PATHWAYS INTO POLICING

– A GENDERED EXPERIENCE?

by

Barbara Ann Stewart B.A.(Hons)

Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies

University of Tasmania

barbaras@utas.edu.au
0437090636

Word count: 2984

Few occupations have been so fully defined as masculine and as resistant to the

integration of women as policing (Martin 1996), but little research has been done on what

motivates women to seek employment in this male dominated occupation. Despite

increased research into women in policing over the past two decades, most studies have

focused on barriers facing women *after* they become officers. The aim of the current

study is to examine whether there are identifiable pathways into policing as a career

choice; whether factors predictive of various pathways can be identified and whether

socialization plays a role in individual perceptions of policing as a suitable career choice.

Further, does a policewoman's gender identity influence her experience of policing i.e. is

there a relationship between 'doing gender' and 'doing policing'? This paper outlines the

results of a survey of male and female constables, and initial findings from interviews

with female constables.

An occupation is considered male-dominated if at least 67% of the employees are male

(Willets-Bloom & Nock 1994:12). In 2003, women officers of all ranks constituted only

18.7% of sworn state police officers (Australian Institute of Criminology 2004). While

policewomen face the same difficulties on the job as their male counterparts, they also

face problems at the organizational and cultural levels. Yet women continue to consider policing as a suitable career option.

The main factors identified in the literature as influencing career choice relate to socialisation, particularly gender socialisation - within the family, from significant others, through educational institutions and within the workplace (c.f. Crespi n.d ; Connell 1994:30: Richmond 1996:32; Lord & Friday 2003:69; Bernes et al.2006:1; Kniveton 2004:47; Foster 1998). These factors can be related to the development of personal attributes such as self-efficacy, self esteem and perceptions of gender appropriate activities (Lord & Findlay 2003:66; Adams 2001:14).

I draw on two distinct perspectives used to explain gender differences: socialization theory and a post-structural approach. From the perspective of socialization theory, definite expectations and values concerning appropriate gender attributes are constantly reflected back to individuals, and are accepted, internalized and become part of the individual's self-identity (c.f. de Bruyn 1995:11-12; Walby 1988:37).

In contrast, post-structuralist approaches to gender construction suggest that individuals develop subjectivities either in agreement with, or in opposition, to dominant expectations. Some individuals choose to resist the imposition of male-female dualisms, and construct identities which challenge stereotypes and partially transcend traditional gender roles (c.f.Wearing 1996:187; Connell 1987; Richmond 1996:23-25). Martin (1996:4) suggests that gender needs to be understood as fluid, rather than static.

Similarly, Messerchmidt's concept of 'doing gender' suggests that females actively construct their identity within particular social constraints and arrangements, reflecting 'both their active choice and the realities of the social situation' (White & Habibis 2005:215).

While it is acknowledged that post-structuralist approaches may be seen as incommensurate with orthodox sociological accounts of socialization, the approach 'loosens up' some of the structural determinism that socialization accounts often fall prey to, giving fuller weight to subjectivities and agencies, and clarifying why some individuals resist the dominant paradigm.

In order to obtain general data on Australian police constables (male and female) and more specific data from female police constables, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used: a survey addressed to male and female constables; semi-structured interviews with female constables; and limited-participant observations of female constables in the workplace.

Survey Method

The survey draws mainly on those factors identified in the literature as influencing career choice-the family, education and the workplace, and consists of 29 questions in two main sections. The first section was formulated to obtain demographic, occupational and biographical data relevant to the participant and their immediate family, including age, marital status, dependents, length of service, whether a partner or immediate family

member is, or has been a police officer, previous employment, and whether one or both parents were employed during the participant's adolescence. The second section addressed two other influential factors in occupational choice –self esteem, and the extent to which individual's identify with stereotypical gender expectations. Self esteem refers to an individual's belief that they have the ability and skills in relation to the requirements of an occupation (Lord & Findlay 2003:66; Adams 2001:14). Self esteem was measured in the survey using Rosenberg's (1965) Self Esteem Scale, adapted by Adams (2001).

