did not have to fight for accommodations to their schedules, which were either anticipated by supervisors or easily given when asked for. It may be the case that policewomen who find ways to assimilate within the culture enjoy more prosperous careers and experience less role conflict. These women were the minority within the interviews conducted.

Most participants spoke at length about how the experience of policing made them hypervigilant around their children, family, and friends. Several recounted situations such as taking their child to the playground and scanning for pedophiles. Another spoke about constantly watching her significant other for lies, even though she knows he is an honest partner. Most spoke of their training and experiences as an officer changing who they were before they took on the role, most notably, in the way they now saw the world. The words “entrenched” and “imprinted” were frequently used to describe how experiencing the police subculture had changed their identity from a lighthearted person to one who had “lost [their] innocence.” Participants spoke about how they struggled not to be “negative” and “untrusting” after years of service and how these qualities negatively affected their private lives. One participant stated, “You lose yourself. You lose your innocence, moral and ethical conflicts are just part of it...the culture is entrenched in both of my worlds.”

Many participants spoke about how naïve they had been about how the role of police officer would affect their identities. As one woman expressed, “Knowing what I know now, I would never recommend the job to anyone.” Yet, most of the participants seemed inclined to stay in the profession. When asked why they stayed, they expressed conflicting feelings. On one hand, they stated that they loved aspects of their career, in particular helping others or the excitement of an ever-changing and challenging work environment. On the other, they identified the large personal toll the career had taken, indicating numerous personal sacrifices they had to endure that they felt differed from the male officer experience. Several identified

a tipping point around the 5-8 year mark when their identities shifted -- a time of applying for other jobs, looking into schooling or resigning from the force. They identified these times as a period of confusion and reflection as they attempted to hold on to “who they were” in relation to “who they were becoming.” They indicated that they stayed for financial reasons, a lack of education outside law enforcement, and the ease of “waiting it out” until retirement. Several of the participants had, in fact, left the profession at the time of the interview and expressed relief that they had done so.

Several of the participants in this study stated that they felt policing was becoming more inclusive of gender. Despite this, most participants stated there was still a long way to go to achieve equality within the police culture, including promotional activity and work-family policies to meet their needs. Some felt the problem was the administration, some felt it was the older police constables, and some felt the older police constables were much more inclusive than the younger “cowboys.” When asked what they thought would improve their lives both on and off-duty, many stated that as “policewomen increased in numbers, and made it up the ranks” their position as a group would improve. While this is possible, and an important step, most of the women also reported discrimination and harassment by female superiors, perpetuating the hegemonic masculine police culture. This suggests more than just an increase of women in the profession is needed to solve the issue of gender inequality in Canadian police forces.

### *Discussion*

Susan Martin (1980) conducted the first study regarding policewomen and identity formation 35 years ago. She found that policewomen had two choices – tailor their identity to conform to the masculine norms of the institution and be granted the status of “real” police officer, or tailor their identity as feminine and be forced to conform to the negative



stereotypes of a female officer. The findings from the current study suggest that the same choices face policewomen today in Canadian police forces. Similarly, research conducted in the past decades reports similar struggles faced by policewomen who try to find a balance between the hypermasculine qualities they must adapt in order to be successful within their career and the greater cultural normative of emphasized femininity expected from a woman in western society (Connell 2005; Kurtz et al. 2012; Martin 1980,1990,2006; Rabe-Hemp 2007,2009). These struggles create identity conflicts for policewomen as their on and off-duty roles do not easily blend. Participants spoke about moral and identity conflicts as just part of the job. The findings suggest that the roles participants perform may not always align with how they view themselves.

In accordance with Connell's (2005) work on hegemonic masculinity, many of the policewomen in this study appear to accept the power and dominance of the ruling class, in this instance, the dominant group of male officers. This is not surprising in a context where career success requires a gendered (male) performance. Policewomen attempt to conform to the masculine role, and adopt the policing standpoint or view of the world as their own. The irony is that in the process, they isolate themselves and each other, thereby perpetuating their own oppression. They experience a bifurcation of consciousness where their previous standpoint – their standpoint as women – seems invalid as they adapt to the police culture. Further, they “other” fellow policewomen in order to align themselves with the dominant group. Smith (1987) recognized that anyone outside of the white male standpoint is separated from their actual lived experience because they are forced to adapt the view of the dominant group who creates the social world's norms and values. As Smith herself experienced, this leaves minority groups, such as policewomen, alienated from their true selves.

