THE IMPACT OF POLICE CULTURE ON WOMEN
AND THEIR PERFORMANCE IN POLICING

Carmel Niland

Paper presented at the Australian Institute of Criminology Conference
First Australasian Women Police Conference

Sydney, 29, 30 & 31 July 1996
Policing is one of the world’s most masculinised occupations.

Policing grew (with few exceptions) from a military background in the nineteenth century. Police drew from army corps or militia for its first recruits and adapted a military model for its uniform, its promotional structure and its culture. Most police forces continue today as semi-military, strictly hierarchical organisations with deeply sexist views about women. And they are deeply resistant to changing.

When I first encountered women in the NSW Police, in 1977, they had just been released from welfare duties, assisting traffic at school crossings and teaching children about road safety. They were confined to these duties by their presumed lack of competency to perform the general duties of a policeman or, in other words, it was believed they lacked the physical strength, stamina, height and weight to deal with thugs and brawls. I was surprised, at that time, that the policewomen did not protest about their menial duties, but when I examined the NSW Police recruiting procedure, I understood why. At their first interview, all police applicants were given a number of points out of ten: points for spelling words correctly, points for being the correct height and weight, and points for how closely they were related to a serving police officer. They gained more points for a blood relationship like brother or father and fewer points for a relationship like cousin or uncle. The small female quota filled quickly with women whose male relations had presumably ensured that they understood the appropriate role of women in supporting male police and freeing them from so called “trivial duties”. Thus the female police who were recruited were already enculturated, ready to accept their supporting duties.

It was with enormous pleasure that I accepted a consultancy last year with the Australian Federal Police, under Commissioner Mick Palmer, to review their EEO performance and to describe the two cultures of its workforces: one involved in community policing in the ACT and the other in its main investigative body.

Before I comment on general findings about AFP culture, let me return to my opening statement - *Policing is one of the world’s most masculinised occupations*. What does this mean? What are masculine occupations? What are feminine occupations?

Masculine occupations are ones which traditionally men have done. They include

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Fighter</th>
<th>Engineer</th>
<th>Armed Forces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builder</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feminised occupations are ones which traditionally women have done. They include:
There are a number of generalisations we can draw about these separate occupations. Masculinised occupations are more valued by society. They are rewarded and paid more. The work often involves physical danger and required physical strength.

On the other hand, female work is underpaid and undervalued. It often involves emotional danger and calls less for physical strength than for physical stamina. Female work is an extension of women’s role in the home. Men have traditionally not welcomed women who want to work in masculinised occupations. There have been a number of arguments advanced for this. I will deal with six of them.

The first argument, the protective argument, is that men’s work is not fit work for a woman. It is too physically demanding and arduous, too demeaning, too dirty and could expose women to the more debased aspects of society, either in the form of swearing workmates or criminals and crooks, and therefore men should protect women, the weaker and purer sex, by doing this work themselves. The second argument is the “women as risks” argument. Men should not expose themselves to the risk of having to rely on someone not physically able to support them in dangerous situations or to protect them in return. Women create sexual danger, as well, in that they can be seductive and men cannot trust themselves around them. The third argument maintains that women undermine men’s conditions. Until 1975 women were paid a proportion of men’s wages and men feared that women, costing employers less, could be hired more cheaply to take men’s jobs and undermine their conditions. The fourth argument is that women’s destiny is biologically determined - women get pregnant, get periods, get PMS and hot flushes. Their hormones have to be accommodated and this causes problems. The fifth argument is that of customer preference. Customers and clients would refuse to work with women. And the final argument is that women will undermine the standing or the value of men’s work in society’s eyes. Because women’s work is seen as trivial and men’s work is seen as important, if women do men’s work then men’s work will not be taken seriously and men’s self-esteem and pride in their work will be lowered.

After twenty years of integration of women into the masculinised profession of policing, it was surprising to hear the old arguments repeated in focus groups from young people while I was mapping the culture of the Australian Federal Police.
Both men and women said there were disadvantages in hiring women. The main disadvantages were:

1. Women had physical limitations, they lacked brawn, you wouldn’t want them in a pub brawl, they could get hurt in tactical positions and were not as able in dealing with male offenders. (The “protective” argument combined with the “women as risk” argument).

2. Mixed partner couples form relationships which break up marriages. But you can’t have two women together as partners. (“Women as risks” argument).

3. For religious and cultural reasons some men won’t allow women to protect them. Ethnic groups won’t relate to women police. (“Customer preference” argument).

4. Women are difficult to retain, and get pregnant and there are not enough day jobs or part time jobs for them. (“Women’s destiny is biologically controlled” argument).

On the other hand, the focus groups identified the following advantages:

Women are needed for special jobs - sexual assault, body searching and finger-printing. They are more organised, think better, adapt better to technology, are more responsible and tougher, with more stamina. They also help defuse violent situations. (This advantage creates a new feminised occupation in a masculinised occupation).

