

Gender Diversity in Officers' Evaluations of Police Work: A Survey of Job Satisfaction in the Police Workplace

William Sousa and Jane Florence Gauthier*



Volume 5 – No. 1 – Spring 2008

* *William H. Sousa is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Jane Florence Gauthier is also an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.*

Abstract

Police agencies across the United States face challenges related to the advancement of female officers within the organizational structure. This study reports on a survey administered by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) that was designed to determine officer opinions of career satisfaction and career advancement. The analyses compare the responses of male and female officers. The results suggest that while there are several differences in opinion between male and female officers, officers overall appear pleased with their careers and their assignments. Additionally, with a few exceptions, female officers are generally well represented in the rank structure and in assignments that are highly valued within the department in terms of career advancement. Consistent with previous research, differences between male and female officers reflect both internal and external aspects of police work.

About the Authors

William H. Sousa is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His current research projects involve police order-maintenance practices, police management, and community crime prevention in neighborhoods of Los Angeles, California and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Jane Florence Gauthier is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Her current research interests focus on gender differences in criminal offending and arrest and community and crime issues.

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Introduction

Many police organizations across the United States continue to struggle with issues pertaining to the recruitment of female candidates and the retention of female officers who have completed academy and field training. Additionally, police agencies often face challenges related to the advancement of female officers within the organizational hierarchy. Schulz (2003) expresses these challenges faced by female officers in terms of potential internal barriers (factors related to a traditionally male-dominated police culture) and external barriers (factors related to conflicts between work and family). Further knowledge of these potential barriers to career advancement is important to police agencies as they look to improve female representation within rank structures, upper administration, and elite units.

As a response to these challenges to gender diversity, a number of police departments have initiated task forces, focus groups, and other types of collective efforts to explore the nature and magnitude of the issue. For example, in 2006 the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) assembled a "Barrier Analysis" working group to examine issues pertaining to diversity within its agency. Using survey data collected from this working group, the current study examines differences in officers' perceptions of job satisfaction, barriers to career advancement, and the general workplace environment of policing.

We begin with an overview of the research literature on women in policing, particularly as it relates to potential barriers to women in terms of transfers and

advancement within the organizational structure. We then describe the methodology and sample used in the study. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results and their implications for policy development.

Literature Review

Researchers have examined the role of women in policing since the 1970s. Much of this research has focused on the abilities of policewomen (Sherman 1975), while other studies have focused on the unique problems that women face in this traditionally male-dominated field. In particular, women as a group have historically faced opposition to their entry into the profession. Research in both the United States and Europe indicates that police forces experienced a great deal of conflict when first allowing women entry into the field (Brown 1997, 2000). In addition, this research suggests that opposition continues to the present day, where female officers experience resistance from both male officers and some sections of the public (Brown 1997). The resistance manifests itself in sexual harassment, gender discrimination in assignments and promotion, and a general lack of concern for integrating women into police departments. Given that women comprise 12.7% of sworn police positions but only 9.6% of supervisory positions (in large agencies), it is important to examine the potential barriers to their promotion and success (Lonsway et al. 2002).¹

Research has also examined a variety of organizational factors that affect job satisfaction for police. Specifically, Zhao, Thurman and He (1999) found that an officers' satisfaction with their job is related to autonomy, perceptions about the

¹ Note that the percentage of female officers in large agencies is higher according to more recent statistics, though still significantly less than the percentage of males. According to the 2005 Uniform Crime Report (FBI 2006), women comprise 17% of sworn officers in cities with populations of 250,000 or more.

importance of their work, the abilities they have to do their work and the acknowledgment they receive. Other research has shown that factors such as the size of departments have an impact on job satisfaction, with officers from smaller departments reporting being more satisfied (Dantzker 1997). However, research has not shown that there are significant gender differences in job satisfaction. As a whole, women officers appear to be as satisfied with their jobs as men (Dantzker and Kubin 1998; Fry and Greenfield 1980). This research suggests that “personal and organizational factors are stronger predictors of attitudes in the workplace than is gender” (Fry and Greenfield 1980: 123).

