

Women in Policing

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ABSTRACT: *This article outlines the history of women in American law enforcement. The author interviewed female police officers who worked with city and county agencies in the Texas Panhandle. Qualitative interviews were conducted with two high-ranking female officers in Massachusetts and California. Results determine women in the profession have overcome many obstacles but have not achieved complete equality.*

History

In law enforcement women have advanced far beyond the days when they were called matrons. The first matron was employed by the New York City Police Department in 1845 (National Center for Women and Policing [NCWP], 2005). They oversaw the women's quarters in jails after the city was pressured by the American Female Moral Reform Society to hire women (Wormer & Bartollas, 2007). Their jobs included accompanying women to and from the detention center, keeping the detention area clean and orderly, making sure women in custody received good care and taking them to and from court (Higgins, 1951).

In the late 1800's the Chicago Police Department hired Mary Owens whose husband was killed in the line of duty. Since there were no death benefits for a widow, they hired her out of sympathy and memory to her husband (NCWP, 2005). Owens worked mostly with the women and children during her thirty years of service and was one of the first women given arrest powers (NCWP, 2005).

In the early 1900s Lola Baldwin was given police powers involving the supervision of several social workers who were helping the Portland, Oregon Police Department during the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair (Higgins, 1951). She was the first woman to work as a sworn police officer in the United States (Cole, 1989). When the city created the Department of Public Safety for the Protection Young Girls and Women in 1905, Baldwin was appointed the director of the program (NCWP, 2005).

In 1910 Alice Stebbin Wells was the first woman officially to be given the title "policewoman" (Wormer & Bartollas, 2007). She was hired by the Los Angeles Police Department as a detective after she petitioned the mayor for the job (Los Angeles Police Department [LAPD], 2008). She was portrayed in newspapers as a masculine

woman who carried a revolver and wore an unflattering uniform. Regardless of her appearance, Wells opened doors for women in law enforcement (Wormer & Bartollas, 2007). Policewomen in the 1920s were seen as having a specific job, one that would rely on the maternal instincts of a woman. Their duties included a runaway child asleep on the park bench at dawn, the mother whose child was beaten by a drunken father and the young girl rescued from a house of prostitution (Pigeon, 1927). Women were supposedly "trained" for those types of assignments (Pigeon, 1927). While most agencies have a policy in place to prevent any type of harassment it is still a big issue in law enforcement and not just in a sexual nature (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 1998). Police officers, both managers and normal male officers, share a myth of policing as action-filled, exciting, adventurous, and dangerous (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). However, the real truth is that police work involves much more paperwork than crime fighting or violence (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). But, even though male police officers know this they still cling to the image of police officers as crime fighters and downplay the femininely-labeled aspects of the job, such as paperwork and social service (Prokos & Padavic, 2002). But a woman's presence and competent performance of the masculine aspects of the job mean that the job can no longer be portrayed as just a "man's job." The "good ole' boy" network is alive and well in some departments.

In the 1970s the percentage of women in law enforcement was only at 2% (Price, 1996). In 1991 women accounted for only 9% of law enforcement agencies (Price, 1996). In 2001 the National Center for Women and Policing reported only 12.7% of all sworn personnel in larger agencies were women (Price, 1996). Most enter the profession because of personal contact and support of pro-law enforcement individuals or groups (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). They will do anything to make a female law enforcement officers' life on the job miserable.

However, a survey of departments in the nation's 50 largest cities revealed women comprised only 7.1% of high ranking positions (Dunham & Alpert, 2005), which demonstrates a forward but slow progress.

Equal, or Not Equal? That is the Question

Being a woman in law enforcement is not easy. It remains a predominantly male profession that does not easily accept them. There is a general agreement as to why men have a problem with women. They think women possess inherent physical and emotional weaknesses. They are seen as less powerful, less trained and less willing to use force than male officers; and they are considered too soft (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007).

I remember the process I went through to become a law enforcement officer. Officers go through rigorous testing prior to being hired. First, everyone interested in a law enforcement career must pass a written test that assesses not only their mental and cognitive abilities. If one scores within a certain percentile one is requested to take an agility and endurance test. The prospective recruit must run an agility course, climb a six foot fence, jump a six foot solid wall, drag a 150 pound dead weight dummy, and run 150 yards. Some even require sit-up and push-up tests. All these tests are timed and better times receive higher scores. Most men can easily pass such tests because upper body strength is necessary for most of them. As a result the agility and endurance test seem geared toward men rather than women.

