“Dry your eyes, princess”: an analysis of gender- and “Other”-based discourses in police organisations

Cheryl Maree Ryan
Deakin University

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the literature relevant to an analysis of gender and discourse in police organisations with a view to testing it through research. Much of the literature on policing can be divided into four key topic areas: the features and construction of police culture; women’s integration into policing; organisational structures and styles of police leadership; and debates about the nature of police work. An examination of the literature has revealed a deficiency of research in discourses within policing and in particular, the impact of discourses on gender and police training. Assumptions underpinning the research project and supported by literature include: formal and informal structures and practices within organisations produce and reproduce gender relations; power, gender relations and masculinity are characteristics of police culture; discourses are products and resources of interactions which establish particular truths; and police organisations have been slow to respond to anti-discrimination legislation and to integrate women into police services. Critical to any analysis of culture, power, gender, discourses, difference, and subjectification is the dynamic and complex nature of culture. Applying Shearing’s and Ericson’s definition of culture as ‘figurative logic’ has resonance in police organisations where symbols, rhetoric and metaphors function as vehicles for discourses.

INTRODUCTION

A review of the literature of the interaction of gender- and “Other”-based discourses in police organisations supports the notion of multiple subcultures within police (Chan 1997; Chan with Devery & Doran 2003; Cochran & Bromley 2003; Shanahan 2000; Reiner 2000; Waddington 1999) with the overarching police culture as symbolic, rhetorical, restorative, and the product of story-telling (Shearing & Ericson 1991). Through the discourses of humour, repartee and “war stories”, a ‘cult of masculinity’ (Waddington 1999) has been established which valorises danger and violence, demands conformity, and has the capacity to marginalise and “Other” individuals who do not conform or who are judged as not “fitting in” (Frewin & Tuffin 1998). These discourses permit men to ostracise and “Other” men, and to marginalise women through the construction of femininity as token, antithetical, and different (Knights & Kerfoot 2004).

In male-dominated, paramilitary, hierarchical structures such as police organisations, gender becomes a powerful resource or tool, a ‘rationale’ and an ‘outcome’ (West & Zimmerman 1987, p.126). In such a context, the function and power of discourses to influence interactions, actions, and impact upon the agency and subjectivity of the individual means the discourses that maintain this ‘cult of masculinity’ become the “truth”.

A set of significant positions and assumptions underscore and inform this topic. Of fundamental importance is that Australian (and other Western) police organisations have been lethargic in expediting anti-discrimination legislation and integrating women into police services (Eveline & Harwood...
Critical to understanding and analysing discourses in this project is that they function as products and resources of dominant ‘cultures, social groups, and institutions’ (Gee 2005, p.7). Discourses have the capacity to manipulate power relations (Connell 1987, cited in Young 2005; Gee 1990) and produce and reproduce identities.

Pivotal to an examination of gender integration in police and other organisations is the notion that workplaces are neither ‘gender-neutral and asexual’ (Acker 1990, p.144) nor driven by ‘neutral administrative logic’ (Burton 1991, p.13). Instead, they actively produce and reproduce gender. Building on this notion of gender in organisations, and particularly within a police context, is the concept of ‘multiple masculinities’ (Hearn & Collinson 2006; Kimmel, Hearn & Connell 2005; Newburn & Stanko 1994) which more accurately captures the dynamism and complexity of power and gender relations between men, and women and men. Whilst multiple masculinities can exist, one can have hegemonic status (Hearn & Collinson 2006) and be ‘culturally exalted’ (Connell 1995, p.110).

An examination of the agency and subjectivity of individuals in a police context is significant given that the sense of ‘self’ and identity are founded on the concept of sex (Gatens 1998). Thus failure to conform to norms of masculinity and femininity translate to failure ‘as a person’ and the labelling of the individual as ‘bad’, ‘inappropriate’ (Gatens 1998, p.7), or not conforming. Compounding this, Benschop (2006) argued that gender and culture are also intrinsically linked. As such, the prescriptive constructs of masculinity and femininity by the dominant will be sustained (Benschop 2006) and will represent the norms, the “truth” of the discourses, and formal and informal organisational structures and practices.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Culture**

In examining police culture, Shearing and Ericson (1991, p.487) proposed a paradigm where culture is seen as ‘figurative logic’. Culture, therefore, is not literal. It is symbolic, rhetorical, and metaphorical: it is the product of oral communication (story telling, narratives) which explains and justifies action.