While female and male officers may not differ in their levels of satisfaction according to previous research, female officers appear to face both internal and external barriers when trying to promote through the ranks of their departments (Schulz 2003). Internal barriers include “tokenism, negative evaluations from male training officers or supervisors, and policies or supervisory biases that [keep] women out of the high-profile assignments from which leaders are often selected” (Schulz 2003: 331). For example, the National Center for Women and Policing (Lonsway et al. 2001) reported that many women officers have been denied transfer into prestigious units such as narcotics, SWAT, gang units, and training, but instead are readily given transfers into more stereotypically female units such as community relations, child abuse, and domestic violence. Morash and Haarr (1995) found that female officers experience unique forms of workplace stress related to their “subgroup” status and the profanity and “sex jokes” that are present at work. In fact, Haarr (2005) found that while men and women have some of the same reasons for resigning from police work, women report gender discrimination as a reason

for dropping out. Additionally, Haarr (1997) suggests that devices designed to increase integration of different races and sexes (e.g., affirmative action policies) actually have the result of increased tensions and segmentation. As such, internal barriers may be even worse for women of color (Martin 1994; Pogrebin, Dodge and Chatman 2000).

External barriers include conflicts between work and family roles, including problems with balancing child-care duties with work-related duties. Since women are still considered the primary caregivers and homemakers in most households, the burden of taking care of the home and holding down a job has led to many conflicts – particularly given the scheduling demands and unpredictability of police work. Exacerbating the problem, many departments have not known how to treat officers during their pregnancies or once they have returned to full duty. For example, Haarr (1997) indicates that a central issue for policewomen in one department was the lack of a formal maternity leave policy. The inconsistent manner in which pregnant policewomen were treated led to some women receiving light duty desk jobs; others were required to remain on patrol into their sixth month of pregnancy; and others were forced to use all of their sick and personal time, which eventually caused them to lose their seniority. In addition, research has shown that child-care issues and work-family conflict have affected job satisfaction (Howard, Donofrio and Boles 2004), stress (He, Zhao and Archbold 2002; Youngcourt and Huffman 2005) and participation in the promotional process (Whetstone and Wilson 1999) for police officers (see also Bradley 1999; Waugh 1996). While some of this research suggests that these are salient issues for all police officers, others suggest that they may have a greater impact on women officers (Bradley 1999; Whetstone and Wilson 1999).

Methodology

The current study was designed to evaluate the nature and magnitude of possible gender differences in officers' job satisfaction and experiences with various aspects of police work. A survey was developed to measure these aspects of the workplace climate. The survey instrument, which was administered during the summer of 2006, consisted of a variety of closed and open-ended questions. In developing the survey, the LVMPD working group drew upon existing questionnaires that examine employee opinions of diversity and the workplace climate.² The final survey, however, was specific to a policing environment.

Sample

The population for the study (N = 2,045) consisted of all sworn LVMPD officers below the rank of Deputy Chief (excluding detention staff). Surveys were distributed to respondents using two methods. Patrol officers below the rank of sergeant were administered the questionnaire in groups at roll call: 218 respondents completed the survey via this method. Detectives and officers in the rank of sergeant and above were contacted via e-mail and then administered the survey electronically. This method produced 362 surveys for a total of 580 completed surveys. Paper surveys were manually inputted into a database by research staff. Electronic surveys were downloaded and merged into the same database. The final database was then formatted for the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis.

² e.g., The UNLV Faculty Climate Survey Spring 2006, developed by the UNLV Committee for an Inclusive and Just University & Status of Women Committee. Both surveys are available from authors upon request.

Of the final sample of 580 officers, nearly a third (31.6%) had promoted to sergeant or higher, and almost half (48.7%) had been with LVMPD for over 10 years. The percentages of females and non-whites in the sample (11.7% and 21.3% respectively) were roughly equivalent to their percentages in LVMPD overall (8.7% and 21.2%).³ Additionally, 43.1% of all officers indicated prior military experience (47.1% of male officers and 14.1% of female officers). Further, 55.5% of respondents noted that they were a primary caregiver for a child under 18 (59.1% of male respondents and 50.0% of female respondents).