If one passes the agility test one is requested to take a series of psychological tests and background checks. The psychological tests are completed in one day and the results are available in a few days. However, background checks take anywhere from six months to a year. Since I was a female and the agency needed female officers my psychological tests results were expedited. My tests and interviews took less than two hours to complete. The county pushed me through the physical and mental tests along with a drug test and oral interview in less than two hours. My background took around two months since I did not have anything that presented a problem. Once completed, I was accepted to the police academy for basic training.

The police academy was a miserable place. Academies are especially so when they belong to the agency for which a recruit works. These academies tend to be harder on their own and they are especially hard on female recruits. There were five females in my class of thirty-two. When time came to learn restraining techniques I was

the only female who had to fight a male recruit. Since I was the tallest and largest woman in our class the instructors probably thought I could handle it. Nevertheless, I wondered how the other women were supposed to know how it felt to fight a man? It seemed as though they were treating them softer than me. Our class graduated with all the females intact and minus two men who failed out.

Prejudice remains beyond the academy. For example, I worked in a mountain community. Our station employed six female officers but two male sergeants that did not like working with us. They felt they had to make their positions and masculinity known, thereby creating a hostile work environment. Crude jokes are common in police departments. It is one way all officers relieve stress after an emotion or physical situation ends. However, these make officers harassed female coworkers far more than males whether or not a crime had occurred or we did our jobs. To prevent these situations all of us were more careful about performing our tasks "by the book"—responding appropriately to situations. We did our job and had our reports in on time. I transferred stations following an incident that could have resulted in injury because a sergeant decided a response to a known "wind" alarm was more important than providing support for me at the scene of a possible robbery. He left me alone and went with the male deputy instead. Luckily I was competent enough to wait and watch before going in and realized it was not a robbery.

The Survey

A potential problem in law enforcement agencies can be sexual harassment. It comes in many forms and can cause recruitment problems if an agency is known for harassment. In 2007 the researcher surveyed female law enforcement officers who work in 23 counties and 48 cities in the Texas Panhandle. In-person interviews were conducted after the results were tabulated. The main idea of the survey was to find solutions to the female recruitment issues plaguing area law enforcement agencies. However for this paper, the recruitment issues were removed as only the harassment issues were pertinent, along with how the public and male officers felt about women in policing.

The first five questions dealt with race, years in law enforcement, rank, educational achievement and their reasons for choosing law enforcement career. The next five centered on their experiences and knowledge of law enforcement. They were asked questions about: harassment and overcoming it, how they are viewed by their

