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Why Did you Become a Police officer? entry-related motives and concerns of Women and men in Policing

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ABSTRACT

As police agencies in the United States suffer declining applications and struggle to recruit women, the National Institute of Justice has identified workforce development as a priority research area. To recruit more effectively, we must understand what attracts people to policing and what deters them. We surveyed officers in two Midwestern police departments ($n = 832$) about entry motivations and concerns and examined gender differences. Serve/protect motivations were most important for men and women, though women rated the category significantly higher. Women and non-White officers rated legacy motives higher than did males and White officers. Women reported more concerns overall and scored higher on job demands and acceptance concerns; officers of color also reported more acceptance concerns than White officers. The largest gender differences were associated with gender-related obstacles and stereotypes (e.g., discrimination; being taken seriously; physical demands), indicating recruitment reform necessarily includes improving systemic issues.

Keywords: policing; gender; employment; gender differences; women

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Police agencies across the United States have seen a recent drop in

applications (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Several forces are likely at work, ranging from declining public trust in response to viral negative officer–citizen encounters, well-publicized attacks on officers, to increased access to college education and a competitive job market, to disqualifier policies that have not kept pace with changing social norms around tattoos or marijuana use (Bolten, 2016; Cook, 2015; Jones, 2015; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019; Rhodes & Tyler, 2019). Furthermore, it is too early to tell how recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the worldwide protests surrounding the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others will affect policing, and ultimately recruitment. Although the last decade or so has seen an increasing need for creativity in overall police recruitment, attracting women to the field has been an undeniable problem for decades (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019), compounded by a culture of hegemonic masculinity, exclusionary testing procedures, absence of family-friendly policies, and lack of targeted recruiting, among others (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Fielding, 1994; Prokos & Padavic, 2002; Schuck, 2014; Schulze, 2010, 2012).

When women entered the field, they were relegated to policing-adjacent positions, assigned to “deal with” women and children (Corsianos, 2009). With broader civil rights changes in the 1960s and 1970s, women fought their way into patrol; lawsuits and consent decrees facilitated sharp increases of women in the 1980s and 1990s (Archbold & Schulz, 2012; Lonsway et al., 2002). After consent decrees expired, efforts crumbled and the proportion of women entering policing dropped (Lonsway et al., 2002, 2003). Today, about 12.6% of sworn officers employed in U.S. agencies are women; the percentage of women is greater in large departments and typically less in rural and small departments (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Women of color typically represent less than 5% of the sworn officer population (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Growth, however, has stalled since the start of the 21st century (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Kringen, 2014).

We argue that a starting point for recruiting is to understand what motivated the current workforce to join. Furthermore, given the continued underrepresentation of women, and the benefits they can bring to the force, it is important to explore the extent to which there may be gender differences in entry motivations. In this article, we explore entry motivations, including gender differences, in a sample of current police officers. This approach provides insight into the perceptions of individuals that actively pursued the career. Although we are not the first to explore motivations (e.g., Lester, 1983; Raganella & White, 2004; M. D. White et al., 2010), persistent struggles with police recruitment demand continued work in this area. We expand the work on police entry with a systematic focus on concerns that surround career entry, a growing area of importance (e.g., Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Lord & Friday, 2003; Rossler et al., 2020). We asked officers to identify what attracted them to policing at the start of their careers and what they remember being nervous about. A better understanding of the entry motives and concerns of current officers can inform general recruitment strategies and understanding gender variations can inform targeted approaches. Finally, a focus on entry-related concerns may highlight systemic issues that are keeping many women out of the field.

Policing motives and gender Literature review

A few researchers have explored motives for entering policing and variation by gender (Lester, 1983; Raganella & White, 2004; Tarng & Hsieh, 2001; M. D. White et al., 2010). Lester (1983) was among the first to explore motivations for joining the force utilizing two samples. The first sample consisted of males, who reported helping others, job security, companionship with coworkers, enforcing the laws, and fighting crime as top motivations. Factor analysis identified themes of pay/security, service, and power/status. In a replication sample that was approximately 20% female, men and women cited similar reasons for joining, but small gender differences emerged. Women rated service higher, power/status lower, and pay/security similar to men (Lester, 1983).

Raganella and White (2004) surveyed New York police department recruits in 2001 using a modified version of Lester's (1983) measure. The top motives (helping people and job security) were the same as those reported by Lester. There were slight differences in rank order by gender, but the most important (helping people) and least important (salary) were the same for men and women. As with Lester's study, women reported helping people higher than did men, although it was still important to both; companionship and lack of alternatives were more important for males (Raganella & White, 2004). Six years after the first study, M. D. White and colleagues (2010) surveyed the same population (i.e., NYPD recruits from 2001) asking them to rate their motivations. Again, they found few gender differences.

Additional research has both reinforced initial findings (e.g., helping

others as top motivation) and highlighted other motives as important, particularly for women (e.g., adventure/ excitement, witnessing, or interacting with female officers; Ridgeway et al., 2008; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Todak, 2017). yet, the policing motives and gender picture is not complete. We need information from all stages of the career life cycle (i.e., precareer women; those that left the academy; women that quit in the first couple years; and others that remained for several). Research thus far has been limited by small, single-agency, or single-gender samples, restricting comparisons. Finally, some of the motives that have been illuminated in qualitative work (e.g., Todak, 2017) have yet to be explored on a larger scale.

