CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING
THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF POLICE WOMEN

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Introduction

Equal employment opportunity (EEO) has been relatively unsuccessful in creating a fully integrated police workforce. Despite the introduction of a range of policies such as equal opportunity and sexual harassment, and despite a range of structures, the integration of policewomen across all ranks and locations has been modest. Indeed, the principles espoused by equal opportunity are not reflected in the attitudes of most policemen, and the resulting practices have led to inequality in terms of job opportunities (Young 1991, 195), retention rates and promotional prospects (Heidensohn 1992, 215). These attitudes have, in fact, had a major effect on the career development of policewomen (Jones 1986, 163).

Policing remains a predominantly male occupational structure and culture, and assuming this predominantly male environment is also clearly at work in the management positions of most police organisations, then one must question whether EEO itself will ever be truly successful in creating a police organisation that not only represents policewomen, but one which is more representative of the community it serves. Given the somewhat limited success of EEO, then existing barriers to the full integration of policewomen should be fully explored. The purpose of this paper therefore is to take a closer look at some of the possible influences constraining the career development of policewomen.

Research for this paper was based on a review of literature concerning women in policing, including an examination of wide ranging studies of EEO in police organisations, and a case study of fifteen policewomen in South Australia police. The impetus for this research arose from a perception that discriminatory attitudes towards policewomen still prevailed and that these attitudes were based on myths about the nature of police work and the ability of policewomen. A rather simple, yet important statistic added to the direction of the research. This statistic revealed that policewomen held just over three per cent of all supervisory and management positions in South Australia police. In other words, 96 per cent of these positions were held by men. As policewomen made up 14.3 per cent of all trainee and sworn police positions, then it was obvious the bulk of positions occupied by policewomen were at the base of the organisational hierarchy.

A review of the literature identified a number of discriminatory practices which operated against policewomen, in particular, the existence of a culture that tended to place doubt on the ability of policewomen on the basis that policing was a physically demanding and dangerous job; a job that required strength, assertiveness and courage in the face of unpleasant situations. This supposedly male mandate acted against policewomen in a number of ways: they were often resented and not fully accepted by their male colleagues, they had to adjust to a policing style defined by men, they had to continually prove themselves, and were also subjected to a host of discriminatory remarks and behaviour, including sexism. In all, these previous findings suggested that policewomen faced a constant battle to gain acceptance, and that in many cases, they resigned themselves to a nominal status within the police hierarchy. Within this environment, many policewomen became apathetic, disenchanted, their expectations were

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frustrated and they became under-achievers (Jones 1986, 173). It suggests their career development was substantially constrained. These findings therefore became the working hypothesis which guided the case study of fifteen policewomen.

The Research Method

The fifteen policewomen selected for the case study were chosen on the basis of their experience and position within South Australia police. Length of service was an important factor given the intention of examining constraints to the career development of the respondents. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select respondents, and only policewomen working in the metropolitan area were considered for interview. While some of the information drawn from the case study reflects the life history of respondents, its context was nonetheless relevant to contemporary instances of discrimination.

Semi-structured interview techniques comprising a number of themes drawn from the literature were used to guide the working hypothesis (Sarantakos 1993, 121) that policewomen were constrained in their career development as a result of the predominant police culture. All interviews were conducted between March - June 1996 and recorded on audio tape. These themes included the physical nature of policing, attitudes and behaviour towards policewomen, work opportunities and coping strategies. While discrimination was an implicit theme, the interview techniques specifically avoided direct questions concerning sexual discrimination experienced by respondents. This topic is an important issue in policing, however, it also contains a number of ethical considerations which were beyond the task of this research project. Coding techniques were used to categorise and code the data contained in the fifteen interviews. Once coded, themes or concepts were categorised and linked together. The aim was to identify, compare and propose relationships between the various categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 96-115).

It is suggested that generalisations can be drawn from the case study, that is, the findings can be interpreted beyond the case study, and it is therefore an ‘exemplar generalisation’ of constraints affecting the career development of policewomen in South Australia police (Sarantakos 1993, 27).