**Discourse**

In this context, discourse comprises two foci: ‘language-in-use’ (discourse ‘with a little “d”’) and language and other elements (Discourse ‘with a big “D”’) (Gee 2005, p.7). D/discourse therefore is concerned with how language sanctions actions and identities and the correlation between language and symbols (uniforms, actions), tools (firearms, physical strength), and values, beliefs, and thinking styles which represent the capacity of dominant cultures and occupations to manipulate power relations and produce and reproduce identities.
Subjectivity and agency
Subjectivity is the effect of the inflexibility of that discourse (Foucault cited in Dick & Cassell 2004) and agency can be understood in part as an individual’s ability to apply her or his ‘habitus’ (cultural dispositions) to the erratic, interconnected yet paradoxical relations of power in a particular ‘field’ (structural dispositions) (Bourdieu cited in McNay 2000).

Difference, injustice, and power
Power, difference, and injustice are intrinsically connected (Young 1990) concepts, events, structures, and practices. Young (1990, pp.48-63) recommended the scrutiny of injustice in terms of oppression and domination and three of the five forms of oppression relevant to this context are ‘powerlessness’, ‘cultural imperialism’, and ‘marginalisation’.

Powerlessness is the lack of power and/or the imposition of power by the dominant over the “Other” or as Foucault (1978, cited in Mills 2003, pp.33-35) proposed, power can be ‘productive’, ‘performed’, and potentially constructive. This leads to Burbules’s (1997, pp.108-109) proposition of ‘difference against’ which highlights the capacity of subjects to simultaneously experience the imposition of power while exercising power through resistance against the dominant.

Cultural imperialism (Young 1990), with an understanding of culture in terms of workplace or organisational culture, means the dominant discourse judges the validity and reality of other discourses as invisible and indiscernible. This aligns with the concept of ‘difference beyond’ (Burbules’s 1997, p.106) where difference within a particular category results in a sense of ‘foreignness’ and ‘strangeness’: the dominant discourse struggles to hear and comprehend other discourses and ways of acting.

Marginalisation refers to the exclusion from certain processes or limited and tokenistic participation, characterised by labelling and interactions which emphasise intolerance and difference (Young 1990). Of significance is the implicit ‘power of denial’ (Brouns 1993, cited in Stobbe 2005, p.108) whereby the dominant can ‘negate the reality of the weaker party’ (Risseeuw 1988, cited in Stobbe 2005). Here ‘difference within’ (Burbules 1997, p.107) is significant where difference is relational and ‘enacted’: sanctioning difference within a particular category, ‘within identity, within the concept of woman [policewoman] or man [policeman]’ (Marshall 1996 & Deleuse 1968, cited in Burbules 1997, p.107, emphasis in original).

SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW
The review of the literature revealed a number of key topics: police culture, women’s integration into policing and women’s responses to discursive constructions and practices, police training, organisational structure, the nature of police work including police strategies, and police leadership. These topics however, were not evenly represented in the literature. Police work and police strategies, especially community policing, and discussions of police culture were most common. A study of police research in 2003 and trends in police research from 2000 to 2003 by Gibbs, Beckman, Miggans and Hart
(2006, p.337) found the trends in police research had not changed since 2000, that community policing still accounted for the majority of police research, and that empirical analysis or outcome evaluation was still lacking in police research.

Further to this, a paucity of research was evident in discourses within policing. Two studies of discourse, discursive practices, and police were identified. Dick and Cassell (2004) described the social construction of police work as essentially masculine, and questioned how and why policewomen constitute their identities in accordance with this dominant view of police work. Frewin and Tuffin (1998) examined the police culture and discourses with respect to homosexuality and argued that discourse analysis provides insights to social constructions of meanings within police culture.