Potential concerns and gender

An emerging area regarding recruitment is concerns about career entry (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Lord & Friday, 2003; Rossler et al., 2020; Todak, 2017). Literature on motivation emphasizes that behavior is inspired by two sides of the motivational coin: (a) hopes and expectations and (b) fears or concerns¹ (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Concerns about future goals can balance expectations and help propel behavior toward them by informing strategies for achievement (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011; Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). At the same time, strong fears can paralyze or motivate alternative actions (Lerner & Keltner, 2001).

The motivational literature not only recognizes the importance of concerns or fears for motivation but also recognizes that some gender differences exist. Most important to this study is that women tend to report more fears than men and put more stock in those fears (Greene & DeBacker, 2004; Knox et al., 2000). Furthermore, women are more sensitive to messages in the sociocultural context (e.g., stereotypes; Greene & DeBacker, 2004; Kimmelmeier & Oyserman, 2001). This is of particular note in policing where decades of cultural socialization have sent the message that policing is a place only for the most masculine among us (Clinkinbeard et al., 2020).

Even if women are attracted to policing, experiences with, or concerns about, discrimination could discourage them from pursuing it. A few studies have found that young women have concerns about gender as a barrier to a career in policing (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Lord & Friday, 2003; Rossler et al., 2020; Todak, 2017), and these concerns are not unfounded. There is plenty of evidence that issues of gender equity and fair treatment still exist in law enforcement. Women often encounter sexualized behavior from coworkers in the forms of sexual teasing and harassment, and they are more likely than men to report experiences of workplace incivilities that negatively affect workgroup fit (Brown et al., 2020; Lonsway et al., 2013; Rief & Clinkinbeard, 2020). A culture based in hegemonic masculinity means that women have to fight for acceptance by managing

their own gender identities and expression (Kringen, 2014; Rabe-Hemp, 2009, 2018). Furthermore, women are often subjected to policies that devalue their femininity (e.g., academy haircut policies, inconsistent pregnancy, and maternity leave policies; Kringen & Novich, 2018; Schulze, 2010), pigeonholed into gendered work (e.g., victims' work, order maintenance), and left out of certain assignments (e.g., special weapons and tactics units (SWAT); Garcia, 2003; Morash & Haarr, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2009). Thus, women's fears and concerns are reflections of reality, highlighting those areas that are most problematic and in need of change.

Current study

To inform police recruitment, we must know what brings people to the field and what deters them, in addition to gender differences in motivations and concerns. Thus, we utilize a sample of approximately 830 officers across two agencies to explore the following:

Research Question 1a (rQ1a): Are there gender differences in reported importance of policing career-entry motives?

Based on previous research (e.g., Lester, 1983; Raganella & White, 2004; M. D. White et al., 2010), we expected to find similarities between men and women on entry motivations.

Research Question 1b (rQ1b): Are there gender differences in reported importance of policing career-entry concerns?

Although gender differences in career-entry concerns have not been explicitly explored, the broader motivational literature indicates that women are likely to have more concerns and rate them as likely (Greene & DeBacker, 2004).

Research Question 2 (rQ2): What are the primary categories of these motives (RQ2a) and concerns (RQ2b)?

Research Question 3 (rQ3): Are there gender differences in the reported importance of motives (RQ3a) and concerns (RQ3b) categories?

Sample and setting

Method

The data come from two Midwestern police departments. In June 2018, at the time of data collection, the smaller department had 341 commissioned officers. Of these 341 officers, 83.6% (285) were male, and 16.4% (56) were female. Almost 10% (34) of both male and female officers were officers of color. The department had 1.2 officers per 1,000 residents, including center city and four geographical precincts. At the time of data collection in July 2018, the larger department consisted of about 790 commissioned officers. Of these officers, 82.5% (652) were male, and 17.5% (138) were female. Approximately 20% (158) were officers of color. This department had two officers per 1,000 residents in 2018, including headquarters and four geographical precincts.

These two departments were chosen because they were large enough to provide a sufficient sample of women for comparison to men and still provide some variation in agency size and practice. Both departments employ slightly more women than the national average of 12% to 13% (Hyland & Davis, 2019). There are more than 12,000 local police departments in the United States and about half of all the departments employ fewer than 10 full-time officers (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Women officers are mostly employed by larger departments serving larger populations (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Thus, given our purpose, larger departments were more likely to provide an acceptable sample of female officers.

We attempted to survey all sworn officers who were employed at the departments described above. Most of the sample represents mid-career officers with a little over a decade of experience. While a primarily mid-career sample has its limitations, it can provide valuable information not only about those that pursued policing but also those who have remained for some time. Understanding the motives of officers at different career points is valuable for devising effective recruitment strategies, which is especially important for departments having a difficult time recruiting and retaining women.

We collected 832 surveys for an overall response rate of 79.7%, across both departments.² Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. Approximately 18% of our sample was female and 82% identified as White, non-Hispanic. Approximately 9% of participants identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 4% as Black or African American, and 2% as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Officers were employed for an average of 14 years ($SD = 8.90$). Two thirds of the sample were patrol officers³ and most (91%) had at least some college education.

Approximately 4% had a high school diploma, 21% had some college, 8% had an associate's, 51% had a bachelor's, and 8% had a graduate degree. Slightly more than half of our sample had a military background, 69% were married, and 57% had at least one child younger than 18 years.

