



GENDER AND POLICING: NARRATIVES OF CRISIS, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY



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Abstract: The recruitment of a more diverse police workforce has been central to police reform agendas across time and place. Police organisations throughout the world have been subject to a number of high-profile and damning reports that have emphasised the damaging effects of a lack of diversity. Such damaging effects have been repeatedly cited in relation to both external interactions between police and citizens, and to the internal interactions between police officers themselves. This paper considers more specifically the issue of gender representation within policing. It reflects on the histories that have shaped women's entry, progression and participation in policing over the past century and considers some of the contemporary challenges faced by police organisations in maintaining and improving women's representation within a climate of economic constraint. Histories of policing have consistently demonstrated that bringing about change to the organisation is a difficult and often protracted process. Indeed much research has pointed to the long tradition of police resistance to organisational change initiatives. Through reflecting on the past and present, it engages with narratives of 'crisis' 'change' and 'continuity' in thinking about the future of gender and policing.

The recruitment of a more diverse police workforce remains a central feature of contemporary police reform agendas throughout the world. Encompassing race, religion, gender and sexuality, diversity debates within policing are wide ranging and go beyond the scope of this contribution. This paper focuses more specifically on the issue of gender and policing. In 2010, the Home Office's 'Assessment of Women in the Police Service' detailed considerable progress in relation to the increase in female recruitment, representation and progression in England and Wales, asserting that *'female recruitment is strong and women officers' chances of promotion are generally on par with their male counterparts'* (Home Office, 2010, p.3). With the number of women in policing in England and Wales indicating an upward trend currently standing at 27 %, there is no doubt that the police service has done much to demonstrate its commitment to realising equality, diversity and human rights. That said, the continued under-representation of women within the police workforce, particularly at senior levels, remains a key and consistent reality for police organisations across the world (Dick *et al.* 2013; Van Ewijk, 2012; Prenzler &

Sinclair, 2013). This paper calls into question the popular mantra that suggests that 'all things are equal now'. It reflects on the histories that have shaped the call for women's entry into policing, their progression and participation within policing over the past century and considers women's early experiences of policing in relation to some of the contemporary concerns about women's participation in policing. It is not my aim here to provide a historical account of women's role in policing nor to compare the progress made by women worldwide. Rather, through historical reflection, we can begin to map just how far policing has come in relation to addressing issues of gender within its workforce and to think more critically about the concepts of 'crisis' and 'change'. It also affords an opportunity to speculate about some of the key challenges that lie ahead in relation to achieving gender balance and equality, particularly in times of global economic constraint and austerity.



A BRIEF HISTORY

Women have been present and engaged in the work of policing for over a century now. Participating in various forms of social control for much of the nineteenth century (in various 'moral rescue' roles), female police officers were first recruited in the early twentieth century. As the century progressed, their appointment continued on a piecemeal basis. In a rare international comparison of the progress and integration of women in policing, Van Ewijk (2012, p1) notes four broad phases of women's recruitment into policing: after the First World War; the Inter-War years; after the Second World War; and the modern period from the 1980s onwards. Despite variation between countries, a consistent and familiar pattern of recruitment is observed, whereby there is a *'period of omission, followed by limited succession, amalgamation or formation of separate women's departments and working towards full integration'*. Alongside this pattern of recruitment, commentaries on early policewomen's experiences suggest much opposition and resistance. Histories document a damning picture in which women's entry and progression was vigorously fought, resisted and undermined on legal, organisational, informal and interpersonal levels (Carrier, 1988; Martin, 1980; Miller, 1999; Schulz, 1995; Segrave, 1995). Whilst countries vary in the dates that women were admitted into the police, there is a strong consensus that suggests that opposition to their entry and integration was almost universal (Brown, 1996). In making sense of this opposition, Brown and Heidensohn (2000) point to a combination of paternalistic concerns to protect women and patriarchal exclusion of women as being unsuitable for the 'rough and dirty tasks' required by policing. Perhaps best described as a history of struggle, the history of women in policing is one in which clear and strong gendered markers of inclusion and exclusion were established. From the very outset, the role and identity of the police officer was firmly located within men's domain and associated with ideas of masculinity. With physicality and the capacity to use coercive force crafted as something that only men possessed, women were constructed and deemed to be 'deficient' in the project of mainstream policing and routinely and legitimately excluded. Cast as 'outsiders' to the main project of policing, early policewomen's presence in policing was enabled only through a focus on social and welfare work tasks, working with female suspects and victims of crime (mainly those engaged in prostitution) and

young people (Brown et al, 1999; Heidensohn, 1992; 2000; Brown & Heidensohn, 2000; Schulz, 1995).