A range of common characteristics of police culture are found in the literature. These characteristics are inherently interrelated, dynamic, and need to be viewed as products and resources of D/discourses. These characteristics can be defined and understood in terms of three subcultures: family-relationships, command and control, and “real” police work.

**Police sub-cultures and discourses**

The heart of the family-relationships subculture is that peers represent the ‘family’ and the organisation the ‘parent’ (Bonifacio 1991). Whilst ‘parent’ and ‘family’ provide solidarity, cohesion, a common understanding and identity, they are also supportive and punitive (Bonifacio 1991; Fielding 1994; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Prenzler 1998; Reiner 1992, cited in Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999). Family-relationships are built upon the perception of and ability to be capable and reliable which necessitates the need to be or be seen to be “perfect”, thereby avoiding mistakes (Bonifacio 1991; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Manning 1978, cited in Chan 1999; Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999). With a sense and perception of solidarity and loyalty comes a sense of isolation and suspicion (Bonifacio 1991; Cochran & Bromley 2003; Prenzler 2002; Reiner 1992, cited in Chan 1999; Reiner 2000) compounded by the conservatism of the working class backgrounds of the majority of police (Skolnick 1966, cited in Shanahan 2000).

The command and control subculture, with its paramilitary ethos and the organisation’s strict hierarchical command structure (Bonifacio 1991; Heidensohn 1992; Cain 2002; Fleming & Lafferty 2003; Palmer 1994; Panzarella 2003; Waddington 1999), simultaneously underpins and complicates the family-relationships subculture. Waddington (1999, p.301) described the police organisation as a ‘punishment-centred bureaucracy’ where poor behaviour is readily noted and punished, but where good behaviour is often unacknowledged. This has been seen to be inherent in the paramilitary model adopted by police.

Cowper (2000) and Panzarella (2003), however, have argued that the ‘boot-camp’ style of military leadership in policing with a rigid and autocratic command and organisational structure is flawed. They argued that it maintains the status of police managers, stifles independent thinking and
innovative practice, and limits responses to the ever-changing imperatives of policing and community needs (Cowper 2000).

Finally, the “real” police work subculture is grounded in operational policing. This is supported by a ‘sense of mission’ (Reiner 2000, p.89) and political and legal sanctions to control society (Manning 1977). The ‘cult of masculinity’ combined with the emphasis on fighting crime provides further justification (ideologically and otherwise) for the application of state power and authority, and the maintenance of reputation and status (Dick & Cassell 2004; Frewin & Tuffin 1998; Reiner 2000; Martin & Jurik 1996; Waddington 1999). A focus on ‘crime-fighting’ valorises the images and discourses of ‘tough cop’, ‘macho cop’ (Etter & Adams 2001; Martin & Jurik 1996; Silvestri 2003; Waddington 1999), and the need for physical strength, command presence, and assertive control. The need to maintain assertive control and demonstrate aggression requires quick and decisive action which means thinking (reflectively or critically) could be judged as a weakness and potentially punishable (Bonifacio 1991).

The functions and consequences of the family-relationship, command and control, and “real” police work subcultures are amplified in the correlation between these subcultures and three discourses: ‘conformity’; ‘internal pressure’; and ‘police status’ (Frewin & Tuffin 1998, pp.178-181). The correlation of these subcultures and discourses drives and sustains features of police culture. Firstly, the ‘conformity discourse’ emphasises adherence to images and standards; “looking the part” and “fitting in“. Marginalisation, isolation, and surveillance of peers and those who ‘fail to conform’ represent the resources of the ‘internal pressure discourse’. Further to this, the ‘police status discourse’ is concerned with the maintenance of reputation, standing and status of police in the society at all costs. Frewin and Tuffin (1998) found that values, images and standards of masculinity were ubiquitous; and crucial to the maintenance of standards and reputation was the exclusion of non-conformists. Whilst this study centred on homosexuality in policing, a number of parallels can be drawn with general practices within policing given the nature and constitution of police culture.

