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Making it Happen: Strategies for Personal Success

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Police and Community: Making It Happen!

Dorothy M. Schulz, Ph.D.  
Professor,  
Dept. of Law, Police Studies, and Criminal Justice Administration  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, NYC, USA

Good morning, Your Excellency, honored guest, delegates. When Helen McDermott invited me to speak, I thought, Wow, Australia. Wow, Australian women police. I believe I am speaking to the current and future leaders in Australian and surrounding nations' police agencies. Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on policing and women's progress over more than a century.

Although I am a historian by training and attitude, I have also had a full career in law enforcement and so my theme for the brief time I have with you is professional success and how important it is not to allow your goals to be derailed by others. The presence—and wise words—of her Excellency, Governor-General Quentin Brice, personifies this. Many women today still turn away from success because they are concerned about being “the first” “the only”—or even, “one of only a few.” Would Governor-General Brice be sitting here today if she had given in to that fear? Would I be speaking to you today? Would many of you who have achieved rank or other signs of success in your agencies be sitting here if you had given into to such fears? I doubt it.

The Governor-General's current position was not her first “first;” which is likely also true for many of you. One of the most interesting findings of my research into women police chiefs and sheriffs in the United States is that many of the most successful women worked in small police departments where they were the ONLY woman or one of few women throughout their careers. They were the first police officer, the first major case detective, the first sergeant—well, you get the point.

Of course, as more women enter law enforcement, that is less likely to be true, but for women my age—and without being disrespectful, the age of the Governor-General—being the first or the only was almost a given.

Now before I go on, I must explain what I mean by small police departments. In Australia, you have somewhere fewer than a dozen police services; in Great Britain, there are fewer than 60 agencies; in Canada there are around 100; but in the United States we have about 18,000 police agencies. Yes, it is breathtaking, but it reflects our history of keeping things local. Although those who watch TV know about the NYPD, the LAPD, the Chicago PD, Hawaii 5-0, and other large departments, about 75 percent of our departments have fewer than 100 sworn officers. Most are not in the glamorous locations popularized by CSI. And most assign the largest percentage of their officers to uniformed patrol—what you call general police duties.

It is in these small, hidden-away agencies that most women—and most men—spend their law enforcement careers. Just as some of you may have been surprised to learn how many police agencies we have in the U.S., I was surprised—albeit pleasantly—to learn that women make up 23 percent overall of the members of the Australian police service. While this percentage is comparable to Great Britain, and somewhat similar to Canada, it is a larger percentage of women than in the United States, where women comprise about 15 percent of sworn officers nationwide, with larger percentages in larger departments. Of course, because we have so many forces and about 700,000 police officers, the numbers may be larger, but the percentage is smaller. It would not surprise me if there were still departments in the U.S. that have yet to hire their first female officer.

Some years ago—okay, it was a while ago when colleagues and I were publicizing the IAWP conference held in New York in 1987—countless chiefs at a state chief meeting came to look at us as if we were freaks. Are you really police officers they asked in wonderment, only to tell us how impossible it was to find women for their agencies. Most admitted they hadn't looked very hard for women, were unaware that uniform manufacturers made trousers and bullet-proof vests in women's sizes, and said it had never occurred to them that a maternity leave policy might assist in recruiting women during child-bearing years. Today their successors probably have read the diversity recruitment strategies and have seen the ads in law enforcement magazines for women's clothing—although one of my favorites that I share with my students is the holster ad featuring the woman with long red fingernails. As to maternity policy, the International Association of Chiefs of Police recently promulgated a model and urged departments—regardless of their size—to follow it as closely as local conditions and budgets allowed.

Why are these things important today?

Women's entry into policing—particularly in the heritage shared by Great Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia—was almost always fostered by demands from outside the police organization, generally by women—to appoint women who could connect with their communities. Many of the early policewomen appointed between 1910 and 1920 had been social workers, settlement house workers, or Bible readers. They came almost always from what we today call the “helping professions” (Schulz, 1995). According to Patricia Higgs and Christie Bettess' *To Walk a Fair Beat* (1987), South Australia's first two policewomen, Kate Cocks and Annie Ross, appointed in 1915, were similar. These women were appointed to assist women and children in their interactions with the criminal justice system, most often to protect them from the harsh realities of crime, delinquency, and prostitution.

Many of our foremothers were amongst the first college-educated women in their countries and among the barely handful of college-educated employees of police agencies. Yet, few if any gave much thought to upward mobility. Few were concerned with equality with their male colleagues—who they mostly saw as beneath them in social class, demeanor, and most other categories they considered important. Women's roles in police departments ebbed and flowed with outside economic considerations—declining during depressions when it was thought that jobs should be kept for men—and increasing during wars—when large numbers of working, unattached women frightened political establishments sufficiently to appoint policewomen who acted as censors, morals officers. In extreme cases such as Detroit during World War II, policewomen assisted authorities in undertaking sexually-transmitted disease tests on women who came into contact with the police.

I should explain that contact here does not mean sexual contact—it means any contact!

By the 1950s, women wanted promotions—but still within sex-typed assignments, and most warned their more aggressive sisters against becoming “little men” and certainly not to consider swaggering around in uniforms with guns strapped to their hips.

By the 1960s, things had changed both here and in the U.S., but they were still nothing like today. Joyce Adeline Richardson, who spent 12 months training the first five women recruited

into the Northern Territory Police Force as head of the Women Police Section, may not have shared many experiences with Theresa Melchionne, head of the New York City Police Department's Women Bureau at about the same time, but their language was similar. Both referred to their policewomen as "our girls." Both tried to improve the status of women under their commands, but neither could have envisioned a Christine Nixon or the first generation of women chiefs of police in the U.S.

By the time Chief Nixon and her American peers appeared, women policed—at least in theory—on an equal basis with men. They performed general police duties and rarely worked with other women. They often, and here again Chief Nixon is typical, came from police families. They were also—again Chief Nixon was typical—far better educated than their male colleagues—a fact that remains true today. I was similarly typical in my own policing career; when I took over command of New York City's Grand Central Terminal for the Metro-North Railroad police, I had no women cops working for me, I was one of only a few employees with a college degree, and the only one with more than a B.A. I differed from the profile in that I did not come from a police family. Yet I was similar to many of the women I would later study in being childless. Luckily for my husband—who is here at the conference with me—I also differed from many of the chiefs in having been married only once and never to a fellow law enforcement officer.

Despite the similarities of so many of the women and probably because of their differences from the men they worked with, only a few were able to crack what I have called the brass ceiling and what you all seem to call the greasy pole. Speaking of greasy poles, it is the title of Alison Halford's attempt to fight the British policing establishment. Despite a rapid rise through the ranks, she was unable to become Britain's first female chief constable, retiring in 1992 as assistant chief constable of the Merseyside Police (Halford, 1993). Never one to take no for an answer, she remained in public life, though, becoming a Labour member of the National Assembly for Wales from 1999 to 2003. More recently, in 2006, reinforcing her willingness to speak her mind, she joined the Conservative Party.

Today's women in law enforcement—women like you—may not all want to be chief constables, break the brass ceiling, or climb the greasy pole. But you are likely to be far more career-oriented than earlier generations of policewomen. What can we learn from the battles fought by the high-achievers I have interviewed and written about (Schulz, 2004)? Although women have made tremendous strides in law enforcement, there are still difficulties in breaking brass and achieving the level of personal fulfillment required to connect with your peers and your communities.

In the 1970s and continuing to the present, many observers have noted not only the small numbers of women in many professions but also traits exhibited by those who are few among many. These traits taken together were termed tokenism by Rosabeth Kanter, (1977) whose work continues to be relevant to this day in all fields, whether business, law enforcement, politics (despite your having a female prime minister), and all areas except those in which women predominate.

In her study of a small number of women who worked in a large corporation, Kanter saw skewed sex ratios as critical to shaping the group dynamics. She defined skewed groups as those with a

ratio of about 85 of the majority—or dominant group—to 15 percent of the minority—or the tokens.

The tokens, by virtue of their small number, always stood out and their performance was under closer scrutiny. When they did poorly, they were seen as fulfilling the view that they were not up to the tasks. When they did well, rather than change their overall perspective, they were seen as exceptions to the expectation of inadequacy. Still true today, isn't it?

Kanter determined that tokens, faced with high visibility, isolation, and problems assimilating into the group, faced performance pressures that the dominants did not face. She said these pressures forced women into stereotypical roles, some became the b-word, some became aggressive temptresses, and some acted as mothers and pets. Still true today, isn't it?

Testing Kanter's thesis among the first women in Washington, DC, to be assigned to general police duties, Susan Martin divided the women into two archetypes—POLICEwomen and policeWOMEN. The stress on the wording tells you what you need to know. The POLICEwomen took their jobs seriously, wanted to patrol, and believed they could do the job—if not the same as the men—just as well as the men.

The policeWOMEN thought that notion absurd; they agreed with—and took advantage of—men's belief in their unsuitability to be patrol officers. They took inside jobs, handled traditional policewomen's duties, and became the office wives, mothers, and sisters of their male colleagues. Not too surprisingly, the two groups of women had little respect for one another. Possibly somewhat surprisingly—at least at first glance—the men preferred the policeWOMEN. Still true today, isn't it?

Today we also know why this was so. The traditional women caused no stress to the men. They did not force the men to question their beliefs about women's inability to perform equally with them. They also did lots of tasks that the men didn't want to do; they typed, they filed, they handled cases involving overwrought women and crying, sniveling children. They also created no threats to men's upward mobility. In a world such as policing, where it is difficult to move from one agency to another, one's progress up the greasy pole is dependent not only on one's own ability but by the competition presented by others in the same rank. The policeWOMEN were perfect, they did the unpleasant jobs, they reinforced men's superiority, and they presented neither threat nor competition.

They also created hostility among the two groups of women, assuring that the deep division would keep women from asserting their power within the agency. Still true today, isn't it?

Unfortunately, the hostility continues to this day—often over policies meant to help women but that reinforce certain divisions. One of those, I'm told is going on here over the introduction of part-time work. Seen in many countries—particularly by diversity advocates—as a way to help women maintain their careers—particularly during the child-bearing years or when their children are quite young—the policy to others smacks of either favoritism or condescension.

Interestingly, part-time work and job-sharing seems to work very well in the Scandinavian countries, where it used often by men who either take a large role in family or who simply want to do something other than police. Years ago, a police couple I met in Germany who shared a job in Sweden explained that it works in their country because they don't take themselves as seriously as Americans and believe that others can do their jobs as well as they can. Unfortunately, I had to agree with them—realizing that an over-developed sense of importance can be a detriment in ways I had never considered.

In English-speaking countries—not only the U.S.—job sharing and part-time work are seen as problems. Each has come to be associated with the so-called “mommy track”—and is seen by many—including women—as making women appear less career-oriented than men. Due to tokenism, this is seen as putting all women in a bad light. Ironically, the concept was developed by a feminist business group, Catalyst, to create an alternate career path for all employees—not only women—of large companies to make career decisions without having a negative impact on their companies' or their own futures (Schwartz, 1989; *Double Bind*, 2007). The idea was that the hard-chargers would select one track and those less interested in upward mobility would select a track that might involve less travel, or less overtime, or in general provided more time away from work. The idea was criticized from the start, and although it seems here it has caused women to be seen as a “problem,” the whole notion has not been without problems from its inception.

This is only one area in which being one among many continues to affect different women differently. I read the comment from Ally Howard of Victoria Police in Special Issue 24 of your *Journal for Women and Policing* that after Chief Nixon was promoted. Male colleagues assured her she would also be promoted because “she was wearing a skirt.” She noted that her answer was unprintable but she did not indicate how that might have affected her attitude toward promotion. In a recent study (Archbold & Schulz, 2008) I completed with a young colleague of women in the Fargo Police Department—please forget the movie of the same name—the women avoided promotion not because they were discouraged by male supervisors, but because they were ENCOURAGED. Rather than see this as acceptance, the women declined to consider promotion because they interpreted the encouragement as demeaning of their abilities.

The women believed that any woman—whether she wore a skirt or the now common uniform trousers—would be promoted regardless of her abilities.

This study reinforced what others had already found, namely, that Kanter's premise that when women reached more than 15 percent of a workforce elements of tokenism would disappear, was overly optimistic—something many of you know from your own experiences.

Obviously, numbers and percentages do not tell the complete story. Research comparing token men in female-dominated professions such as nursing or librarianship, found that token men were advantaged rather than disadvantaged. This was attributed primarily to men having higher status simply because they are men (Ott, 1989; Yoder, 1991) or to sexism in the workplace (Zimmer, 1988).

