

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ~~ROLE~~ OF WOMEN IN POLICING BY
POLICE EDUCATORS, POLICEMEN, AND POLICEWOMEN
ATTENDING COLLEGE

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Current controversy exists over enlarging the role of women in police work, especially in the patrol and supervisory positions. Efforts to place women in patrol positions have aroused serious internal opposition. There is evidence that this opposition stems from the nature of the operational environment and the police organization. Police perceive violence and danger as their primary concern; and women are judged as being weak both physically and emotionally, thereby contributing to the danger. The semi-military and authoritarian character of police organizations inhibits change and openness in the evaluation of women.

Another concern is the paucity of research, that would be applicable nationwide. Current attempts to enlarge the knowledge about women exist only in two heavily populated urban areas, New York City and Washington, D.C. Small urban and rural departments predominate in the United States, making attempts to generalize difficult.

This present investigation sampled experienced police personnel removed, at the time of response, from organizational and group pressures. Police educators, and male and female police officers attending their programs, at the college and university level, were sampled by mail, nationwide. They responded to three instruments. All three sampling populations rated a set of issues that explored an enlarged role for women in policing. A second set of issues, to

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which all populations responded, concerned patrol functions. Half of the populations were asked to rate capabilities of trained policewomen; the other half, trained policemen. Policewomen received a separate set of issues that compared their present treatment with their expectations. Further, each of the responding individuals completed a personal data sheet.

The results indicate that policewomen and educators differ significantly from policemen regarding the role of women. Policewomen and educators believe the role of women could be enlarged. Policewomen responded to the treatment inquiry by expressing responses that indicated a significant amount of dissatisfaction.

Significant differences among the rating populations were expressed on the issues that related to women on patrol. Those tasks that showed no potential for danger, and required the utilization of interpersonal skills reflect some significant differences. Where the differences are significant, then the direction of the responses indicates that women are more competent. As the amount of danger increases, the policemen raters begin to differ significantly from policewomen and educators. Policemen are then aligned against educators and women. They perceive men as more competent. When the patrol tasks reach the stage of violent confrontation, and interpersonal skills cannot be used, police educators tend to align themselves with the policemen. Policewomen, though, consistently perceive themselves as

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equal to or more competent than the policemen, except for a small number of issues.

Should the pressure of women for admittance to a more diversified and enlarged role increase, this present research might serve as a guide to police chiefs and police hiring agents. It would assist an orderly and perceptive integration of women into policing. This research does suggest that women can participate in policing in greater numbers, and be given a wider range of opportunities.