As the century progressed, the appointment of women in policing continued on a piecemeal basis with Brown (1996) reminding us that though political activation and lobbying contributed to changing attitudes towards the idea and possibility of women police officers, their actual entry was often precipitated by a 'crisis'. Europe for example, saw a growth in the number of policewomen after the two world wars; as did Asia and Africa in the post-colonial era and emerging democracies in Eastern Europe and South America (Van Ewijk, 2012); and India, following the crisis brought about the mass movement of people following Partition in 1947 (Mahajan, 1982). The influence of such 'crisis' based discourse holds much continued resonance to contemporary calls for the need to recruit more women into policing. The reality of trafficking problems in newly emerging African nations for example, is a key impetus for the recruitment of more women into policing. Important changes brought about by Equalities policy and legislation throughout established democracies in Western Europe, the US and Australia have also contributed much to the progression of women into mainstream policing in latter part of the twentieth century (Brown, 2007; Natarajan, 2008).

Women in England & Wales began their work in policing in a separate women's sphere in the Women's Police Service (WPS). It was only in 1975 that the police organisation disbanded the WPS and integrated women into its ranks. The idea that integration would automatically improve women's situation and bring about equality however, did not materialise. Relatively little was done to prepare the police service to become a gender-integrated organisation in the aftermath of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and much has been written about the disjuncture between policy and practice in the decades that followed, with studies reporting discrimination and sexual harassment as consistent features of policewomen's experiences. Sexist jokes, the use of derogatory language, deliberate sexual contact, differential deployments, blocked promotions, and the allocation of 'safer' station assignments are all indicative of women's discriminatory experiences of policing over the course of the twentieth century (see Brown, 1997 for a good review of this). Conceived of as a moment of progress and gain for women,



a number of commentators have observed the considerable and simultaneous losses experienced in the movement to integration. In a review of career advancement during this time, Brown (2008) argues that women officers fared worse in achieving promotion when compared to men. She suggests that this was because women were now competing against the total number of eligible officers instead of being considered in terms of the number of appropriately qualified women from the previously separate Police Women's Department. Women who had reached senior positions in the separate policewomen's service were forced to relinquish them as they joined forces with men. Such findings are echoed in the work of Schulz (1995) and Miller (1999) who record the double-edged impact that integration and the move to patrol in the late 1960s was to bring to policewomen in the US. In securing the transition into mainstream policing, many policewomen were to turn their back on their traditional roles. Schulz (1995, p.1) notes that in the movement toward equality, policewomen were 'forced to reject their history...[and] repudiate their past'. Brown and Heidensohn (2000, p.4) concur describing the move towards integration as '... the striking of a somewhat Faustian bargain' with the price of admittance resulting in a loss of a radical agenda and the acceptance of male definitions and methods of control.

But that was then, this is now. We now exist in a post-rights democratic culture in which the main tenets of equality have been enshrined and embedded into macro and micro structures, into organisational and everyday discourse — a discourse that suggests that the major battles encountered by women have been fought and won. We are now living in a reality identified as 'the post-feminist era', a space in which girls who have benefited from an equalities policy discourse are 'mobilised as the embodiment of the values of a new meritocracy' (McRobbie, 2012, p58). It is here that the young woman more particularly has been released from any constraints. Constructed as the 'can do' girl, if she just works hard and long enough, she can do it, anything is possible.... she is a privileged subject, independent, self-reliant and 'empowered' (Harris, 2004 cited in McRobbie, 2012, pp. 58-60). This is a world in which 'all things are equal now' and a world in which there is no more need for an ideology such as feminism. Twenty first century girls and women no longer work within a framework of feminism but through a framework of modernisation — the

project of 'Gender Mainstreaming' — the process of integrating the aims of gender equality and women's rights into the agendas, policies, and practices of governments and organisations. In describing gender mainstreaming, McRobbie (2012, p.152) asserts that it is best thought of as a:

non-conflictual accommodating kind of programme.... [whose]...vocabulary is modern, managerial and professional, a programmatic approach, with all kinds of tools for evaluation and assessment of outcomes which can be rolled out as good practice within corporate as well as state and public sector institutions.