**Women in policing**

Despite initiatives to integrate women into policing in Australia, figures from 2003/2004 revealed females constitute 20.7 percent of employees in police organisations across Australia (Prenzler 2006). Kanter (1977, cited in Etter & Adams 2001) argued that when a marginal group represents such a small percentage of a workforce, practices which emphasise difference will persist. It is interesting to note that ‘Australia has one of the highest rates of sex-segregated occupations’ within the OECD (Eveline 1998, p.90).

A number of barriers to women’s integration and progress in policing have been identified. In Australia, Nixon (1994), Fleming and Lafferty (2002 & 2003), and Eveline and Harwood (2002) noted a number of barriers including: occupational, organisational, and cultural factors; recruitment; Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) policies; employment conditions and
provisions; sexual harassment; barriers to promotion; conservative attitudes which devalue women; and relationships with state governments.

Australian women were permitted to enter police organisations in New South Wales in 1915 and by 1917 five of the six states had women police (Prenzler 2002). Nationally and internationally, their participation reflected the dominant male ideology and traditional theories of gender and skills: custodial matters and the welfare of women, children and juveniles (Boni 1998; Brown 1998; Brown, Hazenberg & Ormiston 1999; Brown & Heidensohn 2000; Fleming & Lafferty 2002 & 2003; Heidensohn 1992; Nixon 1994; Schulz 2003; Westmarland 2001). Law enforcement was perceived to be men’s work while ‘crime prevention through moral guidance’ was women’s work (Garcia 2003, p.332).


Evidence reveals various styles or roles have been adopted by policewomen. In examining gender difference in policing, Garcia (2003) identifies a ‘neutral-impersonal’ approach, a ‘feminine style’, a ‘semi-masculine’ style and a ‘mixed-role’ style (sexuality gains respect). Similarities are evident in the roles Chan et al (2003, p.294, emphasis in original) describe: the ‘policewoman’ who engages in practices which emphasise ‘traditional sex-role stereotypes’ and the ‘policewoman’ who adopts practices which significantly reduce gender difference. Garcia (2003) reports that policewomen who adopted the ‘neutral-impersonal’ and ‘mixed-role’ styles encountered most resistance from male colleagues and experienced more stress. On the other hand, while a ‘feminine’ style and ‘semi-masculine’ role resulted in less stress for women, occupational acceptance and respect were not forthcoming (Garcia 2003).

Etter and Adams (2001, p.8) argue women should not be compelled to ‘adopt “macho” characteristics’ or to ‘become one of the boys’. Brown and Heidensohn (2000) use the term ‘token policewomen’ where the numbers of women are so small they are seen as tokens and where equity practices are tokenistic. Cockburn (1991, p.46) suggests women are often overlooked as a viable resource in organisations and employers use affirmative action and equity policies to promote some women who become the ‘privileged’, ‘affordable’, tokenistic few, thereby separating them from the rest ‘whom the organization continues to exploit in the manner to which it is accustomed,
indeed on which it depends’. Etter and Adams (2001, p.9) discuss the thinking that exists and underlies flexible employment policies in many jurisdictions: ‘part-time, part-able, part-committed’. This thinking was also reflected in women’s integration into other male-dominated occupations.

**Women in other male-dominated occupations**

McNay (2000) contends that as women enter arenas previously the domain of men they will experience uncertainty in constructing and reconstructing their gender identity and face a number of obstacles. The challenges confronting women’s integration into policing are paralleled in studies of women’s integration into a number of other male-dominated occupations. Hemmens, Stohr, Schoeler and Miller (2002, p.475) studied prisons and found that women in corrections were also regarded as ‘tokens, sex objects’ as ‘inferior’.

Eveline and Booth (2002, p.14) studied women in mining in Western Australia and identified a high level of ‘atmospheric harassment’. Women were viewed as ‘tokens’; subjected to practical jokes and violence which risked safety, injury and life, and incurred major injury; and were shunned by men when they excelled at driving the huge trucks and dozers (Eveline & Booth 2002, pp.6-12).