Whether the advantages of hiring women as police are any more accurate than the disadvantages, I believe they reflect current attitudes and beliefs. They indicate that both police training and the example of commanding officers have been ineffective at addressing the fears of police officers about female police or in dismantling the stereotypes about women workers.

But even if fears and stereotypes had been eradicated, along with all of the discriminatory practices, the culture of policing still prevents many women from achieving their potential. The culture emerges from the underlying values which inform the organisation’s behavior, and the sum of attitudes, beliefs, values and customs which are rewarded and accepted as normal.

There are many ways of analysing the values of organisations, but I find the approach of Carl Jung, one of the fathers of modern psychology, most useful. Jung divides values into “masculine” and “feminine”. Masculine values are not about men. They are values which are recognisable in both men and women and Jung’s use of these terms is similar to the Confucian values of “yin” and “yang”, characteristics which exist in everyone to differing degrees.

I’ve set out the masculine and feminine values below. Each value operates to balance its opposite and both values are necessary for balance and harmony in an organisation.
The values illustrated were dismissed in the Seventies as reinforcing stereotypes about male and female behaviours. Now, researchers working with cultural change in organisations are using them again, because the masculinised organisations developed over the last one hundred years exhibit a preponderance of masculine characteristics to such an extraordinary degree that those people who exhibit feminine values find it difficult to be accepted in those cultures.

It is interesting to compare this list with a list of some of the negative values associated with the Australian Federal Police in the early Nineties. These values are gleaned from my own and others’ research.

Negative values included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchical</th>
<th>Highly specialised</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Conformity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lacking trust | ‘Old boys’ network | Lack of emotion
---|---|---
‘Tell’ leadership style | Rules and regulations | Respect for position
Autocratic, paramilitary style | Top down communication | 

Positive values included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong teams</th>
<th>Rationality</th>
<th>Strategic thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Sense of adventure</td>
<td>Hard work ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Strong collegiality and mateship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One can see an absence of feminine values.

A simplistic view of organisational change would be to argue that women on the average exhibit more feminine values than men and introducing more women into masculinised organisations would not only change their culture but it would give men an opportunity to exhibit their feminine values. This does not happen because the organisation’s informal and formal system of rewards and punishments already endorses the accepted masculine values and those who are different, be they men or women, would be forced to move into compliance with the existing values or be forced to move out.

Fortunately, a different set of values is now being associated with successful policing. These values reflect feminine values. I will return to these later. But, first, what happens to women in masculinised organisations?

In a masculinised organisation, women are seen as “the other”, “not part of” or peripheral to its operation. They don’t fit in naturally. Men are fearful of women for the reasons I’ve already advanced. This can impact on women in the following ways:

- Women have to become more like men to survive and in some instances will survive by adopting strong masculine values.

- As a consequence, some women will resist any attempt to identify them as a special group labelled “women”.

- Women will have to perform at higher levels than men to succeed.
• Women’s progression will be dependent on their acceptance by or their defeat of, an ‘old boy’ network.

• Women who are promoted on merit will be disparaged as not deserving their promotion. It will be said that they received their promotion for two reasons: either they slept with someone or it’s solely because of affirmative action for women.

• Women will be seen as useful in auxiliary or peripheral jobs - in administrative and welfare roles but not in operational roles.

• Women will be subjected to sex-based and sexual harassment.

• Women who want to complain about sexist treatment will not be supported, and

• Women who do complain will be ostracised and victimised.

There are many elements of organisational cultures which make the implementation of real equality of opportunity difficult, if not impossible, despite the fact that the organisation has adopted EEO as a management practice and a goal, and this was the case with the AFP. The AFP had a strong anti-sexual harassment policy, a grievance system and some harassment contact officers, but it still had some serious cases of sexual harassment last year. Why?

Let me give you an example. Five male police officers sexually harassed ten female police officers. The incidents included constant obscenities, touching, pushing, leering and spitting. The male superintendent observed the behaviour and did nothing. The women eventually complained to EEO. Some were ostracised and others were moved immediately.

What were the values and beliefs held by some AFP officers behind this behaviour?

• That women were seen as a safety risk to their partners in dangerous situations and therefore no good as police;

• That because some magistrates won’t convict members of the public for swearing at police in public, female police shouldn’t complain about swearing and bad behaviour at the station but they should up with it like all police put up with it on the street;

• That during demonstrations, police women must be prepared to be manhandled by crowds and, therefore, at the station they should be able to “cop it sweet” if they are “man handled”;

• That sexual harassment doesn’t happen here. “If only someone” the joke goes, “would sexually harass me!”

• That you don’t complain about a brother officer, no matter what happens;

• That if you can’t take the heat you should get out of the kitchen and, finally,
• It’s not safe to complain because you won’t be taken seriously.