Literature Review

Attitudes of policemen towards policewomen are a major cause of discrimination. Time and again, the research points to significant barriers and significant discrimination by policemen, even though these studies have indicated that attitudes were not based on observation or experience, but on value judgements (Balkin 1988, 29-38). And these judgements are readily applied by policemen who see no place in policing for their female counterparts (Heidensohn 1992, 129). This of course, has wide ranging implications for policewomen. On the one hand, competent policewomen are seen as a threat, while on the other, any sign of incompetence leads to their rejection as partners (Belknap & Shelley 1992, 47-75).
Young’s (1991) ethnographic study of policing in Great Britain reinforced these findings: marginal value was attached to policewomen who also suffered from consistently hostile and negative attitudes by policemen (Young 1991, 193). Perhaps the most telling problem created for policewomen is that the greatest difficulty and stress faced by them does not come from the job of policing itself, but from their male colleagues (Sutton 1996, 14). As noted by Balkin (1988), policewomen are required to fight injustice more so within police organisations than on the streets (Balkin 1988, 29-38).

While discrimination impacts on policewomen in several ways, it has been the over-emphasis on the physical nature of policing that has consistently been used against them. There is, throughout the literature, a repeated emphasis on the need to be physically strong, and a perception of policewomen not being strong enough for operational policing. Doubts about the physical capabilities of policewomen, along with suggestions they present a risk to their male colleagues, leads to doubts about their status in policing (Jones 1986, 134). Similarly, policewomen were considered unsuitable, because they were unable to deal with danger, could not command authority and should not be exposed to the often degrading side of police-work (Heidensohn 1992, 200; Young 1991, 207).

An over-emphasis on physicality is often made through repeated references to a policewoman’s ability to handle a 15 stone drunk. Every time this argument is raised, one is compelled to ask just how many policemen would be capable of single-handedly confronting such a situation (Heidensohn 1992, 217). Indeed, Jones (1986) concluded that the most controversial issue influencing the full integration of policewomen was an emphasis on physical requirements (Jones 1986, 147). This attitude prevailed, despite research which showed at least 80-90 per cent of time was spent on non-criminal or service functions (Balkin 1988, 29-38).

The somewhat conditional acceptance of policewomen created an atmosphere in which policewomen felt the need to become ‘one of the boys’ (Young 1991, 197), in order to gain trust, acceptance and survive in a male dominated environment (Sutton 1996, 12). Martin (1979), whose research is probably the exemplar of this characterisation, found policewomen were faced with two roles: they either defeminised or deprofessionalised. Defeminised meant assimilating with policemen and proving themselves according to the behavioural traits of their male colleagues. On the other hand, deprofessionalised policewomen refused to assimilate and functioned as nominal equals. Defeminised policewomen proved their loyalty, accepted the prevailing work norms and often agreed with men’s negative evaluation of policewomen. Policewomen who deprofessionalised accepted a lesser status and became underachievers. It led to low motivation, a reduction in the work ethic, fewer career opportunities, and they often sought alternative assignments to patrol work (Martin 1979, 314-23).

Research concerning policewomen consistently alludes to the masculine nature of policing and the difficulties faced by policewomen who were viewed as less reliable and less competent (Taylor & McKenzie 1994, 260-67). Images of masculinity in policing were sustained by emphasising danger and violence; images which not only acted against
policewomen (Coffey et al 1992, 13-19), but emphasised attributes such as physical courage, assertiveness, authoritarianism, suspiciousness and loyalty (Jones 1986, 14). As Young’s ethnographic study showed, drinking, physical courage and a tendency to magnify violence all contributed to a cult of masculinity as a prestige structure whereby policewomen were accorded low status, and whose entry has only ever been partly successful (Young 1991, 192-3). And it is within this context that policewomen were seen as a threat to the image and security of their male colleagues, a threat to the very ownership of policing, and a threat to an occupation which was seen as a male prerogative (Heidensohn 1992, 155-201).

An emphasis on masculinity has not only limited the role of policewomen, but has also contributed to a host of negative attitudes. Police work was not regarded as women’s work, the attitudes of male colleagues was biased and policewomen were not regarded as full or equal members of the workforce (Jones 1986, 11-3). Several policewomen had experienced sexism, being addressed as ‘gentlemen’ at meetings, abuse, hostility, and conditional acceptance (Heidensohn 1992, 129-138). Other negative expressions included anti-female remarks, comments about the sexual orientation of policewomen, hostility, put-downs and the use of affectionate terms (Balkin 1988, 29-38). Unfortunately, many policemen subscribed to myths about policewomen, including weak emotional and physical traits (Belknap & Shelley, 1992, 47-75).