A study in the auto components companies in Argentina by Stobbe (2005, p.110) exposed ‘machismo’; a discourse of ‘hegemonic force’ in Argentinean culture. Stobbe (2005, pp.110-117) identifies three discourses. Firstly, the ‘type-of-work discourse’: women needed to be protected from work that was ‘heavy’, ‘dirty’, and not suitable for them. Eveline’s (1998, p.91) analysis of male advantage in workplaces supports a similar conception of work as ‘heavy’, ‘dirty’, and ‘limp’. Secondly, the ‘availability discourse’: women in general, but especially those with families, are less flexible and available. Thirdly, the ‘working-relations discourse’: women are perceived to be ‘problematic’ because they are more competitive, emotional, and more likely to impact negatively on cohesion and mateship in the workplace.

A number of studies in Britain, America and Australia have revealed that cohesion or ‘male bonding’ as an element of military culture and as an essential feature of combat teams provided justification for the exclusion of women from many areas of military deployment (Burton 1996; Firestone & Harris 2003; Woodward & Winter 2006). Firestone’s and Harris’s (2003) American study and Burton’s (1996) Australian study expose the imperatives of cohesion: conformity and maintenance of reputation. These imperatives align with Frewin’s and Tuffin’s (1998) discourses of ‘conformity’, ‘internal pressure’, and ‘police status’. Additionally, women’s experiences of establishing their identity in a military context revealed similarities experienced by women in policing.

Of particular note and relevant to policing was Woodward’s and Winter’s (2006) study of the British Army and the challenges to women’s integration. The organisation insisted its difference justified its exemption from anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of its unique and legitimate use of violence and force on behalf of the state. This has resonance in police
organisations with the ‘cult of masculinity’, the valorisation of the ‘tough’, ‘crime-fighting’ cop (Waddington 1999, p.302), and the lethargy of police services to respond to anti-discrimination legislation.

**Police training and police leadership**

Training can act as a formally sanctioned vehicle for discourses which supports and validates police culture (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001; Densten 1999; McCoy 2006). Police training has been delivered in a standard format regardless of the topic and through an instructor-centred, lecture-based approach which essentially represents a ‘robotic’ style of learning (Birzer & Tannehill 2001). This is supported by three principles: ‘…it should closely follow the military training model; it should be a punishment-centred experience in which trainees must “prove” themselves; and it should help screen out those who aren’t up to par’ (McCreedy 1983, cited in Birzer & Tannehill 2001, p.238).

Central to the success or otherwise of training are the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills of the trainers. Trainers, however, are not often adequately trained (Birzer 2003; Thomas 2003): they are ‘law enforcement practitioners and not educators’ (McCoy 2006). Compounding this is the paucity of research into police training practices (Birzer 2003).

An essentially pedagogical approach to police training limits ‘intellectual stimulation’ (Densten 1999, p.53). This is compounded when hidden curricula endorse ‘hegemonic masculinity among recruits’ (Prokos & Padavic 2002) and when pedagogical training methods reinforce ‘chains of command, rules, regulations, and policy and procedures’ at the cost of problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001).

Vickers (2000, p.508), in critiquing police management education, describes a ‘resistant anti-intellectual subculture’ in Australian and other international police organisations. In particular, Vickers (2000, pp.508-509) suggests that ‘solidarity…cynicism, isolation…and difficulty admitting weakness’ are features of police culture which might function to protect police from the issues they confront in operational policing, but which might also function to repress ‘learning through reflection and critique’. Adlam’s (2002) reflection on a failed ethics education program for police leaders in England, adds support to Vicker’s (2000) claims. Adlam (2002) argues that a set of unconscious and unchallengeable assumptions regarding police work, conduct, and leadership prevented honest critical thinking.