Alongside other public sector organisations, the police service in England and Wales has done much over the past decade to mainstream gender into its activities, through the development of a series of evaluation tools and good practice measures. Through such activity, the structural obstacles that women police so often described in their history of struggle appear to have been dismantled and women can be found engaged in a range of policing tasks and ranks previously closed to them. Above all else, the transformative possibilities of recruiting a diverse police workforce are increasingly being recognised in England and Wales and beyond as an opportunity to substantially reform and reconfigure policing for the better, bringing about improvements to both *internal* dynamics within policing and to external interactions with communities (Silvestri et al, 2013).

WOMEN POLICE: A TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITY OR A RESPONSE TO CRISIS?

A recent joint report published by ACPO, APA and the Home Office, *Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy for the Police Service* (2010) outlines a number of benefits in relation to the recruitment of a more diverse police workforce. These include the potential to achieve: a broader range of information for decision-making and a wider range of possible solutions; a willingness to challenge established ways of thinking and consider new options; improvements in the overall quality of the team; better staff management, leading to improvements in staff satisfaction; a reduction in the number of employees leaving the service,



and fewer grievances and complaints; and better relationships with the community, resulting in a more effective service and better quality services, leading to increased public confidence.

In an era where the emphasis on service in policing has become paramount, evidence suggests that women may have a positive impact on shifting policing philosophy away from a crime control to a community and citizen-focused approach. Women officers demonstrate a strong 'service oriented' commitment to policing, emphasising communication, familiarity and the building of trust and rapport with communities (Brown and Woolfenden, 2011; Davies and Thomas, 2003; Heidensohn, 1992; Fleming & McLaughlin, 2010). Miller (1999) found that women police are perceived as 'friendly and service oriented' by members of their communities. Brown *et al.* (2009) present evidence to demonstrate that the members of the community recognise the value of an increased representation of women and the importance of a more diverse police service, expressing preferences for women police to deal with victims and missing persons. The Patten Report (1999) in Northern Ireland has also emphasised the positive effect of having a much higher proportion of women officers on enhancing the effectiveness of policing within the community.

In relation to their enactment of everyday practices, specifically, interacting with and apprehending potential or actual perpetrators of crime, research shows that, when compared to men, women police appear to be less 'trigger happy' and much less likely use deadly force (Brown and Langan, 2001; McElvain and Kposowa, 2008; Waugh *et al.*, 1998), utilise threats, physical restraint, force and arrest (Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Shuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005). In a study of conflict management, Braithwaite & Brewer (1998) found that male officers were twice as likely as female officers to engage in threatening behaviour and physical contact with members of the public, which in turn elicited greater resistance and aggression. Such findings appear to provide explanations for evidence which demonstrates that women are less likely to abuse their power and attract complaints and allegations of misconduct (Brereton, 1999; Corsianos, 2011; Lonsway, Wood and Spillar, 2002). Waugh *et al.* (1998) found that male police attracted two and a half times as many allegations of assault as female police. Moreover, successive inquiries into corruption and police misconduct in Australia have concluded that there is a direct

association between increasing the number of women police officers and reducing levels of corruption (Fleming & Lafferty, 2003).

Positive outcomes in relation to policewomen's enactments of police practices can also be found in relation to their interactions with victims of crime, particularly those that have experienced sexual offences and domestic violence. Research by Brown and King (1998); Page (2007) and Schuller and Stewart (2000) found that women police officers are more likely to believe victims, attribute less blame to the victim and be less accepting of rape myths than their male counterparts. Research by Rabe-Hemp (2008, 2009) also suggests that women officers bring a high level of empathy in serving the needs of women and children, especially those that have been subject to violent or sexual abuse. Using data collected by a large scale observational project on the impact of officer gender on police response to domestic violence, Sun (2007) found that whilst there was no significant difference between female and male officers in their exercise of control actions towards citizens, there is some evidence to support the link between officer gender and non-coercive actions. Such findings are echoed in a recent review of global policing which has emphasised the positive effects of women for police conduct and police-community interactions, in the management and de-escalation of conflict situations and in the support for victims of crime (Brown *et al.*, 2014).