Survey administration

The participating agencies requested different methods of survey delivery. The smaller department requested that all surveys be distributed online via their internal training system. The larger department requested in-person delivery at roll calls for patrol officers and online distribution via their employee listserv for the remainder. All data collection procedures were approved by the Human Subjects Review Board.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Demographics	Department 1 (<i>n</i> = 506)			Department 2 (<i>n</i> = 326)			Combined (<i>n</i> = 832)		
	<i>M</i> / %	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i> / %	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i> / %	<i>SD</i>	Range
Female	18.09%	—	0–1	18.15%	—	0–1	18.12%	—	0–1
White	78.43%	—	0–1	91.02%	—	0–1	83.39%	—	0–1
Years employed	14.03	8.23	1–37	14.16	9.85	1–47	14.08	8.90	1–47
Patrol	63.77%	—	0–1	63.93%	—	0–1	66.09%	—	0–1
Bachelors+	56.75%	—	0–1	77.78%	—	0–1	64.69%	—	0–1
Start age	26.51	4.89	18–49	24.38	3.14	18–42	25.71	4.43	18–49
Military	50.32%	—	0–1	74.75%	—	0–1	59.53%	—	0–1

For online surveys, we provided agency contacts with a short message describing the nature of the survey, including an anonymous link to the survey. Agency contacts initiated the surveys through internal email/training networks. Both departments sent reminder messages though there was some variation in the number/nature of reminders. In addition to the email reminder, officers in the smaller department received several reminders via the training system which is set up to show unfinished tasks each time they log on.⁴

Surveys were distributed to patrol officers in the larger department at roll calls. Patrol has three crews assigned to each shift, with two crews per precinct on a shift. A member of our team visited each of the four precincts multiple times across 2 days, allowing us to sample officers from each of the three shifts and all three crews. We sampled at least two crews from each shift (e.g., morning, afternoon/swing, and night) from each precinct. To reach those that had the day off, we also attempted to go the following day. However, this did not work out for one precinct, and we missed the possibility to sample the crews that had the day off. Additional officers were likely missed due to vacation, medical leave, and so on.

Measures

Motives

Officers were asked to report on motivations for entering policing. They were prompted by the following: “People give lots of reasons for becoming a police officer. Listed below are common reasons given by police officers. How important were each of the following in your decision to enter policing?” A list of 21 motives, ranging from topics like job security, pay,

and benefits, fighting crime and helping people, having autonomy, and being a role model, followed the prompt. Participants indicated importance on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *slightly important*, 3 = *moderately important*, 4 = *very important*, 5 = *extremely important*). The list of motives was developed from Lester's (1983) original list and other various motives noted in the literature, and supplemented by additional motives that arose during informal conversations between the investigators, law enforcement officers, and criminal justice students.

Entry concerns

Participants were also asked to report concerns before entering the field. They were prompted with the following: "Prior to entering policing, to what extent were you nervous about any of the following?" The prompt was followed by a list of 13 concerns, ranging from physical nature, danger, being accepted by others, being able to perform the job, to concerns about discrimination and treatment. This list was derived from quantitative and qualitative research on precareer motives (e.g., Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Lord & Friday, 2003; Todak, 2017). Participants indicated importance on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *slightly important*, 3 = *moderately important*, 4 = *very important*, 5 = *extremely important*). Similar to motives, the list was supplemented with additional concerns from informal conversations with law enforcement officers and criminal justice students.

Demographics and occupational characteristics

The primary predictor of interest was gender (1 = *female*, 0 = *male*). Although we utilize gender as a dichotomous predictor (male/female), in our study, we do not assume resulting variable relationships or gender differences are biologically based. We argue that the differences we are interested in are socially produced and thus use gender terminology in lieu of sex (Stewart & McDermott, 2004; Unger, 1979). We also controlled for several other demographics and occupational variables in our analyses (see Table 1). These included race (White = 1), rank (patrol = 1, higher rank = 0), education (bachelors or higher = 1), military (military experience = 1), age at start of police career, and length of employment.

Analytic strategy

To answer our first research questions—are there gender differences in the reported importance of policing career-entry (RQ1a) motives and (RQ1b) concerns?—we present motives and concerns in rank order for the sample. We conducted *t* tests by gender on each individual motive and concern. The next questions (what are the primary categories of these [RQ2a] motives and [RQ2b] concerns?) were addressed utilizing exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Finally, we utilized *t* tests and a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to investigate gender differences

in the reported importance of (RQ3a) motives and (RQ3b) concerns categories. We had nearly full data (missing <5 cases) for the analyses of RQ1a to RQ2b. Missing data on demographic variables limited the regression analyses to approximately 690 cases.⁵ After determining that our data met the assumption of missing at random (MAR), we produced 20 imputed data sets using the chained equations technique in Stata 15.1 (I. R. White et al., 2011). The results from regression models using imputed and nonimputed data were substantively similar; we present the imputed regression models in the “Results” section.⁶

Results

Entry motives, concerns, and gender differences (rQ1a and rQ1B)

Table 2 summarizes motives for the entire sample and differences by gender (RQ1a). Although the order varies slightly, the top three motives (desire to stop those that would harm others, help people in the community, and fighting crime) were the same for men and women. Gender differences were present for approximately half of the career-entry motives with women rating the following significantly higher: help people in the community, to have a challenging career, opportunity to solve problems, help others to live a better life, role model for others like me, show people like me make good officers, and use job as a stepping stone. Men rated ability to work on my own and companionship with coworkers significantly higher than women. The effect size differences were relatively small (Cohen’s d range = 0.21–0.37) with the largest differences in companionship with coworkers (males higher), use job as a stepping stone (females higher), and opportunity to solve problems (females higher).