Fear of being seen as different as well as lacking institutional support for their decision-making abilities may also account for findings in both policing (Engel, 2000) and corrections (Zimmer, 1986) that women supervisors tend to adhere more closely to rules, and be less daring than some of their male colleagues. Many researchers from outside the uniformed services were surprised at this, thinking that women, less acculturated into what the British call “the canteen culture” and what we in the U.S. simply call the “police subculture” would be less traditional in their thinking.

In theory this seemed reasonable, but it likely that as tokens, women supervisors, particularly those at the first or second level of supervision, perceive themselves as lacking support from higher-ranking officers and, therefore, are not as likely to be supported when they make a mistake. Thus, rather than become change-agents, they become risk averse.

Some of these observations may, of course, be generational or may reflect the differences between mid-ranks and higher ranks. The chiefs I interviewed went out of their way to avoid being labeled the first woman chief, the first black woman chief, the first gay woman chief, etc. Many were familiar with having been labeled earlier in their careers and found it unhelpful. The experiences of a friend are typical. Interviewed after being named the first homicide squad commander in her agency, she was dismayed when the local newspaper’s photographer grouped all the men standing around staring at her as if she were from Venus. The reporter then asked her if the men resented her. “Not until you made them all stand around like fools,” she replied.

As human resource personnel have moved away from acceptance of numerical boundaries, they have turned to socialization issues more than tokenism to discuss who succeeds and who does not. It has been suggested that younger women (O’Brien, 1998) who were not pioneers have loftier goals regardless of their numbers because they have already seen women succeed and would be more comfortable using both male and female mentors, role models, and networks.

The need for women to assume greater control of their careers has also been highlighted by two economists (Babcock and Laschever, 2003), who theorized that women’s careers fell behind men’s because women were uncomfortable asking for what they felt they deserved. This failure led, over time, to greater disadvantage because each move or promotion the women did not seek put them further from the next step up the ladder.

These discussions tend to center on promotion, but the same can be said for lateral mobility into high-status assignments. Now that there is a considerable body of research in the U.S. and Canada that promotion is often not the goal of either men or women in law enforcement (Whetstone and Wilson, 1999; Whetstone, 2001; Murphy, 2006 [for Canada]), lateral mobility needs to be more carefully considered. Are researchers at fault for presuming women haven’t made progress solely by counting up the numbers in higher ranks? Of course, going beyond numbers also begs the question of the type of women making it to the top. Might we be asking too much of successful women to turn their backs on an environment that they learned to negotiate even if this were to make it easier for other women to climb the greasy pole? Why change the brand of the product if you have been successful using it?

Would we even be asking these questions if we were not still mired in the tangle of tokenism?

Considering the conference themes of connecting with communities and doing work that an individual considers important and fulfilling, we might pause to ask whether counting heads—and voicing concern over what is in those heads—is the only—or even the best—way to measure progress.

Before taking question, I want to impress upon you two key lessons. Although throughout our history in policing, women have been warned against becoming little men, there are important things we can learn from our male colleagues.

First, shed the attitudes of a token. See yourself as an individual—not a stereotypical representative of a group. The only thing we all share as women is our plumbing. We are different ethnicities, different colors, and we have different attitudes and goals. But, since the majority continues to lump us together, try to support one another despite personal dislikes or questions about whether other women have been too accommodating or chose to stand out for reasons that are not to your liking.

On the other hand, if you continue to be seen as a token by others, use it to your advantage; do not follow the Fargo women. Before you turn down what we call a perk—consider whether a male co-worker would say, “No, I don’t want to be promoted or have a more interesting or more important assignment because you only selected me to represent the department, or join the major case squad, or become a dog handler, because I am a man and you want to show me off.”

Stop laughing while I get to point two.

Do not wait to be asked or recognized. If you want that assignment to major case, or as a dog handler ask for it— find out the requirements and meet them. Do not fall into the trap of “women don’t ask.” Do not wait for someone to tap you on the shoulder because you are the best—or even the most visible. That is as unlikely to happen as your male colleague turning down something because he is worried about being a man.

Finally, do not worry about standing out as one among many — consider that you are standing out and requesting your due not because you are one among many, but because you are the best among many.

If you remember these guidelines you will achieve personal success — you will break brass or climb the greasy pole and along the way you will benefit yourself, your family, your police service, and your community.

Thank you.

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