POLICE CULTURE, WOMEN POLICE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS MISCONDUCT

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting ethical conduct by police officers is an important issue for police services. How police behave is a crucial determinant of the level of confidence and respect held by the public for its police service. In addition there are direct organisational benefits for police services in terms of reduced time and resources spent on processing and investigating complaints to be derived from encouraging higher standards of ethical conduct amongst officers.

One of the more significant developments in policing in recent years has been the influx of women into operational roles. It is often asserted that one of the long-term benefits of this change will be a general raising of ethical standards within policing, because female police officers are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in misconduct or tolerate such behaviour by fellow officers. However, relatively little research has been conducted, particularly in Australia, on the assumptions which underpin this argument.

This paper addresses the issue of ethical differences between male and female police officers as well as exploring the more general issue of male-female differences in styles of policing. The first section of the paper briefly reviews previous research regarding gender differences in the ethical perspectives and behaviour of police officers. The second section presents data on the attitude and behaviour of male and female “rank and file” police in the Queensland Police Service (QPS), drawing on three data sources:

- attitudinal data from surveys administered to Queensland police officers of different levels of experience concerning their views on ethical conduct
- police-initiated complaints received by the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC)
- complaints against police data extracted from the QPS Professional Standards Unit database.

Finally, conclusions are drawn and the implications of this research for the development of strategies for promoting ethical conduct amongst police officers are discussed.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research on gender and ethics in policing falls into two broad categories:

1 We would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Professional Standards Unit in providing a copy of their data base studies which focus on attitudinal and perceptual differences studies which focus on gender differences in behaviour and policing styles.

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Several studies of police attitudes on ethical issues have reported that women officers, on average, express higher ethical standards than males. For example, Hunt (1990) examined the first female officers to join the ranks of uniformed patrol at the “Metro City” Police Department (USA) in the late 1970s. According to Hunt, the introduction of females to operational duties caused concern amongst the rank and file because women were associated with ‘moral virtue, cleanliness, honesty, nonviolence and irrationality’ (p. 12). Management were also apprehensive that
exposure of rank and file corruption by female police officers would lead to investigation at the higher ranks (p. 16). Consequently, women were excluded from participation in graft and isolated from the police subculture of sex, violence, and corruption. Brown et al. (1993) argued that the results of Hunt’s study indicate that ‘because women in policing are not universally accepted by policemen, they can operate outside of the informal rule systems from which they are excluded. Thus they are in a position to expose rule bending and breaking’ (p. 124). According to this analysis, because women are considered to be separate from the culture, and have not participated in its shaping, they feel less obligation to adhere the rules and the “police code” than do males.

Miller and Braswell (1992) surveyed law enforcement officers in a southern region of the United States about ‘what they perceive as ethical behaviour and what they actually do in ethical decision-making situations’ (p. 31). This was a longitudinal study: the first administration of the instrument took place in 1985 when the subjects had been employed for less than two months; the second in 1988, when the officers had three years of experience. The original sample size was 66. However, due to attrition, the sample size for the second survey was reduced to 58; consisting of 14 females and 44 males.

The subjects in Miller and Braswell’s study were provided with seven case studies relating to a number of ethical issues of varying degrees of seriousness. For each scenario respondents were asked what should be done in this situation (idealistic) and what they would do in the situation (realistic). Female officers gave significantly more ethical responses for both idealistic and realistic variables than their male counterparts (p. 35). In line with the analysis of Brown et al. (1993), Miller and Braswell (1992) argued that female officers seemed to be substantially less affected by traditional police values than their male counterparts. This was attributed to ‘female officer’s rejection of the more chauvinistic aspects of police work or due to male officers excluding them, or at least treating them differently’ (p. 38).

In 1993, 861 full-time municipal police officers in Illinois were surveyed about their views on ethical behaviour (Martin 1994). The majority of the sample (96%) was male. A key finding of the study was that female officers were more likely to report having observed unethical behaviour than their male counterparts, regardless of rank (p. 56).