Table 3 summarizes concerns for the entire sample and differences by gender (RQ1b). As with motives, top concerns were similar among women and men. Both males and females rated being able to prove myself, being able to do the job effectively, danger of the job, and stressful nature of the job in the top five. Physical nature of the job made the top five for women but not men, and men rated job fit with relationships in the top five but women did not. Women reported being significantly more nervous about 9 of the 13 items on the questionnaire. Effect sizes ranged from small to moderate (Cohen’s d range = 0.20–0.78). The largest differences were reported on discrimination in the work environment, physical nature of the job, and being taken seriously, indicating women were more likely than men to be nervous about these aspects.

Table 2: entry Motives by Gender

Variables	Total sample	Female (<i>n</i> = 150)	Male (<i>n</i> = 678)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> value	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			
Desire to stop those that would harm others	4.18 (0.92)	4.18 (0.92)	4.19 (0.92)	0.06	.95	0.01
Help people in the community	4.15 (0.91)	4.37 (0.85)	4.10 (0.91)	-3.47	<.01	-0.30
Fighting crime	4.13 (0.90)	4.15 (0.86)	4.12 (0.91)	-0.38	.71	-0.03
Excitement of the work	4.08 (0.94)	4.09 (0.91)	4.08 (0.94)	-0.12	.90	-0.01
To have a challenging career	3.90 (0.95)	4.13 (0.94)	3.85 (0.95)	-3.29	<.01	-0.30
Opportunity to solve problems	3.87 (0.96)	4.14 (0.93)	3.82 (0.95)	-3.83	<.01	-0.34
Help others to live a better life	3.86 (1.01)	4.03 (1.04)	3.83 (0.99)	-2.21	.03	-0.21
Job that is different every day	3.82 (1.08)	3.89 (1.12)	3.80 (1.07)	-0.91	.37	-0.08
Job security	3.79 (1.12)	3.65 (1.14)	3.82 (1.11)	1.58	.11	0.15
Ability to work on my own	3.75 (1.05)	3.50 (1.14)	3.81 (1.02)	2.99	<.01	0.29
Enforcing laws of society	3.74 (0.92)	3.77 (0.89)	3.73 (0.94)	-0.44	.66	-0.04
Salary	3.49 (1.00)	3.54 (1.08)	3.49 (0.98)	-0.57	.57	-0.05
Career advancement	3.40 (1.08)	3.49 (1.12)	3.39 (1.08)	-0.97	.33	-0.09
Show that officers are good people	3.36 (1.32)	3.52 (1.33)	3.34 (1.31)	-1.53	.13	-0.14
Companionship with coworkers	3.32 (1.10)	2.99 (1.16)	3.40 (1.07)	3.91	<.01	0.37
Prestige	3.23 (1.18)	3.11 (1.19)	3.26 (1.17)	1.37	.17	0.12
Role model for others like me	3.17 (1.21)	3.38 (1.29)	3.12 (1.20)	-2.25	.03	-0.21
Show people like me make good officers	3.13 (1.35)	3.49 (1.35)	3.05 (1.33)	-3.63	<.01	-0.33
Lifelong dream	3.12 (1.42)	3.03 (1.53)	3.13 (1.40)	0.72	.47	0.07
Make others proud	2.69 (1.28)	2.89 (1.36)	2.65 (1.26)	-1.94	.05	-0.18
Use job as stepping stone	2.05 (1.13)	2.36 (1.24)	1.98 (1.09)	-3.44	<.01	-0.34

Note: Values in bold are statistically significant. Shaded areas represent top five motives for women and men.

Table 3: entry Concerns by Gender

Variables	Total sample	Female (<i>n</i> = 150)	Male (<i>n</i> = 678)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> value	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			
Being able to do the job effectively	2.69 (1.26)	2.79 (1.25)	2.67 (1.26)	-1.05	.29	-0.09
Being able to prove myself	2.61 (1.25)	2.90 (1.23)	2.55 (1.25)	-3.14	<.01	-0.28
Job fit with relationships	2.41 (1.20)	2.40 (1.18)	2.42 (1.20)	0.17	.87	0.02
Stressful nature of the job	2.36 (1.13)	2.63 (1.10)	2.31 (1.13)	-3.18	<.01	-0.28
Danger of the job	2.34 (1.11)	2.73 (1.21)	2.26 (1.06)	-4.38	<.01	-0.43
Shift work/hours	2.25 (1.16)	2.44 (1.13)	2.21 (1.16)	-2.29	.02	-0.20
Being accepted by coworkers	2.14 (1.13)	2.46 (1.23)	2.08 (1.10)	-3.52	<.01	-0.34
Being accepted by the community	2.00 (1.06)	2.17 (1.07)	1.96 (1.05)	-2.13	.03	-0.20
Dealing with the public	1.91 (1.09)	1.93 (0.91)	1.91 (1.01)	-0.22	.82	-0.02
Physical nature of the job	1.90 (0.99)	2.56 (1.24)	1.76 (1.00)	-7.40	<.01	-0.77
Being taken seriously	1.86 (1.05)	2.38 (1.21)	1.74 (0.98)	-5.95	<.01	-0.62
Whether coworkers similar to me	1.85 (0.96)	1.95 (0.98)	1.83 (0.96)	-1.44	.15	-0.13
Discrimination in work environment	1.63 (1.02)	2.26 (1.23)	1.50 (0.91)	-7.15	<.01	-0.78

Note: Values in bold are statistically significant. Shaded areas represent top five concerns for women and men.