The extent to which the call for more women police stems from an appreciation of the benefits outlined above remains a contested point. More cynically perhaps, the call for more women might be better understood as an attempt to re-balance a loss in police legitimacy in times of crisis. Plagued by a series of high profile events and chief officer resignations in England and Wales, the past decade has witnessed a growing disquiet over the failures of police leaders and of the need to transform and diversify the police workforce, particularly those working in leadership (Condon, 1997; HMIC, 1996; HMIC, 1999). The race to appoint a new London Metropolitan Police Commissioner in September 2011 serves as a good example here. In July 2011, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, told the House of Commons that the system for producing police leaders was 'too closed', and that '*There are too few, and arguably too similar, candidates applying for the top jobs*'. Following widespread media speculation over who might succeed Sir



Paul Stephenson, the lack of women and ethnic minority officers in the frame for this leadership role became unashamedly apparent. The appointment of Sir Bernard Hogan Howe from an all-male short list served once more to emphasise the lack of diversity at the top of British policing — no women or black or ethnic minority candidates applied for the job. This is not to suggest that women were not encouraged to come forward, indeed, London Mayor Boris Johnson clearly favoured the appointment of a woman to the top job, suggesting that this is precisely what policing needed. In predicting possible successors, The Evening Standard (19th July 2011) newspaper ran a double spread feature on potential female candidates entitled *'Can these women save the Met? Restoring trust lies with senior females'*.

Such calls for more women to 'clean up' policing have become a familiar mantra in times of crises, controversies and 'integrity lapses'. This is nothing new; rather it is a recurring theme in women's engagement with policing. As noted earlier, historical reflection demonstrates that a discourse of 'crisis' has served as an important impetus for the recruitment of women into policing. Heidensohn (1992; 2000) reminds us that at moments of crisis the police service often turn to women as 'a desperate remedy' to offset staffing shortages, avert criticism, as an antidote to corruption or symbolically to demonstrate a softer side to policing. The same can be seen in Australia where the movement towards gender equality owes much to organisational crises, with official reports pointing to the direct association between increasing the number of women police officers and reducing the levels of complaints against the police organisation (Fleming & Lafferty, 2003). Increasing women's presence in policing in this respect forms a crucial strategy in professionalising the police. In these cases *'women are "allowed in" at particular historical points when agencies wish to (re)legitimise their practices'* (Prenzler & Wimhurst, 1996, p.16). The appointment of South Africa's first female police chief, Mangwashi Victoria Phiyega in 2012, has also been firmly located within such discourses, being cited as *'South Africa's hope, the saviour of the nation's corruption-riddled, scandal-plagued police service'* (The Guardian, 13 June, 2012). Though not the focus of this paper, it is worth noting briefly here, such a characterisation of women's transformative potential is dangerous, not least because it inevitably has a tendency to essentialise all women (and by implication men), but it assumes that women will not only

bring something different to the work of policing but that they bring something 'better'. This is not necessarily a good place to campaign for more women in policing; rather, the benefits of recruiting more women into policing are best aligned to securing equity, social justice and legitimacy (see Dick *et al.*, 2013 for a fuller discussion of this debate). With equalities law and policy firmly established, together with a recognition by police organisations that gender balance is important, both to the work of policing and to securing greater legitimacy with communities, what do contemporary studies tell us about women's experiences in policing?

CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES?