The discussion has focused, so far, on cultural and gender bias against policewomen. All of this of course indicates negative implications for deployment and career opportunities. Discrimination included a lack of assignment to more important roles and negative evaluations from supervisors (Schulz 1993, 90-7). Policewomen in fact anticipated exclusionary practices, they felt they had to continually prove themselves (Winhurst 1995, 278-97), and faced problems of acceptance (Belknap & Shelley 1992, 47-75). Unlawful deployment on the grounds of sex still occurred, and duties were restricted due to physical considerations (Taylor & McKenzie 1994, 260-7). Indeed, policewomen were constrained and polarised by the dominant male hierarchies in policing (Young 1991, 191).

Discriminatory practices have led to limitations on career opportunities for policewomen (Taylor & McKenzie 1994, 260-7). Often, the negative attitudes held towards policewomen by male supervisors affected deployment decisions (Jones 1986, 177). All of this has of course led to dampened expectations by policewomen and a lessening of their confidence (Dunhill 1989, 109). Support for this is to be found in a 1989 study of sex discrimination which covered all but one police force in Great Britain. Carried out by the Centre for Police Studies at the University of Strathclyde, the study showed that 77 per cent of policewomen desired fuller integration, but were less involved in criminal investigation and traffic policing. Furthermore, 60 per cent believed they were deployed differently because of their sex, and 59 per cent perceived exclusion from specialist sections due to their sex (Coffey et al 1992, 13-19).

A lack of opportunity created by limited deployment, as well as a decrease in confidence and commitment brought about by the host of negative evaluations, led policewomen to become under-achievers. Fewer policewomen attempted promotion and acquiesced by assuming a
nominal status in the police organisation. Moreover, this nominal status reinforced negative stereotypes of policewomen, and contributed to a cause and effect spiral in which many policewomen resigned themselves to the images held by policemen (Jones 1986, 108). Martin’s (1979) study showed how ‘deprofessionalised’ policewomen had lower motivation and became under-achievers who were characterised by de-motivation and failure (Martin 1979, 314-323).

Research by Poole & Pogrebin (1988) supported these findings. In their study, policewomen with less than three years experience placed a high priority on career advancement, however, it diminished as they gained more experience. 39 per cent of policewomen with less than three years experience ranked career advancement as most important, but only 7 per cent of those in the other groups such as 3-6 years and 6-9 years. The conclusion drawn from their research was that policewomen learn very early in their careers that only a few policewomen obtained promotion (Poole & Pogrebin 1988, 49-55). Other studies have shown how policewomen became ambivalent about their career prospects and feelings about the future (Winhurst 1995, 278-97; Jones 1986, 21).

Previous Studies

One broad study on discrimination in Great Britain will be described, before moving to two recent Australian studies. The 1983 Policy Studies Institute’s (PSI) report on London’s Metropolitan Police drew attention to considerable sexism. Conversations in police circles revolved around violence and the exercise of authority, drinking feats and sexual conquests. Policewomen were often described in demeaning terms, and were confronted with sexual innuendo. Despite integration, discriminatory attitudes and work practices were entrenched. Policewomen were not considered as equals; it was thought they needed protection, and were unable to support colleagues in a crisis. Senior officers believed policewomen were unsuitable for particular duties, and opportunities for promotion were therefore restricted. The impact resulted in lowered confidence and expectations on the part of policewomen. The PSI report concluded that policewomen were likely to face more obstacles in gaining promotion (Dunhill 1989, 102-10).

In Australia, Niland’s (1995) recent review of EEO and culture in the Australian Federal Police identified a number of issues. EEO and legal obligations to sexual harassment were poorly understood. Little respect was accorded to women who gained acceptance by adopting the prevailing culture; a culture which was intimidating for women, and one which was conducive to sexual harassment. Female participants in the study revealed that sexism was part of their daily working life. Managers paid lip service to EEO, seeing it as a political issue and not part of good police work or corporate objectives (Niland 1995, 3).

Sutton’s (1996) summary report into the NSW Police revealed that 83 per cent of the policewomen surveyed believed sexist attitudes and behaviour pervaded their work experience. Assimilation into the prevailing culture was a necessary survival tactic. Policewomen believed they had to work harder for recognition, were more likely to meet resistance and were excluded from higher ranks. Moreover, policewomen believed their male
colleagues did not deem them suitable for operational work. “In order to gain trust, acceptance and survive in a male dominated occupation, many women officers identify with dominant others and adopt a pseudo masculinity” (Sutton 1996, 12-13).