Table 4: Three-Factor eFa Solution for Motives

Indicator	Serve/protect	Nature/perks loading (λ)	Legacy
Help people in the community	.62	-.11	.17
Excitement of the work	.71	.30	-.24
Fighting crime	.88	.07	-.17
Enforcing laws of society	.56	.04	.25
Desire to stop those that would harm others	.72	-.11	.15
Help others live a better life	.70	-.25	.32
Opportunity to solve problems	.80	-.05	.16
To have a challenging career	.72	.15	.08
Job security	-.12	.55	.22
Career advancement	.24	.44	.16
Prestige	.18	.44	.25
Ability to work on my own	.19	.61	.04
Salary	-.12	.54	.23
Make others proud	-.11	.31	.55
Show that officers are good people	.09	.09	.67
Role model for others like me	.12	.03	.79
Show people like me make good officers	.05	.03	.85
Companionship with coworkers	.24	.38	.16
Lifelong dream	.18	.18	.29
Use job as stepping stone	-.17	.23	.41
Job that is different every day	.42	.37	.01

Note. Shaded areas indicate items for each identified subscale in final solution. Model fit: χ^2 (150 *df*, *N* = 829) = 1,461.77, *p* < .01; CFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.06. EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Categories of entry motives and concerns (rQ2a and rQ2B)

We conducted EFA using Mplus 8 to investigate underlying motives and concerns related to policing. As this research is preliminary, EFA allowed us to explore underlying factor structures without making a priori assumptions about which items loaded on latent constructs. We utilized oblique rotations to allow the factors to correlate and to achieve the optimal simple structure where each factor explains as much variance as possible in non-overlapping indicators (Yong & Pearce, 2013). We relied on best practices in EFA (see Costello & Osborne, 2005; Yong & Pearce, 2013) to determine which EFA solution provided the best data-driven and theoretically consistent model. The literature suggests that factor loadings should be a minimum of .32 and should not have cross-loadings exceeding .32 (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Yong & Pearce, 2013). We used more strict criteria and retained items from the EFA if loadings (λ) were $\geq .44$ and had no substantial cross-loading ($\lambda \geq .32$) on another factor. We also made determinations based on theory (i.e., sometimes items may empirically load on a factor, but make little theoretical sense).

We started with motives (RQ3a) and decided on a three-factor solution (Table 4). Although items had minimum acceptable loadings on more than

one solution, the three-factor solution had the fewest (20%) nonredundant residual values greater than .05 (Field, 2013) and was the most interpretable of the solutions. Four items (companionship with coworkers, lifelong dream, use job as stepping stone, and job that is different every day) were dropped due to either not loading well on any factors or having high cross-loadings. The first factor identified was serve/protect ($\alpha = .88$) which included items associated with serving (e.g., help people in the community) and protecting (e.g., fighting crime, enforcing laws). The second factor was nature/perks ($\alpha = .74$) and included perks such as salary, prestige, job security, and ability to work on your own. The final factor, legacy ($\alpha = .81$), comprised sources of future legacy (e.g., be a role model, show that people like me make good officers).

For concerns (RQ3b), we again explored multiple possible solutions using EFA. As with motives, EFA analysis suggested that the three-factor solution (Table 5) was the best as it had only 21% of the nonredundant residuals over .05, the fewest problematic cross-loadings, and was the most interpretable. We dropped 1 item (i.e., shift work/hours) as it had problematic cross-loadings on multiple factors. The first identified factor was job demands ($\alpha = .79$) and was characterized by concerns such as stress and dangerous nature. The second factor, performance ($\alpha = .87$), dealt with concerns about proving oneself and doing the job effectively. The final factor, acceptance/fit ($\alpha = .82$), was characterized by concerns like discrimination, similarity to coworkers, and being taken seriously.

Table 5: Three-Factor eFa Solution for Concerns

Item	Job demands	Acceptance/fit loading (λ)	Performance
Physical nature of the job	.63	.08	.21
Danger of the job	.92	-.11	.14
Stressful nature of the job	.72	.13	.02
Job fit with relationships	.53	.30	-.28
Being able to prove myself	.15	.23	.76
Being able to do the job effectively	.26	.13	.66
Being accepted by coworkers	-.02	.58	.30
Being accepted by the community	-.05	.70	.26
Discrimination in the work environment	.04	.67	-.18
Whether my coworkers similar to me	.01	.76	.07
Dealing with the public	.30	.52	.03
Being taken seriously	.14	.63	.12
Shift work/hours	.48	.37	-.34

Note. Shaded areas indicate items for each identified subscale in final solution. Model fit: χ^2 (42 *df*, *N* = 831) = 687.73, $p < .01$; CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.14, SRMR = 0.05. EFA = exploratory factor analysis; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Thematic gender differences (rQ3a and rQ3B)

To explore thematic differences in motivation and concerns by gender, we conducted *t* tests on each subscale identified through factor analysis (see Table 6). For motivations, women scored significantly higher on

serve/protect and legacy, but there was no evidence of gender difference in nature/perks. Effect size differences, indicated by Cohen's *d*, were relatively small. Females scored significantly higher on all three concerns subscales: job demands, performance, and acceptance/fit. Effect size differences ranged from small to moderate with the largest difference in the acceptance/fit subscale.