Despite showing an upward trend in the number of women police, closer inspection suggests a more cautious reading is necessary here. If we locate where women are positioned within the rank structure, it becomes strikingly clear that things are nowhere near equal. The number of women working in police leadership remains low with women forming only 18 % of those officers ranked Chief Inspector or higher. Such figures remain a key concern, particularly given that research commissioned by the British Association of Women Police (BAWP) in 2006 suggests a 35 % representation of female officers is necessary for adequate progression and cultural integration. Women fare no better in policing systems across the world. Indeed one of the striking truisms about policing is that issues of gender transgress national boundaries. Despite jurisdictional differences in policing systems, there are clear parallels in relation to gendered experiences, with women police in England and Wales sharing much in common with their European and more global counterparts. In a rare international review of the progression and integration of women in policing, Van Ewijk (2012) notes that there is no evidence of a fully integrated police organisation where women represent 50 % of the officer workforce and enjoy an equivalent share of the full range of roles and ranks within the police hierarchy. Rather, in most developed democracies it seems that the percentage of sworn women police remains under 25 % and for the most part, appears to have reached a plateau. For women in non-democratic or emerging democracies, they remain grossly under-represented (Natarajan, 2008). The stark lack of women in senior positions is also replicated across jurisdictions (Brown *et al.*,





2013; Prenzler & Sinclair, 2013; Fischbach *et al.*, 2013).

So how do we reconcile the continued absence of women in policing in the 21st century? To what extent has the struggle so characteristic of early women's experiences in policing been eradicated in this new landscape? Do contemporary policewomen experience the same resistance and struggle as their historic counterparts have before them? What are the barriers that stand in the way of their full participation and progression within policing? Any attempt to address these questions requires much more than a simple examination of the number of women engaged in policing. Here the issue of gender equality goes beyond the numeric; for not only do men dominate in terms of their number, but policing — as a kind of power over time — in all forms and aspects remains embedded in notions of 'masculinities' (Barrie & Broomhall, 2012). It is from such a cultural starting point that a more nuanced analysis of change and continuity can emerge.

A CULT OF MASCULINITY(IES)

The presence of a 'cult of masculinity' has been a central element to the study of police culture (Fielding, 1994; Reiner, 2010; Westmarland, 2001). Indeed much of the opposition to women's entry and progression over the last century in policing has been firmly located within such a concept. In deciphering the 'cult of masculinity', Fielding (1994) argues that its stereotypical values of aggression, physicality, competitiveness and its exaggerated heterosexual orientation, may be read as an almost pure form of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987). At the heart of this discourse is a narrative that constructs women through a language of deficits, conceiving of women as lacking in physicality necessary for police work. With the perception that police work involves strength, action and danger, the concept of physicality becomes a defining element of the 'cult of masculinity' and so the work of policing becomes securely defined as 'men's work'. As Heidensohn (1992, p.73) notes: '[A]n elision which is frequently made [is that] coercion requires force which implies physique and hence policing by men'. In turn, women's lack of success is often justified on the grounds of women's unsuitability with the demands of the job, their contributions being perceived in terms of 'deficits' (Heidensohn, 1994). The policewomen's

perceived lack of physical presence, tough physique and, above all masculinity, are used as rational and legitimate reasons for their exclusion. The lack of physical strength and the ensuing problems in violent situations remains a consistent justification offered by policemen for women's continued differential deployment and their negative view of policewomen. While the 'cult of masculinity' remains a valuable frame within which to understand some women's experiences of policing, its explanatory power holds less value when trying to make sense of the lack of women in senior ranks. My argument is a simple one: the 'cult of masculinity' so often used to explain women's negative experiences and lack of progression in policing does not possess sufficient explanatory power for making sense of the experiences of women who hold rank in policing. The 'cult of masculinity' to which we have become so routinely accustomed characterises and refers predominantly to the culture of those at the bottom, the male rank-and-file.

With police leaders perhaps the least likely to be called upon to exhibit physical displays of strength and prowess, it could be assumed that on achieving rank, women will no longer endure hostility, discrimination and exclusion as they no longer face the demands of physicality in the same way as their rank-and-file counterparts. Yet research has emphasised continuities in the resistance and struggle faced by contemporary women police leaders in being accepted by their male peers and superiors (Silvestri, 2003; 2006; 2007). As women progress through the ranks, Silvestri argues that they join new circles, new groups, each with their own distinct set of behavioural prescriptions and each with their own set of gendered identities. Senior policewomen continue to face a gendered environment where masculinity persists; this time, however, they are faced with a different kind of masculinity one where physicality is less obvious, but where traits associated with 'managerial' masculinity dominates. Conceived of as a 'smart macho' culture, Silvestri argues that the organisational restructuring and the reduction of management posts appears to have strengthened the predominantly male culture of long working hours, aggressive and competitive behaviour remains. Interview data with senior policewomen indicate that the culture of police management demands quick decision-making and decision-makers; the transformational approach takes too long and is therefore perceived to be ineffective when performed by women. There is a tacit



understanding among women leaders that using more participatory and consultative approaches does not count towards building a suitable profile for becoming a police leader. Senior policewomen interviewed pointed to the emergence of a new managerial culture in policing, highly performance-driven and preoccupied with meeting performance indicators and targets. This new management style promotes a form of 'competitive masculinity' that encourages:

