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**Exploring Women's Experiences of Policing and the Police: A Thematic  
Analysis Using Autobiographical Narrative.**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Research

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to explore: women's experiences; similarities and differences between the narratives; the construct of the narrative and the performative function; the extent to which the women recognise any oppressive forces and their responses; and the impact of feminist thinking upon the women and their experiences of policing and the police. Four autobiographies of women who were currently serving or who had served in the police were used to explore the issues. Particular consideration was given to how the women constructed their stories and what this said about their experiences and attempted portrayal of them and the themes that existed across all women's accounts in relation to the police service and their experiences of it and the associated culture. A thematic methodology using narrative data was adopted which combines elements of grounded theory and a structural approach and by considering the stories of individual women it analysed what can be learned about their experiences and about policing and the police culture. Individual accounts were explored and then commonalities and themes were identified across the narratives. The common themes across the narratives and these themes tended to support the existing knowledge from the literature on the police organisation, the police culture and the women's experience of it. There were two key themes each having three subthemes: Experiences including interactions with male colleagues, participation and feminist thought; and the police organisation including identity, police culture and power and vulnerability. There are new considerations in respect of feelings of vulnerability of which are not overly represented in the current literature. The ideas of McRobbie (2009) and Millet (1970, 2000) suggests that there is a lack of collectivity amongst women and there is evidence of everyday sexism in line with the fourth wave of feminism. The women's experiences within this analysis are characterised

by a lack of collectivism amongst the women officers; a sense of the anti-sisterhood characterised by competition and individual gains; and feelings of marginalisation.

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my main supervisor, Graham Gibbs of the University of Huddersfield who has supported me through the process, particularly in relation to the methodology. Similarly, I would like to thank Dr Ann Harris who helped guide my thoughts, particularly in relation to the feminist theory and who identified McRobbie to me, a writer who instantly shaped my ideas in relation to feminism and how feminist issues may apply to the police service. From a personal perspective I would like to thank my husband and family for the support that they provided during the sometimes difficult points through the research and the write-up of this work.

## **Introduction**

The new Police was created in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel and at this time was an exclusively male organisation. Indeed it was not until almost a hundred years later as a result of the First World War that women were permitted to have any involvement with the task of policing and this was only in a voluntary capacity and driven out of necessity rather than an attempt at equality. In 1918 the first women patrols were recruited to deal with specific incidents involving women and children, they had very few powers and were paid half the wage of their male colleagues (Lock, 1979). However, by 1922 the issue of female patrols was reviewed and it was recommended that they were no longer utilised. Necessity required again in the 1940's, however, that women police officers be recruited due to the Second World War but it was not until the 1970's that women were integrated into the police service rather than operating from a separate branch to all other police operations (Heidensohn, 2008). Evidently women's' involvement in policing and the police organisation has been a problematic one which has been dogged by rejection and segregation, something which many writers identify in the service still today. This raises the question of what is women's experience of policing in the modern day police service and how do women make sense of that experience? The primary aim for this research is to examine women officer and ex-officer experiences of policing and the police via an in-depth exploration of four autobiographical narratives. The focus is wider than simply the police organisation but includes an exploration of the women's experience of being a police officer more generally. The narrative data was utilised in an attempt to capture the women's experience of policing and the police in a manner which allowed for the women's voice to be fully heard and respected.

## **Literature Review**

Police culture is a defining feature of the police organisation and is therefore an important area of consideration. Organisational cultures are present in most professions. They represent the values, norms and beliefs of a group which are often shaped by the particular features of that profession. Reiner describes culture as

“complex ensembles of values, attitudes, symbols, rules and practices, emerging as people react to the exigencies and situations they confront, interpreted through cognitive frames and orientations they carry with them from prior experiences. Cultures are shaped, but not determined, by the structural pressures of actors’ environments...” (Reiner, 2000: 85).

Police culture is no exception. The level of power and discretion afforded to police officers makes the study of police culture of interest and raises the question of how the existence and nature of the police culture impacts upon the working practices of individual officers. Skolnick (1966) in his consideration of the police ‘working personality’ identifies two principle variables, danger and authority and he states that these variables should be viewed in the context of constantly having to look efficient. The police role is unique in relation to these two points as policing is unpredictable in terms of danger and without comparison in the level of authority that police officers hold. In defining the core characteristics or features of the police culture, Reiner (2000) identifies seven components of police culture: a sense of mission; suspicion; isolation/solidarity; conservatism; machoism; pragmatism; and racial prejudice and a number of these characteristics prove themselves to be significant when exploring women’s experiences of policing. Suspicion could be viewed as a natural response to the demands of the police role which is unpredictable and dangerous. The consequences of a police officer misinterpreting a situation could be grave. Police

stereotyping is key here as stereotypes enable officers to make rapid judgements about an individual and a situation within which they find themselves. Much work has been done on the issue of challenging the stereotypes held by police officers particularly in relation to ethnicity, but when we consider stereotyping within this context its pervasiveness becomes clear. Similarly, because of the almost total social segregation of policing historically, police officers demonstrated a degree of isolation and solidarity. If one considers this within the context of shift work and the demands of the job generally the issue is compounded and the isolation and subsequent solidarity intensifies. The issue of isolation is an interesting one when considering women's experiences of policing and police culture as if one considered that women are not fully included in the police culture and working relationships then they could feel doubly isolated: from both their colleagues and the police service more generally but also their community outside of the police. Much has been done in recent years to attempt to address this isolation, particularly in the wake of the Macpherson Report (1999) and subsequent scandals which have resulted from investigative journalism/ documentaries such as 'The Secret Policeman' (2003). The issue of solidarity links again with the elements of danger attached to the role and in addition to this the need to be able to rely on your peers when in danger or requiring support when doing what can be a stressful and harrowing job. Solidarity also becomes an issue when one considers the conflict between the rank and file officers and management. Officers feel scrutinised in terms of efficiency and effectiveness and as such the rank and file can view themselves as being involved in an elaborate game with management in respect of this, their success in which is increased if there is solidarity in this pursuit. Similarly, a traditional view of machoism is attached to the role which can often be to the detriment of women officers. These characteristics



ordinarily serve as a safety net to officer undertaking an often stressful role but one must consider whether they serve the same function for women in the police service or whether they exacerbate feelings of segregation and isolation. Racial prejudice has been of concern for the police service and research by Fielding (1988) has suggested that whilst training has a temporary liberating effect, subsequent work experience accentuates such negative attitudes. However, Brown (2007) suggests that the emphasis placed on racism has eclipsed that placed on gender inequality and has ensured that a gendered occupational world still exists within the police service. There are potentially very few occupations comparable to the police and therefore the exploration of women's experiences in such a world is an interesting and significant one. Whilst there are prevailing, overarching characteristics of police culture it would be wrong to assume that police culture is homogeneous or monolithic. Indeed, police culture has many variants and police officers themselves adopt different approaches. Reiner (2000) identifies a fourfold typology of police officers which represents the different approaches, level of professionalism and engagement of officers with their role and other writers too have suggested similar categories (Muir, 1977; Shearing, 1981). Police culture can have variations by police force, divisional area, police station and even by different shifts of officers. This is not to mention variations by role such as uniformed, detectives, specialist units such as firearms and dog section, community officers, response officers and management. Indeed some writers (Foster, 2003; Cockcroft, 2007) suggest that one should refer to police culture in the plural rather than the singular. However this does not detract from the fact that working practices and the dominant and prevailing police culture act as a mechanism of socialisation and transmission of the accepted wisdoms of what it is to be a police officer and be part of the police organisation. Shearing and

Ericson (1991) suggest that police talk is integral to guiding behaviour and socialising officers. Loftus (2009) notes that the officers that she observed in her ethnographic research shared a related set of assumptions and practices regardless of whether they were a rural or urban officer and that the only difference visible was the potential for each theme to carry a slightly different meaning or emphasis. The non-monolithic nature of police culture and the use of autobiographies from different times and locations would suggest the potential for diverse experiences to be explored through the four autobiographies utilised within this study. However whilst police culture has been affected by wider social and political developments and as such can be seen as a social construct which is not divorced from wider social and political factors, some aspects of change have been resisted and many of the traditional characteristics of the police culture remain, perhaps suggesting that commonalities between the women's experiences could be witnessed. Loftus (2009) notes that

“An undeniable feature of my ethnography was the persistence of a substantially similar set of cultural traits to those identified almost half a century ago by earlier police research. A collection of dominant features remain within rank and file culture, and continue to exert considerable influence over the day to day functioning of operational policing” (Loftus, 2009: 189).

Several researchers (Chan, 2005; Paoline, 2003; Rowe, 2000; Reiner, 2000; Reuss-Ianni & Ianni, 2005) have identified that there is a clear delineation between 'street cop culture' and 'management culture' within the police and that the two can sometimes be in conflict with each other. An example of this is the use of 'off-colour

humour' (Brown, 2000). This may be due to tensions between the objectives of management officers and the lower ranking officers. Similarly, anyone else who is seen to oppose the view of the police could be viewed in an unfavourable light. Reiner (2000) identified 'challengers' as people who have information and power to challenge the police control. This is particularly interesting when we consider it in terms of the autobiographies examined here and the narrative structure of two of the four books. Within the autobiographies of both Ramsey and Dittrich they detail how they are ostracised because of their actions in relation to challenging police power and the status quo. In addition to this it may be possible to identify differential impacts by gender. Martin (1996) discusses the differential experiences of male and women officers in relation to police culture in the police station. Rowe (2008) discusses the marginalisation of woman generally in the police service and this too is of interest when considering the narratives under investigation. In 2012, 26.8% of police officers were women (36,052 officers out of 134,582) (Dhani, 2013) and yet evidence (Young, 1999; Westmarland, 2001; Van der Lippe et al, 2004; Silvestri, 2003; Paoline and Terrill, 2004; Loftus, 2008, Holdaway and Parker, 1998; Heidensohn, 2008, Gender Agenda 2, 2006) suggests that women are treated as much more of a minority group than is numerically the case. Indeed the police service's Gender Agenda 2 (2006) identifies significant challenges for women such as the failure of the service to understand and take into account issues impacting on women's lives; the exclusion of women from specialist roles and posts due to the lack of suitable equipment; the exclusion of women from playing an active and meaningful role due to the work environment; the lack of representation of women's perspectives in policing issues; unsatisfactory numbers of women in leadership positions; and tokenism in respect of women's involvement in policing. Indeed the

literature on women in policing supports this assertion and offers more detailed evidence in respect of this (Young, 1999; Westmarland, 2001; Van der Lippe et al, 2004; Silvestri, 2003; Paoline and Terrill, 2004; Loftus, 2008, Holdaway and Parker, 1998; Heidensohn, 2008, Gender Agenda 2, 2006; Dick, 2004). A key recognition of the Gender Agenda 2 (BAWP, 2006) and of the research in the area (Young, 1999; Westmarland, 2001; Van der Lippe et al, 2004; Silvestri, 2003; Paoline and Terrill, 2004; Loftus, 2008, Holdaway and Parker, 1998; Heidensohn, 2008) is that policing is a male-dominated occupation and that this dominance shapes the women's experience. How evident this is within the women's autobiographical narratives is of particular interest as it indicates the extent of the impact upon their experiences of policing and the police organisation. In addition to this any information offered in respect of how they navigate their way through such an organisation is of interest and telling in respect of their experiences. Silvestri (2003) argues that,

“Policewomen in Britain and throughout the world continue to encounter resistance and the discriminatory effects of working in a male-dominated occupation...The theory and practice of gender neutrality continues to cover up and obscure the underlying gendered substructure, allowing practices that perpetuate it to continue. The police service is not a gender-neutral organisation, but is deeply gendered at structural, cultural, and individual levels” (Silvestri, 2003: 172).

Silvestri (2003) agrees also with the Gender Agenda 2 in respect of the level of tokenism that women experience within the police service, that career progression is difficult for women under the current structures and processes, and that the concerns of women are not always recognised by the masculine organisational logic. Young