Although societal expectations of gendered behaviours are changing, the extent to which an individual identifies with stereotypical gender expectations remains an important factor in career choice, particularly when a career is non-traditional for one's gender (Kent and Moss 1994:1335). The most commonly used instrument for measuring traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics, or gender stereotypes is Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). A scale based on the BSRI, and developed by Heifer, Knoll, Olsen and Salon (cited in Adams 2001:15) was used to measure gendered world views. The measures rate levels of instrumentality and expressivity. Instrumentality suggests a goal orientation and a general insensitivity to the responses of others. Expressivity suggests sensitivity to others' responses and a concern with interpersonal relationships. Androgyny in this instance is identified as the combined presence of socially valued, stereotypical characteristics of masculinity (instrumentality) and femininity (expressivity).

All research was conducted in three Australian police jurisdictions. Of 1440 surveys distributed, five hundred and seventeen usable surveys were returned, giving a response rate of approximately 36%. Data was analysed using univariate, bivariate and multivariate techniques in SPSS, with statistical significance established at the .05 alpha level.

Survey Results and Discussion

A brief overview of the sample shows that

- 54.7% of respondents were male (n=283), and 45.3% were female (n=234). This result is not representative of the current gender balance of Constables in these states, but rather, an artifact of the survey distribution (800 to male officers and 640 to female officers). The number of men and women in the shifts was used to calculate the gender composition, which was 72% male and 28% female. These figures are overall consistent with those reported by the Australian Institute of Criminology (2004).

- The average age of male respondents was 34.5 years and for females 31.6 years.

- The majority were partnered i.e. married, de facto, living with a partner (75%), with no dependent children (55%).

- 93% of respondents were employed full time – 99% of males and 86% of females.

- The current posting for the majority of the sample, 83% of male officers and 77% of female officers, was General Duties.

- The current rank of the majority of the sample was Constable (62% of males and 76% of females), with similar levels of male and female officers holding the rank of 1st

Class Constable (11%), but more than twice as many male officers (27%) as female

officer (13%) holding the rank of Senior Constable.

• The highest level of educational level attained by the majority of the sample

(54%) was year 11/12. While more female officers held a degree, more male officers had

post graduate qualifications.

Several areas have shown some unexpected results. These relate to the degree to which

respondents identified with gender stereotypes (Personal Qualities), the Self Perception

measure and Birth Order.

As previously mentioned, an important factor in the likelihood that a person will seek

employment within a particular field is the individual's belief they have the requisite

ability and skills. The Self Perception instrument measured the respondent's self esteem

and self confidence. In the following table the responses to the questions on Self

Perception, 'agree' and 'strongly agree' have been collapsed to '*agree*', and the

'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' to '*disagree*'.

Table 1. Self Perception by Gender as Percentages about here

As can be observed there is a marked similarity between male and female responses.

These findings contradict previous findings cited in Boni & Circelli (2002), that males in

policing and other stereotypically masculine occupations have higher self-efficacy than

females. Boni and Circelli (2002) suggest that gender socialization plays a part in

women's low self-efficacy and self esteem, as women are not encouraged to engage in activities that increase self-efficacy and occupational expectations, restricting them to particular occupational fields. A person's self-efficacy is influenced by previous learning experiences and can directly affect career interests, as a person's belief about their ability to perform a task or occupation can significantly influence both their choices and behaviour.

Another unexpected result relates to self ratings of Personal Qualities. These questions are based on Bem's Sex-Role Inventory and measure the degree to which one views the world using gender as a lens i.e. *instrumentality* (masculinity) and *expressivity* (femininity). Again the responses have been collapsed to form two categories –*true* and *not true. Expressivity* measures are identified by italics.

Table 2. Personal Qualities by Gender as Percentages about here

As expected, women scored highly on *expressivity* (femininity) measures, but they also scored highly on most of the *instrumentality* (masculinity) measures, such as 'ambitious', 'strong personality', 'independent' and 'defend my own beliefs'. An unexpected finding was that, while men rated themselves highly on *instrumentality* (masculinity) measures, they also rated highly on *expressivity* (femininity) measures such as 'gentle', 'love children', 'understanding' and 'cheerful'. This suggests that this sample of police constables can be categorized as 'androgynous', in that there is a combination of stereotypical characteristics of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' evident.