In Australia, the National Police Research Unit (NPRU) conducted a study in 1992 which investigated the attitudes of police officers and recruits toward breaches of ethics (Huon et al. 1995). There were 683 participants in the study, of whom 129 were female. The sample contained police officers from each State as well as senior officers attending the Australian Police Staff College. The officers were presented with 20 scenarios relating to unethical behaviours and asked to indicate:

. how serious they thought the violation was
. how serious they believed a ‘typical officer’, an instructor, and the department would judge it to be
. what steps they would take to deal with the violation.
The study reported that: females appeared to have higher personal ethical standards than male officers of equivalent rank. Female officers saw themselves as having higher personal standards than both the typical officer and the instructor (Huon et al. 1995, p. 16).

Huon et al. concluded that these findings were consistent with the view that female police officers tend to see themselves as members of an ‘outgroup’ who are not part of the ‘brotherhood’ (p. 19). However, a more recent study by the NPRU on ethics and policing did not find consistent sex differences (McConkey et al. 1996, p. 9). This was a large study involving 4,655 respondents of which approximately nine per cent were female. The sample included officers from all ranks and all duties.

**POLICING STYLES**

A second group of studies have focused on gender differences in policing styles and associated behavioural indicators such as the number and type.

This analysis was restricted to recruits and Constables because of the insufficient number of females in the senior ranks of complaints made against male and female police. These studies have generally reported that women bring a distinctive style to policing. For example, Prenzler notes that the research tends to report ‘a more service-oriented commitment to policing on the part of existing women officers’ (1993, p. 3).

The types of qualities reported to be characteristic of policewomen include (Belknap & Shelley 1992, pp. 47-48):

- improved relations and support from the citizens
- a less aggressive style of policing which is more likely to de-escalate potentially violent encounters
- better responses to rape victims and battered women
- lower scores on “sadism” scale measures than men
- a less narrow outlook and a stronger creative drive than men.

On the other hand, the characteristics said to be representative of male policing styles are more likely to lead to conflict with the public. Milton (1972) noted that the demand for deference by policemen may be perceived by some citizens as an invitation to aggression (in Bell 1982, p. 116). According to Brown (1994, p. 50), by comparison with men in other occupations, male police officers tend to:

- be more aggressive and cynical
- be impulsive risk takers who have a tendency to use physical violence
- loath change and are opposed to any break in tradition.

Several studies have found a relationship between complaints and the respective working styles of male and female police officers. For instance:

- In the first study of operational policewomen in Washington D.C. (Bloch & Anderson 1974), women police officers were found to: have made fewer arrests and traffic citations; be less aggressive; less likely to be guilty of unprofessional conduct; and more effective in defusing potentially violent situations.
An evaluation of New York City police (Sichel et al. 1978) found female officers to be ‘more effective in handling potentially violent situations than their male counterparts, who were more likely to be the subject of citizen complaints’ (in Hale 1992, p. 130).

A study of Los Angeles Police Department probationers (Felkenes 1991) found women to be the subject of significantly fewer citizen complaints (in Prenzler 1993, p. 3).

Bloch and Anderson (1974) and Timmins and Hainsworth (1989) reported that men were more likely to be charged with serious misconduct.

Recent investigations into the Rodney King incident found that ‘the 120 officers with the most use-of-force complaints were all men’ (Peak & Glensor 1996, p. 162).

Smith and Gray (1983) argue that the police culture resembles closely the dominant values of an all-male institution, such as a rugby club or a boys school (in Sutton 1992, pp. 73-74). These values include:

- an emphasis on remaining dominant in any encounter and not losing face
- the importance placed on masculine solidarity
- the importance given to physical courage
- the glamour attached to violence.

According to Bouza (1975) these attitudes place policemen at greater risk of breaching protocol or citizens’ rights, thereby increase the likelihood of complaints:

Too many civilian review boards have sprouted from the soil of complaints produced by the proclivity of male police for physical domination over a situation. Had the possibilities of conflict management, issue resolution, and negotiation been fully and professionally explored earlier, many police confrontations that ended in violence may have taken a different turn. (p. 6)

Bouza notes that women are more likely to rely on their tact and ingenuity in confrontations because they have generally less physical prowess (p. 7). However, confounding factors which may contribute to the lower proportion of complaints of assault against women officers may be that policewomen are less likely to be deployed to the “front-line”, and that male offenders may be less inclined to act aggressively when a female police officer is involved (Bell 1982; Johnson 1991).