Results from OLS regression models predicting entry motivations are presented in Table 7. In the first model, gender, patrol, and years employed were significant predictors of serve/protect motivations. Women and higher ranking officers reported this motivation as more important than men and patrol officers. Serve/protect was reported as less important with each year on the job. Gender was not a significant predictor of nature/perks motivation; years employed and race were the only significant predictors. Nature/perks motivation was ranked less important with each year on the job and more important by officers of color. Gender, race, and years employed significantly predicted the importance of legacy. Women and officers of color rated legacy higher than men and White officers. Legacy was ranked less important with each year on the job. Demographics accounted for only a modest proportion of the variance in entry motivations with the most variance accounted for in the legacy model.

Table 6: Thematic entry Motives and Concerns by Gender

Subscales	Total sample	Female (<i>n</i> = 150)	Male (<i>n</i> = 678)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> value	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)			
Motivation						
Serve/protect	3.99 (0.69)	4.11 (0.67)	3.96 (0.69)	-2.34	.02	-0.21
Nature/perks	3.53 (0.74)	3.46 (0.80)	3.55 (0.73)	1.28	.20	0.12
Legacy	3.09 (1.03)	3.32 (1.03)	3.04 (1.03)	-3.01	<.01	-0.27
Concerns						
Job demands	2.26 (0.89)	2.58 (0.95)	2.19 (0.03)	-4.67	<.01	-0.45
Performance	2.65 (0.1.18)	2.84 (1.16)	2.61 (1.18)	-2.22	.03	-0.20
Acceptance/fit	1.90 (0.76)	2.19 (0.79)	1.84 (0.73)	-4.97	<.01	-0.47

Note. Values in bold are statistically significant.

Results from OLS regression models predicting entry-related concerns are presented in Table 7. Gender, education, and years on the job significantly predicted concerns related to job demands. Women and officers with at least a bachelor's degree reported being more nervous about demands than males and those with less than a bachelor's degree. Concerns about job demands decreased with each year on the job. Education and years on the job significantly predicted performance, but gender did not. Those with a bachelor's degree reported being more nervous about proving themselves and doing the job effectively, whereas officers who had been on the job longer reported less initial concern in this area. Gender, race, education, and years employed significantly predicted concerns related to acceptance/fit. Women, officers of color, and those with

at least a bachelor's degree reported more concerns about acceptance/fit, or things like being taken seriously, discrimination, and similarity to coworkers. Each year on the job was associated with less reported concern at entry about acceptance/fit. Demographics accounted for a modest proportion of the variance in entry motivations with the most variance accounted for in the job demands model.

Discussion

The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) argued agencies should prioritize diversity (race, gender, language, etc.) in the workforce to facilitate understanding, trust, and effectiveness in serving communities. Indeed, some research indicates women are less likely to be involved in use-of-force incidents, agencies with more women experience fewer citizen complaints, and surges in women often initiates organizational change, such as increased focus on community policing, reductions in sexual harassment, and a more highly educated police force (Brandl & Strohshine, 2013; Lonsway et al., 2003; Schuck, 2014, 2017; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2016). Data from the United Kingdom indicate an association between an increase in officers of color and reductions in police misconduct and citizen complaints (Hong, 2017). Despite these benefits and repeated calls to diversify policing, relatively little has changed in the last couple of decades (Hyland & Davis, 2019; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). The same old recruitment strategies based on the same old images, assumptions, and stereotypes are not likely to bring about desired changes (Clinkinbeard & Rief, 2020). To improve strategies, we need to continue to develop our knowledge base on what attracts people, particularly women and people of color, to policing and what deters them. We focused on one piece of that puzzle—we asked male and female officers, many of whom had been on the force for several years, to identify motives and concerns that were most important to them at the time of career entry.

Motives

Our results on policing motivations align with previous research and add new areas of insight and importance. The most important motives for men and women were desire to stop those that would harm others, helping people in the community, and fighting crime, similar to previous research (Lester, 1983; Raganella & White, 2004; M. D. White et al., 2010). These items were part of the serve/protect category which was rated as most influential by men and women. Although important for all, women rated helping people and the serve/protect category significantly higher than men. Aspects of police work like crime-fighting are highly salient in the public image, and thus, it is likely easier for all applicants to access those

Table 7: OLS Regression Results for entry Motives and Concerns

Predictors	Motives						Concerns					
	Serve/protect		Nature/perks		Legacy		Job demands		Performance		Acceptance/fit	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β	<i>b</i> (SE)	Avg β
Female	.13 (.06)*	.08	-.10 (.07)	-.05	.30 (.09)**	.11	.35 (.08)**	.15	.15 (.11)	.05	.34 (.07)**	.17
White	-.00 (.07)	.00	-.16 (.07)*	-.08	-.26 (.10)*	-.09	-.12 (.09)	-.05	-.14 (.11)	-.04	-.28 (.08)**	-.14
Patrol	-.25 (.06)**	-.17	-.09 (.07)	-.06	-.07 (.10)	-.03	.09 (.08)	.05	-.11 (.11)	-.04	.04 (.07)	.02
Bachelors+	-.06 (.06)	-.04	.08 (.06)	.05	.01 (.08)	-.00	.28 (.07)**	.15	.28 (.09)**	.11	.16 (.06)**	.10
Years employed	-.01 (.00)**	-.16	-.02 (.01)**	-.19	-.02 (.00)**	-.17	-.02 (.00)**	-.21	-.02 (.01)**	-.17	-.01 (.00)**	-.15
Start age	.00 (.01)	.02	-.00 (.01)	-.00	.00 (.01)	-.01	-.00 (.01)	-.01	-.01 (.01)	-.03	-.01 (.01)	-.04
Military	-.04 (.05)	-.03	-.07 (.06)	-.05	-.14 (.08)	-.07	.09 (.06)	.05	.15 (.09)	.06	.02 (.05)	.01
Intercept	4.30		3.97		3.75		2.32		3.10		2.29	
<i>F</i>	4.29		5.40		7.11		13.83		5.93		9.72	
Avg <i>R</i> ²	.04		.05		.06		.10		.05		.08	
Avg RVI	0.12		0.08		0.08		0.07		0.06		0.06	
Largest FMI	0.23		0.12		0.19		0.18		0.13		0.18	

