PROSPECTIVE FEMALE OFFICER PERCEPTIONS OF POLICING

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ABSTRACT

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The scarcity of research on female police officers is a consequence of the low representation of women in the profession. Almost no research has focused on the perceptions, expectations, and beliefs of prospective female police officers. Participants in the current study included four female Criminal Justice students who reported plans to apply to police departments after graduation. In a focus group setting, participants responded to six research questions designed to elicit responses on their perceptions and expectations of police work. They were additionally questioned on perceptions regarding the realities of police work for female officers in particular. The findings are twofold: 1) Prospective female officers possess extensive knowledge about police work and the challenges encountered by policewomen, and 2) They have devised strategies that they believe will help them overcome these challenges in the future. Participants most commonly suggested that female police officers ought to utilize adaptive police behaviors, such as communication skills, on the street. As the focus group consisted of college-educated individuals who were each familiar with the law enforcement field, the findings suggest the importance of motivation and experience with respect to a prospective officer’s perceptions of police work. The findings further imply that prospective policewomen perceive that policewomen have unique responsibilities and provide specialized skills to the police force.
To Mom, Dad, Andrea, Greg, and Grandma
I would first like to thank my committee for the time spent assisting and supporting me on this project. I am grateful to Dr. Englebrecht for the advice that helped me to successfully conduct my first qualitative research study, and to Dr. Liederbach for sharing his knowledge on how to see the larger picture and perfect the final product. I would like to thank KEGAN for listening, especially at the worst of times, and David Tran for sharing his technical expertise. Most of all, I want to thank Dr. Stinson. Your dedication, hard work, and “perpetuated” encouragement did not go unnoticed. Thank you for helping me to reach this accomplishment.
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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

Though countless arguments have been made for the gender diversification of the police profession, females continue to be significantly underrepresented among those applying, entering, working, and succeeding in the field. Scholars seek explanations for such low numbers of women in local and state police agencies, particularly when women’s status in the general work force continues to grow (Cleveland, Stockdale, & Murphy, 2000). Researchers continually question the unusually slow rate at which females have entered the force (Lonsway, 2002).

Many agree that increased gender diversity will benefit policing by enhancing police legitimacy and community relations (White, Cooper, Saunders, & Raganella, 2010), and by improving police communication and negotiation skills (Dodge, Valcore, & Klinger, 2010; Rabe-Hemp, 2011). A 1998 survey of members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police concluded that there was an essential need to “strengthen the position of women in policing—their number, their professional development, their progress in positions of leadership, and their contribution to the public service and safety” (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2011, p. 374). Despite articulated goals of gender diversity in policing, females comprised only 12% of local sworn police personnel, 6.5% of state police personnel, and 11.2% of sheriffs’ deputies in 2007 (Langton, 2010). Only 16.8% of recruits in state and local law enforcement academies from 2005 to 2006 were women (Reaves, 2009).

Background and Theoretical Framework

Personal experience has inspired me to question whether female police applicants are aware of the difficulties commonly reported and experienced by policewomen. I was drawn to the law enforcement profession for several reasons. I grew up in a law enforcement family and
have always been proud of my father’s work as a federal agent. As a runner and triathlete, the physical orientation of the job appealed to me. I was also drawn to the nontraditional hours, the famed brotherhood and culture of policing, and the unpredictable nature of the work. When I applied, I was on several occasions advised by veteran officers and agents to consider the consequences my gender would have on my future career and personal life. I was surprised that these problems were established to the extent that interviewers were instructing me to reconsider my decision. Later, I questioned my father, who was able to express to me candidly what my interviewers had implied. Female coworkers had found it challenging to balance marriage with the travel and stress of federal law enforcement. To him, it seemed that a large portion of them remained single, divorced, or had married other agents, the partners who could best appreciate the extensive time and travel the job entailed. I was shocked that the struggles for women were so widely acknowledged among law enforcement personnel, but also because I had not thought to ask these questions before applying. Was I the only woman who had ever applied to work in law enforcement without first asking questions, gaining insight, and ultimately making an informed decision?

Many researchers have studied females in male-dominated occupations, females in law enforcement, and policewomen. Due to the low representation of females in the academy, knowledge of recruits largely stems from data on male subjects. Research on early resignations of police officers contextualizes the need for deeper understanding of female police recruits. Haarr (2011) found that, of academy students who resigned, 88.2% dropped out “when they realized their experiences in the training academy were inconsistent with… their cognitions about what police work should be” (p. 87). Cognitive dissonance theory states that conflict arises when one’s ideals differ from experienced reality. Consistent with this notion, recruits
holding faulty or idealistic expectations about policing likely felt internal conflict and subsequently chose to resign (Haarr, 2011). The finding suggests an important link between an individual’s initial beliefs about policing and turnover. There are no known studies that have examined perceptions, anticipations, and expectations of female recruits, in order to assess whether these are consistent with the reported experiences of females on the job.

Research Questions and Purpose of the Study

As early as 1978, scholars recognized that “there are powerful means available within the occupation that act to systematically discourage innovation” (Manning & Van Maanen, 1978). The limited representation of women in policing suggests the need to continue efforts to address existing barriers that effectively dissuade or prevent these individuals from seeking work in the field. Though a considerable body of research exists on the experiences, difficulties, and progress of female officers, almost no contemporary researchers have explicitly studied female recruits and females who wish to become police officers. The purpose of the current study is to discover how women who are considering police work contemplate their decision and perceive the work. The research questions are twofold: 1) How do prospective female police officers perceive and anticipate police work? 2) Are anticipations and concerns gender-specific or gender-neutral in content? For the purposes of the study, “gender-neutral” responses will be defined as responses that apply to police officers in general. “Gender-specific” responses will be regarded as only those that can be applied to experiences and issues related to female officers. For example, both males and females might anticipate “fighting crime” while female recruits might look forward to “defying the status quo” or “doing what is unexpected of a female.”
Significance of the Study

A developed understanding of the perceptions of females who aspire for police careers will benefit current and future police officers, police departments, and police scholars alike. Scholars have characterized an individual’s first encounters with police work as a reality shock (Van Maanen, 1973a) where the novice officer, holding unrealistic expectations (Ryan, Kriska, West, & Sacco, 2001) experiences problems of adjustment (Haarr, 2011). Understanding these initial expectations will help to facilitate a more stress-free integration of female recruits into the profession. Understanding whether female recruits possess accurate perceptions of policing, and whether this influences their occupational experiences, might further increase knowledge on the reasons for low representation of females in policing. Law enforcement agencies will, in turn, be able to provide applicants with more realistic views of police work, attract applicants who are wholly invested in the objectives and goals of the profession, and decrease rates of resignation among female officers. Finally, a more developed conception of the motivations and expectations of female police recruits will enhance our understanding of the development and socialization of police culture as a whole.

Women in many professions have experienced resistance from an occupational subculture of male employees, and certainly there are a variety of fields in which women represent a minority (Swiss & Walker, 1993). They have reported stories of sacrifice, struggle, and role conflict between their occupational and familial identities. These issues have inspired scholars to call problems balancing work and personal life the major unresolved dilemma of American families, especially of American women (Swiss & Walker, 1993). Why then is it important to understand the expectations of future policewomen, more so than those held by women who aspire for work in any other career? Perhaps, the high visibility of the police in
media and popular culture increases the likelihood that individuals are misinformed regarding the realities of police work. Movies and television shows depict policing as fast-paced, stimulating, and dangerous. Many shows feature attractive female law enforcement agents and officers. These celebrity heroes frequently inspire female viewers to aspire for jobs in law enforcement. Coupled with common perceptions of policing as an adventurous and unpredictable profession, there is a possibility that individuals adopt misconceptions about the realities of police work, especially for women. An exploratory analysis of perceptions held by females who hope to become police officers will provide knowledge on why recruits initially pursue careers in law enforcement, and what they expect the profession to be like. With this information, we might finally understand why females are underrepresented in the policing.
CHAPTER II.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The review begins with a discussion of existing scholarship on police academy recruits, much of which has compiled common personality traits and motivations among these individuals. This body of research predominantly consists of data on male subjects, due to limited numbers of females in police academies. The second section discusses knowledge on police socialization processes, as scholars have recognized the powerful influence that socialization has on shaping a steady police culture. A summary of the literature surrounding the social isolation of police officers serves as an example of a particular aspect of police work that some people might not anticipate. A review of research on the occupational experiences of policewomen follows, extending from Martin’s 1980’s work on female patrol officers to contemporary literature. This includes studies on the social isolation of female officers from male coworkers and administrators, the subjective experiences that female officers have reported to qualitative researchers, and the particular impact of work-family conflict on female officers. The section portrays the experiences of female officers as distinctly different from those of male coworkers.

Police Recruits

Over the years, scholars have attempted to classify a single personality profile among individuals who apply to and succeed in law enforcement and other service careers. A study that compared the personality profiles of police and firefighter recruits found higher levels of gregariousness and conscientiousness among future police officers as compared to firefighters, and higher levels of excitement-seeking traits in both groups of rescue personnel compared to non-rescuers (Salters-Pedneault, Ruef, & Orr, 2010). Research on personality traits common to
officers who excelled in the police academy has indicated that high levels of extraversion and consciousness, as well as low levels of neuroticism, are related to high performance (Detrick & Chibnall, 2006).