**Case Study Results**

A number of themes emerged from the case study, including the importance placed on the masculine and physical nature of policing, along with corresponding negative attitudes towards policewomen. Perceptions of policing as a ‘man’s job’ still existed, and respondents were often subjected to stereotyped evaluations. Respondents felt the need to continually prove themselves, and some had either witnessed or attempted to assimilate by acting as ‘one of the boys’. Evidence arose of the way in which policewomen were often discriminated against when it came to work opportunities, deployment, as well as during selection processes. In all, these conditions led to a lack of confidence, lowered motivation and a lack of career development opportunities. These aspects will now be discussed in greater detail.

Respondents clearly indicated that physical ideals about policing still prevailed. Policewomen were considered to be weak, and were judged on whether or not they had the same strength as their male colleagues. Even though the physical aspect of policing was over-rated, and while it formed only a small part of policing, a pervading attitude about violence and the ability to back-up their male colleagues continued to discriminate against policewomen. While some women ended up believing the hype about physical strength, others highlighted the important role policewomen played in violent situations, because of their ability to resolve problems:

R2
“Some women must end up believing the general hype which says things like you have to be big and strong to deal with operational situations; now we know that’s not true, that a very, very small percentage of operational time is spent on physical confrontation. I know from my own experience this is not so and being female breaks down these situations but they still subscribe to the idea this is what it’s all about...”

R13
“...because of a lack of physical power there is not the aura of physical power when you walk into a situation...I think sometimes you [policewomen] can quell the situation.”

Many of the respondents’ believed they had to not only prove themselves by their performance, but they had to do twice as much for the same recognition and acceptance. The need to prove yourself as a policewomen was necessary to eliminate suggestions of favourable treatment on the grounds of gender, and also to reject common held views about their ability. One respondent was conscious that mistakes would be put down to the fact she was a policewoman, and another said she had been continually subjected to tests of work performance and questions about her ability:
“Because the way women are viewed, the likelihood of proceeding to management is significantly reduced. Women are still marginalised, not taken seriously, are having to constantly prove themselves. People work from the position that you’re a non-performer unless you prove otherwise...There is an awful weight on women to fit in, to adjust because it’s male and that is quite stressful, and so my personal view is that women have to move away from where they have to fight so hard to prove themselves.”

Many respondents’ believed policing was still perceived as a ‘man’s job’, and examples were given of male colleagues, including supervisors, who thought a women’s place was in the home. Others believed policemen did not react well to female supervisors, or did not want to be supervised by a policewoman. In fact, one respondent had been constantly asked how policemen would react to a woman supervisor when she applied for positions. Even though things had improved, the notion that policing was owned by men prevailed:

“In the past in the squad areas it was very much all the boy’s together. Many had long term careers in the CIB and no exposure to women police. Therefore, there was no perception of confidence and for most, the only experience was of the old women police role, child minding, etc. There is a man’s atmosphere that excludes [police] women and says, this is a man’s job...it is lessened to a greater extent in uniform because there are more women. In the CIB area it is gradually being eroded, but not in the area of squads...”

“Can you give me an example?”

“In one CIB area, a particular sergeant had a female posted onto his team and he was heard to say: “We’ll make her life hard, we don’t want women on the team and we’ll make her life so miserable she’ll ask for a transfer...This was within the last 8-9 months.”

It was acknowledged by respondents that some policewomen tended to be ‘one of the boys’ and assumed some of the male behavioural traits. Examples were given of policewomen mimicking the behaviour of male colleagues, and of using offensive language in what seemed an attempt to align with the men. Others agreed that some policewomen swore and told yarns just be to accepted:

“...I intended to try and act like a man, but after a while intelligence comes through and you realise you just can’t. I mean, you’ve got the physical constraints but you’ve also got behavioural constraints...A lot of women will go through that, they’ve got to be the big tough, but after a while, you know sense will come and realise well, you might as well do it the way you think you can do it, rather than get your head punched in, because you’ve opened your mouth and tried to be tough.”
“They’ve had to become twice as good to be considered - to prove themselves I suppose. They’ve become twice as good to be considered half as good, I suppose. They’ve become more manlike in their attitude and their swearing and aggressiveness - assertiveness, not thinking that they can retain any sort of femininity.”