The Self Perception and Personal Qualities measures were analysed with Age and Time Served to explore if results were an effect of socialisation *within* the police service. It was found that the only significant differences related to those aged less than 24 years and those who had served less than 2 years, who scored higher Ambition and higher Confidence levels than others. This suggests that the measures are stable and the results reflect socialisation experienced *prior* to recruitment and are not a result of socialisation within the workplace.

The presence of androgynous characteristics of this sample suggests that androgeny is a significant factor in the choice of policing as a career. Previous research has found that women who are high in stereotypical masculine traits are more likely to succeed in management than those with stereotypical feminine traits (c.f. Adams 2001). Kolb (1997) found that women displaying androgynous characteristics were more likely to achieve leadership positions. Given the androgynous nature of the women in this sample, it appears that many policewomen have the potential to be leaders. However, there are a wide range of factors that can limit female officers' access to leadership positions and there remains an under-representation of women in the senior ranks. Baxter & Wright (2000 in Boni & Circelli 2002) suggest that a substantial increase in the number of women in policing is one way of improving the position of female officers and of representation in senior management levels, so research which can assist in the recruitment and retention of women officers is important.

Analysis of Birth Order revealed a further unexpected result. Standard multiple regression was used to indicate how well a set of Independent variables, including Birth Order, predict self esteem, instrumentality and expressivity, and motivation. Birth Order was found to be significant in a number of measures for males, but not significant on *any* measure for females in the sample. First born males scored significantly on four expressivity, or 'feminine' measures -sensitive, compassionate, understanding and sympathetic. While this needs further investigation it suggests it could be related to the higher expectations placed on the 1st born son (Nyman 1995:51; Myers et al 2007:58). Studies have found that the first born son is most influenced by the father, with guidance based on traditional gender stereotyping, but there is often an expectation that the eldest will take a degree of responsibility and a caring role for younger siblings. While both males and females have been found to be influenced by familial attitudes towards particular careers, boys tend to be more heavily influenced than are girls. In traditionally masculine occupations, the influence is more strongly associated with fathers and sons and by birth order, the eldest child has been found to be more influenced by the father (Kniveton 2004:5-6).

An initial interpretation is that gender stereotyping through socialisation appears to be influencing males more than females. Social expectations with regard to the importance of gender equality and equal employment opportunity have changed over the past three decades, resulting in an influx of women into the paid workforce, dramatically changing the labour market in Australia. As a result, perceptions of gender appropriate careers have become increasingly blurred (Lord & Friday 2003:64). This raises the question of

whether the 'blurring' of gender lines is from the 'feminine' rather than the 'masculine'. Raised awareness in schools (c.f.Weiner et al 1997) and greater society has resulted in less stereotypical gender expectations for females, but there appears to have been little change in gender socialisation for males. I am not drawing conclusions from the survey at this time, but will re-examine the findings after I have completed the analysis of the interviews.

Interview Method

Interviews were conducted with 24 female constables from the same three police jurisdictions. The interviews provided an opportunity to elicit biographical information relating to individual participant's experiences of gendering within the family, educational institutions and previous workplaces, in order to investigate whether an identifiable relationship can be discerned between experiences of gender socialization and policing as a suitable career choice. The objective of the semi-structured interviews was to elicit narratives from the participants by inviting them to give their own accounts about specific times and situations in their lives. While some questions were standard to all interviews, the interview process was guided by individual responses.

Analysis of interview data was conducted using thematic analysis.   The aim of thematic analysis is to identify themes within the data (Ezzy 2002:88). Interview transcripts were examined to identify key themes and to develop typologies of responses. This method was chosen because, although the specific themes were not predetermined, the general

areas of interest i.e. family, education, previous employment, were determined prior to interviews being conducted.

Interview Results and Discussion

Initial findings support those of the survey. However there have been some unexpected findings. All respondents spoke of areas of their life where they had succeeded, whether academically, in sport or previous employment and saw themselves as successful in their police careers. While this supports the survey findings in that it is indicative of high levels of self confidence and confidence in their ability to perform the job, the interviewees attitude towards failure was unexpected. One interviewee stated

"I would never want to fail… at anything...There is no window for me to fail." (F2)

As the interview process progressed it was noted that many of the interviewees expressed similar attitudes, either directly or through anecdotes.   Some examples are –

"I guess it's not giving up, it's keeping going, having one goal" (F5)

"... I think I'm confident because I've always succeeded" (F8)

