



Females Breaking Barriers: Women Entering Law Enforcement and Breaking Down The Gender Barrier

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<http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Law-Enforcement>

Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to enlighten individuals about gender inequality and help inform individuals about the research problem, which is how females are viewed in male dominated fields of work in Southern, West Virginia. The field of work that was focused on was law enforcement. The methods that were used in this research were interviews with participants employed in law enforcement and research from reliable internet databases. The research performed confirmed just how gender is relevant in law enforcement in our community. The significance of the research and the results produced will help inform society how far we have come in accepting females into all forms of employment. Through this study the researcher hopes that society will have a better understanding of how we can make females apply for these positions and feel like they will be accepted properly in the position they are qualified to hold.

Research Question

How are females viewed in law enforcement, which is a male dominated field of work?

Literature Review

Females in law enforcement was not something that was very common back in 1970 only two percent of all police were women but, by 1991, nine percent of police were women According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1993 (Price). Research has shown that women in policing are not easily accepted by their male peers, their supervisors, or their own police department. Women are viewed with skepticism or worse by their male counterparts in spite of the fact that women have been doing police work for over one hundred years (Price). Although this may come as a shock to some many of us are more than aware that females in this line of work have a lot to prove. There are conflicting views on how women are supposed to present themselves as a law enforcement as well. Some studies suggest that females must be masculine and assertive while other studies prove that females should display feminine-type qualities in order to be considered competent (Gerber). Females are considered a minority in this career and only 10 % of members of patrol teams are women, because law enforcement officials do not like to pair woman together. This means that a female will be paired with a male and the male is always considered to be a higher status than the female, no matter how much experience she may have and this can be a frustrating battle for a female (Gerber). Females also were issued certain roles in the past and still are today and those are cases involving women and juvenile offenders. These tasks reflected and reinforced the conventional belief that women are, above all, mothers and must serve as the “guardians of children and protectors of public morals”(Leger). The other reason that females are given such cases is due to societies perception of a female. Research does suggest that the younger generation of both cops and individuals seem to be more receptive of a female in law enforcement (Vega). The younger society being more receptive is important to note because that is one more movement toward breaking down the barrier, although we still have a lot of room to progress.

Methodology and Limitations

Methods

I collected data by doing interviews with two individuals who are employed in law enforcement in Southern West Virginia. I also interviewed one individual who is a former WV State Trooper. All of the interviews lasted an hour and were transcribed and coded thoroughly for valid information.

I also viewed scholarly journals to collect information about how females were viewed in law enforcement and how males viewed females entering this field of work.

Limitations

- I had limitations in my research because I could not find many statistics solely on southern WV in particular.
- I had to depend mostly on the information provided from the interview participants.

Results

My research showed that women in law enforcement do feel a sense of inferiority to men in this career field and have a lot to prove not only to society but to their male coworkers as well. The most interesting factor that was seen in this research was that most men felt like women were better at dealing with children and female victims and enjoyed doing this part of the career. The truth was very different after interviewing a female law enforcement officer who told me how she really felt about being given those cases in the beginning of her career, “I liked the pursuits, I didn't like the cases pertaining to kids at first, I didn't understand it and at first they would give them to me because I was a woman, and the guys didn't want to deal with it, I got thrown into it.” This was a big difference from what the male officer perceived when he told me, “Dealing with children and women is something that a female law enforcement officer can handle better than most men. Now a days police work is not so much brawn as it is using your head, women can be more level headed and talk to women and children better than men.” Although this was a reasonable perception from the male officer the female would have much rather worked a case dealing with pursuits than she would a case such as child abuse. Also both male and female officers interviewed reported that this was a male dominated field and that women did have to prove themselves.

Discussion

The female that I interviewed in law enforcement supported my theory that a sense of inferiority did exist for the females and most males did expect the female to have a certain personality and hold their own to an extent, she said, “Females have to prove themselves more that they can handle this and I faced a situation where my fellow male officers believed I shouldn't be in law enforcement.” This statement in itself helps support the theory that females are put in a certain category in this field and even though they are qualified for their career, they are still held at a different standard due to gender.

The male officer that is in charge of hiring law enforcement officers did have some important information to convey which is a good sign and that was, “Females are really lack of better words really stepping into these jobs and taking over these jobs and it's good I've always been the one who has said if you are qualified you deserve that job I don't care what color you are or if you are male or female you're qualified you deserve it.” This was great news to hear but he also reported that, “Female officers are not viewed as high as male officers. Even, and I hate to say it and even to a lot of police officers if your a female your not as good as the male officers. Where you are a female that male officer doesn't see you being able to stop a 250 pound man who is fighting and you gotta stop him.” We still have to battle the gender barrier in law enforcement and society, but the good news is that most male officers are becoming used to females in their line of work and that is one step toward progress.

Areas for Further Research

- Increase female law enforcement officers in career fairs in high schools.
- Local law enforcement offices should display female officers more and get more out into the society.
- The media should use their outlets to display female law officers more and show social acceptance to female officers in society in general.
- Further research on past laws regarding females in law enforcement in history.

Citations

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