Note. OLS = ordinary least squares; SE = robust standard errors; Avg β = mean β across the 20 imputed models; Avg *R*² = mean *R*² across the 20 imputed models; Avg RVI = average relative increase in variance of estimates because of missing values (numbers closer to zero better); FMI = fraction of missing information (values range from 0-1; closer to 0 is better).

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

motivations. Although “helping or serving people” is also a well-known characteristic of police work, it may not garner as much attention; it is an area agencies should emphasize. A meta-analysis of gender differences in job preferences found that one of the largest differences across studies was women’s preferences for “opportunities to help people” (Konrad et al., 2000). Still, young women are not likely to see policing as a career option (Clinkinbeard et al., 2020; Rossler et al., 2020) and so the challenge is getting those women who want to help others to see policing as fitting with that desire. This might mean concentrating on marketing that deemphasizes masculine “running and gunning” imagery and focuses more on meaningful interactions with community, or it could mean engaging college students majoring in traditional helping career areas (e.g., psychology, social work) as part of recruitment.

By expanding earlier measures of policing motives, we made important discoveries about the motives of women and officers of color. Women and officers of color rated legacy motives as more important than men and White officers. This category represents desires to affect future generations (e.g., be a role model, show people like me make good officers). Thus, recruitment strategies should appeal to those desires to influence the narrative around policing, improve things for future generations, and prove that it is not a career restricted to White men. Even the best recruitment brochure or social media campaign will not work if dismissed as “not for me.” Direct interactions can plant a seed, leaving potential recruits open to possibilities when later presented through brochures, ads, and social media campaigns. This may also mean starting earlier in life to counteract stereotypes that steer women in other directions (e.g., women’s law enforcement groups partnering with girl scout troops).

Entry concerns

As with motives, there were similarities in the top-reported concerns for men and women. Being able to prove myself, being able to do the job effectively, danger of the job, and

stressful nature of the job made the top five for both men and women. Overall, though, women reported stronger concerns, scoring significantly higher than men on 9 of the 13 individual concerns. This finding is consistent with broader motivational literature which suggests that women tend to report more future-oriented fears, especially in male-dominated domains (Greene & DeBacker, 2004; Knox et al., 2000; Lips, 2004).

Concerns with the largest reported gender differences ($d = 0.62-0.78$) were physical nature of the job, being taken seriously, and discrimination in the work environment. These findings align with previous research on precareer motives in which high school and college students have noted gender-related concerns associated with policing careers (Cambareri & Kuhns, 2018; Lord & Friday, 2003; Todak, 2017). In regression analyses, women rated acceptance/fit (i.e., being accepted by coworkers/community, being taken seriously, and discrimination) and demands (i.e., physical, dangerous, stressful nature, and fit with relationships) categories higher than men. Furthermore, officers of color reported more concerns about acceptance/fit (compared with White officers). Some concerns (e.g., acceptance) among women and officers of color could be partially explained by the visibility and isolation that comes from token status (Gustafson, 2008; Krimmel & Gormley, 2003; Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). Furthermore, people of color are sometimes seen as betraying their race by pursuing policing (Skolnick, 2008), potentially heightening concerns about acceptance from community members.

Concerns highlighted by women and officers of color must be considered by those trying to attract a diverse workforce. Agencies can work to reduce or eliminate real and perceived barriers. For example, research indicates that some physical requirements are responsible for eliminating women from the hiring pool, despite a lack of direct correlation to performance (Martin & Jurik, 2007; Schuck, 2014; Schulze, 2012). Fitness requirements could be modified or eliminated to be more inclusive, or support (e.g., freely available training/ workout programs) could be provided to help applicants succeed. Recruitment and marketing approaches need to move away from the White, hypermasculine images if we are going to

convince people that policing can be for them (Clinkinbeard et al., 2020; Todak, 2017). Combatting concerns requires multiple approaches, but the most important thing departments can do is to make discrimination, alienation, and other gender- and race-based issues less of a reality. Strategies that lead to real, systemic change in climate and equity will be more effective than any recruitment strategy or marketing plan.

Recruiters do not need to portray everything as easy or rosy. Instead, they should address concerns about equity and discrimination and tap into potential recruits' desire to change images of policing for future generations. Police departments might benefit from harnessing desires (e.g., inspiration, anger) similar to those that have encouraged women to run for office since the 2016 presidential election (Entman, 2018; Kurtzleben, 2018). As Todak (2017) stated, ". . . it is up to departments to harness the inherent drive in women to defeat stereotypes and demonstrate their competence in areas thought to be exclusively masculine" (p. 265). That said, it is also important to provide access to networks that will inspire and support female applicants, like women's groups or mentoring programs.