Stereotyped views of policewomen were closely aligned to a belief that policing belonged to men. If a policewoman performed poorly then it was attributed to the fact she was a woman, and ability was assessed on the basis of sex rather than the characteristics of individual policewomen. One respondent believed her male colleagues always had her status as a women in the back of their minds, and another felt she was not regarded as an investigator, but as a woman:

“...it focuses on the sex of the person whereas if it was a bloke it wouldn’t be an issue. It would be like, he’s a good bloke or he’s a useless bloke etc, but it really centres on the female if they’re selected. They forget about the best person for the job, it becomes a male-female issue.”

“Every promotion that you get, you get because you’re a woman and that’s part of every other person’s defence mechanism against failure. If another man got the job they’d say, you know, he’s a friend of the boss or had friends. But if a female gets it it’s always because she’s a female. Sometimes it doesn’t make the achievement as sweet as it should be.”

“They don’t want to think that a job they’ve been doing so well can be done by a woman. And if it can be, well she must be a lesbian. She must have some of the attributes that they have or then it just becomes totally non-logical and she’s a slut. Do you known what I mean?”

Attitudes to policewomen continued to affect their deployment and work opportunities. They were often used to meet particular needs in dealing with female victims and offenders; for example, they were often assigned to sex crime investigations and called into search female prisoners. The assumed relevance of policewomen specifically being used to investigate offences or handling others matters involving women and children was questioned by some respondents who had not had children themselves, but had worked with male colleagues with families, and who were therefore better equipped to deal with such issues. One respondent said she had never gained the opportunity to supervise because she had always been sought for work where a policewoman was required. Other respondents’ believed their work experience had suffered because they were not given the same investigational opportunities as their male colleagues:
R12
“In my previous posting I got the most piss-weak offences you have ever seen. The sergeant had his favourites and they were all male, the good pinches would go to them and I got the stuff which should have been filed.”

R10
“I can only talk from my point of view...which is the type of reports I’m given to investigate. These are dead end reports or long and involved reports that don’t have pinches at the end of it, which tie your time up, so that on paper things don’t actually look like your working as hard as you’re actually working. I know personally I’m given a lot of fiddly jobs that shouldn’t even be in the CIB. It’s hard to put it in words.”

It would seem that perceptions were sometimes carried over into selection and appeal procedures. Respondents’ believed that stereotypes of policewomen influenced the decisions of selection panels, and in fact, one had been a party to conversations in which beliefs about the capabilities of policewomen influenced the selection process. Other examples were provided of female applicants who were continually questioned either about their suitability to supervise policemen, or how policemen would respond to a female supervisor:

R8
“...but every time I applied for a sergeant’s position I was knocked back, questions were asked like, “how do you think the men would respond to a woman in charge?” This remark was consistent.”

Several other respondents provided examples of general opposition or resistance. There was a perception that policewomen were unacceptable to their peer group, that lip service was paid to equal opportunity, and even though things had progressed, discrimination was now more subtle. One spoke of the difficulty policewomen faced in obtaining entry to specialist areas, and another spoke of the struggle for equal status:

R1
“What I found in the early years was that as a woman, I would follow a male partner who would take the initiative and I would help. As I gained more experience in policing and I was the senior person in the patrols, it was very difficult in may cases to carry out the senior role with men who were unwilling to accept a senior female partner and consequently they would always want to take the lead and I can remember so many struggles for control...[there is] an awful weight on women to fit in, to adjust because it’s male and that is quite stressful and so my personal view is that women move away from where they have to fight so hard to prove themselves”

An unexpected outcome of the case study was the added difficulty policewomen had when dealing with the public who often deferred to policemen. Examples were cited where members of the public often focused their attention toward the male officer even though a
A policewoman was conducting the inquiry. One respondent summed up this phenomenon by concluding that her experience of policing as a ‘man’s world’ was reinforced by members of the public who wanted to speak to a policeman:

R7
“Policemen treat it [policing] as though it’s the domain of men...the impression stays with you, that you are not strong enough, and it is backed up by members of the public who want to speak to the policeman” (R7)

Given the nature of the resistance and opposition towards policewomen uncovered by this case study, then it is not surprising that many of them developed a lack of confidence; were worn down by negative attitudes, and even submitted to the pressures and traditional expectations of their role. It is suggested that the overall impact of the range of discriminatory practices faced by policewomen must surely affect their career development opportunities. The consequences are best described by the comments of many respondents; comments which clearly demonstrate that discrimination is not just a series of unconnected incidents occurring over time, but carried a burden which rested heavily on the future prospects of many policewomen, and the position they saw themselves occupying in the police organisation:

R1
“Because of the negative reinforcement women get in the operational environment, I believe that leads to a lack of confidence in their own skills. They see it as easier to do a job that is just generally more accepted as a woman’s job. They submit to expectations.”