Figure 1. Racial Self-Identification

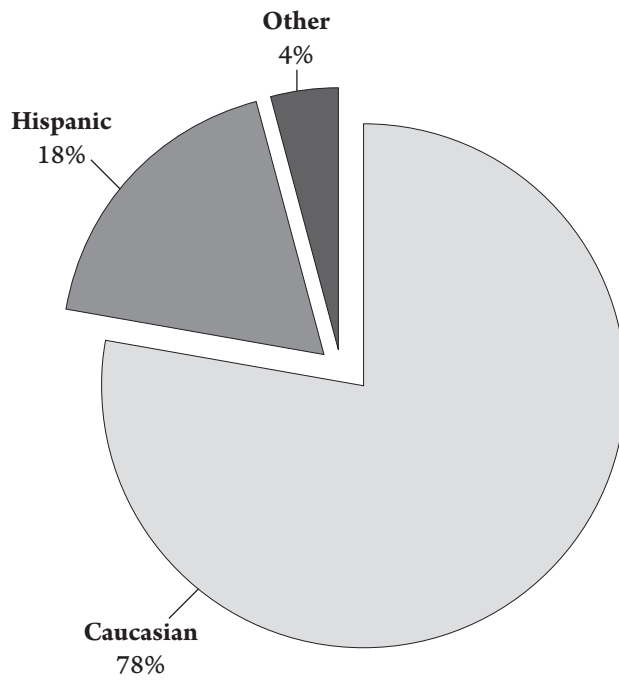


Figure 2. Ranks

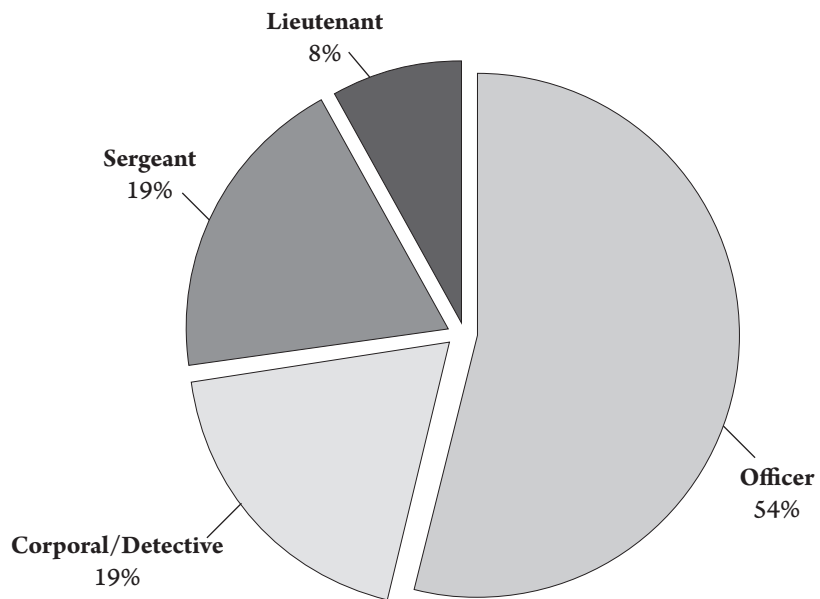


Figure 3. Years in Law Enforcement

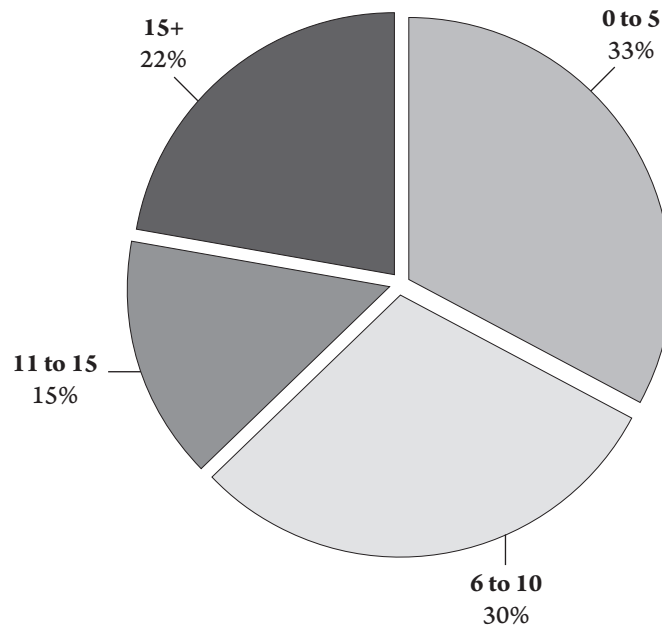
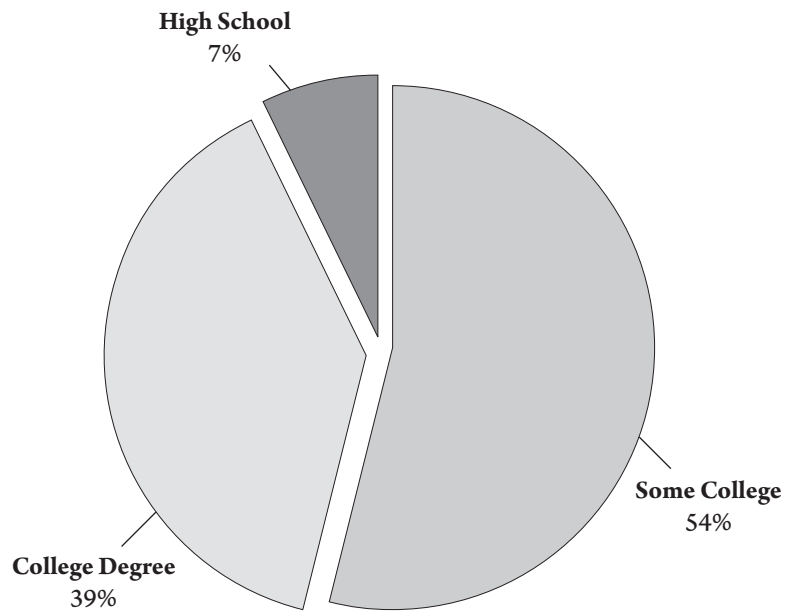


Figure 4. Education Level



peers, how they feel about women in law enforcement, and if more is expected of female than male officers, their perception about law enforcement being a “man’s job,” and advice for women entering the profession.