Others have studied motivating factors that influence decisions to become police officers. Van Maanen (1973a) found that although recruits were highly motivated at the onset of the academy, reliable reductions in motivation occurred over time. The finding was attributed to decreased expectations of rewards for hard work and effort. Van Maanen (1973a) argued that officers eventually assumed more realistic views of police work. Though groundbreaking in police socialization research at that period in time, the study reflects the motivations and attitudes of exclusively male officers.

Police recruit literature from the 1970s and 1980s—the first years in which females were assigned to patrol—indicates high levels of ambiguity among female recruits over what was expected of them at the academy (Timmins & Hainsworth, 1989). Findings showed no significant differences, however, among male and female recruits with regards to motivations for becoming officers. A considerable volume of work on academy recruits has since emerged in response to pressures on departments to increase gender and racial diversity (Raganella & White, 2004). Research consistently found common motivations among men and women when seeking employment in policing. Raganella and White (2004) found that both groups indicated desires to help others and to obtain reliable employment and benefits as primary reasons for entering police work. Scholars assessing the motivations of female officers similarly found that the desire to help people and unpredictability of the job attracted them to the field (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). A longitudinal study on changes in officer attitudes observed an association between unfulfilled expectations and low job satisfaction (White et al., 2010). Similar to Haarr’s (2011)
finding of a connection between voluntary resignations and cognitive dissonance, the findings from White et al. (2010) suggest that recruit expectations hold important implications for officer satisfaction and turnover.

A small volume of research has measured levels of anticipation held by police recruits toward specific elements of police work. For example, Ryan, Kriska, West, and Sacco (2001) measured relationships between anticipated work-family conflict, family member perceptions of police work, and recruit attitudes and behaviors. While applicants and their families agreed that work-family conflict was a significant consideration for police officers, neither regarded this as especially influential in the career decision (Ryan et al., 2001). The authors concluded that “unrealistic expectations” might be of particular concern in police recruiting, as applicants seemed to deny that these issues would affect them personally (p. 236).

A variety of additional factors have been shown to influence a person’s decision to become an officer. These include family tradition, personal interest, military experience, small town and conservative values, and encouragement from university programs (Crank, 2004).

There are abundant opportunities for future research on police recruits and socialization. Recently, some scholars have redirected their focus from recruit dynamics to the strong socialization processes in explaining the persistence of the legendary police culture (Crank, 2004).

Police Socialization and Culture

The study of police officer socialization is particularly appealing in part because police culture appears to be consistently replicated across all varieties of departments (Crank, 2004; Manning & Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen, 1973a). This process is additionally intriguing in that, compared to employees in other fields, the police often share and emphasize stereotypes of
the police subculture. Aspects of the subculture include informal rules, shared language, ideologies, standards, prejudices, etiquette, demeanor, customs, and rituals (Manning & Van Maanen, 1978). Police culture, however, appears to be particularly grounded in a strict adherence to a single concept: solidarity. “Solidarity is carefully cultivated, taught formally and reinforced informally through the first years on the job; for those that are raised in a police family, it is cultivated from a child’s first breath” (Crank, 2004, p. 238). Officers are taught from the beginning that only another officer can be trusted, a belief that is reinforced through early training exercises evaluating the speed with which an individual responds to an officer in trouble call. The dangerous nature of the work, paired with an “us versus them” mentality between the police and the public, each contribute to the preservation of the renowned police brotherhood (Crank, 2004).

The police culture, with its emphasis on camaraderie and protection of fellow officers, has persisted despite efforts for reform, development of new technologies, and increased education and training standards for recruits (Manning & Van Maanen, 1978). Any new member brings with them the potential for trouble, defiance, faulty beliefs, ignorance to and lack of appreciation for embedded customs, and fantastical ideals (Manning & Van Maanen, 1978, p. 267). So how, then, has the police culture persisted and thrived for so long over time, throughout stages of reform and generations of new recruits? Scholars have looked to the unique police socialization process for answers. Van Maanen (1973a), the first to systematically study this in detail, identified four phases of socialization: choice, introduction, encounter, and metamorphosis. After initially selecting a police career, typically in pursuit of adventure and meaningful work, an individual is first acquainted with the distinct police culture in the introduction phase, the academy. The function of this phase is to reduce the unrealistically high
expectations of police recruits, and prepare them for the “reality shock” of the third phase, the encounter (Van Maanen, 1973a, p. 71). A new officer’s primary duty is to leave behind the society from which he came, and endure a complete personal transformation, or metamorphosis (Van Maanen, 1973a, 1988). This is referenced as a breaking down and rebuilding process that begins the first day of the academy and engrains the beliefs, customs, and practices of the subculture into the minds of all new members (Manning & Van Maanen, 1978). In metamorphosis, the officer comes to realize the “irony” of policing, that his initial expectations of constant adventure and danger are actually quite rare. A cop learns to expect routine, but to always anticipate (and hope for) the unexpected. Stinson, Liederbach, and Freiburger (2010) further identified a fifth stage of police socialization. Data revealed that an unexpectedly high number of crimes by police officers are committed during the late stages of officers’ careers. Until that time, the effect may have been statistically masked by the fact that misconduct typically occurs in the earlier years of employment. These late-stage crimes appeared to be more often profit-driven, compared to crimes committed by less experienced officers. These were also more likely to result in a resignation than suspension or termination. Stinson and his colleagues deemed this effect the “exit strategy” and suggested that police officers in later stages of their careers might endure more problems as they come closer to retirement than has been previously perceived (p. 429).

As the profession continues to employ primarily male officers, less is known about socialization and adjustment with respect to female officers. Exploratory qualitative research has revealed difficulties and accomplishments of females who have worked and excelled in the male-dominated police profession. The next section reviews research on the experiences and difficulties that have been reported by policewomen, demonstrating the necessity of studying
whether females consider these factors when applying for the job. Though the representation of women in the police force has risen in recent decades, findings suggest the existence of a unique occupational reality for these individuals, compared to male officers and women working in non-law enforcement careers.

An Unanticipated Consequence of Police Work

With the police so highly visible in society, and frequently depicted in popular media, most people are familiar with the basic elements and challenges of police officers. The dangerous and crime-fighting elements of police work are well recognized. Policing is also generally accepted as one of the most stressful occupations. What some may not realize is that while officers are in need of effective coping strategies to combat stress, police officers experience difficulties finding and maintaining social relationships, compared to average citizens (Skolnick, 2004). The frequent danger, coupled with responsibilities to maintain a position of authority over the public and enforce social morality, contribute to the solidification of a social barrier between police officers and citizens (Martin, 1980; Skolnick, 2004). Further, the job requirements of an officer make these individuals less desirable friends and prevent citizens from viewing them as regular persons (Skolnick, 2004). This social isolation, as well as the frequency with which the police place their lives in fellow officer’s hands, reinforces a social bond within members of the force (Crank, 2004; He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2002). This is further supported in Simons and Barone’s (1994) finding that officers who worked longer on the job identified more fellow officers as primary sources of social support. Characteristics of police work have also been shown to distance individual officers from their family and close friends. The dismal on-duty experiences often encourage officers to keep work-related information a secret from those who are not police officers and therefore cannot understand (He et al., 2002; Martin & Jurik,
This, in turn, prevents friends and family from understanding parts or all of the officer’s troubles, and likely stunts the growth of the relationship bond. Finally, police work also appears to affect officers’ perspectives on human nature. As police officers are consistently confronted with the ‘worst’ examples of human behavior, they begin to feel dispassionate towards others, developing cynicism (Crank, 2004), distrust, and a loss of faith in human beings (Dorsey & Giacopassi, 2011). Therefore, while social support may be especially important in helping officers cope with the difficult and stressful experiences, officers experience difficulties identifying, maintaining and benefiting from these relationships, outside those formed with co-workers.

**Occupational Experiences of Female Officers**

Due to the unusually low representation of women in the police profession, research has focused on documenting the occupational experiences of female officers. This work has revealed that women perform and experience police work differently than their male counterparts. As female officers are a particularly difficult group to recruit in substantial numbers, a large portion of research has utilized qualitative techniques, such as interviewing.

*Social Isolation*

Studies have shown that the most significant problem afflicting the first female patrol officers stemmed from the adversity of male officers (Crank, 2004). This has been attributed to the fact that male officers, who previously considered the masculine subculture to be an occupational benefit of policing, were faced with a situation for which no norms existed to direct their behavior (Hassell, Archbold, & Schulz, 2011). Male officers, accustomed to regarding women as objects to be dominated, were thus misguided as to the proper rules for interaction (Martin, 1980). More recent research on contemporary workplace relationships among male and
female officers asserts that before a female officer is able to achieve “acceptance” into the police
subculture, and the extent to which she can at all remains a topic of continual debate, she must
first prove that she is an exceptionally capable and courageous police officer (Belknap &
Shelley, 2011; Snow, 2010). Further, female officers belonging to the category Martin (2011)
labeled policewomen, who pursue a “crime-fighter” image, socialize with fellow male officers,
receive the benefits of social networking, and are more likely to gain acceptance as real police
officers, may sacrifice aspects of their feminine identities to do so (Martin, 2011; Rabe-Hemp,
2011). Policewomen who refused to sacrifice feminine ideals were found to be less integrated
into the police subculture and less likely to succeed within the profession. In other words, a
female officer may need to adopt a more masculine identity in order to fit in with male
coworkers.

Subjective Experiences of Female Officers

Qualitative research reporting the firsthand experiences of women in law enforcement
began in the 1980s, an effort largely embodied by Martin’s (1980) work with female police
officers in Washington D.C. (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). The study was one of the first to
provide policewomen with an opportunity to report on subjective experiences from within the
station house.

Female officers reported that aspects of organizational policy frequently hindered efforts
to assimilate and excel in their chosen career. Training academies were not adequately prepared
to accommodate female recruits, and female officers continued to receive specialized
assignments considered suitable for women. Finally, Martin (1980) was one of the first to
recognize that policewomen found it difficult to negotiate two incompatible identities: a female
and a crime-fighter. She corroborated this assertion in later research (See Martin, 2011).
Contemporary studies show that—while women have become more commonplace in policing—female officers today reiterate similar themes to those from earlier decades. For example, a nationwide randomized survey of policewomen found that this group felt less welcomed by members of the organizational subculture, compared to male coworkers. Most had purportedly suffered from harassment and degradation from coworkers and citizens (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). In fact, 72.8% of the women sampled reported that they had been subjected to some form of sexual harassment. Other qualitative research has indicated that the high visibility of females in police departments dissuades these individuals from applying for promotions (Archbold & Schulz, 2008). Female officers reported a fear of resentment from male officers who might attribute the promotion of female officers to gender rather than ability.

Women have told stories of resistance from male officers and administrators, yet further asserted that females can earn acceptance by demonstrating competence and willingness to use force if needed (Rabe-Hemp, 2009). Other avenues for earning respect, according to modern policewomen, include achieving high-ranking positions and demonstrating unique skills that male officers lack. Others have found many female officers adamant that their sex affords them benefits in police work, and that male officers are occasionally disadvantaged due to aggressiveness and issues with power and control (Morash & Haarr, 2012). It seems that, while policing remains a male-dominated profession, contemporary female officers have found various openings for success, be it by blending in or utilizing proficiencies unique to women. Dodge et al. (2010) analyzed women’s status on police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams. The hyper-masculine subculture and strenuous physical requirements within tactical teams reduce the numbers of female members and applicants and allow for an analysis of a subsection of policing embodied by maleness, violence, and strength. However, both male and female officers claimed
ability was more important than gender in determining an individual’s success in SWAT, though many agreed that females were disadvantaged due a lack of physical strength. Some women reported an unwillingness to apply for SWAT as they were disinclined to put forth the effort to achieve necessary physical strength, yet asserted that more female members would improve SWAT’s ability to negotiate hostage situations.

The vast collection of literature on work-family conflict (the influence of work on quality of home life), family-work conflict (the impact of family on work performance) and the police suggests the existence of considerable interplay between police officers’ occupational and familial environments. The conflict, sometimes referred to as spillover, can exist in two varieties: time-based and behavior-based (Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1999; Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005). Time-based spillover represents the fixed number of hours available to work full-time and to spend at home with family and the possibility that time spent on one task might impede on time available for the other. Behavior-based spillover refers to an individuals’ fixed amount of available energy and mood on any given day, and thus expending too much of one at work limits the availability of that resource at home, and vice versa. An individual experiences conflict when he or she must manage several demanding and oftentimes incompatible roles: police officer, husband or wife, and parent, for example. Due to increased societal expectations placed upon females in their roles as parents, the influence of work-family conflict is frequently regarded as highly gendered in that female employees, including female police officers, feel the effects of spillover considerably more than male employees (Grosswald, 2003). Triplett refers to this problem as role accumulation or, in extreme situations, role overload (Triplett et al., 1999). Martin (1980) argued that female police officers suffer disapproval originating from a variety of sources: they are perceived as less dedicated parents for sacrificing time with their children to
work, as emasculating to their husbands for choosing a male profession, and as less effective law enforcement officers for expending energy and time to raise a family. They are furthermore regarded as less effective police officers as a result of their gender (Martin & Jurik, 2007).

**Work-Family Conflict**

While the availability of family-friendly policies and programs have been found to be negatively correlated with work-family conflict (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005), the police profession has not made substantial efforts to establish these services (Rabe-Hemp, 2011; Schulze, 2011). While the lack of policy does not have an apparent effect for male officers, this absence forces some female officers to make a choice between advancing in their career and having children (Rabe-Hemp, 2011). Furthermore, some have identified the decision to raise a family as the reason they were forced to leave the profession, and others reported decisions not to seek promotion were due to family and child care conflicts, and a lack of a formal pregnancy policy (Rabe-Hemp, 2011, p. 387). Within departments that have instituted policies, employees report a higher sense of value for their organization, and feelings of comfort that they have or will have help when necessary (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005). The lack of widespread family-friendly policies for police officers has been attributed to a number of causes, none of which are mutually exclusive. First, while female officers support increases in the availability of family policies, male officers do not perceive this as a priority (Schulze, 2011). As males outnumber females by an extensive margin, female voices have less of an influence. Furthermore, police departments may not prioritize family leave policies based on the knowledge that these services will not be used frequently, as a majority of officers will fear stigmatization for any revelation of weakness (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005). Regardless of departments’ efforts to enact policy, however, Schulze (2011) argued that both existing and future programs are likely to have little
impact in reducing work-family conflict unless they address the current underlying contradiction between conceptions of an individual who takes family-leave and one who has an exceptional work ethic. “Until family leave policy is prioritized by law enforcement, it will be in contradiction to other values like loyalty to fellow officers” (Schulze, 2011, p. 139). As women bear the bulk of child-rearing responsibilities in modern society, the lack of family leave policies in the profession, and the department’s disinterest in promoting family values, generates an unequal disadvantage to female officers, who are marginalized for decisions to raise a family (Martin & Jurik, 2007).

The literature on female police officers shows substantial differences between the methods in which males and females perform and experience police work. While female officers have gained relative acceptance, they continue to face barriers assimilating and excelling in a male-dominated field. Researchers question the low representation of female applicants and officers, considering the extended period of time that these individuals have worked in the profession. While the literature on females working in law enforcement continually expands, we as yet have an incomplete understanding of female recruits and their expectations towards policing.
CHAPTER III.

METHODOLOGY

The current study seeks information regarding broadly defined concepts, such as perceptions, anticipations, and beliefs. Prospective female police officers are, furthermore, a target population that has yet to be comprehensively studied and understood. The focus group method is helpful in exploratory research of this nature because it allows participants to dictate the direction of the discussion. It is possible that group participants propose ideas and questions that researchers have yet to consider. In the future, scholars can use this information to design and implement supplemental research studies. The group setting additionally allows participants to listen and react to responses from individuals with similar career interests. In this context, participants might be more forthcoming with their own input if they are in the company of similar others. The following section describes the target population, sampling procedures, data maintenance and storage procedures, the methodology and subsequent analyses.

Participants

Eligible participants were females 18 years of age or older considering police work. To maximize the sample size, I focused on recruiting students from Bowling Green State University (BGSU), which has a large Criminal Justice undergraduate program. I originally sought to recruit two groups of five participants to conduct two separate focus group discussions. I planned to overrecruit at least twelve people to account for potential cancellations and conflicts (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

Sampling Procedures

Recruiting a sufficient number of participants proved to be a difficult task for two major reasons. First, I received approval from the Human Subjects Review Board in late April, which
meant that the focus group was necessarily scheduled during the students’ finals week in order to reach students before they left for the summer. For this reason, I decided to seek additional funding to provide potential participants with monetary incentives. I applied for and received a Health and Human Services PILLARS Grant scholarship award (See Appendix B). With this funding, participants were given $20 gift cards to Amazon.com as compensation for their time. Gift cards were used in place of cash to ensure that subjects’ confidentiality was maintained by eliminating the use of paper receipts.

Nonetheless, responses to recruitment attempts were strikingly slim. Students were initially contacted in an email announcement sent to all members of the BGSU Criminal Justice program (See Appendix A). The announcement was also posted to the BGSU Criminal Justice Program Facebook page. The Facebook posting had no apparent impact on attracting potential participants, while only five individuals replied to the email announcement. The minimal response prompted me to initiate several more recruitment attempts. First, I contacted three Criminal Justice professors, who agreed to make announcements in their undergraduate classes. This produced a list of eleven names of people interested in participating. Emails sent to these individuals, however, also resulted in a very limited number of replies. Finally, I asked those who had already agreed to participate if they could recommend other potential participants. Once again, this effort resulted in no additional candidates.

Seven individuals who provided their information to me expressing interest in participating were contacted on the telephone. During this conversation, I determined whether the individual met the qualification criteria, explained the purpose of my experiment, ensured that information would be kept confidential, and discussed availability. The second major setback surfaced in attempts to schedule a focus group time that met each person’s schedule.
Two individuals dropped out once it was determined that their work schedule conflicted with times that the others were available. Ultimately, I was able to select a time for which five individuals were available. I contacted each person a day prior to the focus group to remind them of the meeting time and location (Stewart et al., 2007). After one more individual dropped out just hours before the study began, the final number of focus group participants came to four.

The group therefore comprised four female Criminal Justice undergraduate students from BGSU. These participants reported interests in applying to police departments after graduation. Three participants had professional experience that related in some way to a career in policing. One had interned with the United States Marshals, another was currently enlisted in the military, and a third had participated in the Police Explorers program and currently works as a Campus Service Officer at BGSU. Two participants indicated that close relatives had worked or currently work as police officers. Detailed information and implications related to characteristics of the group composition are presented in the Results section below.

Data Collection

The focus group consisted of two separate parts. The first part contained three open-ended and gender neutral questions (See Appendix C). During this part of the questioning, I refrained from probing any specific topics that I was specifically interested in studying. The open-ended nature of these questions allowed me to observe which ideas and topics were of greatest importance to these individuals. Specifically, I wanted to assess whether the individuals initiated a discussion on gender-specific or gender-neutral elements of police work.

The second set of questions sought information on issues specific to policewomen (See Appendix D). During this period, participants were asked whether they believed police work was different for men and women. A large body of research exists on the different experiences
of male and female officers. This question was specifically designed to ascertain whether females who were considering police work had contemplated gender-specific issues, and if so, whether they believed these would have an effect on their own occupational experiences. I also prepared probe questions, designed to encourage individuals to expand on responses related to the focused research topic (Appendix E). When a participant presented an issue relating to a topic of interest during the second part of questioning, I used probe questions to encourage the individual to expand on the topic further.

I reserved Room 217 of the Health Center at Bowling Green State University as the setting for the focus group. Chairs were organized so that focus group members faced each other, to facilitate participation from every participant and to eliminate the appearance of a leader (Stewart et al., 2007). The discussion lasted approximately seventy minutes. I distributed the informed consent form to each participant prior to initiating the focus group discussion (See Appendix F). Each person read the document and was encouraged to ask questions. After answering all questions, I gave each participant the opportunity to sign the agreement. After each person had signed the agreement, I initiated the focus group discussion.

Data Storage

Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. An additional analog tape recorder was used as a backup. Data was uploaded to a personal computer in 201 South Hall, where it was uploaded to Sound Organizer audio data and transcription software. I transcribed the focus group audio recording by hand. Audio and transcription data were stored on a secure network file storage system. Signed consent forms were scanned into PDF files and stored on a secure network file storage system, while paper copies were stored in a locked file cabinet within 201 South Hall.
CHAPTER IV.

RESULTS

Results are divided into two sections. The first details the overall composition of the group in terms of past experiences and reasons for seeking a career in law enforcement. In general, the group possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience in law enforcement. The second section responds to the original research questions and discusses the immediate findings. The section examines three themes that emerged from the data. With additional inductive coding and analysis, additional conclusions and implications surfaced.

Focus Group Composition

This section details responses to the question: “What motivated you to seek a career in policing?” Responses to this question highlight the collective experience that the group had with law enforcement in the past. This section also reveals how these individuals became motivated to seek careers in policing based on first-hand experiences with law enforcement officials or agencies.

Experience and Information

Answers to the question “What motivated you to choose a career in policing?” revealed that the group comprised individuals familiar with law enforcement of some form. Two participants indicated that policing runs in their families. One participant had interned in a federal law enforcement agency, one had participated in a Law Enforcement Explorer program, and another is currently enlisted in the military, which she continually likened to the police profession. Two reported that family members on the force had inspired them. All four members had taken steps to learn more about police work.
Participant 1: I don’t have anybody in law enforcement in my family. I was the first one ever as far as anyone can trace back. I’ve educated myself… I’ve done things. I’ve done trainings, I’ve done ride-alongs, I’ve… tried to get an idea of what it is before I get my degree and go through the academy.

Participant 3: Try to gain experience, that’s how you figure out if something is for you or not. Like, I was a nursing major before and I read about stuff about what they do and… that made me realize that nursing isn’t the career path I want to go onto and Criminal Justice is.

Personal Encounters with Law Enforcement

In order to understand why these individuals originally wanted to become police officers, I asked: What initially motivated you to seek a career in policing? To this question, each participant indicated that a specific, positive experience with a law enforcement official, or working within a law enforcement agency, had made a long lasting impression on them.

Participant 1: We used to ride bikes in the parade each year and the police officers would always come and compliment us because we used to wear our helmets and so that kind of stuck with me because I’ve always had good interactions with law enforcement.

Participant 2: My grandpa is… the Chief of Cedar Point… When I was younger we would always go to Cedar Point to ride the little kid rides and everything but then we would always go see my [grandpa]. So, when we would go in there I knew all the officers, they would all talk to us. I got to see what they would do, they would have
somebody in the interrogation room or stuff like that and I just always thought that really interesting. It stuck with me.

Participant 4: When the DARE officer came to our elementary, whenever we were in fourth or fifth grade, he was always really nice and was always like “If you guys have any questions, you guys need to talk or anything, you can come talk to me about stuff. If you get bullied or anything like that.”

A single participant remembered how a popular police television show, CHiPs, had sparked her interest in law enforcement. She, however, also mentioned that a specific meeting with a police officer at her school had been a separate memorable experience. She gained additional experience by working as a student intern for a federal law enforcement agency while attending college. Therefore, while her initial interest was generated from a childhood television show, she made efforts later on to become informed about the realities of the work.

With the police profession frequently depicted in the media and mainstream entertainment, it is feasible that individuals may be drawn to the police profession based on false or idealistic perceptions of law enforcement careers. Responses contradicted this assumption. All participants recalled specific childhood experiences with law enforcement officials that had “stuck with them” for many years. One-half of group members had grown up in law enforcement families. They recalled visits to relatives’ workplaces as positive experiences that inspired them to develop a connection with the law enforcement profession. These positive interactions with police officers or other officials inspired them to seek a career so that they might positively influence others’ lives in similar ways. Individuals in the group, therefore, did not possess false or misrepresented perceptions of the job based on fictional representations.
These findings suggest that prospective officers who have opportunities to interact with law
enforcement at an early age might be inspired to seek careers based on first-hand exchanges with
the police profession and its inner culture.

“Getting Real” with People

Next, I asked: What do you think you will like most about being a police officer? This
question was designed to assess what positive expectations individuals held towards the police
profession. Responses to this question were similar across all four participants. Each spoke of
desires to have personal interactions and to become an integral part of the community.

Participant 1: Actually working with the community, being close to them. Whether it’s
doing programs, offering advice to people, doing patrols, and just saying hi to people,
before getting to know them once they’re involved in the Criminal Justice System.

Participant 2: The job of being a police officer lets you get… you don’t have to do small
talk with people or any of that stuff. It lets you get on a more real level with people.

Participant 3: I know most people have a bad perception of cops. So, showing them that
not every cop is out to get you and just wants to bring you down. Just have positive
interactions with the community.

Participant 4: Getting to be part of the community and being out there and saying “Hey, I
can help, I’m part of the community also. I live here. I can help when problems arise. I
can be your friend.”

Members most anticipated opportunities to “get on a more real level” with the public. They
spoke about practicing community policing and becoming acquainted with the people they serve.
Prospective female officers might anticipate opportunities to communicate with members of the community due to the common assumption that female officers are better at “talking down” suspects.

*Participant 1:* How you handle the situation can be different. If I’m dealing with a 600 pound guy who’s very angry, I’m gunna handle it different than a guy who’s six-six, two-thirty and knows that if they get in a fight, he’s going to have a better chance than I am. I’m better at talking somebody down and wouldn’t have to fight them.

*Participant 4:* If he has a shotgun and is ready to fire you might be able to talk him down better than a guy who sees another guy with a shotgun might just go ahead and shoot right away.

*Participant 1:* I think women tend to talk people down more before using force than I think some male officers. I know a lot of them I speak to they talk about how they’re able to talk themselves out of situations and deescalate people better than some male officers.

In other words, females who believe they are skilled communicators might be drawn to policing because they believe they can help in areas that male officers cannot. In fact, participants reiterated this belief six times during the focus group discussion.

In sum, responses to these questions revealed three characteristics of the group’s composition. First, each participant had made an effort to become educated in policing. This is evident in that they had joined the Explorer program, interned at agencies, and asked questions. This fact is further supported by the fact that each was currently seeking an undergraduate degree.
in Criminal Justice. Second, group participants had each been drawn to law enforcement as a result of a personal, positive encounter with a law enforcement official or agency. This might suggest that each participant possessed an accurate, genuine perception of law enforcement. They were not influenced by a fictional depiction of policing, such a movie or television show. Third, participants unanimously reported the desire to communicate with people about important life issues as their primary reason for seeking work as police officers. This might indicate that individuals perceive female officers to bring unique communication skills to police work.

Themes

Responses to subsequent questions reveal that the prospective female officers had spent much additional time considering how elements of policing would affect them personally and how they would react to these issues. I extended the scope of the study to evaluate two specific discoveries in more detail. I quantified responses into four categories, according to a simple coding procedure. This procedure is described in detail below. Data are presented in three tables. Conclusions and implications taken from these tables are subsequently discussed.

While administering the focus group, I reached two major realizations. First, the group presented discussion topics that encompassed a wide variety of challenges and concerns that affect the police in general. These challenges were consistent with items discussed in relevant policing literature. The first research question for the present study asks: How do prospective female police officers perceive and anticipate police work? Responses revealed that prospective officers hold both positive expectations and negative misgivings regarding their future careers. Perceptions of the police profession were relatively accurate and comprehensively detailed.
Participant 1: There’s discretion that comes with the job. There’s not many jobs you can work at that you get to kinda do what you want, you get to handle situations how you want. It’s also not a nine to five job. It can be a monotonous job.

Participant 2: One split second judgment can make you the bad guy. So, that’s kind of a fine line to be walking all the time when you’re dealing with the public. You can say something wrong or… and you don’t even mean to it’s just a split second thing. So I think that’s probably one of the hardest things that they have to deal with is trying to make the right decision all the time.

Participant 1: If you’re working by yourself at like a Sheriff’s office and your backup’s forty-five minutes away, you’re probably going to handle situations differently than if you were working with a partner who was right there for you.

Participant 2: Professions like law enforcement are not for everybody.

These responses highlight the breadth of participants’ understanding of police work. The finding supplements existing literature that suggests inaccurate perceptions of policing influence decisions to drop out of police work (Haarr, 2011). It questions whether there are innate differences between prospective officers who have sought out information and experience and those who have not. The second research question asked: Are anticipations and concerns gender-specific or gender-neutral in content? Participants’ discussed expectations and beliefs that concerned the police in general, as well as specifically female officers. They are therefore aware that the police profession is oftentimes distinctly different for policemen and policewomen.
Participant 1: Uniforms don’t always fit… It’s hard finding equipment for people who are smaller… if you don’t have a very big waist you can’t fit a lot [on your duty belt]… A lot of departments still carry around large handguns, which can be hard for females to handle.

Participant 2: Finding the balance between getting people to take you seriously and just being the bitch female officer. Like… a lot of people I talk to are like “don’t get pulled over by a female officer because they’re bitches, they’ll always give you a ticket.” Maybe she’s trying to prove a point cause people a lot of times don’t take women seriously in professions like policing… So we have to prove ourselves, but then at the same time we have to find the balance so people don’t think we’re overdoing it.

Participant 4: It’s being taken seriously… You’re also there to catch the bad guys… you’re not just there to say “oh, it’s okay we can work this out.”

Participant 2: People aren’t going to take women officers as seriously… just because of the stereotype that they’re weaker… they can’t handle themselves, they can’t enforce as good as a man can because they’re not as big or strong or whatever. Women have to prove that they can do their job just as well as a man can.

Participant 3: Especially for like a female officer… your schedule isn’t fixed so if you have kids at home it can be a problem. So balance and your home life and your work schedule can be a challenge.

Participant 1: They might not have the policies for maternity leave… Can they put her on light duty? Is there anything for her to do while she’s pregnant as an officer? There’s probably some small town departments that maybe never had women.
Participant 2: A woman has to learn to handle herself physically against somebody who might be combatant. For a lot of men they wouldn’t have to go and take some type of combatant course or anything like that. But for a lot of women they would have to go learn how to fight back against somebody who’s like twice their size.

These participants, who had each been exposed to law enforcement in some way, evidenced knowledge of both basic and unfamiliar characteristics of policing, as well as an understanding of the difficulties faced by females in the male dominated profession. Individuals, both male and female, who have sought out working internships or questioned law enforcement officials about the realities of their job, therefore, might be less inclined to experience internal conflict or difficulties upon entering the police force.

My second realization was unexpected. Without encouragement, participants spent a majority of the allotted time discussing what I have deemed “strategies.” These were well thought out solutions participants had devised for dealing with or avoiding each of the challenges that were discussed.

Participant 2: For a lot of men, they wouldn’t have to go and take some type of combatant course of anything like that. But for a lot of women, they would have to go learn how to fight back against somebody who’s like, twice their size.

Participant 1: [Maternity policies are] something you should look into maybe before you get into the agency… Maybe ask around. If there’s a female say, “Okay, you had a kid. What did you do for it? How did they treat you? How was that handled?” It’s part of your job too to make sure that there is a policy and that they follow it.
Participant 3: If you’re a female and you do plan on having kids while being a police officer… and their policy is to put you on desk duty… you should accept that because really they’re trying to protect you.

Participant 2: We’re women. We’re supposed to be ditzy and we’re supposed to be not as good as men. So, we have to prove ourselves. But then at the same time we have to find the balance so people don’t think we’re overdoing it.

Participant 4: You have to compose yourself in a way to make them realize that, hey, you’re the same as everybody else. You’re out here doing your job. You’re not any different than any of the guys… You just have to keep working at it.

Participant 2: Make sure I had something to aid me… Like a baton would help in a situation like that if that person’s out of control and they’re trying to hurt you… or possibly a Taser if they are trying to physically harm you.

Participant 1: It can be a monotonous job but… [Patrol] is what you make of it. You can keep yourself busy, you can keep yourself occupied, you can keep yourself out visible in the community or you can sit back and just wait for a call.

Participant 2: Don’t try to go overboard in proving yourself. Act like you’re just another officer and then people will want to treat you that way… The guys that I’m in the military with take me seriously and know I can do just as well as they can because I’ve done it.

Participants surprisingly offered these strategies without having been asked. They additionally expanded on these ideas with more detail and frequency than they had in answering the proposed questions. The prospective officers, therefore, not only possessed considerable knowledge about
police work, they had spent much time contemplating the issues and linking them to their own future experiences.

Data Analysis

With this in mind, I became interested in quantifying topics participants considered more relevant or interesting, and for which they had spent more time constructing strategies. I also wanted to see what sorts of strategies individuals felt were more useful to police officers. I focused on the responses to two questions: 1) What do you think are the biggest challenges for all police officers? And 2) What do you think are the biggest challenges for policewomen? The following is a description of how the qualitative data were organized, operationalized, and coded for further quantitative analyses.

Operationalizing Qualitative Data

In order to inductively code the themes that emerged in the focus group discussion, I first had to operationalize qualitative data into quantifiable variables. I divided ideas into four categories. 1) Concerns that affect police officers in general. These were challenges that participants applied to police officers as a whole. For example, a participant asserted that patrol duty is most often monotonous in nature and officers are frequently bored. The monotonous nature of policing is therefore a challenge that all police officers encounter. In total, seven challenges were introduced in response to this question. Participants discussed the dangerous nature of the job, difficulties balancing shift work with family obligations, the monotony of patrol duty, the challenges that accompany a considerable amount of discretion, an officer’s constant pressure to make quick decisions in demanding circumstances, the difficulties of continuously updating one’s training, and the mental exhaustion that accompanies the stress of police work. 2) Concerns that uniquely affect female officers. Challenges that participants
indicated believed were of particular concern to female officers were included in this category. For instance, participants mentioned that female officers are “not taken seriously” or disrespected, perhaps as a result of their low representation in the force. Participants proposed six major issues or concerns in response to this question. These included difficulties with ill-fitting uniforms or equipment, general disrespect from the public, male officers, and administrators, the physical characteristics of policewomen (they are smaller and weaker than men, etc.), ambiguous, insufficient, or overly strict maternity policies, inadequate department facilities, and the emotional involvement women experience in difficult situations. 3) Strategies for all police officers. These were strategies presented to offset the challenges experienced by all who work in the profession. For example, an officer might alleviate the effects of stress by compartmentalizing negative emotions before heading home to spend time with family. 4) Strategies for female officers. These were coded as strategies presented to overcome difficulties unique to female officers. A female officer might, for example, take extra combat or self defense classes to prepare for altercations with larger assailants.

After coding responses into each of these categories, I identified 18 individual strategies, which I divided into four groups. 1) Gender-specific traits. These were special skills possessed by female officers afforded to them solely because they are women. For example, it was suggested that female officers might perform police duties differently than male officers because they possess unique communication skills that male officers do not. 2) Training/Technical skills. These were strategies that indicated an officer utilize skills and training taught in the police academy or on the job. For instance, an officer might take control of a difficult situation by using his or her baton or Taser. 3) Mental strategies. These included any psychological practices or mechanisms used to offset difficult situations or experiences. A female officer
might disregard an impertinent male coworker by assuring herself that she is confident and capable in her abilities as a police officer. 4) Societal/Workplace norms. These were defined as strategies that could be useful to any employee or individual in a difficult situation, such as “work extra hard,” “give it time,” or “learn to compose yourself.”

Coding Protocol

After grouping ideas into meaningful categories, I counted the total number of challenges proposed for police in general, and those that uniquely affect policewomen. Next, I totaled the number of times each particular challenge occurred throughout the course of the discussion. For this, I developed a simple protocol. When a topic was introduced, this was counted as the first occurrence. If a new participant added input to the idea, or reintroduced the topic at a later time, this was counted as the second occurrence. If a new speaker provided input, before discussion returned to the original speaker, this counted as two additional occurrences. When a person mentioned a topic two or more times within a single monologue, this counted as a single occurrence. I also tallied the number of strategies proposed and, using the same protocol as above, how often these occurred within the discussion. Here, I was able to identify which strategies participants believed were most effective. Finally, I categorized each strategy, and counted the number of strategies that fell into each category to see which was referenced most often. Results from these efforts are displayed in Tables 1-5 and discussed in detail below.

Challenges Encountered by All Police Officers

When questioned about the challenges that affect the police in general, responses contained a wide variety of detail and accuracy. This suggested that each of the participants had knowledge about or experience with the realities of the police profession. Due to the depth of discussion and willingness to contribute, I also observed that participants enjoyed discussing the
benefits and downsides of police work. It was apparent that each individual had spent time
contemplating these issues before making the decision to apply as a police officer. Table 1
presents the concerns proposed in response to the question: What do you think are the biggest
challenges for all police officers? In total, participants mentioned seven challenges that affect all
police officers. These issues were repeated ten times during the focus group. Two challenges
were repeated during the discussion, indicating that these were of particular importance or
provided a helpful illustration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Proposed Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing work and family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotony</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to make right decisions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring sufficient training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental taxation/&quot;Taking the job home&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first column shows that participants most commonly referred to the dangerous nature
of police work. They frequently mentioned that the police are often confronted with combative
or dangerous individuals. They also discussed how work duties have the potential to escalate
into life and death situations. Each example highlights that participants were aware of the
dangerous elements of the job. The second most commonly recurring idea held that police
officers struggle to find a balance between working unusual hours or nighttime shifts and
spending time with family. While they acknowledged that work-family conflict might be
especially difficult for female officers, participants believed that all police officers struggle to
achieve this balance.
Data in the second column show the number of strategies that were proposed to help future police officers avoid or alleviate the effects of each challenge. Two separate strategies were suggested for officers who struggle with mental fatigue or stress. For this issue, participants suggested that officers should resist allowing work problems impact their home lives. They also believed that compartmentalization (mentally separating concepts and emotions from work and home) would help an officer to differentiate between the two environments. Two strategies were also presented as suggestions for achieving a work-family balance. Participants believed officer should educate themselves on the challenges of police work prior to entering the force, and simply accept the department’s policies.

Challenges that Affect Policewomen

Table 2 reveals responses to the question: What do you think are some of the biggest challenges for policewomen? Seven challenges were proposed for police in general, while six were presented for female officers. It appears, however, that participants spent more time considering the challenges and struggles that would affect them uniquely as female police officers. These challenges were presented 23 different times during the focus group. In total, participants proposed 17 strategies they had devised to offset the challenges encountered by policewomen. Put differently, participants repeated ideas more often, and engaged in back-and-forth dialogue, when the topic concerned female officers. The finding might signify that these participants have spent more time considering how the profession would influence them as a female.
Table 2. Concerns Unique to Female Officers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Proposed Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General disrespect/Not taken seriously</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical weakness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous maternity leave policies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill-fitting uniforms and gear</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department facilities don’t accommodate females</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants maintained that community members, police administrators, and male coworkers do not take female officers seriously. They repeated this idea nine times during the discussion. They also supplied nine separate strategies for addressing this form of disrespect in their career. One strategy suggested that a female officer should refrain from outperforming male officers. She should instead find a balance between performing duties competently and “overdoing it.” They additionally spoke about the fact that females are not typically as big or strong as males. This assertion was repeated six times within the context of the discussion. For this challenge, they introduced four strategies: utilize communication skills, practice composure in situations where you are outmatched, enroll in additional self-defense classes, and utilize police gear and weapons when necessary. They further discussed ambiguous, non-existent, or overly harsh maternity leave policies four times, for which they provided three strategies. According to participants, a female officer who wishes to begin a family should educate herself on policies, ask questions, and accept the department’s policies if available.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

During the focus group, I asked participants to list various challenges that affect all police officers. I also asked them to list challenges that might affect policewomen specifically. Next, I asked whether they believed police work was different for men and women. Finally, I asked
whether they believed these issues would affect them personally. I never asked, however, to list any ideas for overcoming these challenges. It was therefore surprising to hear participants independently introduce 19 different strategies and ideas for overcoming the challenges of police work. Table 3 presents a comprehensive list of strategies that participants proposed. These include ideas for all police officers, and for female officers in particular. Strategies were discussed on thirty-eight separate occasions during the discussion. Two ideas in particular were repeated more frequently than each of the others.

Table 3. Proposed Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Police&quot; differently/Utilize communication skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate yourself/Gain experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prove yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compose/handle yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't overdo it/ Blend in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take self defense/combat class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your job/Follow your training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept department policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep yourself busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compartmentalize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Don't take your work home&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give it time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be confident in your abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize gear, aid, weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn at the academy*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 38

* Strategy was proposed for no particular challenge. Not included in totals from Tables 1 and 2.
Participants repeatedly stated that female police officers are often outmatched physically in altercations with assailants. They nevertheless argued that female officers could react to these situations differently because they possessed unique communication skills. According to participants, male officers often resort to the use of force more quickly, while female officers defuse situations by “talking down” attackers. Female officers should therefore utilize these special skills when physically restraining a suspect is unrealistic. This idea was repeated six times. Participants also repeatedly stated that prospective police officers ought to gain experience and knowledge about policing prior to applying for an academy. This strategy was supplied as a solution for several different challenges. It was most commonly suggested that female officers should educate themselves on their departments’ maternity policies prior to making decisions to have children. In general, by acquiring knowledge and “becoming educated” about police work, officers might be better prepared for the challenges that arise within the police profession.

For further analysis, strategies were grouped into four categories: Societal/Workplace Norms, Training/Technical Skills, Gender-Specific Traits, and Mental Strategies. Table 4 lists the number of occurrences for each of the four categories. Societal/Workplace Norms were operationalized as ideas that might be applied to employees in any profession. Strategies for handling difficult social interactions were also grouped in this category. For example, participants discussed how female officers might need to work extra hard or prove themselves in a profession where most of their coworkers are male. Ideas such as “give it time” and “accept department policy” are further examples of Societal/Workplace Norms. Training/Technical Skills were defined as strategies that implied an individual should learn new skills, resort to previous police training, attend a police academy, or gain additional knowledge. Gender-Specific Traits were
regarded as strategies available to individuals solely due to their gender. Females, for example, might utilize communication skills to defuse difficult situations. Finally, Mental Strategies were regarded as any strategies that implied a psychological function or exercise. Compartmentalization is an example of a Mental Strategy available to police officers.

The most commonly recurring categories, as seen in Table 4, were Societal/Workplace Norms and Training/Technical skills. Participants therefore referred to status quo defense strategies, such as “work hard” or “give it time,” most often. They also indicated that officers should simply follow their department training: “just do your job.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Proposed Strategies by Category</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal/Workplace Norms</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/Technical Skills</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Specific Traits</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Strategies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 presents a visual depiction of concepts from Table 4. The figure also itemizes all 18 strategies presented during the focus group. The depiction highlights that the Societal/Workplace Norms and Training/Technical Skills categories included many individual strategies. The high occurrence rate (as seen in Table 4) might therefore be a product of the fact that these two categories contained more strategies than the others.
Gender-Specific Traits, however, consisted of a single idea: female officers perform police duties differently, most often by utilizing enhanced communication skills. This idea was repeated six separate times. This might be somehow connected to their collective aspiration to communicate with the public and practice community policing. They also reported that female officers are required to perform adaptive behaviors, most often when their assailant physically outmatches them. The findings suggest that prospective female police officers perceive females to have unique responsibilities within the police force.
CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings of the study are first discussed with respect to existing research. Next is a suggestion of how results of the study might aid police departments in recruiting an increased number of female applicants. This information might also help departments to identify recruits who are most likely to endure and succeed in the field. The subsequent discussion details opportunities for future research that might use the results of the exploratory study to further understand the perceptions and beliefs of prospective policewomen. Future studies might seek information useful in identifying female applicants who are most committed to policing. I next discuss the possibility that prospective female officers perceive the responsibilities of policewomen to be different from those of male officers. Finally, limitations and strengths of the methodology are presented.

Applications to Existing Literature

Research efforts to address the low representation of women in law enforcement have yet to develop a comprehensive understanding of female recruits and other women considering careers in policing. Research on recruits has primarily studied male subjects. One goal of the current study is to explore the expectations and beliefs of prospective female officers regarding the police profession. A second goal is to evaluate whether these considerations are gender-neutral, or specific to issues that affect policewomen. This information would contribute to the minimal literature currently available on policewomen, female recruits, and prospective officers.

Past studies have indicated that recruits’ preconceptions are of interest in ascertaining reasons for early resignations (Haarr, 2011). Former officers, both male and female, reported that they quit their police jobs because the profession turned out to be unlike what they had
originally expected. Other researchers have found that prospective officers might not fully anticipate certain difficulties that accompany a career in law enforcement (Ryan et al., 2001). The current study, however, finds that prospective female police officers with law enforcement experience as interns, Explorers, or by growing up in a police family possess accurate and detailed perceptions of police work. Group participants made efforts to become familiar with the police profession and to consider how the challenges would affect them. Perceptions focused both on problems confronted by police officers in general, as well as on issues specifically experienced by policewomen working in a male dominated profession. Discussion topics included the discretionary, dangerous, and stressful nature of the job, as well as the potential for officers to allow difficulties at work to spillover into their home and personal lives. The group also mentioned the low representation of women in policing, role conflicts experienced by females in a male-dominated field, limited maternity policies, disrespect from the general public and male officers, and the difficult balance of shift work versus rearing a family. In fact, participants proposed a total of 13 different challenges throughout the duration of the focus group, six of which applied to female officers specifically.

Ryan et al. (2001) suggested that, though recruits are aware of certain challenges of police work, they might not believe that these issues will affect them personally. Participants in the current study, however, proposed 18 strategies they believed would help them, and others, combat or alleviate the effects of certain occupational challenges or difficulties. It is particularly interesting that participants proposed a larger number of strategies specifically designed to help female officers overcoming challenges in the profession. Prospective female officers appear to have spent more time considering the challenges that might affect them as women in a male-dominated profession.
Past work on police recruits analyzed motivating factors that influence decisions to seek police careers. Police recruits reported desires to help people (Raganella & White, 2004; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007), to obtain benefits and reliable employment (Raganella & White, 2004) and to work in an unpredictable and exciting career (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). In the current study, females seeking work in the police field exclusively spoke about the desire to communicate “on a more real level” with the public. Also, while male and female officers are assigned identical responsibilities, participants believed that female officers must often perform police duties in adaptive ways. Frequently, this is because many female officers are physically outmatched in situations with combative assailants. Taken together, these responses might reflect the common perception that female police officers possess unique skills for controlling situations verbally, without resorting to the use of force. The idea is supported by a recent study during which female officers were interviewed about opportunities for women on police SWAT teams (Dodge et al., 2010). Female officers agreed that increasing the representation of females on SWAT teams would improve success rates in safely negotiating crisis situations. Indeed, participants in the current study reiterated this belief six times.

Policy Implications

An additional goal of the current study is to understand the mentality of future female officers in order to help departments recruit individuals who are more likely to endure and succeed in policing. Information of this nature might also help to ease the transition of female police recruits into their future career positions. The study finds that participants each made an effort to become educated and gain experience in police work. A few mentioned that they had spoken with current female police officers about how they overcame particular challenges. Based on the low sample size and heterogeneous composition of the group, few generalizable
conclusions can be made. Findings nonetheless indicate that departments might find it beneficial to identify applicants who have experience in law enforcement, or who have grown up in law enforcement families. These factors might imply that an individual recruit feels a deeper attachment to the law enforcement profession. Departments might also seek out recruits who have personal experience working in law enforcement agencies, as these individuals have made an effort to gain skills and knowledge. This is important in law enforcement, as recruits might not fully anticipate the challenges encountered by officers (Ryan et al., 2001). The findings also suggest a widespread belief that female police officers possess unique communication skills. If this is true, departments might search for potential female recruits outside traditional locations, such as college Criminal Justice programs. It might be that the most effective female police officers are those with backgrounds in Communications or Psychology. The following section discusses two future research projects designed to investigate these possibilities.

**Agenda for Future Research**

A few years ago, I applied to several police departments. During this process, members of the law enforcement community spoke to me about the realities of the police profession for female officers. These experiences inspired me to speak with other prospective female officers on the issue. I wanted to assess whether females who had yet to experience police work were aware of these differences and challenges. My Master’s thesis project therefore concentrates on the beliefs and perceptions of females who were interested becoming officers. Through the process of conducting my first focus group discussion, and speaking with other females are similarly interested in the law enforcement field, I have generated a number of ideas for future research.
A “Commitment to Policing” Scale

Police socialization literature has regarded the police profession as a uniquely bonded and consistently reproduced inner culture (Crank, 2004; Manning & Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen, 1973a). Findings from the current study imply that individuals who have experienced some form of law enforcement, whether by growing up in a police family or serving as an intern or Explorer, might be more motivated to succeed and feel more deeply connected to the police profession. A recruit with considerable knowledge of policing, enhanced qualifications, and a stronger connection to the profession might be less likely to resign and more likely to succeed in their career. Literature on police recruits and socialization, however, focuses primarily on data from male subjects. In fact, research on female police officers discusses their exclusion from the general police culture (See, e.g., Martin, 1980). The absence of information on the socialization processes for policewomen is especially troubling considering that the occupational experiences of female police officers are shown to be markedly different from those of male coworkers (See, e.g., Hassell et al., 2011; Martin, 1980).

Findings from the current study suggest that past experiences with law enforcement might influence the accuracy of recruits’ perceptions, their motivation to seek additional information about law enforcement, and their future occupational experiences. This finding might be particularly important for purposes of recruiting females, as departments are currently working to boost recruitment and limit turnover among women. Future research should investigate how the socialization process functions with respect to female police recruits and officers. For example, developing a scale to measure the degree to which an individual in committed to policing might help departments to identify and recruit individuals who are likely to succeed as police officers.
In the future, researchers might develop such a scale that measures a recruit’s “Commitment to Policing.” A study might distribute surveys designed to measure commitment, which would combine information on one’s past experiences with law enforcement, education level, and degree of attachment to the law enforcement profession. An individuals’ experience would be evaluated based on past internships, career positions, and programs in law enforcement agencies. Education level would measure the highest degree received and whether the individual received a degree (or took any classes) applicable to a career in law enforcement. Attachment to the profession would include the number of friends, acquaintances, relatives, or parents who hold (or held) positions in policing or other law enforcement fields. Attachment would also evaluate whether the recruit has applied for other careers in law enforcement, or whether they have been looking for jobs in a wide variety of fields. Finally, attachment would indicate whether the individual has applied for police positions in the past. Before such a scale can be devised, however, more research is needed to identify variables that matter in measuring an individual’s commitment level. With this information, researchers might conduct a norm-reference rest to identify a scores of commitment as they compare to a designated normal value (Rodriguez, 1997). Below is an example of how such a scale might be organized (See Table 5).
Table 5. Conceptualization of the "Commitment to Policing" Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Law Enforcement (LE) Experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># LE Internships</th>
<th>+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># LE Programs</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># LE Job Positions</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Education**

| Degree in LE-Related Field | + |
| Minor in LE-Related Field  | + |
| # Classes in LE-Related Subject | + |

**Attachment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Parents in Policing</th>
<th>+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Parent(s) in LE</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Relatives in Policing</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Relatives in LE</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Close Friends in Policing</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Close Friends in LE</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Applications to LE Job Positions</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Applications to Non-LE Positions</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Applications to Police Departments</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**

A respondent’s answer in each category could be combined to evaluate the recruit’s level of commitment to policing. With this information, the department could assess the individual’s knowledge and awareness of police work, commitment to maintaining a career in law enforcement, and whether they are sufficiently motivated to graduate from the academy and succeed in their position as an officer. This is especially important for females, who might experience police work quite differently from their male coworkers. They might therefore be more susceptible to misconceptions about the realities of police work. Departments might also
have an interest in evaluating a female’s commitment level in order to identify officers who are least likely to resign from the profession. This would help departments to invest in the best possible candidates in order to boost the representation of women in the force.

Female Police Officers: A Separate Duty?

In the past, qualitative researchers found that female officers were uncertain of their roles as policewomen (Timmins & Hainsworth, 1989). These officers did not believe that gender afforded them any particular “edge” on duty. Recent studies similarly found that police officers do not believe that male and female perform police duties differently (Kakar, 2002). Researchers who analyzed police behaviors on the street alternatively found that gender appears to influence policing styles and behaviors (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Policewomen in the study were less likely to threaten, physically restrain, search, or arrest suspects. Rabe-Hemp (2008) attributed this finding to the fact that policewomen were more likely to serve as community police officers. The study also found that policewomen do not appear to utilize “supportive behaviors” more often than male officers.

It is apparent that participants in the current study believed that female officers are especially skilled at communicating. Participants furthermore looked forward to communicating with members of the public in their future careers. According to participants, female police officers are required to perform police duties differently than male officers because they are physically smaller than men. With this in mind, I would like to investigate the idea that contemporary female police officers have (or believe they have) a separate duty or responsibility from male police officers. To understand this idea more clearly, I would conduct face-to-face interviews with police administrators and female and male police officers to ascertain whether
they share these beliefs. I would also like to interview a larger, more diverse sample of prospective female police officers to see whether this perception continues to materialize.

I might ask police administrators: 1) What specific skills do male police officers bring to the job? 2) What specific skills do female police officers bring to the job? 3) What skills do you believe most male police officers lack? 4) What skills do you believe most female police officers lack? 5) Do you believe that the job is different for male and female officers? 6) Do you think that male and female officers perform police work differently? I would also like to ask these questions of current male and female police officers to understand their opinions, based on what they have personally experienced on the street.

In order to receive honest and accurate responses from officers and police administrators, I would reiterate to participants that the objective of the study was not to identify sexism or prejudice in assigning responsibilities to officers. It is imperative that I explain to administrators of my interest in identifying whether there is a common presumption that female and male officers possess unique skills.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Focus groups have been shown to elicit the most information when they consist of approximately six to eight participants (Stewart et al., 2007). After experiencing considerable difficulty in recruiting, only four participants attended the focus group discussion. The small group setting may have caused participants to feel less comfortable sharing particular pieces of information. The small sample size may have therefore limited the scope of the resulting data. As moderator, however, I perceived that focus group members enjoyed discussing the topic of policing with others who similarly shared this interest. I also felt that group members were forthcoming with information. This is supported by the fact that participants proposed a number
of strategies for overcoming strategies without having been asked to do so. The fact that participants supplied strategies independently also highlights the value of the focus group research method in exploratory research of this nature. In a setting with other female participants who shared similar career interests, participants began to openly discuss ideas beyond the scope of the discussion questions. The focus group setting therefore elicited findings beyond the original research proposal.

That so few students agreed to participate in the study, despite the promise of monetary compensation, suggests the significant impact of timing on recruitment. Due to a limited time frame, the focus group was unavoidably scheduled during the students’ finals week. Though twelve individuals reported an interest in taking part in the study, five individuals agreed to participate, and ultimately four attended. When recruiting groups of individuals with shared responsibilities (such as students from a single university program) the date of the focus group must be strategically chosen to ensure that a maximum number of individuals will be able to attend.

Results of this study are therefore based on responses from four Criminal Justice students currently attending Bowling Green State University. In other words, participants were of approximately the same ages and in similar life stages. The group also comprised individuals who reported first-hand experience in law enforcement professions during childhood and through professional internships. The heterogeneity and size of the sample therefore limits the generalizability of the results and implications should be taken with these facts in mind. The depth of knowledge regarding the realities of police work may not be a reflection of the population as a whole. The heterogenous sample, however, may have improved on past studies in that it revealed that certain populations of prospective female officers are indeed well educated
and familiar with the police profession. Where other studies have questioned a randomized sample of individuals, the current study was able to identify a subpopulation that departments might be interested in targeting for recruitment.

Conclusion

In order to understand the reasons for the low representation of women in the police profession, it is important to consider how prospective female officers perceive the realities and challenges that await them in a career in policing. The current study is a qualitative, exploratory analysis of the expectations and perceptions of females who seek employment as police officers. The data suggest that prospective female officers have endeavored to educate themselves and become familiar with the realities of police work. They have additionally considered the challenges encountered by females in the profession, and have devised a wide variety of strategies they believe will help them to succeed in their careers. Most notably, participants believed female officers were especially skilled at “talking down” suspects, more so than male officers.

The findings provide information to police departments for purposes of recruiting an increased number of female officers, retaining a larger percentage of officers who attend the police academy, and identifying those who are most likely to succeed in the field. First, prospective female officers who have experience in law enforcement (by completing internships or growing up in police families) might have a deeper understanding of police work, and may be less likely to experience the “reality shock” that some novice officers encounter (Van Maanen, 1973b). These individuals might be less likely to resign from police work as a result of internal conflict or cognitive dissonance (Haarr, 2011). In addition, while past studies have found that female officers are not more likely to utilize “supportive” police behaviors, this perception may
be commonly shared among prospective female police officers (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). The existence of such a perception has implications for the types of individuals who are drawn to police work. In order to investigate these possibilities, future studies should incorporate a larger, more diverse sample of prospective policewomen.

Prospective female police officers appear to have considerable knowledge about the realities and challenges of the police profession. They are additionally aware that contemporary policewomen continue to experience the profession differently than their male coworkers. They know that females in the profession frequently encounter difficulties as a result of a variety of factors, such as their low representation in the field. These individuals nonetheless feel that they possess the skills and motivation to overcome various challenges. By seeking additional information and gaining experience, they have acquired qualifications and developed an understanding about policing as a whole.

It is possible, however, that participants in the current study are exceedingly informed and qualified, compared to others who may not have college degrees or family members to ask for advice. Future research should work to better understand this population of individuals so that police departments can make more informed (and cost effective) recruitment decisions, especially with respect to female applicants. With this information, we might finally identify the reasons for the low representation of women in policing, as well as the “alarmingly slow rate” at which females are entering the force (Lonsway, 2002).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.

Email Announcement

I am a graduate student in the Criminal Justice program. For my Master’s thesis project, I am conducting a research study on expectations, beliefs, and concerns of individuals who are considering police work after graduation. I am looking for females, 18 years of age or older, who have an interest in working as a police officer. To facilitate discussion on this topic, I will be organizing small groups of approximately 6-8 people who are considering working in law enforcement. These group sessions, or focus groups, will take approximately 1.5 hours and will meet on campus at BGSU in early May. If you are interested in learning more about the project, please email ntodak@bgsu.edu. Individuals will be compensated for their time.

Natalie Todak
MSCJ Student and Graduate Assistant
Criminal Justice Department
College of Health and Human Services
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH
Cell: (805) 908-1211
ntodak@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX B.

College of Health and Human Services PILLARS Grant Award Letter

PILLARS is a grant program designed to provide financial support to College of Health and Human Services students. The grants are funded by annual financial contributions from alumni and friends of the College of Health and Human Services.

May 9, 2012

Natalie Todak
223 Health Center
 Bowling Green, OH 43403

Dear Natalie:

Congratulations! Your application for a Pillars Grant has been favorably reviewed. The committee chose to award you funding in the amount of $160 to assist in compensating research participants (through gift cards or gift certificates) as part of your Master’s thesis research study.

As stipulated within the application materials, the college will plan to reimburse you for your expenses after the project occurs and with proper receipts documenting your expenses. We also require that you submit a brief summary report of how the grant helped you achieve your academic goals. Please note that original receipts (which can also include a mileage log if you are seeking reimbursement for driving expenses) are required in order for reimbursement to be made—the funds are controlled by the BGSU Foundation, and we are bound by their policies.

Again, congratulations on the award. We hope this will help you achieve your academic goals. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Thomas Gorman
Assistant Dean and Director, Advising Center
College of Health and Human Services
102 Health Center
tgorman@bgsu.edu

cc: L. Petrosino, Dean
Pillars Committee Members
APPENDIX C.

Primary Questions

1. What motivated you to choose a career in policing?
2. What do you think you will like most about being a police officer?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges for all police officers?
APPENDIX D.

Secondary Questions

1. Do you believe police work is different for men and women?

2. What do you think are some of the biggest challenges for policewomen?

3. You mentioned (that females are disrespected by members of the community). How do you think this will affect you personally?
APPENDIX E.

Probe Questions

1. You mentioned _______, could you expand on that for me?

2. How did you feel about ____________?

3. What went through your head when ________________?

4. How did you react when ________________?

5. How did you deal with ___________?
APPENDIX F.

Informed Consent Document

[Disseminated on official Bowling Green State University letterhead.]

*Introduction:* My name is Natalie Todak. I am a graduate student, conducting a research study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Science in Criminal Justice at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). My thesis advisor is Dr. Philip M. Stinson, Assistant Professor in the Criminal Justice program.

*Purpose:* I am studying beliefs and concerns of individuals who are considering police work. You were selected because you are a female, over the age of 18 years old, who has expressed interest in someday working as a police officer. While there are no direct benefits to you, I believe that this research has important implications. Understanding how female applicants feel about police work will help police departments to recruit motivated and talented individuals, increase the diversity of the police force, and increase our knowledge about females who want to work in law enforcement.

*Procedure and time required:* If you chose to participate, you will take part in a focus group discussion with approximately five to seven others. Your participation will last approximately 1.5 hours. The moderator will pose six questions regarding your expectations, concerns, and beliefs about police work.
Your rights as a research participant: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to refrain from responding to any questions, or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your class standing, grades, relationship with professors, or relationship with Bowling Green State University. You have the right to have all questions answered by the researcher. You may request a copy of all documents, as well as the summary and results of the study. You will be provided with a copy of the consent document for your records.

Confidentiality Protection: Your information will be kept confidential. While I know your identity, this information will not be available to or shared with anyone else. Direct quotations will be included in the final document, without attribution to your personal information. Data will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. Audio and transcription data will be stored on a secure network file storage system. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet within 201 South Hall, which is kept locked at all times. A backup PDF document of consent forms will be created, which will also be stored on a secure network file storage system.

Risks: I do not foresee any physical or psychological harm that may result from your participation, beyond what you encounter in everyday life. Remember, you are free to refrain from answering any questions, and are free to quit the study at any time without penalty.
Contact information of researcher and advisor for questions about study:

Principle Investigator: Natalie Todak
Cell: (805) 908-1211
Email: ntodak@bgsu.edu

Advisor: Philip M. Stinson
(419) 372-0373
Email: stinspm@bgsu.edu

Contact information for HSRB for questions or concerns about rights as a research participant

Dr. Hillary Harms, HSRB Administrator
(419) 372-7716
Email: hsrb@bgsu.edu

Dr. Amy Morgan, HSRB Chair
(419) 372-0596
Email: amorgan@bgsu.edu

1. Statement of consent

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, have had all relevant questions answered, and agree to participate in the study.
2. Consent to be recorded

Please sign below if you are willing to have this discussion audio recorded.

Name: _______________________________________        Date: ____________________