R4
“...if they see themselves [policewomen] as second rate citizens...perceive themselves to be less than equal...Perhaps that’s why they don’t give commissioned rank a go because they don’t perceive themselves as being equal.”

R8
“A lot is in women’s minds themselves, they hear about discrimination and they ask whether it is worth it. They wonder if it’s worth it. That’s how I felt after the appeal and there’s no way I would ever have another go.”

R10
“Basically you’re on tender hooks all the time because you’re not accepted...I’ve learnt to deal with it and cope...”

“How do you cope?”

R10
“Now I’ve got my daughter, I’ve got to think about her and I go home from work and I try and forget about work whereas, opposed to, I would take my work home and work on it and want to do well, whereas now I do what I can during work...”
“Has your motivation changed?”

R10
“No, I still love my work.”

“Has it changed your attitude to a career in the police?”

R10
“Yeah, I don’t care about it anymore, I’ve stopped studying...”

R15
“Yes. I know the statistics say that the amount of women that stay in the police are very low. And I can tell you why - ‘cause it’s just too hard. After fighting, fighting, fighting, it’s a constant battle.”

“A constant battle to prove yourself and to...”

R15
“Just fit in and it’s just...everyday thinking or being made, felt that you don’t belong.”

Coping Strategies

Despite the negative reactions experienced by many respondents, some had developed coping strategies or ways of dealing with situations. In these cases the policewomen were positive about their approach, were assertive, showed strength of character and confronted problems. Two respondents, however, acknowledged the risk of becoming an outsider by confronting issues. Nonetheless, the strength of the way these policewomen coped provided powerful and compelling examples for all policewomen. While it is accepted that policewomen should not be required to show assertiveness or aggression in order to gain equal treatment, one respondent said it was necessary otherwise policewomen risked being walked all over:

R12
“Yeah, it didn’t mean it was any easier for me and it certainly meant that you know, I might go home and bawl my eyes out, but you never let the bastards see you cry. But you had to be that same aggression like they had, otherwise you would have been walked all over.”

Insightful comments were offered by another respondent who suggested one way to deal with problems was by identifying the key role player and targeting that person. An alternative was to approach those on the periphery and gain their support. It was rarely the case that all would be involved and this respondent suggested approaching those in the background to enlist their cooperation. She also accepted that policewomen should not have to put up with discrimination, and her advice was to show strength of character:
“The best thing is to show strength of character because people admire that, especially coppers, and confront the situation. It’s not a case of fighting back, but more a sense of identifying it. There is always a key role player there somewhere, a bit like a ringmaster in a circus. Target that person and show strength of character. If they see you back off into a corner then they will go in for the kill, if they can see they’re winning. You’ve got to stand up...Another avenue, it’s very rare that all of the team will be involved. Target the ringleader and confront or gain the confidence of those in the background...”

When asked of ways to improve the career opportunities for policewomen, many respondents made reference to the need to increase women’s representation at all levels. It was considered that policewomen would continue to be marginalised until such time as their under-representation was addressed. Other respondents talked about de-mystifying the physical nature of police work and putting more policewomen managers into operational areas:

“...Get the message across about operational policing, about violence and health and safety, that everybody needs a flack jacket. We just don’t live in that violent a society, so I’d try and break down that perception. I’d try and set up more role models...There is a very strong lack of people [policewomen] in positions where these people might aspire to go. For example...there aren’t any female patrol sergeants, so they don’t see role models...”

Other respondents felt it was important to encourage policewomen to apply for promotion by individually approaching them and offering positive feedback. Networking was also seen as important, as were role models, because they indicated to other policewomen that advancement was achievable:

“I’d like to see more networking so the younger one’s have role models to look up to. When [name] was made up, the younger one’s said, well, if she can make it then why can’t we? So they’re looking up to a [name]. It’s very important to have networking and role models.”