(1991) offers similar conclusions in his research in the early 1990's when he says that the police world allocates priority, and what's more respect to male categories and symbols. He goes on to argue that gender is a lurking problem because masculinity has always held the prime position and been understood and deferred to (Young, 1991). Within this male dominated arena physicality and strength can be challenges for women officers. Indeed Young (1991) expresses that size is an issue for women doing 'men's jobs'. Women regularly have to prove themselves within the work environment which links with Brown (2000) who found that 'professional socialisation' into the police culture has been identified as being important to officers and a demonstration of one's physical ability is part of this. It was an issue too for Westmarland (2001) who states that force and anatomy are determinants of competence as a police officer. She found that "Although male and female officers appeared to be equally involved when violent and physical arrests were made, several officers commented that they regarded this to be inadvisable" (Westmarland, 2001: 134). Martin and Jurik (2007) discover also that many male officers believe that women cannot handle the job either physically or emotionally and the authors go on to make the link between the position of women as non-authoritarian figures in society and the perceived weakening of police authority by their inclusion in the policing task. This is a significant point when considering whether women are likely to feel excluded from policing and the police culture. However Paoline and Terrill (2004) challenge the view that women officers are unwilling or unable to use force in the operational context and ultimately do the same job as the male officers when they note that in comparison to their male colleagues, women officers are actually not reluctant to use both verbal and physical force. Westmarland (2001) suggests that gendered deployment can occur because it can be difficult for some male

officers to balance the 'masculine', 'macho' style of their work to incidents such as sexual abuse thereby allowing or encouraging women officers to deal with such matters and the obvious solution then appears to be to let women colleagues deal with such matters resulting in gendered deployment. Similarly, the segregation of roles extends to issues of sexuality in that women are not permitted to have the same approach as men (Westmarland, 2001). Ultimately this suggests that despite years of equality opportunity policy and legislation that women often still undertake a different role to men in the policing sphere. This segregation continues further when one considers the work of Brown and Heidensohn (2000) who refer to a spectrum in relation to women's sexuality with officers being the subject objectification at one end of the spectrum and defeminisation at the other. Indeed a rather crude phrase that was historically used within the police service to refer to a women colleague is "dyke or bike". Young (1991) believes that by focusing on sexuality, the ability of women to 'do the job' can be undermined. Indeed, women are required to work doubly hard in order to be respected by their colleagues (Brown and Heidensohn, 2000; Westmarland, 2001). Brown (1998) found that women are subjected to widespread harassment, forms of discriminatory treatment, differential deployment and limited access to higher or specialist roles demonstrating a very clear level of sexism. For Brown and Heidensohn (2000) this goes further and they detail how women officers are still subjected to levels of such discrimination and harassment due in part to the male dominated culture. Martin and Jurik suggest that "by sexualising the workplace, men superimpose their gender superiority on women's claims to work-based equality" (Martin and Jurik, 2007: 71). An additional perspective offered by these authors is the concept of 'normative heterosexuality'. They suggest that the ability to act out perceived heterosexual norms amongst male officers, such as talk

of sexual conquests, is compromised by the introduction of women officers to the service. Women's experiences are characterised by marginalisation, exclusion, social isolation, sexual and gender harassment and paternalistic treatment. Therefore, they argue, although the change in composition of rank and file policing has weakened the homogeneous police culture, it has far from eradicated it (Martin and Jurik, 2007). Indeed Van der Lippe et al. (2010) in their comparative study of four European police forces found that the most important existing barrier to gender equality is the culture within the organization (Van der Lippe et al, 2010: 391). Indeed, Franklin (2005) identifies a link between the 'hypermasculine social structure' and the adverse experience of women police officers. However, the wider social position of women is important too and Dick and Jankowicz (2001) state that "...women's progression is impeded not because of dominant constructions of the [police officer] role per se, but by the way such constructions intersect with broader socio-cultural constructions of women's domestic roles" (Dick and Jankowicz, 2001: 181). The findings of this literature are key for understanding the context within which the women may be telling their stories and constructing their narrative. However, a contradiction to such findings is that of Westmarland who identifies that women's' experience is not necessarily characterised by feelings of oppression and powerlessness and that a 'new breed' of policewoman has been identified and she is characterised by strength, intelligence, attractiveness, professionalism and competence (Westmarland, 2001). This is extremely significant as it suggests that there has been a change for some women at least in the police service and these women could have very distinct experiences of policing and the police to those explored in this study. However, this 'new breed' of woman police officer is not one that features strongly in the literature and as such is an area for potential future

exploration. Silverstri (2003) addresses the issue of sisterhood within the service (to be more precise the lack of it) and the lack also of 'gendered consciousness' amongst women in the police. She suggests that the number of women in the service is not the most significant determining factor of change but that access to feminist theory and strategy is needed in the police service in order to change women's experiences. There is an acknowledgement of male power and Silverstri (2003) believes that male power is subtle, routine and seen as legitimate in respect of women and explains practices such as gendered deployment. Young (1991) suggests by comparison that power is more explicit, that police men are "...overtly and consistently hostile towards women in 'the job', and that the social control of these women is inevitably a burning issue..." (Young, 1991: 193). Westmarland (2001) acknowledges male power but does not believe that it alone is sufficient enough to explain gendered deployment practices. Women's recognition of such issues, or possibly their lack of it, are of particular interest for this study but perhaps even more interesting is the idea that women do not challenge such practices and potentially even accept and excuse such them. Dick (2000) argues that women's continued marginalisation with the male dominated police service is as a result of their expression of high levels of satisfaction with the status quo. In exploring this issue further Dick identified that women utilise dominant policing and gendered discourses in order to build narratives of both positive and negative experiences of policing but that ultimately these accounts rarely challenged the status quo even where it was potentially oppressive. This was specifically applied to the issue of retention of women officers by Dick and Cassell (2010). Holdaway and Parker (1998) too found evidence of women officers' acceptance and even reinforcement of views commensurate with a traditional view of the police occupational culture. Much



evidence then points to the view that women are marginalised and that patriarchy is a dominant feature of the police service. Perhaps more surprisingly is women's acceptance of such a situation. When considering such a proposition the idea of 'disarticulation' as put forward by McRobbie (2009) and applied to popular culture is an interesting one. McRobbie (2009) describes disarticulation as the process whereby various feminist and other social movements have been fragmented and collectives severed which results in the prevention of any new feminist politics emerging. McRobbie (2009) is primarily focussed on the issue of popular culture but develops ideas which are transferable to the police service and police culture. McRobbie argues that we currently live in a post-feminist age which is characterised by an anti-feminist sentiment in which aspects of feminism have been taken account of and incorporated into political and institutional life but that it has been transformed into a more individualistic discourse which includes words such as 'empowerment' and 'choice' but that in actual fact this is a substitute for feminism, a faux feminism even. This serves ultimately to present as 'modern' ideas about women but in actual fact its purpose is to prevent a re-emergence of a new women's movement. Moreover, and with echoes of women's experience of police organisation, there is active vilification and negation which occurs, particularly at the cultural level and which serves to make feminism unpalatable to younger women. McRobbie describes it as "A kind of hideous spectre of what feminism once was is conjured up, a monstrous ugliness which should send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today, as a kind of deterrent." (McRobbie, 2009: 1). In addition to this there has been a 'trade off' made for young women in that the promise of freedom and independence has been made and in exchange women are to reject the resurrection of feminist ideas and the pursuit of a new kind of feminist politics. McRobbie argues

that whilst women make up half of the world's population their experience of inequality remains unequivocal and substantial, despite the changes that have been witnessed and that feminist politics would be a challenge to the patriarchal system of economic power and domination. Along with this exchange of feminist politics for supposed freedom and independence sits the promotion of individualism over the collective which again undermines the re-emergence of any women's movement. This in turn leads to what McRobbie calls 'disarticulation' and is largely an issue of lack of solidarity amongst women. Ultimately women are now told that feminism is no longer needed and this is accepted due to the illusion of positivity and progress that are presented. Indeed McRobbie (2009) suggests that we are in a state of post-feminism where feminism is said to be redundant due to gender equality having been achieved, for the women in the west at least, and substitutes for feminism are offered in the form of the feminine consumer culture. What's more there is widespread dissemination of values which typecast feminism as being characterised by anger and hostility towards men which is seen as being embittered, unfeminine and repugnant. The concept of disarticulation is one which, whilst originally not one intended to be applied to policing, could be used to explore the experiences and the actions within the women's narratives. A key question for this research relates to women's potential subscription to a police culture that may be oppressing them, their recognition of this and responses to it and as such disarticulation is a concept that may offer some interesting insights. Whilst acknowledging the potential of McRobbie's (2009) work in contributing to our understanding of women's experiences one must also acknowledge the more recent and somewhat contradictory evidence in the form of the development of the fourth wave of feminism. Whilst the fourth wave of feminism is relatively recent phenomena and so

as such would not have been seen within any of the autobiographical narratives, it requires some discussion here as it demonstrates the opposite of disarticulation in the form of particularly online collectivity of women against sexism in society today, as evidenced by Bates' (2014) 'Everyday Sexism' as well as the social media activity that preceded it. Bates (2014) shows that sexism (which she defines as treating someone differently or discriminating against them because of their sex) is so endemic in our society today that it has become a normal part of life and which sets up a power imbalance within society. Bates details sexual harassment in a number of forms from sexual harassment on the street which she details as problematic due to the perceived entitlement to women's bodies in public spaces to sexual and violent attacks. The fourth wave of feminism shows us that we certainly do not live in a post-feminist age however the experiences of the women may not reflect this. Women's dissatisfaction with those activities perceived as minor is described as resulting in women being accused of being oversensitive and yet Bates (2014) details over 60,000 instances of sexism in her book which she describes as being significant instances of harassment. Cochrane (2014) details numerous other fourth wave movements which demonstrate we certainly do not live in a post-feminist era and that not only is there a recognition of the need and value of feminism today but that women in particular are actively joining together in the pursuit of equality. There is however some consensus between McRobbie (2009) and the fourth wave in respect of discourses in relation to equality having been achieved in the western world amongst the wider society and challenges to such an assertion being met by outright hostility. What is of interest here is whether disarticulation can offer any insights into the women's experiences and actions but also whether the more recent narratives of Dittrich, Bloggs and Ramsey demonstrate information that may be of

relevance to the fourth way of feminism. An issue beyond the reach of this study and perhaps one for future research is police women's responses to and engagement in the fourth wave of feminism. In considering disarticulation and everyday sexism one must explore further feminist literature, particularly in light of the conceptual framework adopted for this research. The work of Kate Millet (1970, 2000) in particular is of importance and especially the issues she raises of patriarchy, oppression and the unknowing consent of women to their own oppression. Whilst Kate Millet's work 'Theory of Sexual Politics' was originally published in the 1970's it was republished in 2000 thus demonstrating its continued importance to feminist thinking. McRobbie (2009) considers how social change and gender power operate within an illusion of positivity and progress and this is interesting as it would appear that despite equal opportunities developments women still have very different experiences from men in terms of policing and their police officer role. Burr's (1998) concept of 'malestream' whereby the male dominated view of the world (and in this case policing) affects women's experience by creating ideologies through culture and prevailing discourses is relevant here. An important concept in this study is patriarchy. Burr (1998) states that "...it is argued that patriarchy rests on the widespread acceptance of certain discourses (discourses which construct femininity, masculinity and sexuality in particular ways) as truth" (Burr, 1998: 121). Whilst 'talk' may be adjusted within the police service due to the recognition of legislation on discrimination in recent years, these discourses often still do exist and even practices can be identified which are evident in the findings of this thesis. Cudd and Andreasen (2005) discuss the concept of androcentricism which is concerned with maleness being the norm for humanness. In this respect androcentricism would apply to the police service and in particular police culture as there is an assumption

that a good police officer will have characteristics more commonly associated with masculinity (i.e. a physical presence, minimal emotional involvement, a macho persona etc.). Davies and Gannon (2005) develop this idea by noting that women's' position is somehow seen as lacking,

“...relations of power are constructed and maintained by granting normality, rationality and naturalness to the dominant half of the binary, and in contrast, ... the subordinate term is marked as other, as lacking, as not rationale” (Davies and Gannon, 2005:318).

However they go further and argue that an individual's personal identity can be shaped by such forces. Women are informed of their position on a regular basis and eventually begin to act in accordance with the information that they receive (much like Becker's (1963) labelling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy) which would be in support of disarticulation but inconsistent with the fourth wave. Given the traditional nature of the police institution and organisational culture it has significance for this research too and it offers an interesting symmetry with the era in which Hays' narrative is set. Millet explores the issue of patriarchy in depth and discusses the male control of almost all aspects of public and private life. She argues that everyday interactions between men and women are political and that patriarchy is a powerful mechanism of oppression which impacts on women's lives on a daily basis, much like the everyday sexism highlighted by Bates (2014). For Millet, patriarchal ideology has such power that it results in women's acceptance of their own oppression.

Within this literature review three strands have been explored: police culture, issues of gender relations and malestreaming within the police service, and feminist thought. The literature on police culture is important for this study as it offers an

account of a non-monolithic culture but one which is remarkably resilient to change. Whilst police practices will be different between the forces detailed from the United States of America and those of the United Kingdom the women may share experiences of police culture and if this is not the case then this in itself offers and insight into the individual experiences of such a phenomena. However this is based on the assumption that the culture of western police forces will share characteristics. The literature on issues of gender relations and malestreaming within the police service offers an insight into knowledge previously gained on women's experiences and allows for some context to be provided to the more modern day narratives at least. The findings of this research serve to enhance such existing knowledge by exploring the in-depth narratives of the women themselves. This is of particular relevance when one considers that the narratives have been constructed by the women (whilst acknowledging publishing influences) thereby allowing for their narrative structure and prioritisation of events and sequences to be explored. A quandary within this part of the literature however is the new breed of policewoman as detailed by Westmarland (2001) . There remains many unanswered questions in the literature about this new breed of policewoman in relation to the extent of such an officer, the impact on the other women's experiences within the service and indeed the men and ultimately how her experience may differ from that of her colleagues. The literature on feminist thought allows for the issue of equality to be contextualised and it offers potential explanations as to the way in which the women experience events and respond to such experiences. The issue of disarticulation is a significant one for this study but this is in direct conflict with the uprising of fourth wave feminism. However one must remain mindful of the chronology of the narratives and that of McRobbie in that the disarticulation detailed by McRobbie was

identified as a feature of a society within a particular political and social era and potentially the rise of the fourth wave of feminism a response to this. Similarly the narratives themselves were of a particular era which is consistent with McRobbie's work whilst also potentially demonstrating the inequality within society that fuelled the fourth wave movement. An observation in relation to both the fourth wave of feminism and the work of both Millet and McRobbie is the question of how far we have actually come in respect of inequality and whether one should expect such strikingly different experiences between the women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and Hays who recounts experiences from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and therefore commonalities between the narratives is of particular interest. In considering the current literature available on this topic this study is important because as previously detailed it offers an insight into the experiences of women from their perspective. They have ultimately constructed their narrative, publishing impacts withstanding, which allows one to explore directly the issues that they identify as important and moreover to explore those issues in great detail. The study has academic significance in that it asks questions of why some women may subscribe, or if not subscribe fail to challenge discourses that are potentially oppressive to them through application of McRobbie's (2009) disarticulation and social significance as it offers through the experiences of the women a window into the police organisation and police culture which despite colossal efforts still marginalises and ostracises women. Indeed it supports the fourth wave of feminism in respect of the fact that everyday sexism not only occurs daily on the streets but daily within an organisation which is said to strive to be progressive and actively tackle inequality.

