

Susan Ehrlich

**MARTIN
BREAKING
AND
ENTERING**
Police Women on Patrol

Breaking and Entering

Policewomen on Patrol

Susan Ehrlich Martin

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Preface

The occupational world has long been sex segregated; there are "men's jobs" and "women's work." Occupations that confer high prestige, large incomes, or great authority as well as those that demand great strength or require courage in the face of danger have traditionally been reserved for men. Women have been left with the work that men do not want to do either because it offers low pay or is an extension of women's domestic tasks, which involve nurturing of or service to others. As a result, women entering occupations dominated by men and closely associated with masculinity face formidable obstacles and interactional dilemmas. They must cope with organizational policies and practices that put them at a disadvantage; isolation by and hostility from supervisors and coworkers who resent their presence; inappropriate behavior on the part of clients; an informal occupational social system that excludes them from networks of communication and sponsorship; and interaction rituals that press them into stereotypically feminine behavior which is inappropriate on the job. Highly visible and relatively powerless, these pioneering women must unlearn old patterns of behavior, and learn new skills in order to perform in their new role; they must ignore the subtle and not so subtle messages that women are expected to fail in their new jobs.

This study is an examination of one such group of women "breaking and entering" into police patrol, an occupation traditionally reserved "for men only." It explores the problems they face in learning their work role and entering the mainstream of police life, and

examines the mechanisms they employ for coping with work-related problems, including male coworkers' tendency to treat them as interlopers in a male world.

We know very little about such women. Since work outside the home has been considered primarily the domain of men, most occupational studies focus on men's work. The majority of studies of women's work have focused either on women in traditionally female jobs, such as teaching, nursing, and clerical work, or on women entering nontraditional occupations at the professional level. Although there are a number of studies of female doctors, lawyers, and college professors, little is known as yet about the occupational lives of women who enter nontraditional blue-collar jobs requiring less planning and education. To date there are virtually no studies of women in the skilled crafts, insurance sales, or police work; this book is a step toward filling that void.

Women are not new to policing; the first sworn female officer in the United States was appointed in 1910. But women are new to patrol work. The first city to make extensive use of female patrol officers was Washington, D.C. In 1972 the department hired approximately one hundred female officers and assigned them to patrol duties. This "policewomen on patrol" program initially was regarded as an experiment, and an intensive evaluation of the women's performance in comparison with a group of rookie male officers was arranged and conducted by the Urban Institute, a Washington-based research organization. Bloch and Anderson (1974a and b), using primarily quantitative measures of the officers' performance, found that women were able to perform patrol duties satisfactorily. The study ignored, however, many of the qualitative aspects of the situation in which the women worked.

This book started from a different point. The issue of women's ability to perform patrol duties was largely put aside, and instead, I sought to understand the meaning and implications of the entry of female officers for their male coworkers, the department leadership, and for the women themselves. My goal was to explore the women's perspectives on their new work, the difficulties they faced in gaining a place in the police world due to clearly stated opposition by many male officers, the manner in which these factors affected job performance and morale, and the ways that the women coped with the resistance they faced. I was particularly interested in the conflicts female officers felt between cultural norms prescribing appropriate

behavior for a woman and occupational norms regarding the behavior of police officers as they interact with citizens and coworkers.

To examine these issues I undertook an in-depth study of officers in one police district in the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C. This department was selected for both theoretical and practical reasons: when I began the research in 1975 there were more than three hundred female officers in the department of about forty-six hundred officers (comprising 7 percent of the total force), and there were approximately thirty women assigned to each police district. Thus it was possible to gather data in a single district and have a sufficiently large and heterogeneous sample for intensive examination. In addition, Washington, D.C., was selected because I was (and remain) a resident of the metropolitan area, was familiar with the city, and had a number of contacts which decreased (but did not eliminate) some of the difficulties of gaining access to the department to conduct the research.

The particular police district I studied will not be identified. It included part of the downtown business area, a middle-class residential area, and a segment of a lower-class black ghetto. It was selected because it had a fairly high crime rate, a socially heterogeneous population, and a mix of residential, religious, governmental, commercial, and recreational activities within its boundaries.

Following an initial planning phase, data collection began when I became a police reserve officer in October 1975 and continued full time until June 1976. From March through June 1976 my participant observation continued, with diminished frequency, as I conducted intensive interviews with a sample of male and female officers in the district in which I was a reserve officer as well as with seven policewomen involved in the "policewomen on patrol" program in the department. The final phase of the study consisted of analysis and writing with occasional participant observation to check on data obtained during the interviews and to fill information gaps. (For a fuller discussion of field research procedures, methodological problems, and ethical issues raised by this research, see the Appendix.)

As a police reserve officer I was able to gain intimate familiarity with a world with which I had previously had minimal contact. I got a taste of the excitement and boredom, the sense of independence and the feeling of constant surveillance, the fear in the pit of one's stomach and the cold sweat of relief after dealing with a dangerous situation, the occasional sense of accomplishment and the frequent frustration

with the endless paperwork that make up a "policeman's lot." I was able to experience many of the feelings, view many of the dilemmas and pressures, and learn the meanings patrol officers attribute to various interactions as I worked with more than fifty officers during more than sixty tours of duty covering all shifts and all days of the week.