Most female officers had some college level education or held a degree (see Figure 4). As a career, most female officers have one of the following reasons for choosing law enforcement. A few reported their interest in law enforcement that influenced their career choice. Some wrote it was their desire to help people while others went into the profession for financial security. Most spoke of wanting to make a difference in the lives of others and that law enforcement helped accomplish this.

In regards to sexual harassment, 40.7% stated they had problems, while 59.3% said they had no harassment problems (see Figure 5). The officers who answered “Yes” to the harassment question had the option of answering how they overcame the situations. One chose to ignore the situation and did not report it. Another officer stated she was labeled a whistleblower and the situation was turned to make her out to be the aggressor. No action was taken with the actual aggressor and the officer was humiliated about the situation. Some stood their ground and voiced their concerns to make the situations stop. Others had to go as far as file grievances to get something accomplished. When situations like harassment arise, a department needs to make changes to make sure the changes do not hinder recruitment.

Besides harassment, one has to deal with their peers and coworkers. Coworkers are very important in law enforcement. They are the ones that see how an officer’s work ethic and values effect their working environment. Officers know what their coworkers are going through, just not on a professional basis, but in their personal lives. As a female, peers can help or hinder your place in the agency. They can be your friend or your enemy. Female officers stated there were no problems with discrimination and they are treated like family, equals and one of the guys. Some have had problems with their peers, stating issues such as not being seen as equal until they prove themselves and it being hard to keep the respect once you have earned it. They stated they did not believe it was the same for their male counterparts; the respect was always there until they did something to betray it.

When posing the question of how some females view other women in law enforcement, female officers tended to be harder on their female counterparts than they are towards the males. Women need to prove they can do the job just as well as the males and other females can change that attitude if they slack or mess up on the job. Most fe-

Figure 5. Problems with Harrassment

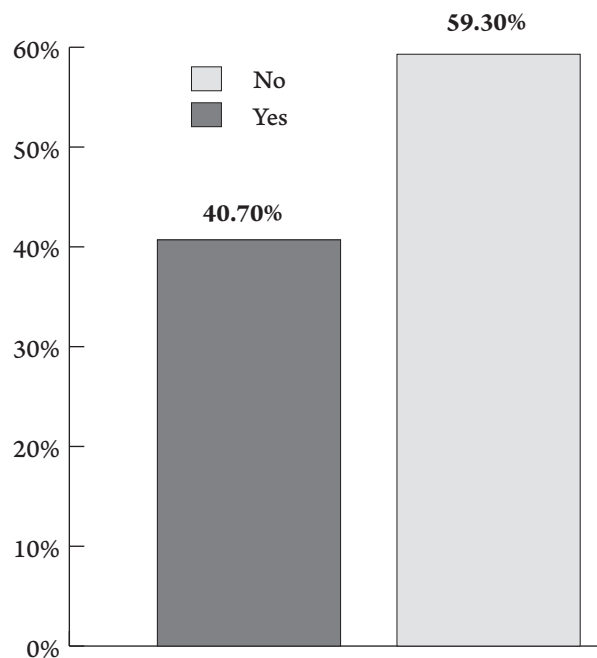


Figure 6. “Is More Expected of Women in Law Enforcement?”

