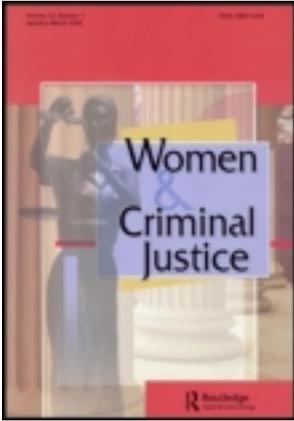


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The Depiction of Female Municipal Police Officers in the First Four Decades of the Core Cop Film Genre: “It’s a Man’s World”

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In a first-step cultivation theory analysis, this study examined the frequency and quality of female municipal police officers depicted in either the leading or joint leading role in the first 4 decades of the core cop film genre. An examination of 112 films released between 1971 and 2011 found that only 15 films portrayed female municipal police officers in either the leading or joint leading role. Findings revealed that key barriers regularly faced by female police officers, such as sexual harassment, gender harassment, and gender discrimination, were not addressed in the films. Female municipal police officers were, however, repeatedly depicted as having had intimate relationships with senior male police officers and/or portrayed as becoming officers because of being scarred emotionally or mentally by past traumatic events. According to cultivation theory, such depictions would cultivate a perceived social reality in which females only become police officers if they are emotionally scarred and intimacy with male colleagues is the norm. This study provides insight into the potential impact the lack and quality of existing portrayals have on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of female municipal police officers.

KEYWORDS *criminological cultivation, cultivation, female, film, law enforcement, perception, police, recruitment, retention, unified film population identification methodology*

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INTRODUCTION

The extent to which media influences the acceptance of female municipal police officers by fellow law enforcement personnel and the general public has been virtually unexplored. In addition, the extent to which media influences females to choose a career in law enforcement is also unclear. This may be because of a number of factors, not the least of which is the laborious nature of conducting analyses of large blocks of media content. Furthermore, even if one did conduct such an analysis in the past, the findings would most likely have faced scrutiny based on the speculative accuracy of the samples and/or populations analyzed. Moreover, what significance could such findings have in the real world? After all, the units of analysis are simply caricatures of police officers. In this study the issue of speculative samples and/or populations is addressed through the utilization of the unified film population identification methodology (UFPIM), a methodology specifically designed to isolate large film populations. Furthermore, the role mediated caricatures of female municipal police officers may play is addressed by exploring the applicability of cultivation theory, which postulates that a diet of repeated imagery or messages through the media impacts perceptions of social reality.

Media studies by academics address issues such as antisocial and pro-social effects of specific media content, uses and gratifications, agenda setting by the media, and the cultivation of perceptions of social reality (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). It is the cultivation of perceptions of social reality that is addressed in this article. The findings of the present study of female municipal police officer depictions represent the first step of the cultivation analysis process, which involves the analysis of large blocks of media content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Based on their examination of depictions of Latinos in prime-time television, Mastro and Behm-Morawitz (2005) stated, "Although effects cannot be determined from content, such data provide insights into the potential influence of consumption on consumers when viewed from the perspectives of cultivation theory" (p. 110). Similarly, in this study the findings point to what may prove to be a significant variable in future studies of recruitment, fellow officer acceptance, and consequent retention of female municipal police officers. Given the findings of this study, we point to a need to extend the application of cultivation analysis to criminal justice majors and criminal justice professionals, with particular emphasis on those individuals seeking employment with, or actively employed by, law enforcement agencies.

FEMALE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

A Brief History

The first known female presence to work on behalf of the U.S. criminal justice system was the Quaker "prison matron" volunteers of the 1820s,

who provided secular training and care for females incarcerated at that time (Alpert, Dunham, & Stroshine, 2006). It was not until 1905 that the first female, Lola Baldwin, was hired onto the Portland, Oregon, Police Bureau (Harrington, 2006) and 1910 that Los Angeles hired the first woman given the power to arrest, Alice Stebbins Wells (Schulz, 1993). Following these advancements, it was nearly 60 years before two female officers working in the Indianapolis Police Department were "assigned to patrol on an equal status with their male counterparts" (Woolsey, 2010, p. 1). These women were pioneers in the field, as it was not until the early 1970s that women and other racial minority officers were represented in substantial numbers on police forces across the nation (Alpert et al., 2006). This growth in racial minority and female officers was due in large part to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and was in direct relation to the 1972 addition of Title VII to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Title VII, which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, gender, color, religion, and national origin in almost every aspect of employment, including but not limited to recruitment, hiring, wages, assignments, promotions, and benefits, opened the doors of law enforcement to all minority groups, including women (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2007).

Although Title VII prohibited overt discrimination in hiring practices and affirmative action regulations required the recruitment of minority officers, including women, like other minority groups women have had a difficult time becoming an accepted part of the law enforcement community. Whereas racial minorities continue to face problems of covert racial discrimination when attempting to assimilate into an occupation of predominantly White males, it is covert gender discrimination and gender ideology that continues to impede women from attaining prosperous law enforcement careers. The most recent statistics indicate that women account for only about 12% of all law enforcement officers in the United States (Archbold, Hassell, & Stichman, 2010) while composing slightly more than half of the general population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, women of racial minority groups who aspire to become law enforcement officers have had to overcome a double disadvantage: covert racial and gender discrimination. In fact, in 2002 it was found that women of color accounted for only 4.8% of the 12.7% of female officers employed by large municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies (Lonsway et al., 2002). Lonsway and colleagues (2002) further found that women of color are almost nonexistent in small and rural agencies, accounting for only 1.2% of officers. Although female law enforcement officers have made great strides over the past century, they remain vastly underrepresented. In this article we suggest that many of the historical barriers faced by female police officers have often been rooted in misconceptions, many of which are arguably perpetuated and/or maintained because of mediated depictions of female police officers still today. This overall lack of female representation, even today, across law

enforcement agencies nationwide is thought to be due to a number of barriers female officers continue to face.

Barriers to Female Law Enforcement Officers

Women seeking to join the law enforcement community face many barriers that oftentimes encumber them from achieving successful law enforcement careers (Felkenes & Schroedel, 1993; Lonsway, 2007; Lonsway et al., 2002; Pogrebin, Dodge, & Chatman, 2000; Schroedel, Frisch, Hallamore, Peterson, & