

Stream 4. Gender, Diversity and Indigeneity

Competitive Session

**Promoting Police Women: A conceptual framework**

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**Promoting Police Women: A conceptual framework****ABSTRACT**

This paper reflects on the continued paucity of women police in senior leadership positions. Studies show that despite the significant career progress made by women, they still face difficulties in entering into senior leadership roles, particularly in gendered organisations. The paper sets out a conceptual framework arguing that promotion strategies of mentoring, networking and sponsoring are used strategically by police women to gain promotion. This, in turn, is expected to form the basis for future research testing the validity of the framework.

**Key words:** women, promotion, police, mentors, networks, sponsors

**PROMOTING WOMEN**

Globally employment data shows a variance between female and male appointments in senior positions, despite the number of women in management positions having doubled in the last three decades (Gevers, 2001). Across the board, women employees almost match the number of males while males exceed females in senior positions (Ahmansson & Ohlund, 2008). This trend exists despite the determination that there is no difference in aspirations to progress a corporate career between women and men (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Thus there is an ongoing debate around reasons why women fail to reach executive levels in comparative numbers and the impact of stereotypes on women's promotion (Koenig et al., 2011).

Lonsway et al. (2003a) argue that statistics confirm that men are often appointed in senior positions ahead of women despite the policy rhetoric that both women and men have equal eligibility to apply for promotion. There remains a paucity of women in senior roles despite years of focussed initiatives for women to be promoted into these roles. This is confirmed by Carter and Silva (2010) reporting that women occupy less than 15% of senior level appointments despite making up 40% of

the workforce. The imbalance undermines the influence and impact that women are supposed to infuse in organisations to re-interpret management and leadership in what is traditionally a harsh, competitive and aggressive environment and undermines the benefits that are to be derived from diversity (Ellemers et al., 2012).

### **PROMOTION IN POLICING**

While some industries report a significant change in circumstances for women employees in terms of promotion and recognition, the police force appears to have retained a two tiered progression pattern along gender lines. Traditionally male police officers have the expectation and experience of progression through the ranks with males ending up in occupying the senior and dominant positions. Over the years policing has been established and developed by men, resulting in male-based structures, frameworks and practices. Maintaining these has not only cemented a culture in which men lead the organisation but also reinforced the inequality of genders (Alban-Metcalf & Alimo-Metcalf 2013; Ianni & Ianni 1983; Lonsway 2002; Lonsway et al., 2003b; Natarajan 2009; Palermo 2004; Paoline, Meyers & Worden 2000 & Sayse, 2012). In investigating the gender imbalance in policing Natarajan (2009) exposed a gender bias and unwillingness to implement required changes to impact the organisation arguably driven by a latent desire to retain the status quo in policing, resulting in a continuation of a male-centric organisation.

In male-dominated police organisations there is a continuous struggle with the perception that women are ill or insufficiently equipped for leadership roles despite the fact that women match their male colleagues in both effectiveness and competitiveness. Researchers (Acker 2012; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Billing 2011 & Olsson & Walker 2003) deplore the fact that the historical development process of policing not only supports and legitimises the status quo but also suggests that men are deemed to be more appropriate and capable to hold leadership roles compared to women. Likewise feminine management and leadership approaches and styles are interpreted as deficient and inferior to the masculine approaches and styles that serve as yardstick during promotion and appraisal exercises (Henderson 1992; Lonsway et al., 2003a & Rigg & Sparrow, 1994). For women to gain promotion to middle management implies overcoming both the male-centred recruitment, including

demanding physical exercises and periodical exams as well as the adoption of masculine approaches to interaction. Although a number of women police have been successful, most of them stagnate somewhere between middle management and top management. Heilman (2001) determines a bias against police women through a set of covert rules and interpretations used in the judgment of their capabilities. This is arguably confirmed by Bayley and Nixon (2010) when reflecting on 25 years of policing since 1985 and projecting forwards, in that women in policing are peculiarly absent in the discussion of the changing police environment. Experience built up by women through years of service, both individual, collective and relational, is seemingly deemed as irrelevant to leadership qualities when considered as part of the police promotion process.

The strong presence of a gender based leadership identity and self-identity in the police force is a result of the belief systems around gendered leadership as compounded by institutional theory. The latter argues the fact that institutional systems, mechanisms and policies develop in such a way that they reinforce the gender differentiation. In addition, the legitimacy theory underpins the institutional characteristics strengthening the rigidity of the current context and influencing ongoing barriers and challenges to aspirations of police women considering to pursue promotion into senior leadership roles. Although both theories form the framework within which the gender promotion and progression takes place, these are not addressed as such in this paper.

### **Management Levels and Influence**

According to Mabey and Mayon-White (1993) top management refers to the highest tier in the management hierarchy, most often a small group of staff that decide on organisational direction and have a heavy influence on organisational dynamics and culture. In gendered organisations this group is male-dominated implying that organisational direction is largely determined by one gender group while impacting the tasks, dynamics and operational actions of both men and women (Billing, 2011). Despite findings by Tarr-Whelan (2009) that organisations with more than a third female senior staff report superior communication and collaboration outcomes, this benefit is not materialised in gendered organisations where women are under-represented in top level positions. Figure 1

indicates that in a policing context the roles of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner represent the top leadership level.

The zone between the top management strategic thinking and operational execution by lower level employees is referred to as middle management (Mabey & Mayon-White, 1993). In contrast with relatively few women occupying senior leadership appointments in gendered organisations, this layer of management and leadership is well represented by women (Marques 2009; Nancherla 2009; Rees-Sheriff 2009; Sindhi, 2009). According to Alvesson and Billing (2009) women are not necessarily adding a unique or different value to policing in middle management roles as they merely articulate tasks on the basis of practices and philosophies put in place by male senior leaders. In a policing environment the roles of Inspector and Superintendents are arguably the layer of middle management as shown in Figure 1.

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In addition to the top and middle management levels, the role of Sergeant in the policing profession reflects the lower management while the role of Constable and Recruit reflect positions without any management responsibilities.

## **GENDERED ORGANISATIONS**

The literature suggests that there are a range of features and sets of established practices common to gendered organisations which operate to entrench imbalances. The term gendered organisation reflects an imbalance resulting in one gender having a louder and more dominant voice over the other. This imbalance establishes a 'gendered construct' that, over time, becomes embedded in policies, procedures and practices of the organisation. Gendered organisations are historically mostly male as a result of a male-dominated workforce informing and shaping working conditions and career paths based on male traits and profiles (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2013 & Williams, Muller & Kilanski, 2012). Seminal work on gendered organisations by Acker (1990; 1992) has over time exposed the anomaly between gender and work structure. Gendered organisations are characterised by an organisational structure and processes that by extension overtly and/or covertly

discriminate against female employees through management styles, work inputs, work outputs, division of labour and wage structure (Sayse, 2012 Sahgal, 2007)

Earlier research by Hartman (1976) concluded that gendered organisations function on a patriarchal system intertwined with a so-called genderless management driven bureaucracy to effectively establish a dual structure. This invariably results in the emergence of covert dual practices that remain unchallenged unless a significant percentage of women were to occupy decision-making roles. Even so, systems and mechanisms established by patriarchal systems remain challenging for women to change, conjuring up questions about the need for working towards a change in organisational culture and the ability of women that do fill leadership positions to do so (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Still, 1994 ). Even under circumstances where organisations actively encourage women to vie for senior management roles the impact and outcomes are limited due to the small number of senior management positions and the preponderance of male applicants (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005).

According to Williams et al. (2012) some gendered organisations are hesitant to bring about change by empowering women in high impact roles and would rather introduce a differentiation between women and men in organisation procedures and processes. This approach can be interpreted to indirectly reflect a lack of support from the organisation's senior management to empower women in the gendered environment (Billing, 2011 Dunn, 2007). According to Dunn (2007) women in gendered organisations are well aware of the challenging environment they are facing in their pursuit of promotion and ultimately a senior position in a male dominated environment.

As a para-military organisation the police has the characteristics of a strongly gendered organisation dominated by a masculine work culture and ethos. This is reflected in recruitment practices being based on physical abilities, uniforms and the overt prominence of male leadership behaviour. As such, the promotion ambitions and endeavours of women challenge the underlying existing social construct of policing and the resulting bias it holds for women (Gultkin, 2010).

### **Male – Female dynamics**

In gendered organisations where more often than not male dominance over women has become the norm, normative behaviour of male domination creates challenges for women considering joining the organisations (Acker 2012). In an environment where gender bias is considered as legitimate and becomes a normative dimension, such as policing, the employment attraction is focussed on only one gender, further strengthening the existing framework. Both Acker (1990) and Edeltraud (2012) claim that the presence of an imbalance between male and female senior appointments is claimed as evidence of a workplace gender bias resulting from gender inequities that have become normative over time. This is echoed by Wilson and Brewer (2001) who determine that behaviour amongst police in teams reflects the adoption of norms associated with group identity. This echoes the determination by Blair-Loy (1999) that women in gendered organisations retain supportive roles and responsibilities while men progress to the most senior positions.

Billing (2011) laments the fact that women seem to be unable to impact the powerbase of the patriarchal organisation in a convincing way and attribute this to the limited training they receive in management and leadership. Nanchera (2009) reiterates this by reporting that 50% of men receive training at the executive level in addition to 28% of specialist training at the entry level, arguing that women are not only at a disadvantage at the start of the career but pointing out that the female – male training gap widens and employees pursue promotion and occupy leadership positions and roles.

Notwithstanding empirical studies evidencing that woman and men perform equally well in leadership roles, Eagly and Karau (2002, p. 164) argue that “stereotypic expectations do not change at the same rate”. In addition, Olsson (2000) posits that in a gendered environment women are expected to operate in and adapt to the male construct. Consequently women will have to consciously adopt strategies to pursue promotion.

## **PROMOTION STRATEGIES**

Today, despite experiencing challenges in their ambitions to be appointed in senior roles, women are using a range of strategies as extreme as delaying raising a family, pursuing higher education and targeted mentoring and networking to build their career trajectories. According to Shoemaker and Park (2014) women have increasingly embraced mentoring as a focussed career

development instrument signalling a shift in power and control towards promotion. In essence women are taking ownership of their career progression and pro-actively engage to best position them for advancement. One of the ways of doing this is by seeking out a mentor.

### **Mentors**

According to Friday, Friday and Green (2004) mentoring is best described as the guidance process taking place between a mentor and a mentee. While the guidance activity pivots around the provision of professional advice, this is often subject to interpretation and evolution leading to personal development (Caldwell & Carter, 1992) and most likely career progression (Fagenson, 1992). The interpretation of the impact of mentoring on professional development and particularly its influence on subsequent career progression remains an area of interest in research. Both Maxwell and Ogden (2009) and Holmes (2005) postulate that effective mentoring programs contribute to higher levels of skill and confidence in interacting with higher ranked colleagues and therefore arguably have the capability to boost career prospects of mentees. In interpreting the different intensities of mentoring Hagberg and Leider (1988, p.1) propose three types of mentoring models, namely:

- an “associate” model, predominantly skill focussed, where the mentor defines the development goals and outcomes, monitors and evaluates performance at the conclusion of the program. This model is dependency driven focussed on the notion of instruction provided by the mentor.
- a relational approach is the “adaptive” model where mentor and mentee have an asymmetrical relationship evolving to meet the demands of the organisation, the necessary skills are developed to meet those demands. The outcome is both professional and personal development. This model has a large dependency component through guidance by the mentor.
- a “reflective” model where both mentor and mentee give and receive feedback on personal and professional development without time constraints and with benefit for both parties (Hagberg & Leider, 1998). This model shifts towards the notion of interdependency. This form of mentoring is

holistic, without a framework of expected goals and often useful for entry levels as it introduces the mentees to the organisation culture and its organisational behaviour

The three models described above have different outcomes and approaches and the notion that a lasting solution to overcome the promotion challenges experienced by women in gendered organisations can be found in any of them is unlikely, simply because the challenges are both complex and unique to each person. It is important to note that each mentoring model also reflects a different nuance of dependency between the mentor and the mentee.

### *Gender and Mentoring*

According to Higgins and Kram (2010) for employees in gendered organisations to position themselves as professionally competitive it is imperative to be involved in mentoring. Indeed, Schoemaker and Park (2014) determined the women working in the law enforcement environment express the view that mentoring is integral to career advancement. From a practical perspective this implies that, in order to competitively pursue promotion and career progression women are required to proactively identify and engage with mentors that can equip and support them in this space.

While mentoring has traditionally been associated with men and is deemed a relatively new concept in the gendered organisation, there is an increasing belief that it has emerged as an important tool for women to utilise their unique skills and simultaneously express themselves (Holmes, 2005; Shoemaker & Park 2014). Since the cross-gender mentoring allows men to gain an insight into the ways women function and contribute while simultaneously opening professional opportunities for women researchers deem it crucial for mentoring programs to be encouraged in gendered organisations (Cox 1993; Hite 1998).

Amongst women in influential appointments mentoring is perceived as a suitable strategy to support staff. It is argued that in gendered organisations mentoring is more readily available to men than it is to women (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Though the onus to find and engage with the most suitable mentor remains on the mentee, this process is fraught with difficulties for women facing additional barriers such as demands on an appropriate support network and participating in mentoring sessions outside work hours (Dreher & Ash 1990; Higgins & Kram 2001). In addition the question

arises if gender plays a role in mentoring, i.e. are male mentors deemed to be more influential than female mentors in gendered organisations? Shoemaker and Park (2014) determined that younger women in law enforcement expressed no gender preference in mentoring while more senior women preferred male mentors. The research also attributed the noted lack of female mentors to a range of factors including feelings of insecurity and a fear of competition exacerbating a reluctance to mentor. This is ironic in the context that the role of a mentor is partly to enhance confidence and develop skills of the mentee over a period of time.