Results

We present the results of the survey in five sections: job satisfaction, valued assignments and personal characteristics, supervisory support, nature of the work environment, and balancing career and personal life. Since gender differences were a specific concern for the Barrier Analysis group, we display the findings for both male and female officers within the tables in the text. Unless otherwise noted, we employ a two-way chi-square test of significance to examine differences in responses between male and female officers.

Job Satisfaction

To gauge job satisfaction, respondents were provided with a series of statements concerning various aspects of their employment at LVMPD. The respondents were then asked to specify their level of satisfaction with each aspect using the following response categories: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Table 1

³ Percentages are based on personnel records for patrol services from August 2006.

summarizes the percentage of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the job satisfaction measures.

The results of these measures indicate a high level of job satisfaction in general. Nearly 85% of the respondents were pleased with their jobs overall, demonstrating a generally positive attitude within the LVMPD workplace. Additionally, although only about half of the respondents agreed that they were satisfied with their opportunities for transfer and for overtime, approximately three-quarters were pleased with their current assignment and their opportunities for promotion. The results for both male and female officers were consistent across all measures, with both groups generally satisfied with their jobs. No gender differences were statistically significant.

TABLE 1: Percent of officers indicating whether they *agree* or *strongly agree* with the following measures of job satisfaction

	Total ⁴ n = 576	Male n = 481	Female n = 64
I am generally satisfied with my job at LVMPD	83.7%	84.2%	87.5%
I am satisfied with my current assignment / unit / command	77.7%	77.7%	81.2%
I am satisfied with my opportunities for advancement in rank	73.2%	73.8%	75.0%
I am satisfied with my opportunities for transfer to other assignments	54.1%	54.0%	59.3%
I am satisfied with my opportunities for overtime	49.3%	49.6%	50.0%

⁴ The total number may exceed the sum of males and females because some respondents did not report their gender. This can result in a total percent that is less than the average of male and female percents.

Valued Assignments and Personal Characteristics

Previous research suggests that female officers may face barriers to advancement because they do not have the valued experience or are not given the valued assignments within the department. To measure this possibility, respondents were asked what assignments they believed were the three most important for career advancement. The results, shown in Table 2, indicate no significant gender differences in how officers rank assignments.⁵ As the table indicates, officers considered training and internal affairs to be important in terms of career advancement: over 60% of respondents reported that these assignments were among the top three most important in the department. If female officers were less likely to be given these assignments, one could surmise that this is a potential barrier for the advancement of women within the department. However, LVMPD personnel records indicate that both training (10.4% female) and internal affairs (12.5% female) have a higher representation of females than their representation in the overall department (8.7%). Additionally, their representation in patrol (8.4%) – the third most valued assignment – is about equivalent to their representation in the department. Generally, women appear to be well represented in the most valued assignments.⁶

⁵ The percentages for those who are sergeant or above were also examined since they are more likely to be making decisions about promotion and transfer. The percentages for these officers were not different than the overall percentages, however, and therefore are not reported here.

⁶ Note that relative to their representation within the department as a whole (8.7%), women are also well represented within the rank structure. According to personnel data from December 2005, 9.4% of sergeants and above are female.

TABLE 2. Percent of respondents who reported various assignments as one of the three most important in terms of advancement

	Most Important Assignment		
	Total (n=580)	Male (n=482)	Female (n=64)
Internal Affairs	68.7%	67.6%	76.6%
Training	63.0%	64.3%	53.1%
Patrol	41.6%	40.9%	46.9%
Robbery / Homicide	36.1%	36.9%	29.7%
SWAT	25.5%	25.7%	23.4%
Homeland Security	12.3%	11.8%	15.6%
Gang Crimes	10.6%	10.8%	9.4%
Vice and Narcotics	7.9%	7.9%	7.8%
Financial / Property Crimes	5.1%	5.4%	3.1%
Crimes Against Youth / Family	3.7%	3.1%	7.8%
K-9 and Mounted	3.5%	3.1%	6.3%
Transportation Safety	2.4%	2.7%	0.0%
Air Support / Search & Rescue	1.6%	1.5%	3.1%
Resident	0.7%	0.6%	1.6%

