

**The Bill Blackwood
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Women Needed in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

The world is filled with powerful women and the United States is no different. Unfortunately, many of these powerful women do not hold positions of authority. Women emerging in leadership roles in areas such as law, corporate boards, and government offices have been at a snail's pace. The working-age women in the United States make up more than half of the adult populace, yet fewer than 13% of women are employed in the law enforcement field (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). The percentages plummet when these numbers are compared to women holding high ranking command positions over the rank of lieutenant. Women in executive positions are exceptionally scarce, such as deputy chief, assistant chief, and captain. A more impartial, or more balanced law enforcement agency is molded when women can bring their distinctive perspectives to the field. Law enforcement should focus on recruiting and developing qualified female candidates that are able to compete for leadership positions. There is a disproportionate absence of females in law enforcement and command positions. Female officers possess a unique perspective on criminal justice. In order to create a balanced police force representing our constituency, there is a need to recruit, develop, and promote female officers in the criminal justice field. Otherwise, the industry leaves significant potential resources on the table.

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INTRODUCTION

Women in the United States make up more than half of the populace, yet fewer than 13% of women are employed in the law enforcement field (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). The percentages plummet when these numbers are compared to women holding high ranking command positions over the rank of lieutenant. The National Center for Women and Policing, in 1997, reported the largest obstacle to increasing the number of women in law enforcement was the mindsets of their male coworkers (Jordan, Fridell, Faggiani & Kubu, 2009). Sexual harassment and discrimination was a common occurrence within law enforcement agencies and was overlooked by supervisors, due to the fact the supervisors were offenders themselves. Historically, men are labeled as the head of the household and the breadwinners and the women were assigned to care for the home and children. It was 1893 when the first female, Mary Owens was given full arrest powers with the Chicago Police Department (Schultz, 1993). Law enforcement should focus on recruiting and developing qualified female candidates that are able to compete for leadership positions.

Twelve years later, in 1905, Officer Lola Baldwin, with the Portland Police Department, faced the same challenges as Mary Owens did in 1893 (Brinser, 2016). Women police officers were not provided the same standing as that of the male police officers (Brinser, 2016). Female police officers were held to the same law enforcement criterion but were not treated equivalently.

The 1970s began a transition to normalizing women's roles in law enforcement. The 1970s found female officers occupied 2% of all police positions; and, it was not until the 1980s that there was a widespread emergence of female police officers in the

United States (Brinser, 2016). Yet, 45 years later, the transformation is still not complete. There is a disproportionate absence of females in law enforcement and command positions. Female officers possess a unique perspective on criminal justice. In order to create a balanced police force representing our constituency, there is a need to recruit, develop, and promote female officers in the criminal justice field. Otherwise, the industry leaves significant potential resources on the table.

Historically, law enforcement has been a male-dominated field, and when a woman chooses to enter the field, she is taking on a battle with history. Women will face negative attitudes from male officers both on patrol and from higher-level positions within the department. The existence of the glass-ceiling has been a metaphorical barrier set in place that separates females from higher-level positions within the workplace (Taylor, 2014). Hitting the “glass ceiling” is the term used when women in law enforcement are denied higher-level positions within the department, even though they are more qualified, or equally qualified as their male counterparts (Taylor, 2014). A cultural shift and a transformation in attitude are required in the field of law enforcement, in order to improve the representation and experiences of women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). Studies have clearly shown that women not only belong in law enforcement but enhance agencies as well. Female and male police officers were evaluated by research and it was discovered that female police officers were more psychologically independent, adaptable, and proactive than their male counterparts (Taylor, 2014). These are characteristics that are advantageous to any law enforcement agency. Yet, female police officers are still experiencing discrimination in the workplace with regards to recruitment, hiring, and retention (Taylor, 2014). Under-

representation of women in the law enforcement field adversely influences all police agencies across the nation. The research strengthens the notion that law enforcement should focus on recruiting and developing qualified female candidates that are able to compete for leadership positions.

POSITION

A vast majority of tenured female police officers have faced some form of discrimination in their careers. A clear understanding of what women in law enforcement experience would help police agencies to develop ideas that would recruit, retain, and develop qualified police candidates (Taylor, 2014). These results would be advantageous in granting female officers the capability of being effective and dedicated to their agencies. Often, female officers face work environments where they are not welcome, they feel undervalued, and not viewed as an equal. After a time, female officers begin to normalize sexual bias and harassment; and only report the most malicious cases (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). While some research results report declining levels of harassment in law enforcement, many female law enforcement officers “questioned whether harassment had truly declined—or only the reporting of it” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 8). Sexual harassment is fed by weak policies and the difficulties women face going through the complaint process. Female police officers reported concerns of retaliation and other “roadblocks are thrown up so that people won’t rock the boat” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 8). These roadblocks consist of providing their name on the official complaint form and waiting for hours to speak to someone in internal affairs. Many female officers feel that it is easier “to get used to being disrespected by their male counterparts, as opposed to women police

officers demanding the respect they deserve” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 9). Most concerning is the idea that if male officers are willing to harass and disrespect women in their agency, exactly how are these same officers interacting with the public that they were entrusted to protect (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019).