Martin (1980), in an in-depth study of police officers in the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington D.C., found that sex does influence the exchange of deference in police-citizen interactions (p. 180). Perhaps a decisive factor in the differences in policing style is the different views held by male and female police officers about the nature of police work: ‘policemen see police work as involving control through authority while policewomen see it as a public service’ (Fielding & Fielding 1992, p. 214).

Sherman’s (1975) evaluation of female police officers also concluded that women’s policing style differed significantly from that of men. Policewomen were found to have performed in a less aggressive fashion; made fewer arrests and
engaged less in preventive activity such as car and pedestrian stops (p. 435). In light of the findings of his research Sherman suggested that future research should examine whether a more conciliatory style of policing may be better ‘in terms of community acceptance, public satisfaction, citizen cooperation and service delivery’ (p. 435).

In summary, most previous research has reported that female police officers tend to have higher personal ethical standards, generate fewer complaints and employ less aggressive policing styles than their male counterparts. The remainder of this paper considers whether these broad generalisations apply equally to the QPS.

**ETHICAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE**

**WOMEN IN THE QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE**

In Queensland, women were first recruited as “sworn” officers in 1965, but assignment to general duties only became common in the 1970s (Fitzgerald Inquiry 3 1989, p. 246). In 1994/95, females constituted 12.6 per cent of the total number of police officers in Queensland (excluding recruits). Females are still underrepresented in the QPS, but there has been a marked increase in their employment since the Fitzgerald Inquiry reported in 1989 that females comprised only 5.4 per cent of the Service (p. 246). However, women continue to be employed mainly in lower ranks with very few at the Commissioned Officer level and none in the position of Executive Officers (see Table 1). To control for this factor, our paper focuses specifically on comparing the attitudes and behaviour of male and female police officers at the ranks of Constable and Senior Constable.

**TABLE 1 + RANK DISTRIBUTION IN THE QPS BY GENDER 1994/1995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>MALE Number</th>
<th>MALE Percent</th>
<th>FEMALE Number</th>
<th>FEMALE Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Officers</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commissioned Officers</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeants &amp; Senior Sergeants</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constables &amp; Senior Constables</td>
<td>3383</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5502</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**FINDINGS FROM POLICE ETHICS SURVEYS**

In early 1995, the CJC’s Research and Co-ordination Division administered a survey of police attitudes to ethical issues to 59 recruits from the January 1995 intake; 52 First Year Constables 4 (FYCs); and, 63 experienced officers. The recruits were surveyed at the commencement of their training at the Police Academy, FYCs while in routine training at the Police Academy, and the experienced officers while attending a detective and investigative skills course (see CJC 1995 for a full description of this study). The January 1995 recruit intake was
surveyed again in early 1996, after they had completed six months training at the Police Academy and eight months training in the field. The object of this second survey was to assess the extent to which differences between recruits and FYCs identified in the first round of surveys were the result of socialisation as opposed to cohort effects. The re-surveyed group are identified as the FYC2 sample for the remainder of the report.5

Table 2 shows the size and gender composition of the various samples.

4 The recruit training program for the QPS has two phases. The first involves six months of residential-based training at the Police Academy. Upon completion, recruits become First Year Constables and enter 12 months of supervised training in the field.

5 When the recruit intake was surveyed, one squad was unavailable therefore leaving 59 respondents. The entire intake was available when surveyed as FYCs, giving 84 respondents; however, nine FYCs did not respond to the gender question, leaving 76 valid cases.

TABLE 2 + RANK AND GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUPS</th>
<th>Survey Data</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>Female (n)</td>
<td>Male (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruits Feb ’95</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>23 36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYCs Feb ’95</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Officers</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12 51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYC2 Mar ’96</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>29 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey instrument contained a series of scenarios based on situations in which police might find themselves involved. The scenarios described conduct by police which, if proven, would generally result in some form of disciplinary action being taken against the officer(s) concerned. The scenarios were modelled on questions used in the 1992 NPRU survey (Huon et al. 1995).

For each scenario the officers were asked to rate the conduct of the police officer on a 10-point scale, ranging from ‘not at all serious’ to ‘extremely serious’, in terms of:

. the respondent’s personal view of the conduct
. the view of a typical officer
. the view of the QPS
. the view of a member of the public.