"...no, I've never failed." (F10)

"I won't give up on things... I know that anything I want to do, I could possibly do..." (F17)

"I think of myself as ...an achiever...got over a lot of bad spots in my life and I'm doing good..." (F19)

Another interesting and possibly related finding has been to the question of who had been the most influential person in their life. The majority of interviewees identified their mother as the most influential person. Consistent with the survey data, most interviewees were raised in two parent families, where the mother had been in some type of employment during the participant's adolescence. Maternal employment has been associated with more liberal attitudes to gender. For example, it has been found that women who choose traditionally masculine occupations and who tend to reject gender stereotypes are more likely to have been raised in families where the mother was employed (Kent and Moss 1994:1335). Although the relationship is somewhat reciprocal, in that more liberal gender attitudes may lead to the desire to seek employment, and employment to liberalized attitudes, maternal employment has been found to lessen the value women place on traditional understandings of gender.

Although two constables whose mothers were described as 'typical stay-at home Mum's' remarked that the influence was in a negative sense, most described their mother as 'strong' and encouraging. Examples are

"I would say it was my mother... she's a strong woman...and she'll stand up for herself..." (F8)

"I always sort of look at her as...she's...she's a shining light, you know. She's very strong, really strong. Looking at her strength, I think, she can do anything, so why can't I?" (F10)

"Mum, yeah my Mum. My Mum...is strong...pretty much an older version of me" (F7)

"... it comes back to Mum and Nan for me, every single time...two very strong females...Particularly strong women...Great role models." (F16)

"I admired her. She worked part of the year to, you know, get the nicer things in life... Yeah...I looked up to her as a strong person and I guess she is..." (F15)   and

"She's always said... do well at what you do, because you've always had that in you" (F18)

"She encouraged us...she didn't hold us back if we wanted to do it." (F17)

These findings suggest that maternal employment is influential in the development of a liberal attitude towards gender in daughters. This can also be linked to these participants' high levels of self confidence and belief in their ability to achieve in a male-dominated occupation, such as policing.

Conclusion

The presence of androgynous characteristics suggests that androgeny is a significant factor in the choice of policing as a career. The marked degree of androgeny in this sample of police constables can be related to socialisation, primarily socialisation within the family. However, males and females appear to be influenced by different factors. Male androgeny can be linked to Birth Order and being first born, which has no in influence on *any* measure for the females in the sample. While sons have been shown to be most influenced by the father, there is often an expectation in families that the first born child will take on responsibility and caring for siblings (Kniveton 2004:47; Nyman

1995:51; Myers et al 2007:58). This is supported by the finding that first born males scored significantly on four stereotypically 'feminine' measures.

Female androgeny in this sample is most closely related to maternal employment. Most interviewees stated that their mother had been the most influential and encouraging person in their life. The majority of the sample had a mother who was employed during the participants' adolescence. Maternal employment has been associated with more liberal attitudes to gender and a lessening of the value placed on traditional understandings of gender (Kent & Moss 1994:1335). While this was not of influence for males, female participants rated high levels of self esteem, both in the survey and during interviews, suggesting maternal employment is an important factor in women's belief in their ability to succeed in a male dominated occupation.

References

Adams, Kim (2001) 'Women in senior police management' http://www.acpr.gov.au

Australian Institute of Criminology (2004) http://www.aic.gov.au/policing

Bernes, K., K. Witko, K. Magnusson and A. Bardick (2005) 'Senior High School Career Planning; What students think' *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 6(1) pp.34-49.

Boni, Nadia and Michelle Circelli (2002) 'Contemporary issues facing women in policing' http://www.acpr.gov.au)

Connell R. (1987) *Gender and Power* Allen and Unwin : Sydney.

Connell, R. (1994) 'The social organization of masculinity' in *Masculinities* Allen and Unwin: St. Leonards: 246-257.

Crespi, Isabella (n.d.) ' Socialisation and Gender Roles within the Family : A study of adolescents and their families in Great Britain' http://www.mariecuries.org/annals/volume3/crespi.pdf (3 April 2005).

de Bruyn, M. (1995) *Advancing women's status : women and men together? : gender, society and development* Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT).