The representation of women in politics, religion, and law has come a long way. However, law enforcement continues to struggle when it comes to recruiting, “hiring, retaining and promoting female police officers” (Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011, p. 351). When recruiting for police officers, departments used masculine pictures and icons to define what it means to be a police officer and that image reinforces that it does not include women. Female police officers fought to be recognized and appreciated in a primarily male profession. Performance requirements and standards are the same for men and women in law enforcement, therefore “men and women are of equal value and that the representation of both genders in the law enforcement community makes it stronger” (Bennett & Hemenway, 2015, p. 70).

However, once hired, female officers are often confronted with “sexual harassment and discrimination” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 7). Female police officers indicated that male officers told explicit sexual jokes, made comments regarding sexual stereotypes, and used profanity to emphasize the masculinity of policing and to isolate women as outsiders (Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011). Discrimination and harassment are methods that manipulate and separate women from the career of law enforcement. Female officers experienced extreme stress associated with sexual harassment from male officers and from the organization as well (Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011). Many police organizations ignored the harassing behavior and

deny that such behavior had ever occurred in the department. Female officers have been exposed to a great deal of hostility and animosity from their male peers. The hostility and animosity spilled over into the street and many female officers reported that “responding backup is slow or non-existent during numerous bad calls, [and] I found complaining only made this worse” (Shelley, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011, p. 356). Discrimination and hostility were also found in the handling of female officers during assignments and throughout the promotional process. Police departments would often assign female police officers to stereotypical duty assignments such as speaking to victims of sexual assault, child abuse calls, community relations events, and they received most of the nonemergency calls.

From 2007 through 2009, research was conducted in two midwestern states focusing on women in law enforcement. The research discovered that “over 90% of the female officers had been sexually harassed by a male coworker” (Harrington, 2014, p. 30). The research documentation also uncovered that over 60% of the sexual remarks were initiated by male officers serving in supervisory capacities (Harrington, 2014). Sadly, it was not until regulations and laws were in place that the discrimination and sexual harassment toward female police officers were reduced. This reduction was mostly credited to successful court decisions, executive orders, and legislation (Harrington, 2014).

Gender prejudice influences the number of women that chose law enforcement for their career. These biases include the belief that women are emotionally and physically not able to do the job, that there is a lack of trust between the genders and that women are simply required tokens. Gender roles are engrained from birth through

adulthood by parents, relatives, and teachers that provide verbal and nonverbal cues about what is appropriate for specific genders. Masculinity and femininity are traits learned early in life; such as pink is for girls and blue is for boys; boys play with trucks and girls play with dolls; and explains the types of careers associated with each gender (Brinser, 2016). Other traits that are taught and assigned to a specific gender are that males must be independent, self-confident, and aggressive, while females are to be passive, sensitive and supportive (Brinser, 2016). As boys mature into men, they are taught that they are the head of the household and the women's duties are to raise the children and care for the home. The lack of acceptance of women in law enforcement was illustrated in 1970 when a group of male officers from the Los Angeles Police Department created an all-male group called Men Against Women (M.A.W.) (Brinser, 2016). The all-men group, M.A.W., supported discrimination of female police officers with the purpose of driving them out of law enforcement (Brinser, 2016).

The success of any police department is based on the key components of trust and integrity, along with the relationship between all employees. Male police officers voiced their lack of trust in the female officers by saying “they did not trust female police officers with the thin blue line’s code of silence” (Brinser, 2016, p.13). The male police officers were troubled that the females would reveal the secrets of police corruption. This lack of trust formed an invisible wall between the male and female police officers that “caused decreased respect, ineffective teamwork, and increased stress for both. Men were stressed with the addition of female officers and female officers were stressed because of the discrimination from their coworkers” (Brinser, 2016, p. 14).