## **Design of Study and Methods**

### **Aims & Objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to explore individual women's experiences of policing and the police whilst also considering any commonalities within their narratives. Much has been offered in the existing literature on women within the police service and an objective will be to consider whether issues identified in the literature present themselves in the women's narratives and if so what extent they present themselves and how the women respond and demonstrate their understanding. Whilst the individual narratives of the women will be under consideration it will be interesting to observe whether there are any similarities or indeed differences in the experiences presented by the women, particularly due to the fact that the locations and in the case of one narrative, the time period reported on, vary. However, despite these differences there is some suggestion within the literature that policing and police culture has almost universal characteristics which may suggest that common themes will be a feature of the experiences. The way in which the women construct their narratives is of interest too as the highlighting of any performative functions in the narrative construction may be telling in itself in respect of the experiences of policing and police culture. In particular the way in which the narrative is constructed in addition to what is directly offered in the narrative could provide an insight into the extent to which the women recognise any oppressive forces upon them within the police and the police culture. Similarly, the impact, if any, of feminist thinking on the women's experiences will be an area of exploration. In summary this research aims to explore: women's experiences; similarities and differences between the narratives; the construct of the narrative and the performative function; the extent to which the women recognise any oppressive



forces and their responses; and the impact of feminist thinking upon the women and their experiences of policing and the police.

### **The epistemological and methodological approach of the study**

An important initial consideration is 'what constitutes social reality?' or put more simply 'what is out there to know in respect of this topic?'. As the title of this research may suggest this research is based on the premise that reality is created by the individuals involved. The women's experiences are individual and our understanding of their experiences can only be known through their narratives of such experiences. The lived experiences of these women are the reality that we seek to explore and it is the only reality available to us when looking at the social world given that individual actors interpret the world around them and make sense of it in their own terms. This is particularly true for these women as although the police service may be a large social institution experiences of it will not be homogenous and will need to be explored on an individual basis in the first instance. However, given that knowledge is often created by social and contextual understanding it is possible that there may be commonalities within the individual experiences and the responses to such experiences. In this vein the thematic approach is an interesting one as once the individual narratives have been explored and indeed respected then there is scope to consider the wider knowledge that can be explored by considering commonalities. This leads on to the epistemological question then of 'what and how can we know about the women's experiences?' and using the women's accounts of their experiences and particularly via the identification of any commonalities in these accounts, we can begin to potentially discover the underlying meaning of events and activities to the women, which in turn could inform us about the nature of policing and the police from their perspective. In this regard the use of the women's own narrative in the form of their autobiographies is extremely helpful but one must also consider the impact of external factors on this 'knowledge' offered such as publishing pressures, the construction of their story and the performative action of it (although this in itself can

be informative) and the researcher influence in respect of interpretation, all of which will be considered in more detail later in this chapter. The epistemological approach whereby subjective meanings and actions are investigated and we are led largely by the knowledge shared by the women thereby leading to an inductive approach to theory is the underlying principle of the methodology and research method within this study and has resulted in an overall interpretivist research paradigm. As such interpretations, meanings, motivations, the values of the social actors, structures and patterns are a key concern for this research. The use of narrative in the form of autobiographies allows for depth in relation to the shared experiences of the women individually but also in many respects lends itself to comparisons being made due to the often common life course of the story telling. There are challenges in relation to the narratives selected for this study as there are differences in the time period of one autobiography and the location of the remainder, although again this will be discussed further. By adopting a thematic approach, but one which first considers the individual narratives holistically, we are able to add an interesting dimension to what we know about women's experiences and consider whether the social institution of policing and police culture is experienced in a similar manner despite time and geographical variations. Subsequent theory based upon such consideration is firmly grounded in the data as a result of the thematic approach. The adoption of such a methodology (a thematic approach with theory grounded in the data) allows for the women's experiences to be shared and their knowledge in terms of policing and police culture whilst also allowing for the potential underlying meaning of events and activities to be identified as a result of the thematic approach.

### **The data used and why**

There are many benefits of using autobiographies as a data source with the main one being the depth of detail provided and the fact that the voice is wholly that of the individuals concerned, highlighting the experiences that they view as important. Similarly due to the nature of such a resource the narrative often offers a life cycle perspective which can provide context and further understanding to the information shared by the individuals. The data is unaffected by any researcher influence in the way it is initially presented, although of course one has to consider the issue of interpretation and other influencing factors but overall the women are free to express their views in an arguably unparalleled way. The interest in narrative taken by this research means that aspects such as how the women construct their stories can in itself be a rich source of information on their experiences and something that would not be as readily available if an alternative data source were utilised. The use of such narrative data also combatted perceived and experienced barriers to exploring the experiences of serving women police officers. Such barriers would include access issues as participating police forces would need to grant permission and allow access to women officers, which would be problematic due to the traditionally guarded nature of the police service to external observers, particularly those who may not report favourably on the service. In the event that permissions were granted then the next hurdle would be to engage women willing to participate in the research and given the knowledge of the force to the participation this would be likely to be problematic. Further to this, and supposing that women did volunteer, participation would likely require many hours of detailed and possibly intrusive interviews in order to illicit data that had any chance of being as detailed as the autobiographies. This is all assuming that the women would want to share their experiences in such depth, particularly if they felt happy with the status quo of their situation within the service.

As was evidenced from the autobiographies a sense of epiphany often resulted from a change in circumstance of the working role of the women and this would not have been captured potentially with any other method. On a personal note the level of interpretation applied to the accounts of the women within the autobiographies was not always complimentary and I would have felt uncomfortable with such interrogation of women's accounts if they had been provided in a more personal manner. The very fact that the autobiographies are published works means that they are open to external scrutiny, if only in the form of reviews, and this seems to lend itself more acceptably to my interpretations. The sample of autobiographies was identified via a purposive sampling method due to necessity in that they were the only autobiographies by serving or previously serving police women available at the time of the commencement of the research. This is an acceptable strategy due to the nature of the research itself; the results of this research are not going to be generalisable to the population as a whole, although generalisations to theoretical propositions could be possible, the main aim is to explore the experiences of policing and police culture. Similarly, the autobiographies were written from the perspective of different locations and one from a different time period but this too is an acceptable strategy as the area of exploration is women's experiences generally (not experiences of the policing in England and Wales for example). Indeed the intention is not to learn something new about policing and the police but instead to highlight women's experiences of it and as such the experiences need not necessarily be from the same geographical location. The four autobiographies studied can be seen in Table 1 below and as is demonstrated here three of the narratives (Dittrich, Ramsey and Bloggs) are all written from the same time period but from different geographical locations but nonetheless are comparable in terms of the social and

cultural context. Hays' is the narrative which is written some years earlier but in addition Hays' account is actually a reflection on her service in the 1970's and therefore although it provides for some interesting comparisons across time the experiences shared by Hays are always put into context throughout the interpretations and analysis process. . The very fact that themes are able to be identified between these narratives demonstrates that policing and police culture results in some shared experiences for women regardless of geographical locations and this in itself serves as justification for the use of such data sources.

Table 1: Details of the autobiographies analysed

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date Published</b>	<b>Location</b>
Dittrich, S.	'Stumbling along the beat: A policewoman's uncensored story from the world of law enforcement'	2010	USA
Ramsey, A.	'Girl in Blue: How one woman survived fourteen years in the Police Force'	2008	Scotland
Bloggs, E.E.	'Diary of an on-call girl: True stories from the frontline'	2007	England
Hays, G.	'Policewoman one: my twenty years on the LAPD'	1992	USA

However, despite what has been stated above in relation to Hays' narrative is the extent to which Hays' accounts of her experiences from the 1970's actually mirror the experiences of the modern day police women. An interesting consideration is whether the police organisation which is said to be a very traditional institution does respond to change in some respects at least at a very slow pace, has aspects that

appear to be frozen in time, an example of which possibly being police officer attitudes and ultimately police culture and whether this has led to a slow change of pace in respect of women's experiences. It is interesting to consider that whilst the postmodern world within which policing is set becomes ever more unpredictable, individualised and unstructured, internally the police organisation and police culture operates still in somewhat of a traditional framework whereby the old ethos still plays a significant role and there is an air of 'how things have always been done' continuing. One may even consider that the increased lack of predictability of the postmodern world serves as a driver for the traditional ways, an example of which may be the need for the characteristics of police culture as identified by Reiner (2000) to prevail i.e. suspicion and solidarity. If this were deemed the case then Hays' narrative account adds a further interesting dimension when considering the experiences of the women and any commonalities between them. Narrative as a source of data offers many interesting aspects to the data analysis process and the potential results. As Kohler Riessman states, "Stories are social artefacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group" (Kohler Riessman, 2008: 105). The reasons for the choice of autobiographies as a form of data were two-fold. Firstly, my interest in narrative naturally made them an obvious choice as I was interested in not only the women's experiences but also their view of those experiences and therefore the use of narrative whereby they tell their story was an attractive proposition, as previously identified. Similarly, the autobiographies would, in large, explain and justify their experiences in a way that would offer a greater insight. Shacklock and Thorp (2005) discuss how narrative imitates life and life imitates narrative. This means that we build our narratives of life around episodic and temporal qualities of lived experience and that as humans we live our lives in

ways that can be understood and communicated narratively. Shacklock and Thorp explain that narrative is "...concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied account of lived experience..." (Shacklock and Thorp, 2005: 156). In this respect the use of narrative as a data source facilitates the aims and objectives of this study and indeed compliments perfectly the underpinning propositions of the research.



### **The limitations of the data**

However, the use of such autobiographies is not without its challenges and just as the fact that they are written for public consumption can hold its benefits for my research it can also hold its disadvantages. One must consider how idiosyncratic the narratives are and the extent to which they reflect general experiences of women or the extent to which they are unmodified by the exigencies of publishing as we have no way of assuring this. The author may have embellished certain experiences in order to make them more palatable or attractive to the audience. Indeed the content of the autobiography undergoes numerous editorial processes before it can be considered the finished product and the impact of these processes on the narrative contained therein cannot be underestimated. An example of this would be that all of the autobiographies analysed followed a similar 'hero' narrative in that the author is surviving through adversity. Is this the actual experiences of these women or does this pattern relate to what is perceived to constitute a good story in the non-fiction publishing world? One must also consider the type of data as the narrative was formulated with a performative action in mind and one cannot rule out the possibility that similarities with existing literature on both feminism and women in the police service were deliberately included by the authors themselves out of some conscious or unconscious desire to highlight such points to the readership. In addressing this issue I considered, as part of my analysis of the narrative structure, the performative action of the narrative and what ultimately the narrative was trying to achieve. In this instance I considered not only what the women themselves might be trying to achieve but also how the publishing process may have influenced the narrative. This appeared to be an appropriate way to approach the issue and one which felt sensible given that every narrative is offered on the basis of and shaped by the intentions of the author, in this case the intentions of both the author and those

publishing were considered. In addition to this one must also consider that autobiographies rely heavily on the memory of the author in order to for them to recall events and these recollections could be influenced by external factors and other actors. At least three of the narratives recount information from before the women's police service and back to a time when they were a child or a young adult. In presenting their narrative there are potentially significant events that have been forgotten altogether or jaded by the passing of time. However, again referring back to the overall aim of this research, the purpose is to explore the women's experiences and therefore the events highlighted in their memory and even modified over time with reflection, in themselves tell us something about the experiences overall. For example if an event had stayed with a woman then it is likely to have had an impact on her, more so than a memory that has not. Similarly, the reflection on past events with a current eye will be done in the context of subsequent experiences, understandings and meanings and therefore are important in terms of the experiences of the woman. In the broader sense the autobiographies are secondary data and as such were not specifically constructed for use within this research which meant that another method could have provided a richer data source in certain areas. An example of this was particularly so when considering Bloggs' narrative as it did not follow the same lifecycle format as the other autobiographies and therefore there was some data omitted in terms of choice for joining the police and personal identity. Similarly, if another research method were used, such as interviews for example, the opportunity would have existed to probe further on interesting points of information and also to check my understanding of events and meanings within the narrative to be clarified.

## **The data analysis**

My awareness of the potential limitations of the data source meant that I was keen to consider the context within which the women told their stories and the pressures (both overt and covert) upon them in doing so meant that there was a tension and challenge in relation to maintaining the power of voice for the women and the provision of my interpretation as the researcher. Plummer (2001) argues that rewriting someone's story in your analysis rather than representing their story and voice is problematic in terms of ethics and truth and I have struggled immensely with this. However, the acceptance by the women of a potentially oppressive status quo within the police service could mean that interpretations that I offered were sometimes questioning of the narrative itself. However, I feel that this was important in understanding the women's experiences. As Chase (2005) notes,

“When researchers' interpretive strategies reveal the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives, they help to open up possibilities for social change. In this sense, audiences need to hear not only the narrator's story, but also the researcher's explication of how the narrator's story is constrained by, and strains against, the mediating aspects of culture (and of institutions, organisations, and sometimes the social sciences themselves)” (Chase, 2005: 668).

The autobiographies offered differing volumes of data in relation to the women's experience and as such some may appear more frequently in the presentation and discussion of results in terms of specific examples but all offered evidence towards the themes identified and each was taken holistically prior to the thematic approach. The process of data analysis was undertaken several times with the autobiographies being read a total of four times each and I was keen during the identification of

themes to view the data as new. In my analysis I wanted to consider more than simply the story that was told but also how they constructed those stories and prioritised and emphasised certain aspects of their story. Narration or storytelling is a fundamental way in which people understand and share their experiences. In addition to this events that the storyteller feels are important are selected and presented to the reader. In turn this reveals peoples understanding of events. (Gibbs, 2007; Kohler Riesman, 2008). Shacklock and Thorp (2005) discuss how a life history narrative should allow one to see how an individual subjectively maps their experiences, works out the culture and a social system that is often obscured in a typified account. Indeed, Plummer (2001) states that there are two ways to use life history (and these autobiographies could be viewed as the policing life history of these women), the first is to use life history as a resource in that we are concerned with what the narrative or story tells us about social life. Alternatively life story can be used as the topic itself and in this instance the interest is in the focus on the actual autobiography and why and how the women came to tell their life stories, the things they say being shaped by social conditions and this is the thing which is under investigation (Plummer, 2001). In actual fact this research uses life story as both a resource in terms of what can be learnt about the women's experiences and as a topic due to the fact that the manner in which the story is shaped and offered is of interest. By using a thematic approach one is able to identify a meaningful pattern on what might otherwise be random events (Kohler Riessman, 2008). Indeed Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests that stories have a social role in that they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world. In order to capture this aspect of the personal narrative it was important that themes and structure are considered and an exploration of the performance aspect of the narrative is undertaken. The data

analysis process began with me reading each book in turn. I then reread the books and made observations on the data in the margins. This was a very open process whereby the intention was not necessarily to identify themes within the data but explore the narratives as a whole. Following this and after all books had been dealt with in this way, the data was reanalysed and general themes were highlighted across all of the data. In exploring the narrative I considered elements identified by Plummer (2001) which included the story; the involved characters and how they are categorised; use of imagery, metaphors and ironies; the use of language; and the existence of epiphanies and the effect that these have on the narrative and the author's experiences. The next step of this process was to input that data into NVivo which involved a lengthy process of recreating the text from the books within NVivo. I did consider alternatives to this but felt that the benefits in terms of the resultant ability to recall the data and my further familiarisation of it outweighed the time implications. Broad themes were firstly identified and then these were organised into main themes and related subthemes. Focusing on a specific area in this manner allows for close links with theory as you can link the topic/themes to existing theory more readily (Kohler Riessman, 2008) and it also ensures that the results/theory are grounded in the data. NVivo then allowed for the themes and associated data to be viewed with ease and comparisons in terms of the different authors' experiences to be made and the number of times that the theme was identified by then to be calculated. The research thereby contained elements of quantitative analysis by way of calculating the number of times that a theme presented itself in the data. I believe that this is a useful tool in itself in the analysis of the data and the thematic approach more specifically as it allows comment to be made on the construction of the narrative which is useful when narrative has a performative function in helping us to

understand the author's experience. This quantitative element serves to compliment the more qualitative analysis of what is actually being said. The use of NVivo for this type of research may not be seen as a totally conventional one and similarly the use of a thematic approach could be seen as not in keeping with the use of narrative data. However, due to the size of the data set that I had to analyse, NVivo was enormously helpful. Given that the analysis took the form of a thematic approach whereby themes were identified through the narrative and were in effect 'grounded' in the data, the general inductive coding approach from grounded theory was utilised as this allowed theory to be developed directly from the data. Kohler Riessman's description of what she terms 'dialogic/performance approach' explains aspects of the analysis process quite well, "what I have named a dialogic/performance approach draws on components of thematic and structural analysis, but folds them into broad interpretive research inquiries. Attention expands from detailed attention to a narrators speech – what is said and/ or how it is said – to the dialogic environment in all its complexity. Historical and cultural context, audiences for the narrative and shifts in the interpreter's positioning over time are brought into interpretation. Language – the particular words and styles narrators select to recount experiences – is interrogated, not taken at face value" (Kohler Riessman, 2008: 137). In practical terms the focus was on how the women used narrative style to tell their story and whether that told us anything about their experiences within the police service and the police culture generally. The theoretical ideas developed in an uncontrived way and this felt very reassuring in terms of wanting the data to speak for itself. However, one must be aware of the issue of potential bias within this process and whilst I was and am fully aware of my personal values and beliefs and how these might colour my perspective the only way to attempt to safeguard against

bias through the analysis process was to ensure that the themes were properly supported by evidence and therefore ideas were grounded in the data. This is, however, not to say that there wasn't a level of ambiguity within the narratives and I would agree with Plummer (2001) when he states that "Researchers seek consistency in subjects' responses when subjects' lives are often inconsistent." (Plummer, 2001: 40). I do believe, however, that if a new researcher were to consider the coding that they would find the key issues and areas of theoretical importance evident but that perhaps the integration of the categories as part of a selective coding process is a little less evident. The grounded theory approach has received criticism in a number of areas and one of these is the fact that it requires pre-existing assumptions and ideas to be set aside before the data analysis can take place. Theory is 'discovered' – inductively generated – and grounded in the data. But setting aside pre-existing ideas is almost impossible. Within my research I found that some a-priori ideas were found to be proved and others to be disproved and other ideas evolved through the research was both interesting and gratifying as a researcher. In undertaking the initial analysis I did not concern myself too much with the saturation of categories or the development of theory. Instead I attempted to remain as impartial as was possible given my level of involvement with the data and allow the themes to be grounded in the data. I am, however, acutely aware of concerns around my role as the researcher and despite my constant questioning of myself in my interpretations of the data I do accept that my background and experiences are likely to have impacted on the theme generation in some way. I see this as inevitable in to an extent but believe that as a result of the rigour in the analysis and the number of times that the data was reviewed that the validity and reliability of the research has not been adversely or excessively impacted upon.

### **Author's positioning within the research**

Perhaps the main consideration when assessing my influence would be my previous work experiences. As a graduate having read Social Policy and Criminology my first position on leaving university was as a case worker at the Crown Prosecution Service and as such I had contact with the police file builders who were all male at that time. Following from this I actually worked for the police service as a researcher undertaking Best Value Reviews and other service improvement functions. Interestingly whilst in the position I would now, on reflection, suggest that although I recognised aspects of the organisational culture as not acting in my interests as a female member of civilian staff I also acted in accordance with the culture and adopted some of the thought processes and exhibited some of the behaviours. This continued into my employment post the police service which was as a Lecturer in Police and Community Studies. However, I began to question my experiences of the police service and the police culture more generally when I subsequently began teaching new recruits to the police service as part of a Foundation Degree in Policing and their Initial Police Learning and Development Programme (IPLDP). This happened for several reasons including:

1. my greater engagement with feminist literature;
2. my observations of new recruits' interpretation of the culture and demonstrated behaviours in the first year (having had only two weeks as a police officer) and the often astounding transformation of student attitudes from year one to year two of the degree;
3. the witnessing of how the police service attempted to impose itself on and dominate its partner organisation, the University;



4. and my viewing this whole situation from the new and more liberal organisational culture of the University.

This has influenced the conceptual framework used for this research as on reading Angela McRobbie's (2009) 'The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change' I found that the discussions in relation to post-feminism epitomised my experiences and personal understanding of them, as the fourth wave movement has done subsequently. Similarly, my consideration of potentially oppressive metanarratives within the autobiographies despite my concerns about how this sits with my feminist approach is born out of my personal experiences and my current understanding of them. In addition to this the identification of themes could have been influenced and also the categorisation of those themes could be coloured by my experiences and perspective. However, the data analysis process was as objective as possible. I believe I approached it with an open mind. There were themes too that emerged that were contrary to my experiences and unexpected and so I am satisfied that this was undertaken to the best of my ability in terms of minimising my influence. However, one must also consider that my interpretation and influence may lead to new insights. In addition to this the literature offers support to my findings and it is highly unlikely that this research would have been done by individuals with a similar journey or cultural background to me.

## Results

The consideration of four women police officers autobiographies provided an interesting insight into the experiences of women police officers of policing and police culture. What is significant is that these texts could each be distinguished from the other in a number of ways such as geography, time or role within the police service, and yet they share a number of key themes in respect of the women officers' experiences. This in itself tells us much about Loftus' finding that there is a shared and related set of assumptions and practices regardless of whether the women were a rural or urban officer (Loftus, 2009). As will be discussed in this chapter there are common themes/subthemes across the narratives which demonstrate some commonality of experience amongst these women.. The themes and subthemes will be dealt with and discussed in turn:

- Experiences
  - Interactions with Male Colleagues
  - Participation
  - Feminist thought and Practice
- The Police Organisation
  - Identity
  - Police Culture
  - Power and Vulnerability

Each autobiography itself offered some interesting information in terms of the narrative structure. Hays' autobiography was published in 1993 and is entitled 'Policewoman One: My Twenty Years on the LAPD' which fits with her narrative as

she was keen to establish that she was 'policewoman one' and that she refused to give up this identity when offered in return for full police officer status, instead preferring to remain with the lower, historical police powers afforded to a policewoman in the LAPD at that time. Her experiences of policing are based in the Los Angeles Police Department in the 1970's (although the narrative is written in 1992) and therefore the narrative must be viewed in terms of this fact. However, having acknowledged this there are a number of experiences identified which are common with the more recent and UK based narratives. Hays' narrative portrays a largely positive view of her experiences of policing, although there are a number of points made which allude to more negative experiences, However she fails to afford any significant time or explanation to these issues within her narrative structure. Similarly, and perhaps as one may suspect from the era she was writing, Hays includes in her narrative a number of experiences which would be deemed inappropriate of the police service today (such as a 'Miss Fuzz' competition being held as part of a recruitment drive for women). Hays' narrative is based largely on her experiences in elite squads but by her own admission these were temporary assignments and not open to women officers on a permanent basis. Perhaps the most interesting contribution of Hays' narrative and experience is the opportunity that it provides to make comparisons between the historical period she writes about and the present day.

Ramsey joined the police force in 1992 and served for 14 years. Indeed the title of her autobiography is 'Girl in Blue: How One Woman Survived Fourteen Years in the Police Force' which is very fitting in respect of her narrative which is a survival story. The book was published in 2008 and is UK based. The narrative is largely based around how she experiences the police force, from being very much incorporated

into the police culture and organisation, to being an outsider and feeling like a victim, culminating in her feeling it necessary, on a personal level, to leave the occupation. The narrative structure of this autobiography is interesting in that, whilst there are indicators early in the narrative such as how she is negatively treated by the Inspector sent to assess her application to be an officer, the victim narrative is introduced unexpectedly in the form of a session with a psychiatrist being detailed. These contrasting chapters become more frequent until eventually the narrative is taken over wholly by the victim narrative.

Dittrich's autobiography was published in 2010 and is entitled 'Stumbling Along the Beat: A Policewoman's Uncensored Story from the World of Law Enforcement' and in respect of the overall performative action of the narrative it serves a similar purpose to that of Ramsey. However, the narrative structure of Dittrich's autobiography is very different in that only one, albeit, long chapter is dedicated to the harassment that she experiences (although there are indicators of negative experiences at other points in the narrative). The inclusion of the word 'uncensored' in the title of her autobiography is telling and the blurb states that "Terrifyingly, some of the most dangerous people she encountered were her fellow cops. And they would not stop until Stacy gave up – her career, her dreams, and even her life". There is an obvious sense of sensationalisation here which is undoubtedly born out of marketing issues. However this could reflect a tension in the narrative between the aspects that Dittrich herself wants to emphasise, given her continuing identity as a police officer and family links (her first chapter is entitled 'born blue') and that of the editorial/ publication process. Nonetheless Dittrich offers a contemporary account of a police department within the United States of America, but one which holds some strikingly similar experiences to that of the UK based narratives.

Bloggs' text was published in 2007, is a UK based text and is entitled 'Diary of an On-Call Girl: True Stories from the Front Line'. It offers a very different approach to the other narratives. As the title would suggest the book offers a series of anecdotes which are loosely held together by a personal chronicle. Bloggs has obviously made reference to prostitution in her title but one questions whether she has any deeper intention, other than a comedic quip. This takes on more relevance when we consider Ramsey's comparisons of herself to a prostitute later in this analysis. Bloggs adopts a heavily satirical and sarcastic style in her writing and the book largely degenerates into a rant about specific types of jobs that are dealt with by police officers and the state of society and the police service today. However, possibly unknowingly, Bloggs offers insights into her experiences of the police culture, the police organisation, indeed her first chapter is entitled 'W is for Woman'.

## **Experiences**

### **Interactions with Male Colleagues**

Perhaps one of the most well evidenced themes from the data analysis was that of 'sexual harassment and sexist behaviour'. Each of the women provided numerous personal examples and examples that they had witnessed happen to colleagues. There was a sense of vulnerability attached to such experiences and also the threat that a complaint would make matters worse. Despite Hays' relaxed commentary on many issues she does detail numerous attempts by other officers, including one woman, to engage in sexual relations with her. She suggests that humour was one way to deal with such issues but that on occasion this was not enough and that her only other option was to request a transfer. As she describes it, "A moving target is harder to hit". Hays' sums up the situation in that time period by stating:

“We have definitely come a long way, baby, but that doesn’t mean that sexism, overt and covert, isn’t still lingering in the departments ranks...It doesn’t matter how good a woman is or how much experiences she has on the force; some guys will never think that a woman has any business carrying a badge”

One must be mindful of the time in which Hays’ narrative is set as the social context is very different from the other three in relation to anti-discrimination laws and working practices but it is interesting to note that there are some similarities which lead one to ponder the extent of the changes over the years in relation to the experiences of women in terms of sexism and sexual harassment. Ramsey details many overt examples of such behaviour and these examples are evident in her narrative from her first day in the service:

“As I walked down the corridor to the briefing room two older officers in suits walked past me and looked me up and down.

‘Who’s she?’ I heard one say.

‘I don’t know but she’s a bit of alright,’ said the other.

I went bright red with embarrassment and had a horrible feeling that they had turned to watch me walk away. I could sense their eyes locked on my bum.”

Behaviour such as this extended beyond colleagues too with Ramsey detailing the conduct of an officer who she worked with and was actually quite fond of in a professional capacity:

“He had a crush on a large breasted woman called Margaret who worked in the local optician’s. It didn’t stop him from noticing other women though, his

eyes firmly fixed on their bums, particularly in the summer months when they wore fewer clothes. I was forever shaking my head at him and jokingly accusing him of being a pervert.”

In addition to these very overt examples Ramsey offers a more subtle example when detailing her performance development process where the superintendent made reference to her competence but also her looking very slim and petite in her uniform and questioning whether it was her boyfriend who dropped her off at work each morning:

“I hear that you’re very competent at your job. You’re great at dealing with the public and it says here that you’re an asset to the force,” he said.

I beamed. I had had very good feedback from the other officers about my performance and was delighted that they had made such positive comments for my appraisal.

‘And you look very slim and petite in your uniform.’ He looked me up and down, making me feel like a piece of meat.

I was reeling but said nothing. ‘What’s that got to do with anything?’ I thought to myself.

‘I’ve noticed you get dropped off to work in a Porsche sometimes,’ he said, leaning forward. ‘Is that your boyfriend who’s driving?’

I hadn’t realized that I’d been observed.

‘Yes,’ I said reluctantly. I felt very uneasy that my appearance and my relationship with Graeme seemed to be of at least as much interest to the police as the way I did my work. It made me feel like my life was not my own.”

This demonstrates the extent of such experiences and the regularity in which they occur. Bloggs, discusses how diversity training is delivered, where being seen to be racist is far more serious than being seen to be sexist. She explains that officers are willing to identify themselves as being prejudiced against women with some even identifying themselves as being willing to act on their prejudices whereas none is in respect of racism. Dittrich says that she was nicknamed ‘Barbie’ and talks about her supervisor whose view is that the “only thing a female officer brings to the department is problems and pregnancy”. An unusual type of harassment that was identified by Dittrich, Ramsey and Hays and alluded to by Bloggs is the spreading of rumours relating to a women officer’s sexual activities both within and outside of the workplace, thereby serving to undermine her position and belittle her. Bloggs states:

“As in most workplaces, gossip in the police usually travels faster than events themselves, and I’d have expected to hear this rumour at least three weeks before anything actually happened”

Dittrich dedicated a chapter to such issues and entitles it, fittingly, ‘rumours’:

“Even after I’d been a cop for years, the hits kept coming. I went to work one day to learn there were naked photographs of me on the internet. No one had actually seen them; they’d just heard the rumour from a couple of gossip-hungry dispatchers in the next county...Finally, the root of the rumour



surfaced....For the most part I ignored rumours, but I also learned that dealing with them head-on and going right to the source usually did the trick.”

The fact that all of the women identify rumours as a tactic to ostracise them is both interesting and concerning. This is particularly true when one considers that there is potential, at least in the feelings expressed by the women, for such behaviours to be born out of the attempt to belittle them and undermine their position. However, rumours are at the lower end of the overtly sexist attitudes and behaviours that the women experienced and as previously discussed the experiences of Hays are staggeringly similar to those of the women who are writing from a supposedly very different time period. However, considering that everyday sexism is one of the key drivers for the emergence of the fourth wave of feminism then perhaps we should not be surprised to see such attitudes and behaviours being experienced by women within the police service today as was in the 1970's of Hays narrative. The impact is that women's experiences of the police service and being a police officer are not only coloured by sexist behaviour and sexual harassment but in addition it becomes the accepted backdrop for their experiences as women police officers. In a similar way, Dittrich details feeling as though she were forever under the microscope with her male colleagues and she notes that there were no correct facilities and that she has to wear a man's stab vest. This point is also raised by the Gender Agenda 2 (BAWP, 2006) which found that there was often a lack of suitable equipment for women undertaking the police officer role. The majority of references to male colleagues in all four autobiographies involve attraction and sexual encounters. Hays takes a romanticised view of this situation initially when she details the close bond between colleagues which is the result of the pressures of the job stating that men and women cops sometimes get as close as two people can get. She refers to them

understanding each other when the outside world and their spouses do not. However, she acknowledges that a lot of sex occurs and that this happens even whilst on duty. Hays' account again supports that of the more recent narratives: Ramsay says that men that didn't seem attractive at the beginning of training school do afterwards due to the intense training experience. Bloggs says:

“Stories of sexual misdemeanour are always highly relished in the police service; I don't know if we have more sex than other people, but I'd like to think we do, and if you can get to my level of service without being forbidden to work with a good two or three of your colleagues, you just aren't doing your job properly. You need not actually have slept with them; what is important is that people think you have”.

Interestingly all of the women discuss the issue with a level of detachment but all admit that they themselves have had relationships with male colleagues, somehow separating themselves from the stereotypical and often somewhat sordid situation that they previously described. This demonstrates that despite the more negative elements highlighted a characteristic of their experiences is relationships with colleagues and what's more reasons for such interactions are often centred around understanding the position of the women within their professional role. However there appears to be a distinction made by the women in respect of the nature of the relationships with male colleagues that are acceptable with serious relationships being accepted but women who foster male attention being berated; Ramsay says of one such woman that she is:

“the kind of woman who made it harder for the rest of us to be taken seriously...she was continuously bending over the male officers in a provocative way”.

Dittrich tells that there are women who deliberately go after, sleep with, and get officers to leave their wives and that these women are known as ‘cop groupies’, ‘gun suckers’ or ‘badge chasers’. She suggests that these women get promotion and other advantageous treatment but that they are disliked by ‘legitimate’ police women. Interestingly whilst she talks about such women with disdain she goes on to divulge that her husband (also a police officer) was married when they met, that he left his wife for her and that she was described as a ‘badge bunny’ by colleagues but that this did not phase her. There is an undeniable threat here which is that the workplace is a sexualised one and this is both detrimental in some respects and advantageous (if you consider the identification of a spouse as advantageous) in other ways for the women. The distinction between the men and the women, as reported in these narratives, appears to be that women are far more likely to receive negative comment and consequence as a result of their sexual and romantic activities than the men are and this originates from other women in the service as well as the men themselves.

Perhaps the most disturbing similarities in the women’s narratives presents itself in respect of how women are described. Ramsay details a DC Logan who describes police women as being good for two things, ‘fucking and frying’. Ramsay also details that women police officers are viewed as being in one of two categories: ‘dyke or bike’, referring to the fact that they are perceived to be lesbians or sexually promiscuous. Bloggs makes reference to this saying:

“For the first time, not all female officers are lesbians, so that makes for a much happier atmosphere of flirting and inter-colleague affairs, rather than all the nasty insults about ‘dykes’, which are now just reserved for those women officers with really short hair or who do not flirt enough”.

This crude reduction of women’s worth did not appear to present itself as too shocking to the women when reporting it within the narrative and as such one could suggest that it forms part of the backdrop of sexist behaviour discussed earlier. Nonetheless by sharing this information the women shed some light on the potential experiences of other women officers even if they do feel the burden of such experiences personally. What is event regardless of this however is that the worth of the women police officer is not appreciated by all in the service and that there remains some very negative and derogatory forces which serve to shape women’s experiences and question their competence. This demonstrates also the patriarchal nature of policing and patriarchy and malestreaming is evident in some accounts of interactions with male colleagues. For example, Ramsey details her initiation at a new station in which she had her bare backside forcibly stamped by a male colleague. She states:

“A few days after I started, Harry and Dean came towards me holding the office stamp with glints in their eyes. It bore the date and the Strathclyde Police logo. I edged away from them.

‘What’s going on?’ I asked.

‘You’re getting it. All the girls have to pass an initiation when they come to this office. They get their arse stamped.’

I was totally shocked”

Ramsey goes on to recount another experience at a new station which demonstrates both malestream and sexualisation of the workplace:

“I pushed open the door of the briefing room and saw a sea of male suits. As I squeezed past the officers already seated to reach one of the vacant chairs, one of them leered at me and hissed under his breath, ‘Your arse looks great in that suit’. I gave him a dirty look and made my usual response: ‘Fuck off!’ Like most of the female officers I got comments like that all of the time, and although I tried my best not to let them get to me I found them increasingly distressing. I was becoming more and more disenchanted with the behaviour of some of my male colleagues. They all looked so respectable in their suits and ties, but along with the leering remarks and the drunken behaviour”.

Bloggs’ experience supports this view when she talks of sitting in the briefing room listening to “...the lads have the customary conversation – about engine parts and wind-breaking, that sort of thing – with which they fill the first fifteen minutes of each shift”. This demonstrates malestream as the briefing room is dominated by male activities. Dittrich suggests that whilst she does get support from her male colleagues during her divorce that there is the ‘banter’ aspect too and that she does not appreciate it when the men take bets on who will be the first to sleep with her once her divorce is finalised. These experiences serve to demonstrate that ‘maleness’ is the norm within the women’s working environment.

Responses to sexist behaviour appear surprisingly uniform. As previously suggested humour and an unwillingness to complain are usual approaches. For example, Hays suggests that one of the reasons why she adopted a 'dizzy blonde' character was to get her through but she acknowledges that this would not be to every police woman's taste. Ramsey provides information on a male officer commenting about another female colleague who complained that her shift inspector had been sexually harassing her:

"The shift gossip that day was about an officer called Lesley Brown who had gone off sick. Every officer I spoke to couldn't wait to tell me that her sick leave had begun after she made a complaint against her shift inspector. He'd been sexually harassing her for months. Nothing had happened to him, but she'd been moved onto this shift and had been off sick the whole time.

'She might win the battle but she'll never win the war,' said one of the officers, raising his eyebrows.

I felt angry and wanted to say something but decided that because it was my first day it was best to keep my mouth shut."

The outcome of this situation was that nothing happened to the male inspector but that the officer was moved to another shift and began taking time off work as sick, with the suggestion within the narrative being that this was linked to her experiences of the sexual harassment. Ramsey's response is characteristic of what the other women share in terms of their response to behaviours and attitudes that they find offensive which is to feel anger instead but to say nothing for fear of potential reprisals. This is with the exception of Bloggs who details many incidents of sexist

behaviour but who does not detail feelings of anger in response. This is likely due to the fact that Bloggs demonstrates attitudes largely consistent with those expressed by her male colleagues. Hays' responses are comparable here from a personal perspective and she often uses humour to highlight such observations, although one may need to consider whether women today would feel more or less able to express their disdain for discriminatory attitudes and beliefs. In any event the practice of feeling as though one does not have a voice to protest in respect of such experiences and instead one employs the use of humour or silence is something which appears common amongst the narratives of three of the women and therefore appears to characterise their experiences. What we see within this theme is evidence from all of the narratives, despite the location or time where they were written, that the women's experiences are characterised by sexist behaviour and attitudes and indeed sexual harassment which serves to alienate and ostracise them. A resulting factor is also the undermining of the women's role and the questioning of their competence. The women are put into crude pigeon holes based on their appearance and even if they prove themselves as competent officers their appearance will always be an important factor in how they are perceived. The women experience routine patriarchy and malestreaming to the point where it becomes a back drop to their experiences. A concerning dimension to this though is the lack of power or voice that women feel that they have to challenge such behaviours and instead they choose to opt for humour or silence as a response. There was very little deviancy from this experience presented by each of the four women, with the only exception being the response of Bloggs (although she still identified the behaviours). The workplace is a highly sexualised one regardless of

whether the women invite or reject such attention but interestingly all of the women share that they have relationships with male colleagues.

### **Participation**

As one would expect given the era in which the events occur, Hays' account of gendered deployment is very obvious and can be distinguished from the other narratives in that she clearly states that in 1967 women were only allowed to do certain jobs, usually dealing with women and children. However, what is interesting is that the other women's narratives suggest that same is largely true of their working experiences many years later, albeit in a more informal sense of organisation. Even though Ramsey was part of an elite squad she still experiences gendered deployment:

“The superintendent handed out various jobs to people. The guys were all given the cushy tasks but my name was much further down the list. Everyone wanted to interview the suspect, but there was no chance of me being asked to do that. It was a case of jobs for the boys.”

Interestingly Bloggs too has some strong words to say on this issue when discussing a rape case that she has been asked to deal with:

“It's because I'm a WOMAN, is it?' I say. Sergeants and control rooms are always itching to send female officers to deal with rapes. That's all well and good, except that there aren't many women in the police, rapes take a long time to deal with and we still have the same non-rape stuff as everyone else to work on too...This also means that my female colleague and I receive regular training in the womanly attributes of gathering



evidence at the scene of a serious crime and taking important victim statements.”

The recognition of gendered deployment by Bloggs is significant given that she is usually sympathetic to the status quo of working practices. She also explains that male colleagues buy them gifts for doing such jobs. She goes on to detail a situation where she is paired with a male colleague but where she is the one sent to deal with suicidal female and how her male colleague opts not to engage in the task:

“Rich doesn’t do skinny women in grubby underwear, so I have to ensure Colleen is wrapped in a curtain before he can enter. Once inside she moves out of the curtain and into the lounge virtually naked, which means that Rich says very little for the rest of our stay”.

Interestingly she states that the woman asks her for a hug but that she is not comfortable with showing emotions under normal circumstances and certainly not with members of the public. This is significant as it contradicts the original premise of the gendered deployment whereby women are seen to be more likely to have caring qualities. Indeed the premise for gendered deployment as reported by the women does not seem to be, based on the women’s experiences grounded in any assumption about suitability for undertaking the task but instead appears to related to the preferences of the male officers. This then serves to delineate the policing tasks suitable for men and those suitable for women, reiterating that a difference exists between the two for the women within these narratives. Similarly a key issue that emerged within the women’s experience was that of having to prove oneself. Indeed, women not only have to prove themselves in line with what police culture would expect from all new officers but they have to prove themselves as a woman

doing a man's job. Dittrich's narrative provides an interesting extract from her father, a retired officer:

"In law enforcement, one of the greatest compliments an officer can get comes from his or her partners: That he or she can be counted on when the chips are down, and does not fade away in the face of danger or death. Along with her public accolades, what makes me most proud of Stacy are the many unsolicited compliments, from a variety of officers and civilians, that she is "just one of the guys". High praise indeed"

Again, it is demonstrated here that being a part of the group is valued significantly. Dittrich's key messages within her narrative could be seen to be expressed via the three quotes that she offers prior to the forward. The first of these quotes refers to a police officer being a peacetime soldier; the second to there being a real person behind the badge who cares and believes in what they are doing; and the third is a quotes from the entertainer Jennifer Lopez which reads "I just observed – like when a female cop is standing with a male cop, people talk to the male cop. So women find ways to demand respect...they banter with them line for line. They shoot with them shot for shot". This along with the above comments from Dittrich's father serve to demonstrate the importance of being accepted and being able to measure up to their male counterparts. Acceptance and inclusion appear to be a regular quest of the women's experiences particularly in the early stages of their service and yet it would seem that such things are much more elusive for these women than they perceive for their male counterparts. The issue of acceptance links with physicality and strength both of which are a feature of each of the narratives analysed. Hays talks of the trend for officers to be discouraged from grappling with offenders

suggesting that this was as a result of the size of officer recruits reducing. Similarly, Ramsay makes reference to size when she discusses a woman officer who works in the supplies office which provides uniforms and the such like, that she finds scary. Bloggs refers to size in a number of her accounts such as the size of the individuals that she is dealing with, the size of the armed response officers, the size of the paramedics and the size of a stolen vehicle that she is dealing with. The significance of this becomes clear when considering Young's (1991) argument that size is an issue for women doing 'men's jobs' and size and physical capability are often inhibiting factors for the women in terms of their assumed capability. Dittrich recalls an attorney asking her to account for how she thought that she could possibly physically handle his client, a large football player. Bloggs mentions that members of the public appear surprised that she is single crewed and ask whether she should be on her own or normally crewed with a man. This echoes Westmarland's (2001) finding that force and anatomy are determinants of competence as a police officer. Dittrich and Bloggs both talk about this issue, Dittrich says:

“What many people don't realise is that being female actually kept me out of a lot of physical altercations. People think that the bad guys will see a female officer and assume he (the bad guy) can fight his way out. I learnt just the opposite. Not all so-called criminals think that way. They may commit other crimes, but they feel it is “unmanly” to attack a woman. In fact, I've used that to my advantage several times.”

Bloggs suggests that being flirtatious is a tactic when dealing with male offenders. A similar point is made by Dittrich when she explains that her physical ability and fitness were questioned in court by a prosecutor after returning to work six weeks

after having a baby. However, Bloggs also alludes to a new breed of police women in describing her colleague:

“Becks is not a reedy little girl. She is several inches taller than me, and I would describe her as ‘solid’. She is also ridiculously fit, lifts weights and even ‘runs’ on her days off”.

Similarly, there is recognition of this new breed of police woman in her description of the dog handler but this is not based necessarily on the physical aspects:

“five foot three, Indian, with short peroxide hair, Saira is diamond edged. In fact there is only one person I would less like to meet alone in a dark alley, and she travels around in the boot of Saira’s car”.

This is consistent with Westmarland’s (2001) claim that a ‘new breed’ of policewoman has been identified and that she is characterised by strength, intelligence, attractiveness, professionalism and competence. However this new breed of woman police officer is one which is not developed further in the narratives and questions such as the frequency and impact of such an officer on other women and indeed the women in this analysis is left unanswered. Nonetheless women’s participation appears to be marred by the question of their physical abilities and therefore competence. Each of the women detail supporting examples within their narratives and this contributes to the experience of demarcation for the women. A factor prohibiting the participation of women fully and preventing them from being a successful police officer is the attempt to have a happy and balanced family life is an issue that was strongly present in all of the narratives under investigation. This does

not appear to be something that differs significantly through time or place as Hays suggests that she eventually had to give up being part of an elite squad due to the erratic nature of the work which left her with the clear choice between family and work, which are deemed incompatible despite her professed success within the squad. Ramsay supports this and makes an interesting additional point in relation to the fact that as a police officer you do not have much of a social life due to the fact that people don't want to socialise with you because you are not deemed a regular person and because as a police officer you are on call 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Dittirich's narrative becomes dominated with such experiences towards the end of her narrative and indeed her final chapter is entitled 'Mommy's Home to Stay' where she states:

“I was missing more soccer games and school plays – and frankly, my daughters' entire lives...I decided to come to terms with what was important to me: my children”

Whilst such tensions may be a feature of men's experiences too, the women in this analysis identified it as a significant problem and one which resulted in, if only partly to their leaving their role within police service. This experience is significant in that it is presented as an important aspect of the women's experiences and their ability to be a police officer. There is a clear and strong conflict of roles which they battle with and which is a defining feature in the conclusion of their narratives. Nevertheless, each narrative also provided evidence of the women's feeling very much included and fully participating at some point. An example of this would be Ramsey who during her time within the CID felt she was very much a part of the culture and engaged fully in the associated activities:

“I felt as if I was never away from the police these days, because I worked such long hours and often did overtime. When I did finally get off duty I’d still meet up with my colleagues in the evening at a pub or club. Our group of eight Plainers [plain clothed police officers] was very tight-knit. The nature of what we were dealing with made us very close and we were happy to be in each other’s company all the time.”

Dittrich too states that she received lots of support from her male colleagues during a difficult time that she had with her captain and that they went as far as to make a complaint about how she was being treated: had enough.

“I kept my mouth shut. However, it was my male counterparts – and friends - who had enough. It was *they* who went to the police chief and complained about Lieutenant Roberts’s treatment of Lolita and me.”

Bloggs’ account also identifies most frequently occasions where she and her woman colleagues feel very much a part of the police culture and undertake activities along with the male officers. This demonstrates that despite what has previously been discussed in relation to feelings of segregation and demarcation that the women did feel included in the camaraderie and policing task. However the balance of experiences shared shows that Ramsey and Dittrich are weighted towards the negative experiences whilst Hays and Bloggs share more inclusive and often positive experiences. In this respect there is a contradiction within the experiences which may be explained by considering the intended performative action of the narrative. As previously discussed Ramsey and Dittrich retired or resigned from the police service under the difficult circumstances whereby complaints had been made following long conflicts between themselves and their colleagues and police

organisation and this may account for why their narrative is characterised by more negative accounts of their participation and inclusion.

### **Feminist thought and practice**

Bloggs and Hays both make specific reference to the issue of feminism. However, as one would expect from these two sources given their subscription to patriarchal discourses, it was not made within a context of positivity. In the first chapter Bloggs states that she is a 21<sup>st</sup> century police officer and goes on to point out;

“I’m not a feminist, and nor am I in favour of positive discrimination. I don’t think we should ever lower fitness standards to allow more women into the force, and I don’t think anyone should get treated differently – whether better or worse – just because they have children.”

Later she states that;

“Occasionally you hear a gobby female mouthing off about how ‘we still have a long way to go’, about ‘sexism in the workplace’ and such clichés. These females need to have it pointed out to them just how far we have come over the last few months, in 2005/6 no fewer than three Women Police Constables were shot, SHOT, in the line of duty. How much more equal can we get? Because women have found it so hard to become equal there is a lot of help out there for the Woman Police Constable. Take the police fitness.”

In addition to the overtly anti-feminist points being made here by Bloggs in the first extract, which clearly demonstrate an acceptance of perspectives related to the traditional police culture. The language used is very revealing too in respect of her

describing issues facing women in the service as 'clichés', women that highlight the issue as 'gobby' and how she identifies that women have found it hard to become equal, thereby making it the women's responsibility specifically. What is of interest to me as a researcher here is to what extent would Bloggs' perspectives and possible resultant actions perpetuate her own, and other police women's oppression?

Bloggs' interpretation of what equality is appears to be somewhat misunderstood as she suggests that by the simple fact that women face the same risks as men whilst undertaking the role of police officer that they can be considered equal. In addition to this she does not recognise that people with children (whether men or women but of course we know that women bear the main responsibility for childcare) face additional challenges and a lack of recognition can in fact lead to them having restricted opportunities as compared to those without children. This issue of what equality is according to Bloggs can also be identified in her dialogue with her colleague about a female victim of domestic assault:

“Becks sighs. She's just as bad as him'. 'Well that's not very feminist,' I say. 'Yes it is,' she says. 'Women are just as capable of committing crimes as men. She's just weaker so she loses the fight. What's not feminist about that?'”

However, when considering the issue of rape and the experience of a rape victim in court Bloggs appears to understand some of the issues faced and in particular the power imbalance:

[Sarcastic context] “...an abused single mother of three, living on welfare and suffering from depression and substance abuse is unable to give a



professional speech in front of a room full of highly-educated people in wigs. It is almost as if she has made no effort to continually re-live the day of her rape until now”

Both Ramsey and Dittirch detail issues of domestic violence and sexual assaults and rape that they have dealt with and both identify this power differential too. However, interestingly none of the women actually view feminism or feminist thought as helpful in their understanding of the context of this nor in their understanding of their own experiences. Whilst Hays writes of a different time period from the other women and therefore cannot be directly compared in this scenario due to the socio-political differences of the time, she too recognises the power differential between men and women, particularly in relation to rape and states that the pimps that she dealt with were all about controlling women and exploiting their own power. She goes on to detail that all women have to be aware of the possibility of rape and that we live in a place where we can be victimised anytime and anyplace. This reflects in the current activities in relation to the fourth wave of feminism and in particular the renaissance of the ‘reclaim the night’ movement and leads one to ponder how much the situation has changed in terms of women’s experiences since Hays’ era. Interestingly her use of the collective ‘we’ in her discussions on this topic suggest a shared identity as a woman rather than a police officer which is of interest in terms of feminism although whether Hays realises this or not is another question. It is unlikely that Hays would describe herself as a feminist based on her descriptions of herself and her activities in the force, such as her participating in the ‘Miss Fuzz’ competition where she acknowledges that she looked good in her hot pants and made it into the paper. In addition to this she details her family history which includes burlesque and brothels; however, she appears to be proud of this and suggests that she finds this history

empowering. At the time of Hays' joining the police force women undertook different roles from men and the generational differences are evident in Hays' accounts and she states that:

“In 1972 *The Feminine Mystique* had already been out for nine years or so, and women's liberation was in full flower in the real world, but there was no question that the police department was dragging its feet when it came to full-fledged feminism. Yes, there were women on the job, but they were definitely considered a breed apart, that until 1972 we used to have the Los Angeles Policewomen's Fashion Show every year.”

The extent to which the police service has developed in light of the women's experiences shared through these narratives is questionable in some respects as the police service is still experienced as a patriarchal, sexualised and sexist environment for the women in this analysis at least. Hays' description of the 'Miss Fuzz' event actually holds some interesting points in relation to sisterhood as she states that it was a good opportunity for women to get together en masse, that this prevented her from feeling 'cut off' and that it was nice to feel connected to other women colleagues. Such feelings of togetherness amongst women within the service is not an area regularly highlighted by these narratives and whilst all the women identify their support for other colleagues and victims that they are dealing with at some point in their narratives, the issue of sisterhood is largely an absent one. There appears to be a high level of division between the individual women officers and no sense of a collective or sustained acknowledgement of supporting each other through their experiences and in the role generally. Bloggs demonstrates this with her usual sarcasm:

“The fashion at Blandmore nick at the moment is for female officers to have long luscious hair. The fashion is for them to be also far younger than me and far more brunette than me, but I try not to hold these traits against them. It may be possible for a girl to be young, pretty and have long hair and still be a good police officer, for all I know”.

Bloggs highlights the issue of competition here amongst the women and this seemed quite common within the narratives. Ramsey details her sense of resentment towards the woman DCI for making her dress up as the murdered prostitute for the reconstruction and as such allows her to go out in front of the media with her skirt tucked into her underwear. Ramsey also offers some positive accounts of sisterhood when she recounts how she, as a more experienced officer, supports another women officer who is struggling with her colleagues (one in particular in relation to sexual harassment) and role, Ramsey recounts that she said:

“‘Look don’t worry, I’ll do what I can to help you,’ I said. ‘You can talk to me about this anytime, you don’t need to put up with it.’ I was alarmed at what I’d heard, but not surprised. I had come across other young women officers who had experienced the same problems.”

Whilst Ramsey shares this experience it is one of few identified in her narrative and comes after an epiphany in her narrative in relation to her questioning the police organisation and culture based on her personal experiences and therefore she is in a different position, perhaps searching for camaraderie from women as she may not have done before. The lack of such examples of sisterhood and the presence of examples of competition and conflict amongst women within the narratives is unfortunate particularly in the context of the women’s experiences which as we know

are characterised by segregation and marginalisation on both a personal and professional level. Despite this all of the women detail accounts of trying to fit in and even being 'one of the boys' as previously discussed but this does not appear to be a strategy that often serves them well based on the experiences shared in the narratives. A greater collective with other women may have resulted in different and potentially more positive accounts within the women's experiences and therefore narratives.

## **The police organisation**

### **Identity**

All of the women identify a change in identity on becoming and on being a police officer and becoming part of the police organisation. This is also an important theme however in discovering how the women want themselves to be viewed. Hays portrays the most positive view stating that prior to being a police officer she was like a cute little mouse but that the police service made an enormous difference to her life and that she is no longer shy or nervous. She is very clear on portraying herself as a professional person who is competent if not exceptional at her job as a police officer. However, she tells numerous anecdotes which relate to her physical appearance which is of obvious importance too. Hays has an interpretation of what an officer is and she suggests that she attempts to fulfil the requirement, for example on discussing the flag outside of the training school she states that if she were in uniform she would probably describe it as "a real motherfucker". What is interesting here is that she feels that she has to be in uniform to use such language which poses questions about her personal identity and the identity that she adopts as a police officer. Ramsey admits that she was very naïve, vulnerable, nervous and scared when she first joined the police but that as an individual she thought herself

confident, competent and innovative. She goes on to say “I felt like I was in an episode of the cartoon *Mr Benn*, stepping into a fantasy world and becoming a new character for the day”. In addition to this the experience of training school left her feeling “stamped on”. The change in identity was a problem for Ramsey and her family as she believes she is now bossy, has an ‘I know best’ attitude, is suspicious, arrogant and has lost her innocence. Following the difficulties she experienced at work she states

“I bore no resemblance to the person that I used to be. I’d been so strong and now I felt too weak to do anything...I didn’t recognise the woman staring back at me [in the mirror]. Who was I? I was no longer a police officer. I didn’t have the comfort blanket of that job title behind me and I didn’t have anyone I could talk to about what had happened to me...Now that there was some distance between me and the work I was able to see for the first time how much the job had defined me. Sometimes I’d told my sister Lynne off when she’d introduced me as ‘my sister the police officer’, as I felt it robbed me of my identity as Anne the woman. Even though I’d left the police I was still being defined by my former job title”.

On finally leaving the police service Ramsey adds:

“As I reflected on my police career I began to think that there was not much difference between me and prostitutes like Margo Lafferty. Being dressed in police uniform, I sometimes felt I was being judged in the same way. Both of us had been filed in certain categories and were no longer judged as individuals”.

Dittrich offers similar experiences and she too identifies herself as being very naïve when she joined the job, despite also acknowledging that she is from a policing family and has no doubt from an early age that she is going to be a police officer. Dittrich too provides a narrative that suggests that she was competent as a police officer and also states that she struggled with her identity on leaving the police force as she thinks that if she isn't a police officer she is not sure what she is; it is what she has done all of her life. However Dittrich does retain some of that identity as she describes herself as retired which could be due to the fact that she has always identified herself with policing as a result of her family members being police officers. What is of particular interest in relation to Dittrich's narrative is its structure in that only one chapter, albeit a long one is dedicated to the issue of her harassment at work which is in contrast to the other four autobiographies which weave such issues through the narrative, this can be seen particularly with Ramsey's narrative. This is perhaps due to loyalties to the police given her family situation but also perhaps due to her not wanting to be seen as a victim. In support of this would be the fact that we find out almost by accident that she has a heart problem which is an obviously serious issue but one which she omits to address in any detail, perhaps again not wanting her narrative to be cast as a victim narrative. Hays takes a similar approach in her narrative whereby she informs the reader that she has been the victim of a number serious sexual assaults but she avoids allowing her narrative to be shaped by these events and asserts that she is a strong individual. Bloggs provides very little detail on her personal identity other than she is not a feminist but that she is a woman police officer. Of course Bloggs is writing her narrative from an anonymous perspective and therefore is unlikely to offer vast amounts of information on her personal identity. However it is clear that she strongly views herself in terms of her

police identity and it is within this identity that her whole narrative is framed. Each of the women view themselves as confident before entering the police service whilst perhaps being slightly naïve about the world or the role they will be undertaking. However, the most interesting point of consideration when exploring identity is the fact that the women who offered information on identity all stated that their identity changed as a result of the role and what's more that it changed in a similar way. This similarity was regardless of time or geography and resulted in a more cynical and jaded view of the world. One may suggest that a change whereby one becomes more assertive is perhaps inevitable for any individual undertaking such a role as a police officer but what is also of interest is the similarities between Ramsey and Dittrich's post-police identity. Again this similarity defies location and suggests that the police officer identity can become all-consuming and that reverting back to a civilian identity is a difficult transition. Ramsey and Dittrich's narratives are also interesting because they have similar experiences in terms of the course that their time in the police service took and indeed how it ended, which is perhaps why their narrative structure mirrors each other on occasion with this issue of identity being one. The exploration of identity suggests that the police officer identity often becomes a dominant one in these women's lives and is one that is often difficult to abandon.

### **Police culture**

All of the narratives studied are rich with references to police culture, both knowingly and unknowingly. The experiences offered within the narrative clearly exemplify many aspects of the existing literature on police culture. Hays is proud of her 'belonging' and indeed states that she spent her life looking for a family and a home and that when she became an officer she felt that she was finally home, protected

and able to protect. Hays makes constant references to being a part of the police organisation and the word 'we' features heavily in her narrative when talking about the organisation and her colleagues. Indeed she notes that Los Angeles Police Department Field Manual states that camaraderie amongst colleagues is necessary and healthy for a successful, productive and fulfilling occupation. Whilst the location and era of Hays' narrative must be appreciated she actually identifies issues here consistent with the literature on police culture in respect of the camaraderie and close working relationships and from this respect it can be compared to the other narratives. Interestingly, Dittrich's summary of the police culture supports this view and somewhat agrees with Loftus' view that the police organisation, and police culture in particular, is resistant to change when she identifies that

“The institution that is the police is like a colossal steam roller, flattening any challenge or any voice of dissent that dares to cast a shadow over the way this monolithic structure operates. They recoil from transparency, determined to continue to do things the way they have always done them. The police are skilled in manipulation”.

Ramsey's narrative gives a relatively generous amount of space to the issue of training school where she details the rules in relation to police culture which were instilled there. She recalls how the trainer informs them that they have joined the “biggest gang in the world”, which she makes several other references to throughout her narrative, including her acknowledgement at one point that she fully subscribes to this perspective:

“I started to go on police nights out which also involved heavy drinking, happy to be part of the team. I'd been in the police for seven years now, I was



twenty-eight and I'd reached a point where I was playing the game. I'd lost my independent streak and was more willing to swallow the 'We're the biggest gang in the world' mentality. I was ambitious, and getting into the CID had become very important to me. It was touted as the ultimate in police work, and because I was longing to work there I was uncritically buying into police culture."

Bloggs makes many references to police culture and its features but this is done through her anecdotes rather than an overt recognition of it. It is interesting to note that she writes her book from an anonymous perspective and one could suggest that she fully subscribes to the police culture and does not want to suffer the consequences of potentially being viewed as disloyal by having revealed unflattering information about the organisation and police culture. Her account uses satire, irony and sarcasm which could be said to be a feature of the police working practices. Perhaps the most significant clue about her position in relation to police culture and her adoption of it is that her book is dedicated to her colleagues: "To my colleagues, who laugh, seethe and sometimes grieve together". However, whilst Bloggs demonstrates the most obvious subscription to the police culture, all of the other narratives also offer information that suggests that they too subscribed, at least during certain parts of their time within the police service. This is of particular interest when we consider that much of the activities of male colleagues, the discourses and accepted behaviours, attitudes and practices are often portrayed as being detrimental in the women's experiences both personally and professionally and yet the women are so very keen to be accepted and present themselves as being part of this police culture.

One area where subscription to the occupational police culture is evident is when considering the writers' perspectives on police management. Hays says:

“The department is chock full of asslickers [police management] already.  
Ask any street cop”

Whilst Bloggs states that the police is being run by

“...a group of paranoid, pedantic and politically-correct accountants. On acid”.

Ramsey details that baton training is an exercise protecting the Chief Constable from liability and that in high risk tactical situations senior officers often make decisions that put lower ranking officers in danger. Dittrich refers to the organisational management as “the administration” and claims that due to her perceived disloyalty they are looking for excuses to discipline her. In this respect the women feel very much a part of the team and there was unwavering commonality between the accounts of the women within their narrative in respect of this, thereby demonstrating their subscription to the occupational police culture as a characteristic of their experiences.

Professionalism and deviance in general is a key feature of the women's narratives. Ramsey in particular offers numerous anecdotes in relation to deviant behaviour by officers and examples include having to write your name on your property in the station otherwise it would be taken by other officers, and still often was, that there were rumours that the police were involved when a drug dealer was found dead and the officer breathalysing himself after a night out and having driven to work and being over the limit. She summarises by saying

“By the time I left the job I felt that the criminals often had more integrity than the police. Whilst criminals are up to no good in a way the police aren't, I felt that at least the criminals are honest about what they do. The police pretend to be whiter than white when in fact they're no different to anyone else. They hide behind their uniform, believing that no matter what they do it automatically makes them honest citizens and that they're above the law. The criminals that I encountered had no truck with that sort of hypocrisy”.

Dittrich too details lower level deviance and discrepancies in relation to professionalism but also points to a more sinister reality when talking about her police officer uncle who was shot:

“I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking that whoever shot Uncle Jim better be dead and that if he wasn't, he would be soon. I knew my family. No one shot a Wendling and lived to tell about it. Our family, one of the most well-known and respected in the city [and also with many members who were serving police officers], almost lost one of its members that night. The good thing is that Uncle Jim survived being shot. As for the guy who shot him...well, like I said, he didn't live to tell about it”.

Bloggs details only the lower level, although still extremely serious, deviance when she tells of how a prisoner is lost, how she orchestrates it so that she can claim double time for having to work a rest day when called to court and how she dumps CCTV evidence in a public rubbish bin. In relation to these women's experiences then, deviance and a lack of professionalism are common place and in respect of Bloggs are part of her own activities. Evidently whilst this does not necessarily

impact on them on a personal level in respect of their experiences it is a feature of a characteristic of how they experience policing and police culture. However, the issue could have a role in shaping their understanding of their role and their perceived interpretation of what policing is and what the requirements of police culture are.

Overall police culture was a feature of the women's experiences and was one which they largely subscribed to despite the fact that the consequences of it were not always favourable to them. Their narratives demonstrated that police culture is often seen as the defining feature of the role of police officer and policing more generally and is very rarely questioned by the officers themselves. Dittrich and Ramsey in particular detail their experiences of being in receipt of the negative aspects that police culture can result in and yet they both, and particularly Dittrich, detail their complete adoption of the norms and values of it through their narratives for the majority of the length of their service. There are two pertinent points here worth noting; the first being the extent to which the women acknowledge the negativity aspects of police culture potentially working upon them and the second is the responses of the women, with any direct responses resulting in negative consequences for them. This leads onto the next subtheme which is power and vulnerability.

### **Power and vulnerability**

This subthemes relates to more than the general control that the police are seen to have control over an officer's personal life regardless of their gender which was detailed in each of the narratives which can be seen in decisions about which geographic area a person will be deployed, where they can live and with whom (in the case of Ramsey in particular), short notice changes to their rest days due to court appearances, cancellation of holiday leave and mandatory requirement to

remain on duty if there is an identified need. This relates to a much more sinister account of power and vulnerability as detailed by the women. Whilst Ramsey and Dittrich's time with the police service ended negatively and unsurprisingly their feelings of vulnerability and paranoia increased specifically during this period, Hays and Bloggs refer in more general terms to the power that the organisation holds. Hays suggests that if you let the "brass" know that you are happy with your situation (i.e. shift, partner etc.) then they will find a way to change it as "They have that power". Bloggs details a potential complaint that may be made about her and identifies the very different outcomes depending on your standing with the organisation:

"Inspectors have two modes: 'Shaft' and 'Deflect' ['shaft' meaning not support and deflect' meaning cover for and support]. Fortunately, I haven't put too many backs up in my short career and I normally benefit from the deflect mode".

This illustrates that if you are accepted within the organisational culture you are more likely to be supported as if you are seen to be conforming to the requirements of the organisation and the culture then you are more likely to be protected. The experiences of Ramsey and Dittrich in relation to such issues are distinctly more sinister. Ramsey details how her actions in relation to a complaint made by her boyfriend (also a serving police officer who made complaints relating to racism) left her outside of the usual protection. She states that they were concerned that certain evidence (a racist letter) would be "lost" by the police and so notified the Commission for Racial Equality and goes on to say:

“I knew the police wouldn’t be happy and would regard what we’d done as an act of disloyalty. I was working night shifts at the time and felt on edge when I was in the police office”.

In relation to officers attending her home to gather her fingerprints and DNA in order to eliminate her from their enquiries about the letter sent to her boyfriend she says:

“We felt as if we’d been visited by the enemy and violated in some way...I felt completely bullied. This was the time of the day that police officers would raid a suspected criminal’s house. I couldn’t believe they were treating me in the same way, particularly when they knew that I was off work with stress”.

On later talking of how her leave card disappeared and she was warned by a federation (police union) officer to watch her back she says:

“I was furious and I knew I was being set up. I went to see Inspector McClelland and told him about my concerns and how my holiday form had gone missing. He told me I was right to be concerned and that I should watch my back because he felt that something untoward might happen to me... I was tormented by the fear of the unknown and increasingly understood how powerful they were and how powerless I was. This wasn’t just a normal job that I could be sacked from. I became paranoid that the police could plant drugs on me or do something equally awful that would land me in jail. There would be absolutely nothing I could do about it. The police had total control of my life, and they could put an end to my career, and my future, whenever they wanted”.

This is an example of the extreme vulnerability felt by Ramsey at this time and similar feelings were detailed by Dittrich who says:

“Slowly I began to understand that the police don’t need to actually do anything physical to destroy you. The constant threat of what they might do is enough. There are no fingerprints left on the crime and you end up destroying yourself...I believe that the police abuse the enormous powers they are given simply because they can”.

One must consider that these autobiographies have been published due to the very controversial nature of the narrative content and that perhaps this is why two similar experiences can be identified. It cannot be argued on this basis that their experiences are representative of women police officers as a whole. Nevertheless, the common themes within the narrative are strikingly similar which is of great significance, particularly when one considers that women whose careers have not ended, as Ramsey’s and Dittrich’s did, also identify this issue of power and vulnerability as being part of their experience as well as the time and location differences. The women perceived the power of the police organisation to be immense and one which they were often under the total control of. The consequences of the power for the women who did not conform was far reaching and importantly went beyond their careers and professional standing but instead had the potential to destroy their personal lives too. Ramsey and Dittirch who in particular had serious official complaints against the police organisation felt very strongly a feeling of vulnerability and even powerlessness at points in their narrative. Such feelings shared by these women are unprecedented in the existing literature which raises the question of what the value of undertaking research on women who have

resigned from the police or have even been dismissed. This may expose experiences of the police culture and police organisation not routinely available when studying serving police officers.



## **Discussion**

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this research was to explore women's experiences of policing and police culture. The objectives were to consider similarities and difference within the narratives; the construction and performative function of the narrative; the extent of the women's recognition of oppressive forces; and the impact of feminist thinking upon the women and their experiences of policing and police culture.