Ezzy, Douglas (2002) *Qualitative Analysis: Practices and Innovation* Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Foster, Victoria (1998) 'Gender, Schooling Achievement and Post-School Pathways : Beyond Statistics and Populist Discourse' Paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education Dec. 1998 : Adelaide http://www.aare.edu.au/98pap/fos98289.htm

Kent, R. and S. Moss (1994) 'Effects of sex and gender role on leader emergence' *Academy of Management Journal* Vol.37 (5).

Kniveton, B.H. (2004) 'The influences and motivations on which students base their choice of career.' *Research in Education*. 72 pp. 47-57.

Kolb, J. (1997) 'Are we still stereotyping leadership? A look at gender and other predictors of leader emergence' *Small Group Research* 28(3):370-393.

Lord, V. and P. Friday (2003) "Choosing A Career In Police Work: Comparative study between applicants for employment with a large police department and public high school students" in *Police Practice and Research* 4(1) :pp63-78.

Martin, Susan (1996) 'Doing gender, doing police work: An examination of the barriers to the integration pf women officers' Paper presented at 1st Australian Women Police Conference July 1996 http://www.aic.gov.au

Myers, R., J. Kovacs, S. Hampson and C. Embrett (2007) "Know your place?" *Today's Parent* 24(8):56-65.

Nyman, L. (1995) "The identification of birth order personality attributes" *The Journal of Psychology* 129(1):51.

Richmond, K. (1996) 'The Gendered Self' in A. Kellehear (ed) *Social Self, Global Culture* Melbourne : Oxford University Press: 22-33.

Weiner, G., M. Arnot and M. David (1997) 'Is the future female? Female success, male disadvantage and changing gender patterns in education' in A.H. Halsey, P. Brown and H. Lauder (eds.) *Education, Economy, Culture and Society* Melbourne : Oxford University Press.

Walby, S (1988) *Patriarchy at Work* Cambridge :Polity Press.

Wearing, B. (1996) *Gender: The pleasure and pain of difference* Melbourne: Longman Aust.

Willetts-Bloom, M. and S. Nock (1994) 'The influence of maternal employment on gender role attitudes of men and women' *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* March:1-13.

White, R. and D. Habibis (2005) *Crime and Society* Sth. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Table1. Self Perception by Gender as Percentages

	Agree		Disagree	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
I wish I could have more respect for myself	12.4	20.5	87.6	79.5
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	98.0	97.9	2.0	2.1
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	4.2	5.1	95.8	94.9
I am able to do things as well as most other people	95.8	95.7	4.2	4.3
I feel I am a person of worth-at least on an equal basis with others	96.6	94.8	3.4	5.2
I feel I do not have much to be proud of	4.2	4.2	95.8	95.8
I take a positive attitude toward myself	93.4	88.9	6.6	11.1
I certainly feel useless at times	15.5	27.9	84.5	72.1
At times I think I am no good at all	8.2	10.3	91.8	89.7

Table2. Personal Qualities by Gender as Percentages

	TRUE		NOT TRUE	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Defend my own beliefs	97.2	97.0	2.9	3.0
Cheerful	99.3	99.5	.4	.4
Independent	99.0	100	1.2	0.0
Affectionate	92.9	95.0	7.1	5.0
Strong Personality	95.1	91.9	4.9	8.1
Sympathetic	89.7	95.6	11.3	4.4
Forceful	84.7	76.9	15.3	23.1
Sensitive to needs of others	93.6	97.5	6.4	2.5
Have leadership abilities	96.5	93.2	3.5	6.8
Understanding	99.6	99.1	.4	.9
Make decisions easily	98.5	93.7	1.5	6.3
Compassionate	94.3	94.8	5.7	5.2
Ambitious	89.7	87.1	10.3	12.9
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	82.7	88.5	17.3	11.5
Dominant	71.0	66.3	29.0	33.7
Warm	92.1	95.3	7.9	4.7
Willing to take a stand	99.2	92.4	.8	7.6
Tender	80.5	83.8	19.5	16.2
Aggressive	52.6	49.2	47.4	50.8
Love children	93.0	86.8	7.0	13.2
Act as a leader	96.4	85.5	3.6	14.5
Gentle	91.4	94.0	8.6	6.0
Individualistic	91.6	95.3	8.4	4.7
Competitive	91.5	81.2	8.5	18.8