In all, the findings of the case study were consistent with numerous other studies throughout the western world. It is therefore not surprising that many policewomen developed a lack of confidence in their ability and status within policing. As others have noted (Balkin 1988 & Sutton 1996), the major difficulties and stress facing policewomen often came from their male colleagues.

**Conclusion**

Results drawn from the case study revealed a number of themes which discriminated against policewomen. These themes mirrored findings drawn from the literature review, as well as previous studies into police organisations. Physical strength remained an important part of the police mind-set even though it formed a very small part of daily police work.
Unfortunately, it meant that policewomen were often judged on physical strength and aggression.

Policewomen faced a host of negative evaluations: many found they had to continually prove themselves; they worked in an environment which placed limits on their acceptance; some tried to be ‘one the boys’ in order to gain acceptance; others were stereotyped and assessed on the basis of their gender, rather than on their individual ability; the work opportunities of some respondents had been restricted because of their gender; and some had faced doubts about their ability to supervise male colleagues. Some policewomen adopted coping strategies in order to deal with these negative evaluations, even though it carried a risk of alienation; and in some instances, even if it meant having to adopt the assertive and aggressive traits displayed by policemen.

As indicated by respondents, the sum of these negative evaluations contributed to a lack of confidence in their own ability, acceptance of a nominal status in the organisation, and doubts about their future career prospects. It is therefore suggested the case study uncovered sufficient evidence to conclude that the career development of policewomen in South Australia police had been constrained by the predominant male culture, and had, in fact, contributed significantly to the low numbers of policewomen at supervisory and management levels.

Jones (1986) offered three main strategies to limit discriminatory attitudes and practices. Firstly, a definitive policy on equal employment opportunity is required, one which incorporates guidelines on the responsibilities of all supervisors. Secondly, a clear message must come from the top in order to overcome the ambivalent approach to equal employment opportunity. There must be a clear understanding of equal employment principles. Not only must leaders clearly state their obligation to these principles, but they must actively support and enforce them. Thirdly, other provisions such as training in equal opportunity and discrimination must be introduced, particularly for managers and supervisors: “It cannot be stressed enough that supervisors and managers have considerable power, through their authority and discretion, to determine the quality of women’s working lives...” (Jones 1986, 178).

Training should also extend to the development of policewomen’s skills, including their ability to better cope with a predominantly male environment. In addition, more extensive part-time work options and child care provisions should be adopted (Jones 1986, 180). However, enabling provisions such as these will only meet with limited success while police organisations remain predominantly male. Therefore, there must be a concerted effort to increase the representation of policewomen at all levels within the organisation.

Executives and line managers in police organisations must commit themselves to equal employment opportunity. For many police organisations, this is a major problem, because many of these managers lack a proper understanding of difficult gender issues. Furthermore, police organisations must move beyond the fine words contained in equal employment policies, and realise that these mechanisms will not suffice. “It is not enough for a force to
claim to be an equal opportunities employer. Chief officers of police must take the necessary steps to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices and to guard against the risk of discriminating unwittingly” (Taylor & McKenzie 1994, 260-7). Indeed, one of the most important reasons why equal employment opportunity had failed is because there has been a lack of genuine commitment from senior police managers (Jones 1986, 177-81).

This paper therefore advocates commitment beyond EEO policies; commitment to strategies and practices that genuinely confront a host of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that are a significant feature of the prevailing police culture. Equal opportunity advisers, consultative committees, training, and structures such as part-time employment can only do so much. Real change will only occur when police organisations are proportionally represented by policewomen at all levels; and only when the predominant police culture unequivocally accepts the full status and integration of policewomen. Senior police managers have the capacity to make this happen. “It is not enough for senior management to preach equal opportunities, they themselves have to be seen to practice what they preach” (Jones 1986, 177).

In concluding, it is interesting to note Karpin’s (1995) comments about the challenge of equal opportunity facing Australian businesses. The Industry Task Force on leadership and management skills chaired by Karpin, suggested the glass ceiling preventing women from entering management appeared to be thickening, and that not enough was being done to encourage their participation. The task force therefore recommended that government give higher priority to management for diversity, including the targeting of women (Karpin 1995, 26-7).
Bibliography