The scenarios to which the officers were asked to respond were as follows:

Scenario 1 + Off duty officer tries to avoid RBT  ‘An off duty police officer who has drunk a little too much is stopped for an RBT by police officers he doesn’t know. The off duty officer is obviously a bit under the weather. He identifies himself as a fellow police officer in an effort to avoid blowing in the bag.’
Scenario 2 + Officer at bottle shop pockets cigarettes ‘The local bottle shop has been broken into for the third time in so many weeks. The responding patrol enters the premises to wait for the owner to arrive and sort out the mess of cigarettes and liquor lying all over the floor. One of the officers bends down, picks up a torn pack of cigarettes from the shattered window display, and puts the pack in his pocket.’

Scenario 3 + Officer retaliates against youth who assaulted female officer ‘In a pub brawl a young female First Year Constable responding with her partner to a ‘disturbance’ call, receives a nasty black eye from a tattooed youth wielding a billiard cue. As the arrested youth is led into the cells, the male team member gives him a savage kidney punch saying, “hurts, doesn’t it”.’

Scenario 4 + Accident by police misrepresented in report ‘During a quiet period on patrol, two officers decided to test how the rear of the police vehicle would slide on the deserted, wet car park. Their attempts resulted in a minor collision with a shopping trolley. Rather than go into full details about the scrape when reporting the damage, the driver stated the car was ‘sideswiped’ by an unidentified vehicle while they were attending to an inquiry.’

Scenario 5 + Words added to suspected rapist’s statement ‘An offender is picked up for a particularly nasty rape/assault in a local park. There’s no doubt he’s the culprit. There’s an excellent I.D. but the offender who is ‘streetwise’ says nothing. To make matters certain, the arresting officer attributes the words, “OK I was in the park but I didn’t touch the bitch” to the offender in his note book.’

Scenario 6 + Pick-up outside of patrol area ‘On a quiet Saturday afternoon an officer decides to travel well outside his area to get some equipment for his Sunday building job. In radio contact all the time he picks up the gear and returns to his patrol area.’

Scenario 7 + Registration check to get details of attractive woman ‘The young lady in the Mazda sports car is very attractive and smiles at the young officer in the patrol car alongside at the traffic lights. The officer, following a couple of lengths behind, radios for a vehicle registration check to find out her address.’

Respondents were also asked to identify what action they might take if they became aware that another officer had engaged in the conduct described in each of the scenarios. Respondents were given a choice of one or more of the following actions:
Data from these surveys were used to make two sets of comparisons.
First, we combined the two FYC samples and the experienced officer sample and then compared the responses of male and female officers within this aggregated sample. Recruits were excluded from this analysis, firstly, to avoid ‘double counting’ (all of the respondents in the recruit sub-sample had been surveyed again for the FYC2 sample) and, secondly, because previous analysis of the data indicated that recruits differed markedly in their responses from FYCs and experienced officers (CJC 1995).

The second comparison was of responses given by the recruit sample and the FYC2 sample. This comparison was designed to ascertain if there were any differences in: (a) the initial attitudes of male and female recruits; and (b) the extent to which male and female officers changed their views once they became exposed to the “real world” of policing. Each analysis was run twice: once on the total samples, and once on modified samples adjusted to provide for an equal distribution of gender. For this purpose, males were randomly selected to match the number of females at recruit, FYC and experienced officer levels. This was done to test for the possible effects of unequal cell sizes, and to correct for the under-representation of females in the experienced officers sub-sample. As there were no differences between the analyses in the statistical significance of the findings, only results for the modified samples are reported.

For the combined FYC/experienced officer sample, we compared average male and female seriousness ratings for each scenario using analysis of variance (ANOVA). However, few items reached statistical significance and those that did failed to show any consistent pattern in terms of gender differences. We then collapsed responses to the seven scenarios to give overall seriousness ratings for the four different perceptions (personal, typical officer, QPS, and public). This analysis confirmed that there were no systematic differences between males and females in how they responded to the various scenarios (Table 3).
TABLE 3 + COMPARISON OF OVERALL MALE AND FEMALE SERIOUSNESS RATINGS: FYCS AND EXPERIENCED OFFICERS

Perceptions of the scenarios Mean seriousness rating

Female Male

Personal view 6.2 6.2
Public’s view 7.7 7.4
Typical officer’s view 4.7 5.3
Police service view 8.1 8.5

Notes: 1. For this analysis, female (n)=56 and male (n)=56. 2. Seriousness ratings were from 1 (not at all serious) to 10 (extremely serious).