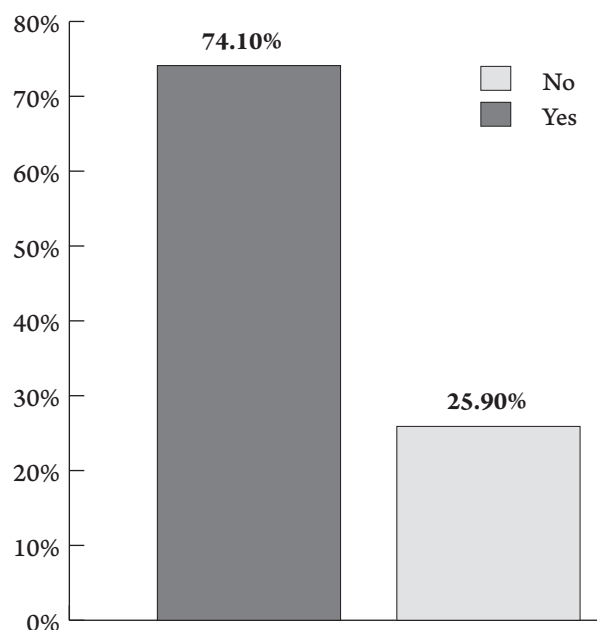
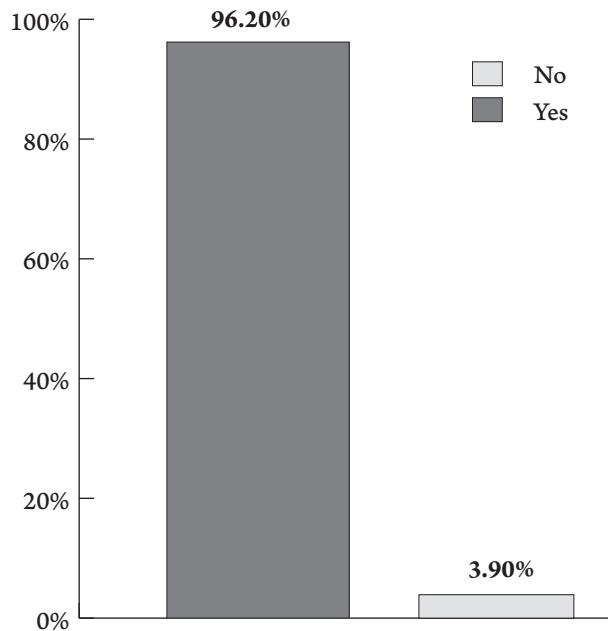


Figure 7. Awareness of the Number of Other Women Employed by Agency



males feel women should be in law enforcement if they can meet the goals set for the agency. They should not think that they need special treatment or that they will not be asked to do certain tasks because they are female.

The biggest drawback to women in law enforcement is their general lack of physical strength as compared to a man; a problem that was apparent in the preparation for the academy. On the brighter side, females stated there is a definite need for more women in law enforcement. They feel women have more to offer to law enforcement besides brawn. Women tend to handle situations better and sometimes there are calls in which a woman would be better suited to managing. People tend to see women as mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers, so it is easier to talk to them. Women are viewed as less confrontational, patient and do not require constant validation of their police position.

When it came to considering whether more was expected of them since they were females, 74.1% said no and 25.9% said yes (see Figure 6).

The female officers felt the public still views it as a man's job, making it harder for them to do their job (see Figure 7). Females felt there were gender issues when dealing with certain races. Some races feel women are beneath them and they look down upon them; for them dealing with a female officer can be difficult. It is impor-

tant to change this view and show how strong females are in the profession.

Interviews

The first interview was conducted with Chief Inspector Kathleen O'Toole of the Garda Inspectorate for the Republic of Ireland. She has 28 years experience in law enforcement, which include being the first female Police Commissioner of the Boston Police Department. The second interview was with Captain Valerie Tanguay, one of the few female captains with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. Both officers have been or are working for large departments. They discussed what is needed to help women in law enforcement.

Chief Inspector Kathleen O'Toole

O'Toole became a police officer on a dare while she was a law student. She thought it would be an interesting opportunity to see the law from a different perspective and had only intended to do it for a few years. (personal communication, August 30, 2007)

Harassment has not been a big issue in her career. She dealt with subtle harassment from disgruntled employees or from people she's competed against for promotions. A few of them attempted to sabotage her, but she felt that happens to most people in the profession. She was able to overcome this by trying to confront the situations head-on in an honest, direct and transparent way. She did not allow them to deter her in any way. O'Toole felt these situations made her stronger and more determined.

Her advancement, she contends, was due to her competitiveness, even as a child she was competitive. She thought she could make more of a difference by attaining higher ranks. But she adds that the police officers on the ground have always been her true heroes. "They're the ones who make the greatest difference," she said. O'Toole was blessed with great opportunities, but her favorite part of the job was as a patrol officer.

Her peers and subordinates, she says, hopefully view her as principled, caring and capable. She can name her enemies on one hand; they are people she as either disciplined or competed against for promotions or appointments.