Maxwell and Ogden (2009) argue that, from a gender perspective engagement in mentoring can be viewed in the context of individual goals and ambitions, concluding that the pursuit of promotion is similar between male and female employees. This is questioned (Tannen, 1995; Acker, 2012 Billing 2011) who contemplate that the transactional mentoring approach that leads to male mentors imposing their leadership style on female mentees gives rise to negative experiences. Maxwell and Ogden (2009) agrees that a counterproductive outcome of mentoring is likely when female leadership traits are inadvertently overridden by male mentors. Since the police is a male dominated workplace with a male dominated mentor pool it is reasonable to argue that the male-centric organisation culture is inadvertently projected onto the female colleagues by the male mentors (Brogden & Shearing 1993). Holmes (2005) laments that this trend may give rise to the impression that women aspire to develop leadership skills similar to their male colleagues.

While women prefer to follow a prescriptive approach to mentoring characterised by structure, men tend to be more comfortable with a descriptive approach (Maxwell & Ogden, 2009). Ragins and Krams (2007) determined however that mentoring has the potential to be fulfilling and contribute to development and growth of the parties involved.

## **Networks**

The pursuit of promotion in the current day work environment where additional responsibilities and personal time investment has become standard is translating in networking inadvertently merging as a promotion strategy (Lockett & Jack 2013). As people progress between roles the exposure to new influencers and structures leads to a diminished level of direct support

(mentoring) being replaced by opportunities to network (Shoemaker & Park 2014). According to Bartol and Zhang (cited in Pearce 2007) networking is a crucial instrument towards promotion and leadership development as it facilitates the sharing of knowledge and mutual benefit in an environment of informal interdependence as compared to the formal dependency often associated with mentoring. Holmes (2005) postulates that the achievement of professional success pivots to a large extent on the success and efficiency of networking.

### *Gender and Networking*

In gendered organisations the 'boys club' mentality, where a group of colleagues gather to interact about issues and similar interests, takes preference amongst men who regard mentoring as the more female or 'soft' approach to engaging with colleagues (Lonsway, 2002). According to Oakley (2000), police organisations are rife of situations where activities organised by male officers exclude female officers, often inadvertently, and by doing so not only marginalise female colleagues but also perpetuate the male oriented social dynamics of the interactions. In this context it is argued that the opportunities to undergo personal development, up-skill and access resources are more easily available to male officers than to female officers.

According to Kwong, Jones-Evans and Thompson (2012), the inability of women to network to the same extent than men can be attributed to a range of factors, including a work-life balance choice, lack of accessibility of opportunities, negative peer pressure and an inability to dedicate time outside work. Rather, it appears that women approach mentoring as an instrument to execute relational interactions aimed at identifying opportunities for themselves and others within the organisations (Holmes, 2005).

Despite the different nuances, Lockett and Jack (2013) determined that both men and women label networking as important for their career advancement into senior positions and are keen to further enhance their networks.

### **Sponsors**

According to Shoemaker and Park (2014) the sponsorship concept is a lead on from mentoring. The involvement of a sponsor in the pursuit of promotion and career progression is an avenue similar to, but with a different intensity to mentoring and used by both men and women. Since the role of a sponsor is characterised as being more influential than a mentor, reflecting the seniority of sponsors, their executive level appointment and subsequently the limited availability (Shoemaker & Park, 2014).

Essentially a sponsor campaigns on behalf of the individual through a personal endorsement and creating a mutual dependency. Rolling and Eby (2009) argue that a sponsor commits to the development of executive skills of the subject in addition to providing various forms of organisational support as a sign of a personal commitment and belief aimed to prepare the individual for a specific and significant role in the organisation. The presence of a sponsor not only confirms the availability of latent support mechanisms but also implies the presence of power and influence across decision makers in the organisation. (Dworkin, 2012; Schipani, Dworkin, Kwolek-Folland & Maurer, 2009).

In the sponsoring activity loyalty and trust are core components for success (Mann, 1980), supported by a close alignment with organisational values and required attributes as the sponsorship is effectively an endorsement by the organisation (Baranik, 2010). There is limited research on the dynamics of sponsorship although corporate periodicals anecdotally emphasize on the importance for an individual to have a sponsor for career trajectory. It is therefore critical that women have sponsors to support them, as without this support, women risk being grouped into stereotypes (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). The reality is that women need to be noticed by a sponsor to assist their quest for top leadership roles and influence, which is one of driving change and influencing the male-centred environment (Carter & Silva, 2010). According to Foust-Cummings et al. (2011) in order to effectively showcase the profile of women, the gradual integration of skills, mentoring and networking needs to be crowned by the advocacy of a sponsor.

## CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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It appears that the strategic approach to promotion used by police women takes on a different form as the policing career progresses. Figure 2 speculates that in the early stages of the police career, women would be accessing a more dependency based interaction with colleagues, both male and female. This would predominantly constitute the various forms of mentoring. In progressing the career to middle management it is likely that the female police officer will embrace a reduced dependency and increased informal interdependency by moving away from the 'associate' mentoring and increasingly engage in networking. The few police women that progress to top management do so through an ability to engage a sponsor and establish an interdependent relationship with a senior executive superior. This ability, or rather lack thereof amongst most police women, is as much a reflection on the limited opportunities present in policing as a gendered institution as on the poor understanding and/or willingness for female officers to pursue such links.

## **CONCLUSION**

The pursuit of promotion of police women as females in a gendered organisation requires the adoption of promotion strategies along the career path. At the outset it appears that mentoring plays a crucial role. The broader concept of mentoring includes notions of intensity including direction, guidance, networking and sponsoring, (Baranik 2010; Durley & Ragins, 2010 Eby, Butts; & Mann 1980; Wanberg, Kanmeyer-Mueller & Marchese, 2006) rendering it difficult to understand and interpret the value of each. As the police women career progresses, mentoring through direction and guidance is gradually complemented by networking and ultimately replaced by sponsoring. There remains little doubt though that each strategy of engaging with colleagues can and does play an important part in career development and progression. While organisations do not necessarily invest in all aspects, there appears to be strategic relevance for an individual's career. The next phase of the research will test the rigour of the framework to ascertain its validity and to assist in determining the importance of the various elements for police women to achieve promotion.

Figure 1: Levels of Management and Police Hierarchy

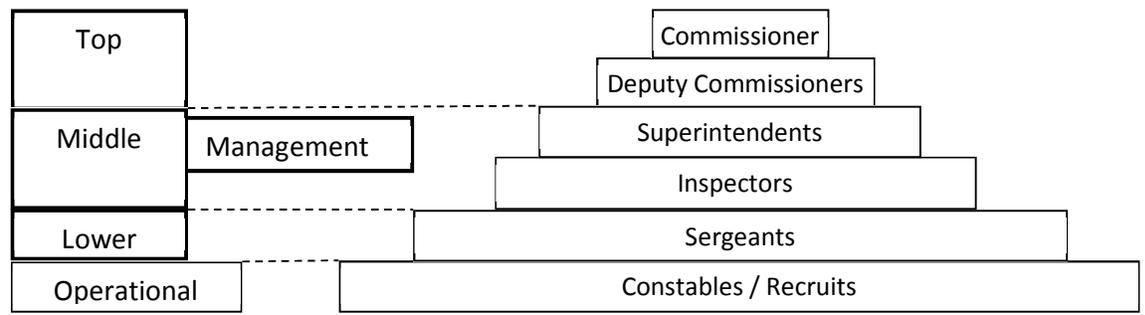
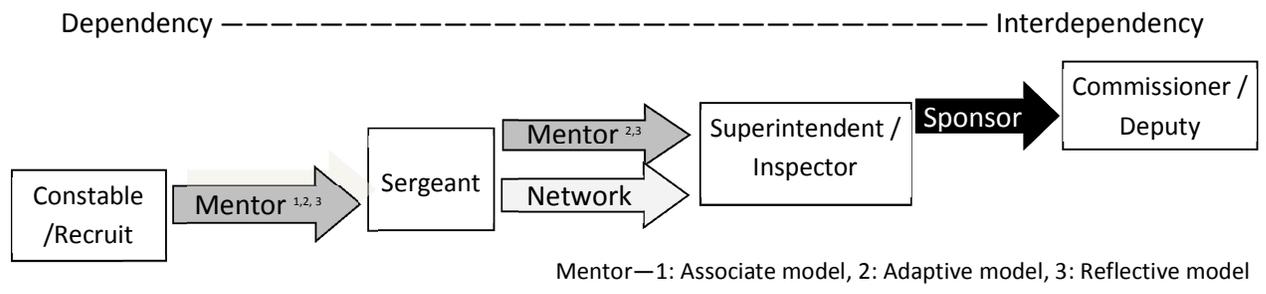


Figure 2: Conceptualising Promotion Strategies of Police Women



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