In examining leadership practices in policing, Densten (1999) found that management-by-exception was a common practice. This passive approach, characterised by a lack of genuine engagement with and motivation of personnel, and a focus on maintaining the status quo (Densten 1999) is supported by Cowper’s (2000) and Panzarella’s (2003) critiques of the flawed nature of the paramilitary model. A lack of creativity and critical thinking and practice therefore can lead to simplistic and inadequate decision-making and reinforce traditional and often inappropriate practices (Densten 1999). This was also born out in other studies (Delattre 1996, Goldsmith 1990 and Waters
1995, cited in Densten 1999, p.46) which reveal conservatism, caution, authoritative behaviour, ineffectual and traditional responses, and 'poor communication skills' were common behaviours of police leaders. In such a deficient environment, individual and collective 'self-interest' becomes the motivator (Densten 1999, p.54) which seems antithetical to a state sanctioned organisation which exists to serve and protect the community.

Adlam (2002, pp.15-16) applies Foucault's conception of 'governmental authorities' to the analysis of predominant thinking styles or 'rationalities' of police leadership culture and practices. His research reveals an amalgam of interconnected yet somewhat contradictory rationalities which simultaneously support and maintain culture and discourses, and power and gender relations. Of rudimentary significance is a 'functionalist' thinking (‘socio-political professional rationality’) which uncritically accepts police work (Adlam 2002, pp.22-23). Then there is the emblematic struggle between ‘good and evil’ (‘moral panic rationality’) where the image of police and community reassurance are paramount (Adlam 2002, p.24). An elitist identity built on the notions of legitimate power and authority (Silvestri 2003) underpins the ‘socio-biological elitist rationality’ and the belief that police “know best” (Adlam 2002, pp.27-28). The imperative to “manage the look” through the construction and maintenance of a credible police image is evidenced in the ‘post-modern rationality’ (Adlam 2002, p.31). A final and less accentuated approach is ‘critical emancipatory rationality’ which advocates diversity, duty of care, inclusive practices, and ethics (Adlam 2002, p.25). Given the lethargy of police organisations in expediting anti-discrimination legislation, a lack of congruence might well exist between actions, driven by legislation, policies and procedures, and beliefs, informal practices, and culture.

CONCLUSION
Police culture, its constitution, and the various discourses created and sustained by formal and informal structures and practices, including training, provide a complex platform for gender and other differences to be constructed, maintained and emphasised (Brown & Heidensohn 2000; Eveline & Hanwood 2002; Garcia 2003; Silvestri 2003; Westmarland 2001). Etter and Adams (2001) suggest that the construction of police work as an essentially masculine occupation is resistant to change, and equity, sexual harassment, and flexible employment policies and practices will not necessarily change attitudes towards diversity in the workplace.

Gender and power relations pervade all aspects of organisational life (Acker 1990, cited in Martin 2001; Gatens 1998) and “doing” gender is an individual and situational process (West & Zimmerman 1987). The power of gender norms to be implicitly and explicitly propagated by habits, practices, ideology and discourses (Gatens 1998) plus the linkage between gender and culture (Benschop 2006) mean the agency and subjectivity of individuals will be impacted upon (Halford and Leonard 2001). These connections between gender and power, and gender and culture mean Frewin’s and Tuffin’s (1998) ‘conformity’, ‘internal pressure’, and ‘police status’ discourses have greater resonance.
The discourses of pedagogical training practices (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001), a ‘hidden curriculum’ (Prokos & Padavic 2002, p.439), police leadership, functionalist and elitist thinking styles (Adlam 2002), the family-relationships, command and control, and “real” police work subcultures represent the capacity of the dominant culture and group to manipulate identities and power relations (Connell 1987, cited in Young 2005; Gee 2005). The power of the dominant D/discourses to establish a “truth” which renders the validity and reality of other D/discourses as invisible and indiscernible has substance in the ‘field’ of policing.

A number of questions arise from this literature review. Has the willingness and legitimacy of police to use force on behalf of the state (Waddington 1999) combined with the rigid hierarchical command and organisational structure vindicated a lethargic response to expediting anti-discrimination legislation? How do D/discourses impact on gender and “Othering” in everyday interactions and activities? How do D/discourses impact on training practices? What would it take to achieve genuine diversity in police organisations? Why do women and men accept the “truth” of the D/discourses? Whatever the answers, a deficiency in research into D/discourses in police organisations exists, but the findings of this literature review provide a foundation for future research into gender- and “Other”-based D/discourses in police organisations.

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