When it comes to females in law enforcement, she thinks it's fantastic, and it is hard to even imagine policing without women. Today, a police agency should be diverse and reflect the community it serves. O'Toole has

high expectations of women in law enforcement and has tried to be supportive as possible to women in the field. She feels agencies are recruiting better educated, more capable candidates to policing today, which she included both men and women in that category. She thinks that bodes well for the future.

She feels there are fewer disadvantages today than there were before for women. Much progress has been made, but every department is different. It usually depends on the leadership. Women have done very well in organizations with strong, progressive leaders. No doubt some feel it is still perceived as a “man’s job,” but most people value women in policing now. People routinely see women police officers now and she thinks they are being readily accepted.

O’Toole’s advice is strong: pursue your education, work hard and identify strong mentors.

Captain Valerie Tanguay

The second interview was with Valerie Tanguay (personal communication, 17 July, 2007). Her career in law enforcement started out as a college freshman majoring in criminal justice. She was first hired as a records clerk, which allowed her to have a glimpse of what law enforcement was all about. She was able to see firsthand what “real cops” did. They were not like *Charlie’s Angels*. She was “promoted” to dispatcher and was able to go on ride-alongs, participate in evidence collecting and minor report writing, this she says helped prepare her for a career in law enforcement.

Her decision for law enforcement came while she was a junior in high school. Her best friend’s dad was a detective in the local agency. He would tell stories of how he would work his way through investigations, chasing clues and trying to figure out “who dunnit.” She was a Nancy Drew fan and thought the combination of helping people and solving mysteries was exactly the excitement she was looking for. Knowing she had to be twenty-one years old to get into the academy in the State of California, she chose her college major and waited patiently for the calendar pages to turn so she could follow her dream.

Her education includes a BA in criminal justice with a minor in sociology, and a BA in liberal studies. She also holds a teaching credential for elementary school K-3. Tanguay earned the dual degrees so she could have options in case law enforcement did not work for her. She continues with local training and has been working as a facilitator for California’s Peace Officers Standard and Training Supervisory Leadership Institute program for approximately four years. Working through California State University, Long

Beach, the Supervisory Leadership Institute program is an eight-month leadership program for law enforcement Sergeants from throughout California.

She felt she was easily received as a woman in the profession and had very little problems with harassment. Being a part of a Sheriff’s Department, women were needed as ‘jail matrons’. It was when she sought out the patrol side of it that she encountered some ill feelings from the “real cops” who had been working patrol for years. Being among the first women assigned to the high desert, she felt she had to work harder, arrest more people and author better reports than her peers. Perhaps this was self-imposed, but being among the first, she was afraid that her performance would reflect on all women who followed her to the streets. To overcome the ill feelings against her, she focused on being brighter, faster, and better than the men, while maintaining humility. She would not be perceived as a “know it all,” for she felt it would lead to her demise. She had to be accepted as different (based on her gender), but still capable of holding her own with her male counterparts.

While working as a jail deputy she decided advancement was a definite possibility. A fellow female deputy named Sheree Palmerton from New York was an “up and comer” who moved to California. She was seen as bright, talented and with a determination to succeed. She was someone they all knew who would go out and change the world and Tanguay wanted to be part of that world. The two women a competitive alliance, knowing they had to support each other because of the profession’s public perception and their desire to break the “glass ceiling” preventing women from entering higher ranks and administrative positions. Tanguay said she would become the first chief inspector and Palmerton vowed that she would be the first. Tanguay “lost” the bet made so many years ago. Palmerton, now Sheree Stewart, became the first deputy chief in the department in 2005. They are innovators. They forged ahead to make the lives of those who followed easier. These women felt the pressure of being among the first to hold rank, but they did it with confidence, class and determination. They are making a positive difference for the future of the department, and doing it with a woman’s touch.

Her peers and subordinates who do not know her are initially hesitant to work with her. She is hopeful that she has developed the reputation of someone who is firm, fair, and considerate and has enough diversified experience to be credible.

When it comes to other women in law enforcement, she feels they bring a different perspective to the career.

Women solve problems with brains rather than brawn. She feels women have proven that they *can* accomplish more with words than brawn, but women are not afraid to take action when the time comes. Tanguay states there are so many exceptional women who have flooded the law enforcement profession, which continues to enforce that women are here to stay.