The women's experiences shared a number of commonalities in respect of police culture and the police organisation. Despite the different geographical locations Dittrich and Ramsey's experiences were the most similar with them both deciding to leave the police service prematurely and their narratives followed a similar overall plot as a result. Bloggs and Hays shared a more positive outlook of their experiences despite them both identifying some negative experiences. Whilst Hays' narrative and experiences had to be considered in the context of the era within which it was reporting on it actually bore strikingly similar experiences to the other narratives under consideration. This was particularly so when considering the interactions with male colleagues and power and vulnerability. It would appear from the analysis that very little progress has been made in relation to sexist attitudes and behaviours from the perspective of these women's experiences. Features of such behaviour appeared uniform and evasive with the use of tools such as rumour being identified by all of the women. The policing arena, as portrayed by these women is not only patriarchal but is defined by male symbols to the detriment of women's perceived competence within the role. As a result the women often felt segregated and sexualised and unable to respond in any other way than with humour or silence. Any acknowledgment of feminism as a means to help them understand their experiences

was strongly rejected and it was seen as unnecessary and often redundant by the women. Again an interesting observation is that very little appears to have changed between Hays' experiences of the police service and the current day accounts. The forces that have led to the fourth wave of feminism present themselves in the experiences of the women and yet they still reject any form of feminism. However, it remains to be seen whether subsequent and post fourth wave movement accounts of women's experiences will acknowledge feminism in a different way but for the timing of these narratives that consideration was not possible. Sisterhood too and the coming together of women to support each other within the narratives was a rare experience and only Ramsey detailed such occurrences but these were not directed towards her and were instead her acts of good will towards others. Relationships with other women officers were presented as being competitive. Perhaps the most interesting experience shared by the women was the feelings of immense power of the organisation and their personal vulnerability. This was an experience that was unequivocal amongst the narratives and pervasive in its nature.

### **Literature**

McRobbie's assertion that we currently live in a post-feminist age which is characterised by an anti-feminist sentiment is evident when considering the experiences of the four women under analysis. This is despite the fact that we know, as a result of the fourth wave of feminism, that we do not live in a post-feminist age. Feminism is most certainly seen as redundant if not abhorrent within the narratives, and this is despite the identification, to a greater or lesser degree across the narratives, of women's concerns, negative experiences and patriarchy. The analysis supports what McRobbie terms 'disarticulation' in that the women accept individualism over the collective and an exchange of feminist ideas for supposed

freedom and independence. However, my analysis would suggest that this is demonstrated in a more aggressive manner than a simple acceptance and is instead an active denunciation and rejection. Indeed, for the four women whose autobiographies have been considered the mere suggestion of some affiliation or sympathy with feminist ideas is seen as an abomination. The aggressive nature of the disarticulation in this analysis then goes beyond what McRobbie describes in her assertion of the concept. Disarticulation presents itself in another form within my analysis in relation to a sense of anti-sisterhood which is characterised by competition and individual gains at the expense of any real potential to challenge the patriarchal organisation and culture of the police service. It would appear from the commonality between the experiences of the women studied as part of this research and the clear links with the experiences of women officers, as identified by existing research, that there is the potential for real benefit from the adoption of feminist knowledge and the collective pursuit of change. The Gender Agenda (BAWP, 2006) obviously serves as an attempt to rectify this situation and its authors too identify that there are significant challenges for women within the police organisation and the police culture. This is view supported by police research too with Silvestri stating that there is a lack of sisterhood and 'gendered consciousness' amongst women in the police. She too states that access to feminist theory and strategy is needed in the police service in order to change women's experiences. The analysis then directly supports the work of Silvestri and, as discussed, demonstrates an extension to McRobbie's work on articulation, at least when applied to the four women police officers considered within this research. Loftus notes;

“An undeniable feature of my ethnography was the persistence of a substantially similar set of cultural traits to those identified almost half a

century ago by earlier police research. A collection of dominant features remain within rank and file culture, and continue to exert considerable influence over the day to day functioning of operational policing” (Loftus, 2009: 189).

We can see how, despite initially perceived barriers, the experiences women have of the police organisation and the police culture share remarkably similar themes which is particularly true of the narrative and experiences of Hays. If this point is accepted then the issue of McRobbie’s disarticulation becomes a very important one as without a sense of the collective and recognition of this shared experience and of feminist thought generally amongst police women, then these experiences are unlikely to see a positive change. The fourth wave of feminism is too recent a movement for the impact on these women’s experiences to be explored but the analysis clearly demonstrates that the experiences of the women are commensurate of those women engaging in the fourth wave (everyday sexism; continued workplace discrimination; sexual and violent victimisation etc). An interesting future consideration would be the extent to which women officer’s experiences have been impacted upon, if at all, by this renewed feminist movement. Further to the disarticulation, gendered consciousness and anti-sisterhood is the acceptance, demonstrated in the analysis, of the patriarchal ideology and subsequent oppression. Millet (1970) discusses, femininity and masculinity are ideological constructs which actually serve to ensure women’s subordination to men. If one considers that the women generally subscribe to the view that, within the police service, masculinity is valued more than femininity (i.e. the ability to pass the fitness test for entry rather than the ability to reason and calm irate offenders by way of verbal communication, for example) then one could assert that this patriarchal ideology is accepted by the

women (and in particular Bloggs) who thereby accept their own oppression without significant challenge and demonstrate Millet's proposition. This is something that I suspected may have been present when embarking on this research but the extent to which it presented within the autobiographies was unanticipated. The account of both Hays and Bloggs here point to what Davies and Gannon (2005) would describe as the naturalness of the dominant half of the gender binary in that 'maleness' is the normal position within the police force and therefore women and/or femininity are seen as subordinate or somehow lacking. This assertion was clearly evident within the experiences of the women. What is interesting in respect of Bloggs' narrative in particular but also for Ramsey and Dittrich's accounts too, is that an individual's personal identity can be shaped by such forces in that as women are informed of their position on a regular basis and eventually begin to act in accordance with the information that they receive. This was an unforeseen finding which, when applied to these four autobiographies, displays an extension to Davies and Gannon's (2005) work. Patriarchy and malestreaming is evident within the experiences of the women. Burr's (1998) consideration of the widespread acceptance of certain discourses as truth is found here. As previously discussed maleness is the norm and as such male symbols are ever present and valued (Young, 1991). The experience of the women providing these narratives, even that of Bloggs, supports the findings of researchers such as Silvestri (2003) who found that the police service remains a male-dominated occupation and Dick (2000) who identified women's marginalisation within the organisation. Surprising too was the extent to which the interaction with male colleagues was sexualised. This would support Martin and Jurik's (2007) views that this sexualisation of the workplace serves to superimpose male gender superiority on women's claims to work-based

equality. The analysis directly supported the literature on the area (Brown and Heidensohn, 2000; Westmarland, 2001; Young, 1991) which largely suggests that the consequence of this sexualisation is the undermining of women's perceived ability to successfully perform their role as a police officer. A striking similarity between the findings and the literature was the language used by some male officers to describe women officers (dyke or bike), as identified by Brown and Heidensohn (2000) who also argue that there is a spectrum in relation to women's sexuality with officers being the subject objectification at one end of the spectrum and defeminisation at the other. The women's experiences analysed here directly support this proposition. Similarly, all four autobiographies clearly identified sexist behaviour and even harassment as a feature of their interaction with male colleagues. This is consistent with the research of both Loftus (2009) and Brown (2007). Brown found that women are subject to widespread harassment, discriminatory treatment and gendered deployment, and Loftus (2009) argued that whilst officers were very aware of demonstrating overtly racist beliefs or behaviours, they were less conscious of gender bias or discrimination. Subsequently, the analysis was able to identify the women's responses and one which also was not emphasised consistently in existing literature. The main tactics used in such circumstances, as per the four autobiographies studied, was to use humour; respond with outright hostility (less common); or to simply ignore the behaviour.

An area that was consistent with the existing literature was the account provided of the characteristics of the police culture. However, an interesting addition to this was the women's subscription to the police culture of the four women, either wholly or at some point within their narrative and this is despite the fact that they identify that it is detrimental to them on occasion. This level of inclusion somewhat contradicts other

aspects of women's experience that present themselves within the analysis elsewhere. It demonstrates that the women's experience is not solely characterised by marginalisation, hostility or oppression. However, there was a definite sense of having to prove oneself amongst the women's experiences and a concerted effort to be accepted by male colleagues and the organisation in particular. Size and physicality were features that were present within the experiences of the women within each text. This is reflected in the literature too: danger and authority are key components of the police officer's working personality (Skolnick 1966); machoism and solidarity are key characteristics of the culture (Reiner 2000); and physicality and strength as important aspects of the ability to successfully undertake the role of a police officer (Young 1991). The findings of this analysis therefore are consistent with the literature in respect of size and physicality and how this is seen as a factor which undermines the competence and ability of women officers. However, the analysis also acknowledged the 'new breed' of policewoman as identified by Westmarland (2001). This policewoman is characterised by strength, intelligence, attractiveness, professionalism and competence. However, the consequences of this new breed of police woman in respect of the women's experiences was not fully discussed within the narratives and is a potential area for future exploration.

The findings in relation to gendered deployment also support the existing literature (Silvestri, 2003; Westmarland, 2001; Young, 1991) in that as a woman officer they were liable to be deployed to jobs concerned with sexual assault and rape and that this was often due to male colleagues not wanting to deal with such matters. Interestingly there was an assumption that women officers would be better equipped to deal with such matters but the narrative of Bloggs in particular would question this assumption. Through each narrative there is clear recognition that the police

organisation has the power and that the women as individuals are vulnerable. This is an area that is not so comprehensively addressed within the existing research and this is perhaps as a result of the specific experiences of the women whose narratives have been considered as part of this analysis. In contrast, much research on women's experiences of the police organisation and police culture is conducted on serving officers who may not be willing to share such feelings of vulnerability or power. The level of vulnerability felt by the women, and in particular Dittrich and Ramsey, was immense and this was because they in particular had challenged the police organisation and culture. The narratives of Bloggs and Hays did not express the same level of vulnerability but did detail the power that the police organisation had over their lives. This is a significant finding and one which adds to the current knowledge in terms of policewomen's experience, at least in respect of the four autobiographies considered here. Research on officers who have resigned or retired prematurely from the police service may offer some interesting and invaluable insights in relation to this issue.

In conclusion, the analysis of the women's experiences concurred with the existing literature and this was regardless of location and largely the era of the experiences suggesting that women's experiences may be relatively unchanged through time despite changes in the socio-political context: a feature of women's experiences is marginalisation and sexualisation; their competence and abilities are questioned because they are woman and as such they have to prove themselves not only as an officer but as a woman. An interesting discovery however is the progression of McRobbie's concept of disarticulation when applied to the four autobiographies considered and the identification of the aspect of power and vulnerability which shaped these women's experiences.





## **Conclusion**

This research was conducted using a small sample of four autobiographies written by women who were retired officers, still currently serving and those who had resigned from the service. Despite equal opportunities legislation and policy it would appear that gendered deployment is routinely experienced by the four officers whose autobiographies were considered. However, there would also appear to be instances, albeit relatively infrequently, when women are fully included in the task of policing and the camaraderie surrounding the role. Responses to sexism and harassment came in numerous forms (humour, banter, aggression) but women, appeared, rarely, if ever to challenge the content of the offensive comment/activity. Interestingly, as women progressed in their service they became more confident at responding aggressively, but it was always recognised that complaining was to be avoided at all costs. Women's 'issues' such as pregnancy were not looked upon favourably by superiors in the police and are instead seen as an inconvenience to the organisation and colleagues. Indeed each of the women expressed views that were oppressive to their own and other women's positions in the service at some point in their narrative. Thus the women's views about support for each other were contradictory and equivocal. The need for mutual support was clear but this was not often recognised by the women. In this respect, the issue of sisterhood was an interesting one in that sisterly support was often detailed in respect of female members of the public and even some female offenders such as prostitutes but that it appeared less common in respect of support to colleagues and from senior women officers. An area that has not been extensively covered in the literature was discovered as a key theme in the autobiographies, was the issue of vulnerability and power. All of the women detailed differing degrees of feelings of vulnerability as a result of the power of the police organisation. This was more than just the notion of

being 'owned' by the police as expressed by the four women. In most cases this threat came from an almost anonymous and structural being but one which could destroy them, both personally and professionally at any time it so wished. This is an area for further research as an unanswered question here is to what extent is this a feature of other women's experiences and in particular those women no longer serving in the police service? Another consistent but perhaps unsurprising theme was that of identity. Some of the women focused heavily on this, detailing the change of their personal identity through the different police roles that they undertook. But all four described both a change from an innocent and sometimes naïve individual to a suspicious and cynical one during their time in the service, and also their struggle with establishing a different identity on leaving the service. Whilst these transitions may also be experienced by male officers, women often detailed the further impact on their family

What is evident is that women's experiences are remarkably similar and a key feature of this is the continued patriarchal nature of the police service and the level of 'malestreaming' within it. This is despite the fact that one might expect interview or observation based research to show different findings from research based on autobiographies (mainly because of the effect of the pressures of publication) but the fact that this data concurs largely with the existing literature suggests that the women's experience as it has been identified within this analysis is more deeply entrenched and perhaps more deeply experienced. This provides perhaps the key conclusion from this research which is that there is a lack of collectivity amongst women police officers which serves to prevent the emergence or re-emergence of any women's movement and the proper contestation of sexism and male dominance. Indeed my research would suggest that not only is there a lack of collectivism

amongst the women officers considered but indeed there is often a sense of the anti-sisterhood, characterised by competition and individual gains which is at the expense of any real potential to challenge the patriarchal organisation and culture of the police service. It would appear from the commonality between the experiences of the women studied as part of this research and the clear links with the experiences of women officers, as identified by existing research, that there is the potential for real benefit from the adoption of feminist knowledge and the collective pursuit of change. However the achievement of this is something that will remain elusive in the current climate of both operational and management culture within the police. An area for further research would be an exploration of the impact of fourth wave feminism in respect of women's experiences of policing and the police service and whether this renewed movement has the potential to have an impact on the anti-feminist sentiments of the women's experiences as it has in the wider society. In short the post-feminist age as detailed by McRobbie is being questioned in the wider society but does it still hold credence for the women within the police service? Similarly the existence of and the impact upon women's experiences of the 'new breed' of women police officer is an area for further research as there were many unanswered questions within the analysis here but also within the existing literature in the area. Whilst there remains these areas of required exploration this analysis has allowed for the exploration of seemingly diverse narratives to show that women's experiences of policing and the police are often strikingly similar, and that in some respects experiences remain unchanged over time, role and geographic area.

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