More often men are considered to be in leadership positions, and law enforcement leadership roles are no different. Women are uncomfortable with self-promotion and are considerably more reserved when speaking of their achievements (Samples, 2015). Self-promotion goes against what most women have been taught their entire lives, however in a promotional process that uses an assessment center, self-promotion is vital. Leadership candidates are evaluated on their ability to successfully promote themselves in front of a panel of evaluators, that many times consist of all men. Statistics reveal that very few females move beyond the lower levels of the supervisory ranks. If women are unable to witness successful female leadership or if they do not know female role models in management positions, they often become discouraged from wanting to join the supervisory ranks. The police department command structure follows a military hierarchy, and as one travels the promotional ladder it begins to narrow at the top. This means there are a limited number of supervisory positions available as an officer promotes up into higher command ranks. Female officers find this promotional process to be filled with “intimidation, teasing, harassment and unfortunately some female officers see this as too high a price to pay” (Wells, 2001, p. 28). Female police officers will pass on promotional opportunities if it is believed that “they will face extraordinary resistance” (Wells, 2001, p. 29). Other causes that reduce chances to promote in the department include hiring freezes, slow turnover, and economic considerations (Wells, 2001).

The philosophy based on the idea that an individual is designated for employment or a promotion due to their minority standing, such as gender is called the tokenism theory (Brinser, 2016). Perceptions of tokenism have decreased the number

of female police officers in the promotional process (Brinser, 2016). Token female officers “may not want the attention on them and would rather stay as a patrol officer and fade amongst the other employees” (Brinser, 2016, p. 25). Female police officers continue to face resistance as they strive for promotions. Male police officers view the promotion of female officers as unworthy of the position and believe the promotion was simply a benefit for a token female. This sequence becomes an endless cycle contributing to the lack of female officers in leadership positions. This cycle creates a hindrance for young female police officers who strive for promotion, due to the absence of leadership and support by other female supervisors (Brinser, 2016).

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

When female police officers successfully promote within the police department their attention and support will gravitate toward other female officers of equal or higher rank. This makes it appear that female officers are working against one another in the workplace which causes outward stress (Wells, 2001). Female police officers that have been promoted will often separate themselves from the other female police officers in the lower ranks of the department. Female supervisors will separate themselves from “the lower ranks in which most women formerly worked” (Wells, 2001, p. 32). Female officers in command positions have often made comments on how they would much rather work with men, further sealing the separation from the lower ranks of the department. These intra-gender challenges affect how women see themselves in law enforcement. In 1975, thirty-two female police officers from Washington, D.C. Police Department were monitored and eventually interviewed (Brinser, 2016). Two types of female officers were discovered in the workplace; *police-women* and *police-women*

(Brinser, 2016). Both designations involve female police officers but there were variations to the actual role of the officer (Brinser, 2016). *Police-women* were female officers that conformed to the position of a police officer and took on all required duties and responsibilities of a police officer (Brinser, 2016). These female officers were aware of the hazards and vulnerabilities of the job; and were able to respond to criminal situations in a professional manner as a law enforcement officer (Brinser, 2016). These were the valued female officers that trained hard and continued to educate themselves in the criminal justice field (Brinser, 2016). The *police-women* were career-driven; they were dedicated, confident, and inspired to succeed (Brinser, 2016). These female officers were able to recognize and overcome the challenges and barriers that were presented to them by other officers and the public (Brinser, 2016).

The second type of female officers were the *police-women* (Brinser, 2016). The *police-women* were the female officers who held “their normative gender roles while on duty” (Brinser, 2016, p. 17). These officers often acted as the weaker gender and asked for flexibility in their job assignments (Brinser, 2016). These female officers primarily wanted a paycheck and did not like proactive patrol, therefore wanted desk jobs (Brinser, 2016). This caused a separation of female officers that either considered themselves “doing police work”; or “doing gender” (Brinser, 2016, p. 17). Unfortunately, this separation created added stress and formed a stigma that followed all-female police officers. This stigma implied that all female officers were not capable of the job requirements and responsibilities needed for a police officer to succeed (Brinser, 2016).

Female officers are affected by the training or lack of. Non-existent or weak training will affect how female officers respond in the field of law enforcement. Female

officers should participate in programs and professional development opportunities that strengthen their abilities. Women in law enforcement should expect to be judged and promoted based on their abilities and qualifications. Women should motivate each other to overcome the stereotypes that imply female officers are not fit for law enforcement (Samples, 2015). Female officers have often experienced the burdens inherited from previous generations of women in the field, which makes mentoring essential. Women are proven to succeed in an environment where mentoring is extended beyond advice and encouragement. Female officers that were influenced by mentors early in their careers are often found in leadership roles (Saucedo, 2018). The research found that mentoring leads to positive public perceptions, increased retention rates, and a greater balance of career advancement and job approval. Mentoring by police executives has had a tremendous influence on women in law enforcement throughout all ranks of the department (Saucedo, 2018).