We note, however, that robbery/homicide and SWAT (ranked fourth and fifth) have a representation of females less than their representation in the department overall (robbery/homicide is 5.9% female and SWAT has no female officers according to personnel records). Also, the highest representation of women in the department is found in Crimes against Youth and Family (approximately 30% of officers in this unit are women – more than three times their representation in the department as whole). In fact, approximately 11% of women in the entire department are in this unit. While this

assignment is not the lowest ranked assignment by officers, it was rarely considered one of the more important – a potential point of interest concerning opportunities for advancement.

Respondents were also asked to report the personal characteristics that they thought were most and least important for police work.⁷ Table 3 shows that communication skills were overwhelmingly considered most important for males and females. The results also show that military experience is not considered to be an important characteristic for police work. This finding is noteworthy because previous research suggests that lower rates of military experience for women may be a possible barrier in departments who value such experience (Harrington n.d.). If LVMPD officers generally do not consider this experience necessary for competent police work, then this is unlikely to be a barrier for women within LVMPD. In addition, the high value that officers place on communication skills should not place women at a disadvantage.

⁷ Again, percentages were not significantly different for officers who may be making decisions about promotion and transfer (sergeant and above), so these results were not reported.

TABLE 3. Percent of respondents who reported various characteristics as the most important to police work

Most Important Characteristics (n=580)			
	Total (n=580)	Male (n=471)	Female (n=63)
Communication	78.3%	78.6%	76.2%
Leadership Ability	12.7%	12.5%	14.3%
Specialized Training	4.5%	1.6%	4.1%
Military Experience	2.1%	1.6%	2.1%
Education	1.9%	1.3%	6.3%
Physical Skills	0.9%	1.1%	0.0%

Supervisory Support

To gauge the level of support that officers receive within the organization, several items on the survey were used to measure supervisory support. For example, officers were asked to rate their immediate supervisors on a five-point scale (from poor to excellent) on several factors related to the degree of support they provide to the respondent. Table 4 displays the percentage of respondents who rated their immediate supervisors as either above average or excellent in a specified category. Overall, the results indicated general satisfaction with the support that supervisors provide. In fact, in no category did more than 15% of the respondents rate their supervisors as either below average or poor. These results are consistent for both male and female officers.

TABLE 4: Percent of officers indicating whether their immediate supervisors are either above average or excellent in the following categories of supervision

	Total n = 580	Male n = 478	Female n = 64
Honors agreements with me	67.7%	68.3%	62.5%
Shows commitment to diversity (gender, race, etc.)	66.9%	67.1%	65.7%
Creates a cooperative and supportive environment	64.1%	64.0%	64.1%
Treats all personnel with the same degree of fairness	62.8%	62.1%	61.9%
Administers the unit / command effectively	61.7%	61.7%	64.1%
Communicates with me consistently	61.5%	61.6%	62.6%
Accepts criticism from me	53.9%	54.5%	45.3%

Nature of Work Environment

The nature of the work environment within LVMPD was also measured by a series of survey questions. First, respondents were presented with a series of categories and asked whether they had seen unfair behavior in those categories based on personal characteristics, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. We focus this discussion on respondents' opinions of unfair treatment based on gender.

Table 5 shows that the majority of survey participants did not report unfair practices based on gender within the department. However, we note some significant gender differences. In particular, female officers are more likely to state that they have seen unfair behavior based on gender with regard to transfers, access to upper management, promotion, respect, representation in senior positions and representation in special units. The greatest difference can be seen with regard to respect; a large percentage of female officers (37.5%) report that people are disrespected because of their gender compared to male officers (5.4%).