While working at the academy as a tactical officer, she had a reputation for being harder on the female recruits than the males. This was true. She was able to recognize that these individuals would face more adversity than the men; they were not gifted with great body strength, and knowing that their gender reflected heavily on the profession as a whole, she was intolerant of “weak” sisters. Her expectations of other females were they had to be smarter, stronger, and emotionally more stable than their counterparts. Even today, as commander, she has to remind herself that “meets standards” is not good enough for all deputies. She loves to hear of great successes of the young women within the department and is much more sensitive to their weaknesses and successes and of the male deputies. But as some have discovered, she is still intolerant of any female who looks unprofessional in uniform.

Tanguay admits she keeps track of how many women come into the department. She gives several examples as to why this is important. Keeping the number of females in the academy at an elevated level equates to more women being able to go out on patrol. Because of minimum staffing levels in corrections, there had to be a one-for-one exchange for the females who were waiting to hit the streets, which meant before a female could enter patrol, there had to be another officer to replace her in the correctional setting. Today Tanguay is more sensitive to women attaining rank; she closely scrutinizes the list of names on the promotional lists to continue to assess the women who are the future of the department.

Tanguay offers the following advice to women interested in law enforcement. Get an education to prove you are smarter and a great value. Go on ride alongs and interview current police officers. Harness your talents. Although many women are not as strong as men physically, they do possess other important skills. Don't be afraid to cry. Seek out advice and guidance of those you respect, both male and female. Most important: Dream! No one can take that away from you. The experience and observations of these interviews gave insight into experiences of women in the law enforcement field. The women showed how others feel about them in their positions and what they did to overcome obstacles along the way. They offer advice on what females in law enforcement need to

be successful in their career and what could be done to improve recruitment, along with what they have done to help the process. Both women are a fine example of women in law enforcement.

Conclusion

Females in law enforcement use a different tactic than men when it comes to policing. They rely less on physical force and more on their communication skill, which results in less potentially violent confrontations. They are also less likely to be involved in excessive force cases and female victims of violence tend to feel more comfortable dealing with female officers than with male officers (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2001). Women tend to get fewer citizens complaints than their male counterparts, causing the department to look good and getting the community to trust them more than they do (Streit, 2001). In a male dominated profession the women tend to promote teamwork and effectiveness within the agency (Harris, 1999). They are dignified, tactful, sensible and sympathetic to situations and good law enforcement officers command respect to all situations they are involved with (Tenny, 1953).

I have encountered many situations in which being a woman really helped me. I was able to diffuse situations that I did not think would turn out well, from suicides to people with guns. Being a woman also helped me to deal with women who were raped and small children who were afraid. They seemed to be able to talk to a female officer more comfortably than talking to a male officer. But I also brought compassion into my job, the need and want to help people and keep them safe. Men always seem to have that rough exterior that does not allow them to let people know they really care about them and what they are going through.

While this research only touches some subjects of women in policing it is evident that women are slowly moving up and have a lot to offer. It is still evident harassment is a problem, not just from the survey results, but personal experiences along with the interviews from the higher ranking females. There is a need for more women in policing, but that is another research paper on its own.

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Appendix A Survey Questions

1. What race are you?
2. How long have you been in law enforcement?
3. What is your current rank?
4. What type of schooling have you had?
5. What made you decide to choose law enforcement as a career?
6. Have you had any problems with any type of harassment?
7. If so, what did you do to overcome the situation?
8. In your own words, how do you feel you are viewed by your peers as a female in law enforcement?
9. How do you feel about women being in law enforcement?
10. Do you think more is expected from a female law enforcement officer?
11. Are you aware of how many female law enforcement personnel are in your department?
12. Do you think the public still views law enforcement as a man's job?
13. What advice would you give to other females interested in a law enforcement career?

Appendix B Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in law enforcement?
2. What made you chose law enforcement as a career?
3. What type of schooling have you had?
4. Have you had any problems with any form of harassment?
5. What did you do to overcome, if any, those situations?
6. What made you decide to take the next step towards advancement?
7. How do you think you are viewed by your peers and subordinates?
8. How do you feel about women being in law enforcement?
9. Do you have high levels of expectations for other women in law enforcement?
10. Do you keep track of how many women are in your department?
11. What do you feel is the problem with recruiting women into the field?
12. Have you made any improvements towards trying to recruit more women?
13. Being a woman yourself, do you feel women are still at a disadvantage in law enforcement?
14. Do you feel people still see law enforcement as a "man's" job?
15. What advice would you give other women trying to get into law enforcement?