Table 4 compares how males and females in the recruit and FYC2 samples rated the seriousness of the various scenarios, and also how these respondents rated the view of the ‘typical’ officer. The table shows that female recruits tended to rate the scenarios slightly more seriously overall than did males, but the difference was not statistically significant. The table also shows that women respondents tended to modify their views to a greater extent between Time 1 and Time 2 than did the males (significant at p<.05 level for personal and typical view).

TABLE 4 + COMPARISON OF OVERALL SERIOUSNESS RATINGS : RECRUITS AND FYC2 SAMPLES

Perceptions of the Scenarios Mean Seriousness Rating

Female Male

Personal View Recruit (T 1) 7.7 6.9
FYC2 (T 2) 6.7 6.4
Typical Officer Recruit (T 1) 6.3 5.9
FYC2 (T 2) 5.0 5.1

Notes: 1. For analysis, female recruit n=23 and male recruit n=29. 2. The perception of public view and QPS were excluded as they were not relevant to the matters of interest here.
As noted above, respondents were also asked what action, if any, they would take if they found out that a fellow officer had engaged in the behaviour described in the scenario. Figure 1 shows, for each scenario, the proportion of male and female respondents in the FYC/experienced officer sample who said that they would be willing to formally or informally report the officer. There were some gender differences in responses to individual scenarios, but no consistent pattern. Overall, women respondents did not show a greater propensity to report than male respondents. Regardless of gender, most of the officers surveyed indicated a reluctance to take action likely to result in official attention against an officer known to be committing breaches of behaviour.6 Consistent with this general pattern, our comparison of the recruit and FYC2 sample showed that stated willingness to report misconduct by other officers declined markedly after respondents had spent a few months “in the field”. The extent of change was as great for female as for male respondents.

FIGURE 1 + PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS IN EACH SCENARIO WILLING TO TAKE ACTION LIKELY TO RESULT IN OFFICIAL ATTENTION : FYC/EXPERIENCED OFFICER SAMPLE

In summary, our analysis of the ethics survey data found no consistent gender differences in officers’ perceptions of the seriousness of the breaches of behaviour described in the scenarios, or in the stated willingness of respondents to report fellow officers for engaging in such behaviour. Moreover, female respondents seem to be no less susceptible than males to changing their views once they have been exposed to the police task environment and organisational culture. These results are contrary to most other research using attitudinal data (Huon et al. 1995; Martin 1994; Miller & Braswell 1992) which has generally found females to be more “virtuous” than their male counterparts (although our findings are in line with the recent NPRU study: McConkey et al. 1996). Previous research has also suggested that gender differences in the ethical principles of serving police officers is the result of females being more resistant to the influences of the male-dominated police culture. Our data provides little support for this view.

POLICE COMPLAINTS AGAINST POLICE

A basic limitation of the survey methodology is that what a respondent reports in response to a hypothetical scenario may be different to what he or

6 Under section 7.2 of the Police Service Administration Act, members of the QPS, including unsworn personnel, are required to report all cases of suspected
misconduct to the CJC and the Commissioner of Police, irrespective of whether a 
complaint has been received from a member of the public in relation to this matter. 

13 she does in practice. It is therefore important to also use behavioural measures 
where they are available.

As part of a larger study of the complaints and discipline system, the CJC’s 
Research and Co-ordination Division has recently completed a detailed analysis of 
all “police against police” complaints reported to the CJC in 1991/92 and 1994/95. 
These data allow us to assess the extent to which female police officers are 
prepared to enforce higher standards and are prepared to act free of the constraints 
of the ‘police code’.7

For the purposes of this analysis the complaining officer was defined as the officer 
who provided the information on which the complaint was based (regardless of 
whether the officer was formally recorded as the complainant). As discussed 
earlier, to enhance comparability only those complaints involving complaining 
officers of the ranks of Constables and Senior Constables have been included in the 
analysis.8

In the two years examined there were 68 police-initiated complaints where the 
complaining officer’s rank was Constable or Senior Constable and the gender of 
the officer was known. In approximately 82 per cent of these complaints, the 
complaining officers were male; in 22 per cent of complaints, at least one of the 
complaining officers was female.9

Table 5 presents the number of complaints and the rate per 100 QPS officers by 
gender for the financial years 1991/92 and 1994/95.