TABLE 5. Percent of officers who have seen unfair behavior at LVMPD in terms of gender

	Total n = 580	Male n = 481	Female n = 64
Respect	8.8%	5.4%	37.5%*
Transfers	7.8%	6.4%	20.3%*
Representation in Special Units	6.0%	3.3%	26.6%*
Representation in Senior Positions	5.3%	2.3%	28.1%*
Promotion	5.2%	3.7%	15.6%*
Access to Upper Management	4.5%	3.3%	14.1%*
Mentoring	2.8%	2.3%	6.3%
Overtime	0.6%	0.0%	4.7%*

* p < .05

Respondents were then asked to rate their work environment on the various characteristics listed below in Table 6. Specifically, they were asked to rank each characteristic on a scale from 1 (negative) to 5 (positive). As indicated in Table 6, the averages for all respondents were high – above 4 for all but one of the work environment characteristics. However, we also note several gender differences in these rankings. While still reflecting a positive position, females rated some characteristics less favorably than did males, including characteristics related to sexism, competition, homophobia, fairness, and supportiveness. Although most respondents, regardless of gender, reported favorable attitudes about their work environment, it appears that female officers tend to see their work environment in a less positive light than do their male peers.

TABLE 6. Mean ratings of workplace environment characteristics (based on a five-point scale)

					Total (n = 580)	Male (n = 481)	Female (n = 64)	
	1	2	3	4	5			
	-				+			
Racist					Non-racist	4.54	4.57	4.38
Sexist					Non-sexist	4.30	4.38	3.71*
Unfriendly					Friendly	4.18	4.19	4.08
Disrespectful					Respectful	4.16	4.19	4.00
Homophobic					Non-homophobic	4.16	4.20	3.83*
Unfair					Fair	4.09	4.13	3.78*
Non-diverse					Diverse	4.06	4.10	3.84
Competitive					Cooperative	3.83	3.88	3.48*
Non-supportive					Supportive	3.95	4.00	3.64*

*p < .05

Note: independent sample t-tests were used to test the significance of gender differences.

Finally, officers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements about their work environment. Table 7 reports the percent of officers who stated that they agree or strongly agree with these statements. Results show that respondents believe their work is valued by other officers (69.5%); and, overall, most believe they are being treated fairly. Again, we note several gender differences. Female officers are significantly more likely to say that their colleagues have lower expectations of them, and that other officers have not wanted to partner with them because of their gender. The largest gender difference, however, is that female officers were more likely to say that they have to work harder than others to be perceived as equal.

TABLE 7. Percent of officers who *agree* or *strongly agree* with the following statements about their work environment

	Total (n = 580)	Male (n = 481)	Female (n = 64)
I believe my work is valued by other officers	69.5%	69.6%	68.8%
I can express my opinions without negative results	36.7%	37.4%	31.3%
Other officers know more about opportunities	21.6%	20.5%	29.7%
My colleagues expect me to represent my gender	21.1%	19.7%	31.7%
I have to work harder than others to be perceived as equal	14.2%	10.3%	43.8%*
I feel I am under scrutiny by other officers	13.1%	12.3%	19.0%
My colleagues expect me to represent my race/ethnicity	13.1%	12.7%	15.6%
I have no one to turn to within my unit/command	11.8%	10.5%	21.9%
I don't have a lot in common with other officers	9.1%	8.3%	15.6%
I'm often left out from what other officers are doing	6.8%	6.1%	11.3%
My colleagues have lower expectations of me	4.8%	4.0%	11.1%*
Other officers have not wanted to partner with me because of my gender	2.9%	0.4%	22.3%*
Other officers have not wanted to partner with me because of my race/ethnicity	1.3%	1.2%	1.6%

* p < .05

Career and Personal Life / Reasons for Transfers and Promotion

Previous research reports that many female officers have problems balancing work with their family life (Bradley 1999). Because women are traditionally seen as the caretakers of the home and children, women frequently shoulder most of this burden, which can potentially translate into problems with work. It is possible that many women see a conflict between family life and a police career, and therefore choose to delay having a family or consider not having a family at all. On a scale from one to five,

respondents were asked to report how likely it would be that they would consider delaying a family or not having a family at all because of their jobs (1 = not at all considered; 5 = very much considered). Table 8 shows that while the averages are fairly low for all respondents, indicating that most officers do not consider these options, there are significant gender differences in the responses. Specifically, females are more likely to consider both delaying and not having families than male officers.

