

Inside the police and facing down the culture

Our 1996 conference attenders appear less likely than the earlier sample to report a strong missionary zeal as a factor in their choice of policing as a career. Yet, they were clearly highly motivated to stay in once they had joined. The length of service of the majority was over ten years and only two had been recruited in the 1990s. Several professed a lack of prior awareness of conditions in the police before they entered:

it has worked out OK but I know I would have thought this person is going to struggle in this job. She is very naive (No. 2).

In common with our survey respondents and the 1980s group, these women faced a huge variety of problems and harassment from their male colleagues. These could be simple rejection:

off the record, we don't want a woman on the unit (No. 7).

I will never forget my first night on patrol. It was first shift and I had a lieutenant that had probably twenty years and he just came out and said 'you know, you really need to be at home, this is no place for a woman. I really think you should be at home'. I mean, if I heard that one time, I heard it five times that night (No. 16).

There were numerous reports of difficulties over deployment and promotion:

I couldn't move up (No. 42).

as a woman, definitely your credibility took a lot longer to get (No. 9).

I was trying to have a job with the foreign police...they took another man... they would rather have another man (No. 39).

Individuals did vary in their career histories. One officer:

tried to be riot trained but they wouldn't let me (No. 7).

whereas two others had and indeed recounted the challenges (and the humour) they faced later as Public Order Training Instructors:

I wore the same uniform as the men...a flying suit...huge boots...body armour...I'd be standing on the parade square when all the students...[pre-

dominantly male officers]... would saunter across the parade ground and say 'I hope you've got the oxygen'... 'Well, you are the first aider, aren't you?' And they had such a shock when I started to bark and shout at them and drill them up and down the square... and I said 'I'm *not* the first aider' (No. 4).

being an instructor they were easily able to identify who I was and I had a couple of courses where one individual man who's like determined to take me out, it was like 'I'm not having this woman here, she's going to have to go', and that was quite interesting... it was because I was a female they found that hard to deal with (No. 3).

The majority of our group had been promoted above the basic grade, several also came from agencies which had dual-level entry which they had joined at higher ranks. The proportion with supervisory positions was high and reflected the 'skewed' sample likely to be attending the conference (many delegates, especially from the USA, paid their own fares and expenses). They had thus clearly demonstrated that women could be promoted; nevertheless, this could still be a contentious issue:

when the man gets the job that the man wants to have, it is OK, but if the woman gets the job, it's a big problem, and normal explanations are that she is cute or very pretty, or she has affairs with the chief or something like that (No. 43).

You know the nature of men, they would not want any woman to compete with them (No. 27).

they are afraid of losing their positions and to lose to a woman in the police force... is like dragging down their trousers (No. 34).

This creates a destructive, discouraging atmosphere:

we certainly felt that we had to be twice as good and we were tested more... [they were] waiting to see you fail (No. 9).

if anything, some of them wanted me to fall by the wayside (No. 30).

Traditional macho cop culture has become a much-discussed topic (Waddington 1999; Macpherson 1999) since the publication of *Women in Control?* in 1992. In the histories discussed then, all the women acknowledged the issue of harassment and abuse and some reported gross (and petty) examples of both. Some respondents in the more recent study claimed not to have come across these matters in their organizations:

sexual harassment, grievance, it's like saying you know, what kind of country are we in, we don't understand these concepts because they're not applicable to us but I couldn't tell you the reason why (No. 24).

For the majority, however, episodes such as these were, or had been, characteristic of their careers or those of their colleagues:

He assaulted me... first I had a relationship with him... that was ended but he wouldn't accept it... it was at my home that he assaulted me, not at work... (No. 37).

a lot of sexual harassment as well... touching... orally... trying to enforce intercourse... I wasn't raped, I'm lucky (No. 44).

snide comments and remarks... no end... a lot were... very destructive... and I was raped by a police officer (No. 2).

There were detailed accounts of how entrenched and supported within the organizational culture such behaviour was:

You didn't challenge anything... blatant racism and sexism in the classes and the training Sergeants... subjected many students to harassment, both sexual and racial... One sergeant... he'd walk past you in class and grab the top of your thigh to see if you were wearing stockings... a black recruit... was subjected to horrific harassment and comments like 'vagrant and get in the jungle and get your knuckles off the table (No. 3).

When three women all separately reported a male supervisor for sexual assault:

most of the men were saying 'He's all right, he's a nice bloke, he wouldn't do that' and looking at the women sort of and 'they must be right, he's a nice bloke, he couldn't possibly have done it' (No. 4).

A woman felt doubly victimized:

I was a victim of sexual harassment after two years. And the policy was then, both the male and and me were transferred. Yeah, that was a bad time... then I wanted to go in another place in the region and wasn't allowed (No. 37).

A considerable repertoire of responses to harassment and abuse was outlined:

I'm never allowing such a thing... but fortunately I have, I held my ground, I never gave any such idea to them, that they can subdue me, so may be that's the reason why I never saw such a thing (No. 27).

if you just act normal to the men and then the men will act normal with you they [sexual innuendoes] shouldn't be blown up . . . if the women were more assertive in the first place (No. 38).

Staying in and getting on with a career in policing in the face of such incivilities clearly required persistence and commitment. These interviewees were, in more than one sense, the survivors; one described herself as a member of a trio still in the force out of eighteen women who had joined together. Some of the stories related had echoes of the 1980s accounts; indeed many of this sample had years of service which overlapped with the earlier group.