TABLE 5 + COMPLAINING OFFICERS BY GENDER, POLICE COMPLAINTS 
AGAINST POLICE: CONSTABLES AND SENIOR CONSTABLES 
(QUEENSLAND, 1991/92 & 1994/95)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>MALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>7 1.2</td>
<td>29 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 The police ‘code of silence’ was identified by the Fitzgerald Inquiry (1989) as a 
significant factor contributing to corruption in the QPS.

8 The following complaints were not analysed for the study: complaints relating to 
major incidents (eg. high speed police chases); complaints where the complainant 
or the subject officer were not members of the QPS, including complaints passed 
on by external sources; complaints involving a breach of discipline; complaints 
relating to unsworn QPS employees; and complaints relating to notification of 
charges or breaches of a court order.

9 Percentages add to over 100 per cent because three complaints (4%) were double 
counted as they involved complainants from both genders.
The table shows that female officers were slightly more likely than males to report misconduct by fellow officers, but the differences are not statistically significant. The slightly higher proportion of complaints initiated by female officers is attributable to sexual harassment matters. Female Constables and Senior Constables made two reports of sexual harassment by fellow officers in 1991/92 and one in 1994/95, whereas there were no reports from male officers.

Overall, very few officers of either gender at the rank of Constable and Senior Constable made complaints. Moreover, reporting rates for both male and female police officers remained consistently low over the period examined. Reporting behaviour appears to be much more a function of rank than of gender. In 1991/92, Constables and Senior Constables, who make up 67 per cent of the sworn strength of the QPS, accounted for only 37 per cent of all police-initiated complaints; in 1994/95 the proportion decreased slightly to 32 per cent. By contrast, officers of the rank of Sergeant and above, who make up around 33 per cent of sworn officers in the QPS, were responsible for approximately 66 per cent of all police-initiated complaints.

Overall, these findings are consistent with the results obtained from the ethics surveys discussed above. Both sets of data show that male and female officers at the ranks of Constable and Senior Constable are equally reluctant to report fellow officers for misconduct. This is again contrary to the accepted wisdom that females have a greater propensity to report misconduct.

COMPLAINTS AGAINST POLICE

The third source of data which we utilised for this study was the QPS Professional Standards Unit database, which contains records of all complaints against Queensland police received and/or finalised since 1 January 1992. We focused on complaints data because this is the best available measure of behavioural differences, short of directly observing officers. At the end of April 1996, the database contained details on 18,299 allegations arising out of 11,260 complaints involving 10,040 complainants and 5,030 QPS members. For the purposes of this paper, the three complete financial years between July 1992 and June 1995 were analysed.

A single ‘complaint’ may involve several specific allegations, multiple complainants, and multiple officers. An officer may be the subject of more than one complaint over this period.
Complaints against members of the QPS recorded in the database are divided into two categories: ‘breaches of discipline’ and ‘misconduct’. A breach of discipline is a breach of any provision of the Police Service Administration Act 1990 or directions of the Commissioner. Breaches can commonly be described as a violation or dereliction of duty. Misconduct matters are more serious. Misconduct is defined as conduct which is disgraceful, improper or unbecoming an officer; that shows unfitness to be or continue as an officer; or that does not meet the standard of conduct reasonably expected by the community of a police officer. The difference between a breach of discipline of a serious nature and minor misconduct is often only a matter of degree.

Table 6 compares the average number of complaints recorded in each of the three financial years from 1992/93 to 1994/95, according to whether they constituted a breach of discipline or misconduct. In addition the table shows the number of complaints per 100 male and per 100 female officers of the rank of Constable or Senior Constable. Chi-square analysis revealed that gender differences were significant for misconduct complaints (chi-square = 9.4, df 1, p<.01), and total complaints (chi-square = 8.5, df 1, p<.01). However, there was only a small difference in the proportion of breach of discipline complaints recorded against male as opposed to female officers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Subject Officer</th>
<th>Average Misconduct Complaints per Year</th>
<th>Average Misconduct Complaints per Year per 100 Officers</th>
<th>Average Breach of Discipline Complaints per Year</th>
<th>Average Breach of Discipline Complaints per Year per 100 Officers</th>
<th>Average Total Complaints per Year</th>
<th>Average Total Complaints per Year per 100 Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>1613</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Professional Standards Unit database.