'a way of relating to the world wherein everything becomes an object of, and for, control... [which] generates and sustains a hierarchy imbued with instrumentalist, careerism, and the language of success, emulates competition linked to decisive action, productivism and risk taking' (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, p.67).

The effects of being perceived as not being 'tough' enough or 'quick thinking' enough for the demands of management and leadership hold serious consequences for women engaged in developing alternative conceptions of police leadership (often associated with transformative leadership). Women adopting alternative styles come to be labelled not as progressive or innovative, but as weak, passive, over-sensitive and unable to withstand the rigours and demands required of the police leader — again 'outsiders' to the real project of policing (Silvestri, 2003).

A GENDERED CAREER LADDER

Closer examination of the police career itself also provides additional clues to understanding the struggle experienced by contemporary policewomen. Following the earlier work of Kanter (1977) and Cockburn (1988) it was Joan Acker (1990) who developed one of the first systematic attempts to theorise the processes through which organisations and occupations are gendered at both institutional and individual levels. In her influential paper '*Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organisations*', Acker argues that organisations are arenas in which both gender and sexuality have been obscured through gender-neutral, asexual discourses, concealing the embodied elements of work. As a result, job positions and management

hierarchies assume a universal, disembodied worker. For Acker, the bureaucratic organisation has a 'gendered substructure', that is, the social practices that are generally understood to constitute an 'organisation' rest on certain gendered processes and assumptions. In defining this substructure, she notes that:

'The gendered substructure lies in the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, in the rules prescribing workplace behaviour and in the relations linking work places to living places. These practices and relations, encoded in arrangements and rules, are supported by assumptions that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has the first claim on the worker' (Acker, 1990, p.255).

It is within this gendered substructure that the 'ideal worker' is routinely constructed and reproduced and it becomes obvious that organisational designs and established norms are far closer to men's lives and assumptions about men, than to women's lives and the assumptions made about women. It is men's bodies, men's sexuality and men's relationships to procreation and production that are subsumed in the image of the disembodied worker. Acker's ideas provide an important framework for examining the police career. The very way in which police work is organised and structured carries the dominant meanings of police work that have been embedded and carried over time. Whilst appearing to offer its workforce a gender-neutral career ladder within which to advance, it becomes clear that progression within policing is premised on an 'ideal' type of worker. A *recurring* obstacle for the retention and progression of women in policing lies in its working patterns, and whilst the police service has done much to acknowledge this barrier through the development of part time and flexible working arrangements, the police career in England and Wales remains bound by a century old career model. Unlike some of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe and the rest of the world, Britain operates a single entry system of recruitment with all officers without exception beginning their careers as constables (¹). From here, career advancement is achieved through climbing a highly structured career ladder through a series of ranks. The ideology of internal recruitment together with a rank-

(¹) This looks set to be modified following the recent proposal to introduce direct/multi-point entry to the police service as outlined in the Winsor Report (2012).