Other areas of consideration

years on the job was negatively associated with all categories of motives and concerns in the regression models. Because the finding was consistent across categories, we suggest that the perceived importance of all motives and concerns may have dissipated with time. The perceived strength of some of the motives and concerns likely weakens over time.

Furthermore, initial motives may be interpreted through the lens of experience, making them seem more or less important than they were previously. It is also possible that motives are slightly different for those that have been on the job several years versus those that are early in their career or those that choose to leave (i.e., we do not know whether those that are in their first few years will stick around). Although it was outside the scope of our research, future work should explore the association between motives and concerns and long-term retention.

Race was not our primary focus, but racial diversity is a critical component in building an effective police force. Although

our sample was larger than many, it was not of sufficient size to break down the analysis by various race/gender combinations (e.g., Black women⁷ compared with White women or White men). That said, it is important to note that race was a significant predictor of legacy and nature/perks motives and acceptance/fit concerns. We believe these categories represent what is referred to as balance in the motivational literature (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2011; Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Legacy (e.g., desire to be role models, show that people like me make good officers) and nature/perks (job security, ability to work on my own) motives may have helped officers counteract or overcome concerns around acceptance/fit (e.g., discrimination, acceptance by community and coworkers). For example, officers of color likely expect they will face challenges related to their race (e.g., discrimination, accusations of betrayal) when they pursue policing, but they may be more likely to endure them if they feel they have a secure job that allows them to contribute to an important purpose (e.g., a role model for future generations). Research should further explore the concept of balance and motives and fears within multiple race/gender combinations using large samples.

One final note is that paying special attention to how to attract more women will likely serve everyone better. It is noteworthy that job fit with relationships was a top-five fear for men, but not women. Family-friendly policies are often recommended to attract women to the field (Rabe-Hemp & Humiston, 2015; Schulze, 2010, 2011); however, such policies may also appeal to men. As gender roles continue to expand and more men take responsibility for childrearing, family-friendly policies tend to help everyone. When it comes to recruiting in a legitimacy crisis and changing workforce landscapes, departments need to rethink not only how they approach women but also how they approach every potential applicant.

Limitations

One of our goals was to add to the conceptualization of policing motives. Although we are not the first to examine motives, the literature is relatively sparse, it is primarily a

theoretical, and concepts are not well defined. Aside from Lester's (1983) motives, there has been no consistent approach to conceptualization and measurement but rather a collection of varied motives and, less often, concerns. Thus, our work is largely exploratory, although we have situated it within the broader social psychological framework on future-oriented thinking. More work is needed to improve upon and establish core measures of motives and barriers. We have provided initial evidence for latent factors surrounding career entry, and now additional research is necessary to refine and validate measures and improve fit.

Although our investigation employs the largest known sample comparing motives of male and female officers, the sample has its limitations. The officers in our sample were already employed as officers, meaning that they made it through the application, hiring, and training hoops to become officers. As half of our sample had been on the job at least 13 years, they also represent officers that had been retained through their first few years. Future research should compare people at various career stages (e.g., precareer, application, early career, late-career) with those that considered but never pursued and those that left to get a complete picture of motivation and how it might best inform recruitment.

Conclusion

There may have been a time when it was easy to recruit police officers, but that is no longer the case (Police Executive Research Forum, 2019). Understanding what draws people to the field and what turns them off can help agencies get creative with recruitment. We found popular notions of serving and protecting the community remain important motivations for men and women. We also identified less-obvious motives. The desire to leave a legacy and be a role model for others was particularly important for women and officers of color compared with men and White officers. Men and women both reported concerns around career entry, but these were more pronounced for women. Many concerns were related to issues of gender or stereotypes (e.g., physical nature, being taken seriously, discrimination), which is not surprising, given the

long history of inequity, harassment, and hegemonic masculinity in policing. To attract more women, departments need to consider multiple approaches for addressing concerns, including giving candidates opportunities to connect with officers, ask questions, and discuss concerns; providing opportunities for networking and support to help diverse candidates persist; thinking more broadly about recruitment imagery and target populations; and most importantly, making discrimination, alienation, and other gender- and race-based issues less of a reality in policing. Strategies that lead to real, systemic change in climate and equity will be more effective than any single recruitment strategy or marketing plan.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material is available in the online version of this article at <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/cjb>

Notes

1. The psychological literature on future-oriented thinking, specifically possible selves theory, typically refers to future-oriented concerns as “fears” (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which could be considered stronger than the way we operationalized concerns in our sample. Throughout the article, we use a few different terms but reserve “fear” to when we are referring to past or previous research and the more conservative term, “concerns” when referring to our research and sample.

2. The response rates varied by department though a majority responded for both departments (64% for the larger department; 96% for the smaller department). The larger response rate from the smaller department may, in part, be attributed to the fact that the survey was distributed via an online training

system, which sent multiple reminders (see survey administration).

3. The remaining 33.91% were detectives, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, deputy chiefs, chiefs, school resource officers, or training officers.
4. Officers could delete the survey from their training task list by clicking, not completing, the external survey link.
5. Missing data on these variables ranged from <1% to 15%. Patrol had the largest amount of missing. This variable was created from an open-ended rank question. The patrol variable was coded as missing when either it was not completed or the answer was illegible/uninterpretable.
6. The nonimputed regression tables can be found in the Online Supplemental Materials (Supplemental Tables 1–2).
7. Although 16% of our sample was non-White, non-White females only made up 2.6% ($n = 21$) of the sample.

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