Similar to Rabe-Hemp's (2007, 2009) findings in qualitative studies of American policewomen, the results of this study revealed the presence of labels, stigma, and the devaluation of women within the hegemonic masculine institution of policing which perpetuates police culture. Many participants were unhappy with the state of their workplace, yet most of them were unwilling to try to change it after witnessing the outcome for fellow female officers who fought back. The idea that most participants had thought about speaking out, but did not, and later expressed inner conflict over their lack of support for women who did, reveals an identity conflict. On the one hand many expressed frustration about the harassment and discrimination they either witnessed or experienced themselves. On the other hand, rather than speak out against it, many helped to perpetuate it by remaining silent and even joining in by rejecting those women who embodied feminine traits or questioned the culture. This identity conflict discourages women from acting, and reproduces the "old boys club" that maintains male dominance, while undermining women as a group.

Overall, it appears that policewomen attempt to negotiate two types of consciousness, one associated with their on-duty persona, and one associated with their off-duty lives. These dueling perspectives are hard to reconcile (Smith 1987). Policewomen report a bifurcated consciousness at several different levels, including work-life balance, identity formation, and on-duty/off-duty personas. Policewomen are expected to adopt masculine identities, yet cannot be too masculine in order to maintain the hierarchy so important to the policing culture. The gendered institution of policing allows women to be police officers to a point, but there are constant boundaries they must negotiate, such as not displaying more masculinity than male officers, limited career advancement, and the acceptance of the role as "other," no matter their competence level. Further, they report their use of masculinity within their private lives as frequently negative, with the examples of relationship and motherhood conflicts. The

result is a great deal of hardship and stress that takes a toll on the women's mental health, and their relationships with others.

What is the impact of this institution on men? Do men seamlessly fit into this masculine culture? Research has not explored their experiences sufficiently. Future research should continue to explore the gendering of police work and its impact on police officers across gender, as well as race, sexual orientation and rank. Future research should also explore this issue across locale and time period to create better understanding of the impact of the social-historical context on women's (and men's) experiences of policing. This research is important in order to create environments that promote the recruitment, promotion, and retention of healthy, qualified policewomen.

### *Conclusion*

The findings of the study concur with prior literature that not much has changed for policewomen in the 40 years that they have been navigating the institution of policing. The relations of ruling that created the institution from the standpoint of white, middle-class men, continue to be perpetuated through the hierarchy, administration, and bureaucracy of modern day police forces. The police culture is a powerful tool used by the institution to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity. Police forces maintain masculine norms and values through training, informal sanctions against women, and the creation of a dividing, competitive environment that leaves women little choice but to conform their identities to fit in. However, as this study demonstrates, outward conformity out of necessity is not the same as complete indoctrination. Policewomen clearly demonstrate a bifurcated consciousness in how they view themselves and their world inwardly, compared to how they are forced to outwardly perform in their role as police officer. Further, due to the all-encompassing identity of police officer and the gendered expectations that come with it, they struggle to reconcile their on and off-duty

identities. This is problematic as many policewomen reported frequent identity and moral conflicts, along with a deep sense of powerlessness in both their professional and personal lives.

To create a more humane workplace for men and women, the profession of policing needs to make a shift from the reactive, enforcement style of law enforcement that glorifies the hypermasculine hero image of what it means to be a real police officer. A more holistic approach to policing, such as a community-based style that incorporates traditionally feminine traits such as communication, collaboration, and empathy would create an environment that values the unique skill sets that policewomen identify as strengths they bring to the profession. In turn, as women are more valued within the institution, and society in general, the clash between the private and public sphere would be diminished. Perhaps then women in policing would be able to reconcile their on and off-duty identities as their contributions to the profession become more important than their gender. As hegemonic masculinity is diminished, women would be free to incorporate their inner identities with their role as police officer, no longer forced to make a choice between who they are and who they must be. Further, workplace practices and policies would begin to incorporate women's experiences within the private sphere as well, additionally supporting women's actual lived experiences versus the need to conform to a male-dominated version of the public sphere. A police force with employees that do not have to negotiate the stress of living a life within the confines of a bifurcated consciousness would produce healthier and happier officers, in turn producing a police force that is able to serve the public with the honour and integrity so important for police legitimacy within a democratic society.

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