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The Thin Pink Line: A Case Study of the Experiences and Opinions of Fairfield, Ohio's Female Police Officers

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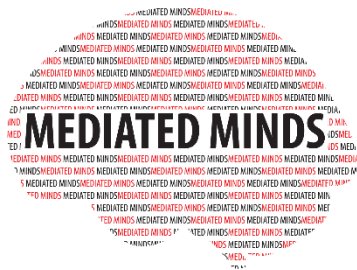
Abstract — *In this presentation, I will explore the experiences of female police officers in a local department and how they compare with the notions commonly held by the public. I conducted personal interviews with the officers, and will be presenting a summary of my findings on the poster.*

I. INTRODUCTION

My main conclusion was that the female officers I interviewed did not experience as much discrimination as I expected. Most discussed incidents when they were new hires where they had to "prove themselves" to gain the trust of the other officers. I also expected some discrimination when it came to case assignments (giving female officers all the cases involving women and children). While this is the case, it is because female officers tend to empathize and connect with these types of victims better and it makes it easier for them to cooperate.

II. FINDINGS

Regarding my first research question, Do Fairfield's female officers feel they had any challenges or obstacles in their career path compared to their male colleagues?, my expectation was that the answers would overall be yes. However, I was unsure what forms any potential obstacles would take. My interview results showed that this expectation was incorrect. Of the five officers interviewed, all five said that they did not have any major challenges or obstacles compared to their male colleagues. One of the officers said her only challenge was an agility course she ran when she initially applied for a different department. She could not make it over a six and a half foot wall while wearing a duty belt because of her height. Other than that, all the



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challenges mentioned were of the administrative variety. One officer mentioned having difficulty adjusting to her new administrative role because she loved being on the road so much. Another officer said her only challenge was trying to have a productive day because it always felt like she had more paperwork to do than there were hours in the day. One officer found it difficult to fire employees because she saw their poor performance as a negative reflection on herself as a mentor. Another officer said she struggled with getting the older officers on day shift to follow new policies. She even likened it to “trying to teach old dogs new tricks.”

My second research question was: What are some elements Fairfield’s female officers enjoy about the job? My only experience with the job is from ride-alongs, but I always enjoyed being able to help people so my expectation was that female officers would too. The interview results showed that this expectation was correct. Of the five officers interviewed, all five said helping people was an element of the job that they really enjoyed. Other enjoyable elements listed were: seeing new hires they had mentored get promoted; working with children; the variety of every day; and trying to show people who hate the police that not all officers are terrible.

My final research question was: Have Fairfield’s female officers noticed any discrimination in the cases that they are assigned compared to their male colleagues? My expectation was that due to Fairfield’s small size, they would not have a lot of the Law & Order: Special Victims Unit style cases. However, I expected that if they did have any cases of that nature occur, they would be assigned to female officers. The interview results showed that this expectation was overall correct, but not in the way that I expected. Of the five officers interviewed, all five said that while they were predominantly the officers assigned to the “SVU” style cases, it was not with a malicious or discriminatory intent. They explained that female officers are often the best choice on cases like these because they are generally more empathetic, compassionate, and organized than male officers. Female officers are also typically a better choice because male officers tend to be confrontational, intimidating, and prone to escalation of tensions. The officers noted that it is usually easier for them to form a connection with the victim and coax them into opening up about their victimization than it is for male officers. Also, in most instances minority groups like immigrants and members of the LGBT community are more comfortable talking to female officers, which leads to them being more descriptive and willing to discuss what happened to them. The officers also mentioned that this is not the case one hundred percent of the time and that there are a few male officers who are just as suited to these kinds of cases, which was very surprising.



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