governed progression system tells us much about the importance that the police organisation and its members attach to the importance of 'time serving'. The strict linear career model together with the continued importance it attaches to time served holds serious consequences for all officers but impacts in a particularly damning way for women. Whilst the police service may provide opportunities for part-time and flexible working (and can therefore demonstrate progress in the name of equality), senior policewomen interviewed by Silvestri (2003) remained sceptical of the possibility of engaging with such alternative working practices. Their narratives suggest a strong awareness that utilising alternative working patterns do not count towards the profile of earning or demonstrating either 'credibility' or 'commitment' in the journey to the top. On the contrary, it is an 'uninterrupted, long and full time career' profile that counts in building an identity in police leadership. The 'irresolvable conflict' that exists between balancing family commitments and a career in policing remains a major barrier for women in policing with research continuing to stress that officers working part-time or flexibly are perceived as less professional and less committed, which in turn, affects the promotion aspirations and opportunities of policewomen (Charlesworth & Whittenbury, 2007; Dick & Cassell, 2002; Fischbach *et al.*, 2013). Constructed as being 'ever-available' and without family commitments, such an identity is justified through the conception of 'real' policing and police work and it is here that the male identity of the 'ideal' officer is upheld, assured and preserved.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The past century has been a mixed one for women working in policing. There have been a number of important and welcome changes in equalities policy and substantial inroads have been made to advancement and position of women in policing. At the same time, there is evidence of the considerable *continuities*, ingrained and enduring features of the masculine ethos that has shaped the police career over time and across place. Characterised by moments of *progression* and *regression*, *gains* and *losses* (often simultaneously felt) are an enduring theme of women's experiences of policing over time. The history of struggle so often used to describe early policewomen's experiences of policing is not confined to the past but rather can be seen in the

present. Through the dominant mantra that 'all things are equal now' and the process of gender mainstreaming (and its association with progress), it is easy to fail to recognise the simultaneous 'undoing' of gender and regression inherent in this process. It is true that policewomen in England & Wales no longer face or experience the visible and audible hostility of the past; they do, however, continue to experience the processes of gendered inclusion and exclusion — albeit in more subtle ways. Despite a discourse that suggests otherwise, the police career continues to be remarkably resilient to change.

Women have now been afforded opportunities to compete on equal terms with men for promotion to senior management positions and while gender alone is no longer a barrier to even the most senior police management position, the characteristics required of leaders in this new order may be leaving their mark. Rather than representing an opportunity for change, organisational restructuring and the reduction of management posts appears to have strengthened the predominantly male culture of long working hours, aggressive and competitive behaviour, maintaining gendered identities in the police organisation. In this context policewomen often have to make stark choices between pursuing promotion and fulfilling commitments outside of work. The contemporary policewoman continues to struggle, this time, however, she has no recourse to claim that structures are not in place — after all, gender has been mainstreamed and a system of checks is now routinely part and parcel of organisational life. The 'can do' woman, so symbolic of the 21st century, is independent and empowered and if she does not remain or progress within policing, then the problem is seen to reside within her as an individual and not as part of the ongoing and recurring constraints posed by the structural and cultural elements within policing, which for the most part remain unhindered by policies of gender mainstreaming.

In her analysis of police culture, Loftus (2010) suggests that claims regarding transformation and change within policing have been exaggerated and overstated. The ongoing public and police preoccupation with crime and crime control reflect the continuing dominance of a masculine ethos within the police occupational culture. As does the continued 'male' advantage inherent in the structuring of the police career itself (Silvestri, 2003; 2006). And things look set to get worse. Recent findings in 2013 from the



Independent Police Commission on the Future of Policing, for example, indicate a possible moment of regression, with four in 10 women police officers having considered leaving the force because of low morale and concerns regarding flexible working and childcare considerations (Dick *et al.*, 2013).

Current climates of 'economic constraint' austerity 'and 'bureaucracy reduction' serve to perpetuate the problem further. Since the formation of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in May 2010, we have seen the articulation, and now enactment, of a different approach to tackling equality. Rather than continuing to develop equality architecture, a move to deregulate and cut bureaucracy has seen the government restrict rather than build on existing state institutions and weaken legal provisions. As the policing landscape becomes radically reorganised with fewer officers and reduced opportunities for promotion, cultures of insecurity and competition are enabled to flourish,

as individuals and groups compete against one another for scarce opportunities and resources. There is evidence of a dismantling of support structures within policing, with cuts being made to national police support associations working in the area of diversity and reduced investment to address diversity and equality issues (Laverick, 2012). Such change poses further evidence of an 'undoing' of gender in a time of progress. The importance of staff networks was fundamental in the successes of early women police. Heidensohn (2000) reminds us of the importance of 'organising' and 'collective action', noting that national and international alliances and networks that women forged throughout the twentieth century were instrumental in developing their roles and their cause. With developments in globalisation and increasing attention on international trafficking, the conditions are in place for a greater mobilisation around the representation of women in policing — the challenge for police organisations across the world will be to respond.

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