TABLE 8. Mean response on a scale from 1 (not considered) to 5 (very much considered)

	Total (n = 580)	Male (n = 481)	Female (n = 64)
Consider delaying family	1.94	1.83	2.73*
Consider not having a family	1.69	1.61	2.22*

* p < .05

Another indication of the importance of family considerations comes from a series of questions asking respondents if they had ever chosen to not apply for a promotion or transfer in which they were seriously interested. Of those respondents who did not apply for promotions and transfers, the most common reason listed – for both males and females – was family considerations. This finding is interesting given that females were more likely than males to report considering delaying or not having a family. Perhaps women are more likely to put off having a family because they must deal with career complications due to pregnancy, but once they do have a family, women are no more likely than male officers to consider their families when making important career decisions. A large percentage of respondents also reported that they did not apply for transfer and/or promotion because they wanted to retain seniority, did not want to change shifts, or lose their days off. However, there were also no gender differences in these responses.

Discussion and Conclusion

A working group of police officers and professionals was interested in whether female officers within LVMPD encountered barriers in terms of career advancement. The survey results suggest that while there are several differences in opinion between male and female officers, officers overall appear pleased with their careers and their assignments. Male and female officers, for the most part, were positive in their ratings of their workplace environment and their views of their supervisors and mentors. Furthermore, with a few exceptions, female officers are generally well-represented in the rank structure and in assignments that are highly valued within the department in terms of career advancement (relative to their overall numbers in the department). In terms of how female officers rate their experiences with LVMPD, the findings of the survey are mostly positive.

Nevertheless, the differences between male and female officers are noteworthy. Consistent with previous research, these differences reflect both internal and external aspects of police work. From the internal perspective, differences in opinion between male and female officers primarily involved issues of perceived fairness and matters of peer recognition. Female officers, for example, were more likely to indicate that they have seen unfair behavior based on gender with regard to transfers, access to upper management, promotion, and representation in senior positions and in special units. Women were also more likely than men to report that they had to work harder than others in order to be perceived as equals within the organization. Additionally, some women believe that their colleagues have lower expectations of them, and that some officers have not wanted to partner with them because of their gender. The results of the survey also

indicate that female officers believe they have less respect within the organization. These findings suggest that many female officers perceive unfair treatment based on gender – perhaps a reflection of a historically male-dominated culture within policing.

The external aspects involve issues pertaining to family life. Many respondents – both male and female – agreed that family considerations were important reasons for not applying for promotions or transfers. Female officers, however, were more likely than their male peers to report considering delaying or not having a family. This gender difference may be due to the fact that women must deal with the effect that pregnancy could have on their careers. It is also possible that women officers are more cognizant of potential child-care issues that a career in policing can bring, and thus are more concerned with the support that will be provided to them.

Limitations

The present study is cross-sectional in design – it represents officer opinions at one point in time. This is relevant because LVMPD is currently engaged in aggressive recruitment strategies designed to increase female and minority participation in policing. Should this survey be conducted at some point in the future, results may differ as they reflect changes in the demographic characteristics of the department.

Although conducting this survey in the future would be interesting for monitoring changes in officer attitudes toward diversity and the workplace environment, another avenue to pursue would be the potential barriers women face in terms of entering the organization. The current survey indicates that, despite some areas for consideration, female officers are generally satisfied with their jobs, their opportunities, and the overall status of their workplace environment. Further, the present study suggests that relative to

their numbers within the organization, women are reasonably well represented within the ranks and divisions. This study, however, does not address another question that was posed by the working group: why women represent only about 9% of the organization. Addressing this question would involve a more detailed study of recruiting, hiring, and training processes to determine if (and where) potential barriers to women remain in terms of entering the agency.

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