As a member of the Metropolitan Police reserves I was both participant and observer. I was never accepted nor treated as a "regular" officer and had limited duties. Reserve officers are unpaid citizens who wear uniforms hardly distinguishable from those of sworn officers, carry no firearms (but do have mace, handcuffs, and a nightstick), have no special police powers, and work alongside sworn officers. They are usually assigned to a scout car to work with an officer without a partner for the shift. The attitudes of officers toward reserves tended to be negative, although many were personally cordial.

My duties on patrol were few; I was not permitted to drive the scout car and only occasionally used the radio. For the most part I remained in the background, speaking only when citizens addressed me as an officer. In terms of dispatched assignments, the scout car in which a reserve is working is treated as a one-officer unit. I conducted occasional searches on female suspects, however, and assisted my partner with paperwork when I became familiar with departmental procedure.

Doing observation as a reserve had both advantages and disadvantages. The primary disadvantages were that I was not able to observe partners working together because I was assigned to work in one-officer units, and it was difficult to observe policewomen on patrol since few were assigned to patrol alone, while others had permanent station assignments. I did, however, have the opportunity to work with nine of the women, three on several occasions. An additional disadvantage was the fact that as a reserve (and female) I was not included in off-duty socializing.

Although my status in the police department was low, being a reserve had advantages. It permitted me to enter the police world, view its "backstage" activities, get to know a number of police officers, and experience some of their joy, pride, fear, and frustration on the beat. Without the responsibilities of an officer, I was freer to observe, and, in time, was treated as a "friend of the police." I was thereby able to gain the confidence and cooperation of officers who often are reluctant to be open with outsiders.

My perspective on police work as a participant observer was limited by the fact that I am female. As the report will make clear, women are treated as "different." Not "one of the boys," I was unable to gain access to the inner circles of the district organization. I did, however, experience some of the frustrations of the policewomen in their work and personal relationships with coworkers.

The interviews, including both open and closed questions, elicited information from officers about their background, work history, motivation for becoming a police officer, expectations and aspirations, and attitudes toward the department, citizens, fellow officers, and the work itself. They ranged in length from forty-five minutes to six hours with the majority lasting between one-and-a-half and two hours.

A total of 55 officers and 15 officials from the observation district were interviewed. I sought to include all of the women assigned to the district with one year of police experience, an equal number of male officers matched as closely as possible for length of service and race, and a variety of officials. I was able to interview 28 of the 33 women in the district as well as a corresponding group of 27 male officers. In addition a sample of 15 officials from the observation district and seven current or former policewomen connected with the police-women's program were interviewed. One of these women was my "informant" throughout the project.

Although one must exercise caution in generalizing from a case study based on data collected in a single district of one police department, it seems reasonable to assume that if the policewomen in a department committed to their integration face difficulties different from their male peers', female officers working in departments opposing their assignment to patrol will encounter (at the very least) many of the same problems and adopt similar coping strategies.

Two final limitations of the study merit comment. I have taken as "given" the existing police role and organizational structure and not raised important questions about the role of the police in the criminal justice system or in society. For a woman to be a "successful" officer in the context of this study means only that she successfully negotiated the existing system and conformed to the organizational and occupational norms as they currently exist for a patrol officer.

Finally, although I have attempted to be objective and neutral, the reader might do well to keep in mind the potential biases that arise from the fact that I perceived the police world through the eyes of an upper-middle-class white woman and feminist.

My feminist perspective may have affected the research in two somewhat contradictory ways. On the one hand it sensitized me to the many subtle ways in which language, interpersonal interaction, and institutions perpetuate and reinforce the social arrangements between the sexes. A feminist perspective permitted me to perceive and analyze much of the taken-for-granted behavior that shapes and reflects genderism as it operated in the police world. At the same time I began my research with a commitment to the idea of equality of opportunity for women and with the conviction that women can function effectively on police patrol. Because I was not neutral on the issue of policewomen—or women's rights in general—on a number of occasions I found myself inwardly annoyed (and probably outwardly defensive) when policemen glibly criticized or overgeneralized about policewomen's shortcomings. In several instances I might better (from a sociological perspective) have remained silent when policemen baited me about policewomen. To some of the men I appeared to be an advocate of policewomen and "women's lib," which may have inhibited their willingness to express negative feelings about the presence of patrolwomen and their impact on the police world and may have led them to alter their behavior in my presence in a variety of ways.

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Part I

The Setting

Chapter I

Introduction

THREE OFFICERS

Jane, Tim, and Ann are officers in the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C., assigned to the same patrol district. Differences in their backgrounds, expectations, and, most importantly, in their experience as police officers have led them to quite divergent perspectives about their lives and work. A closer examination of these three officers will indicate some of the factors that make “breaking in” as a police officer a different experience for each.

Tim and Jane are both twenty-four years old. Both are from blue-collar families. Each graduated from high school in 1970, attended two years of college and joined the department in late 1974. Tim is a white man of average size (5'10", 170 pounds) with a muscular build. Jane is black, pretty, and petite (5'3", 118 pounds). During his high school years in a western city, Tim participated in “organized violence on the football field” which, he believes, helped prepare him for police teamwork. During her high school years Jane moved to Washington from the south and became a wife (she has since divorced) and mother.

Tim remembers his college experience as one big fraternity party and beer blast. He dropped out, took a “boring” clerical job for a year, and then worked in a factory for another year before becoming a police officer. He says of himself, about those years, “I was a bum.” During that time, Tim had the opportunity to ride along with a police officer, found the work exciting, and decided to become a police