If you compare this set of beliefs with the checklist of the nine predictions about what happens to women in masculinised occupations, you will see some striking similarities.

What makes police forces different from what happens in other masculinised organisations? The people who are attracted to be police officers are men and women who want to serve others, make society safer, show courage and enjoy adventure, and they want to exercise power over others.

It is only the last desire which is relevant here. The use of power in a disciplined, quasi-military organisation, encourages fear or, as it is more colloquially called, “respect”. The power is not demonstrated by brute force; instead it is exercised through the virtue of either superior position or superior numbers to intimidate, ridicule or belittle women officers. This has the following outcomes for women police:

• They are reluctant to join women’s networks.

• They are reluctant to support other women who rock the boat or make waves.

• They will resign rather than work part time to cope with family responsibilities.

**Family Responsibilities**

Women in the AFP who work in community policing give strong support to part time work, job sharing, paternity leave and child sickness leave. Their male colleagues do not. They see these as benefits which go to women and increase the burden on them of having to do unpopular shifts, covering for women who leave work “early” or come “late” and decreasing the opportunities for clerical or desk jobs - that is, non-shift work which is filled by women.

**Promotion**

When running focus groups with the AFP, I asked a number of questions about promotion, including: *What does a man have to do to be successful?* and *What does a women have to do to be successful?*

Obviously I was trying to probe the group response and see if there were any perceived differences. There were. Here are the five most frequently cited responses about what men have to do to be successful:

• Perform, work hard, be competent.

• Stuff up, drink.

• Brown-nose, grovel, be a suck, laugh at boss’s jokes.

• Have a sponsor, a patron to assist you.
• Be a Mason, a Catholic or join the Lodge.

Here are the six most frequently cited responses for women:

• Be more competent than a man, be 110%, be bigger, better, brighter and more beautiful, make no mistakes, super performer, be 150%.

• It’s easier for women, reverse discrimination, need to fill quotas, women are promoted quicker than men.

• Same as a man, no bias between the sexes

• Be like a man, adopt male attitudes.

• Perform, work hard.

• Screw stripes on. Was your promotion sewn or or screwed on?

The differences are evident in the responses. The notion that you must fit in or assimilate into the dominant culture comes through. As one man said: Gender is not the issue - it’s how you fit in that counts”. He agreed with me that fitting in meant conforming to a masculinised culture, not a feminised one - and therefore, it would be easier if you were a man in the first place.

Some of the behaviours rated very highly for men, like brown-nosing, etc., did not rate a mention for women. There was a general belief that women didn’t have to grovel. But there was a perception strongly held by men and, to a very much lesser extent, by women, that there is reverse discrimination and filling of quotas. As one man said: A women’s promotion draws more comment. To which a woman added: If she’s promoted it’s because she’s female, which reinforces the belief that she did not deserve it. “Sleeping her way to the top” was still a prevalent belief in some sections, but the majority of women who responded said that women had to be more competent to be successful. They also agreed that being attractive helped but breasts, the bigger the better, also helped. If you look good and are the right shape you will do better a female officer said. If you are seen as forceful, a loud mouthed female, they won’t like you.

The perceived promotion system of men - the “sponsorship” and the networking, which are very important considerations for male officers - was not seen as important for women. A male officer commented that Sponsorship by senior officers is the greatest determinant for promotion. Sponsorship discriminates against both men and women.

Results of Research

The results of my research show that women have not been fully accepted by or integrated into the AFP. They are resisted by their male colleagues. Women and men have quite different and separate perceptions of this experience. Further, the training of police officers had no mention of gender awareness or difference nor did it offer any strategies to trainees on
how to counter sexist workplace behaviour or sexual harassment. Nor were issues like organisational culture mentioned or explored in the training.

The organisational style of the AFP favoured those in the past with personal characteristics which are typically masculine, like aggressiveness and competitiveness. Most women and any men who do not behave this way, have said they were not deemed suitable for promotion.

In 1995 the AFP decided its culture was going to change. New values and new structures would shape a new culture. It would take give years to effect the change.

AFP, like other police forces, has been dominated by the masculine values of competitiveness, hierarchy, toughness, discipline and rules. Now a different set of values is necessary for police success. These values include respect for people and for difference, trust, integrity, cooperative teamwork, high performance, innovative risk taking, enabling leadership, collaborative and participative decision-making and an open approach to learning. These values will shape an integrated, cross-functional police service.

I am not suggesting that all the traditional masculine values will be or should be swept aside. Far from it. They have contributed a great deal to modern policing. But as the emerging feminine values complement and balance them, and as police officers learn the behaviours to implement them, we will finally see women appropriately integrated into police services.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Chorn, N, ‘Creating feminine values in organisations’, Management, November, 1995, 5-7