12 This includes the Code of Conduct and Code of Dress and Appearance.
Complaints
Per
100
Officers Assaults All Others Type of Misconduct Complaint

Male Female A complaint may involve several allegations of a variety of different types, such as assault, behaviour, duty failure, and so on. Allegations are classified into 15 categories of behaviour. Because of the small number of allegations in total against female officers, most categories did not show significant gender differences. The main exception is the category of assault, which accounts for approximately 37 per cent of misconduct allegations. As shown by Figure 2, male officers are about 1.87 times more likely than female officers to be subject to such allegations (chi-square = 9.2, df 1, p<.01).

FIGURE 2 + MISCONDUCT COMPLAINTS PER 100 MALE AND PER 100 FEMALE OFFICERS: CONSTABLES AND SENIOR CONSTABLES (QUEENSLAND, 1992/93 + 1994/95)

In summary, female officers of the rank of Constable or Senior Constable are less likely than their male counterparts to attract more serious misconduct complaints, with the difference being most marked in the case of complaints involving allegations of assault. These findings, in conjunction with those of other studies discussed above, lend support to the view that female police officers are generally less confrontational in their manner and more adept at handling conflict than are males (Sherman 1975; Grennan 1987; Bell 1982; van Wormer 1981). However, we do not yet have sufficient data to test alternative explanations of these findings, such as that women police are less likely to be deployed to deal with potentially conflictual situations; or that members of the public react differently to female officers.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of three different sources of data has found the following in relation to Queensland police officers:

. There are few attitudinal differences between male and female police officers in terms of their views of ethical conduct. Generally, the responses to the scenarios provided in the ethics surveys were similar for both male and female police officers.

. Female recruits are as likely as males to modify their views once they have spent some time “in the field”.

. Female officers are only slightly more likely than males to report misconduct by their colleagues. For both males and females, it is uncommon for an officer below the rank of Sergeant to report a fellow officer for misconduct.
17. Overall, female officers are subject to significantly fewer complaints than male officers, particularly in regard to allegations of assault.

In combination, these findings do not support the argument that female police officers are inherently “more ethical” in their outlook than their male counterparts. Police views on ethical issues appear to be shaped much more by occupational and organisational factors + in particular, exposure to the police culture + than by gender per se. However, we did find some significant differences in the number and type of complaints made against male and female police officers, which may be indicative of differences in policing styles.

While female police officers may not be inherently more ethical than their male counterparts, the employment of female police officers has some important organisational advantages. It is likely that greater use of women in operational positions will lead to fewer complaints, particularly relating to the use of force. This is a significant potential benefit, as allegations of assault currently comprise one of the largest categories of complaints made against police. More generally, the recent emphasis on community policing indicates the need and relevance of the “female” style to policing. As argued by Peak and Glensor (1996):

As contemporary policing becomes more COPPS [community oriented and problem-solving] oriented, the growing presence of women may help to improve its tarnished image; improve community relations; and foster a more flexible, less violent, approach to keeping the peace. (p. 162)

Arguably, police services could benefit from examining more closely the ways in which skilled policewomen perform their duties and then educating male police officers in these techniques. Also, perhaps experienced female officers could be paired with male First Year Constables so that impressionable officers can be exposed to alternative policing styles early in their careers.

Although there are obvious and important benefits to be derived from increasing the number of women in policing, our study has also highlighted the strength of the prevailing police culture, as indicated by:

. the relatively small differences in attitudes between male and female police officers
. significant changes in how new officers judge the seriousness of various forms of misconduct
. marked differences, within a short time-frame, in the stated willingness of both males and female recruits to report misconduct.
These findings indicate that an increased influx of women into policing will not, of itself, necessarily result in a significant weakening of the existing police culture. There is a need to develop more broad ranging strategies for promoting ethical conduct in policing organisations which focus not just on changing the make-up of recruit intakes, but also on altering the organisational climate and the task environment of policing, and on counteracting the influence of the prevailing culture on new officers (CJC 1995).

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