The small percentage of women in leadership roles is a direct result of choices women make. Research by Archbold and Schultz discovered personal and professional factors that influenced women on their decision to promote (Schultz, 1993). Women preferred their current shift and assignment because it was convenient for their family lives (Saucedo, 2018). No matter the profession that was chosen, women continue to be responsible for the children and the household, and “marriage and family issues proved to be a significant barrier for career advancement when promotions would require a change in schedule” (Saucedo, 2018, p. 43). Women married to other sworn police officers added to the complexity of accepting a promotion, due to possible conflicting shifts and childcare concerns (Saucedo, 2018). The duty a woman has to

their children and family appears to limit career advancement. Many women feel they must choose to be an ideal police officer or an ideal mother and “compartmentalizing officers according to their gender can have a devastating effect on a female officer’s willingness or ability to promote” (Samples, 2015, p. 21). Promotions create obstacles with possible changes in location, shifts and days off which limits their advancement within the department (Saucedo, 2018). Research has found that “women may not pursue opportunities for promotion because they lack confidence, along with a lack of structured support for maintaining personal life and raising children while handling the demands of a policing career” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 19).

Lastly, it is argued that men make better leaders in law enforcement than do women. Leadership positions in law enforcement tend to be dominated by men. Characteristics associated with a leader are often compared to characteristics of masculinity, and “leadership power comes from a position within the hierarchy” (Richard, 2001, p. 35). Leadership is the ability to set solid policies, assign clear responsibilities, react quickly to an emergency, weed out weak officers, and the ability to keep sensitive information confidential. History has established that men have acquired their leadership abilities from their experience of being on the front lines of war. Male officers show leadership skills through their confidence in the transactional style of leadership. This style of leadership requires subordinates to incorporate their awareness into the group through concern for the larger goals of the organization (Richard, 2001). A transactional leadership style allows a supervisor to tell the subordinates what their responsibilities are and either reward them for meeting the expectations or punishing them for failing to meet the objectives (Eagly, 2007).

RECOMMENDATION

A career in law enforcement can be appealing, interesting, and challenging to both women and men. Not everyone has the aptitude or the disposition to have a successful career as a police officer, but this disposition is not based on gender. The requirements of the occupation are significant, the hours are irregular, there are high-tension calls for service, combined with periods of sheer boredom, and, in many cases, the pay is nominal. A police officer is in the public's eye every hour of every day. This means police officers' every move is scrutinized, including what they do in their personal lives. Police officers and their families are held to a higher standard than the rest of the population. When a police officer in our society is viewed as substandard in the public's opinion, that opinion is reflected in every police agency and onto every police officer beyond just the agency that employs an officer. When these types of negative events occur in society, recruiting for law enforcement officers become more difficult. A positive relationship with the public is very important; it encourages males and females to give the law enforcement profession a chance. At the beginning of the 1990s, observers of hiring patterns in law enforcement projected an impending "crisis" stemming from an apparent failure to attract the necessary number of qualified applicants, particularly female and minority candidates (Jordan, Fridell, Faggiani & Kubu, 2009, p. 37). This crisis has a direct impact on police departments hiring females as well as developing qualified female candidates to hold leadership positions.

Police organizations must evolve and continue to adapt and respond to the needs of a changing society (Brinser, 2016). Relationships need to be built and encouragement is needed for women to advance in law enforcement careers. An

organization's attempt to promote females into law enforcement will be futile unless the emphasis comes from a female leader. This female supervisor must be sincere and be able to build a trusting relationship with officers below her rank. Female officers in any organization will require continuous mentoring and an environment of inclusion (Samples, 2015). Law enforcement agencies should create support networks for women and act by removing as many barriers as possible. These networks are used to focus on the issues that officers may face, raise awareness of reasonable adjustments that may need attention, and provide growth and development training to improve the women in law enforcement (Saucedo, 2018). These networks can also assist with perceived policy concerns, possible career barriers, and develop interview and presentation skills to increase recruitment, retention, and the progression of women in law enforcement (Saucedo, 2018). Changes are needed and "underrepresentation of women in policing should not be addressed as a gender issue" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 6). However, "the focus should be on transforming policing and policing culture in a way that would naturally lead to an increase in women applicants and retention of women officers" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019, p. 6).

The role of police officers has changed over time and police departments must be innovative and continue to evolve in order to meet the needs of a changing society. The focus of law enforcement should be on recruiting and developing qualified female candidates that are able to compete for leadership positions. Police department administrators should lead by example; acknowledge and embrace gender equality in order to protect all police officers and provide encouragement for female officers to

settle on a law enforcement career. Failing to do so leaves valuable resources off the table in a time when law enforcement needs to recruit the very best, from all genders.

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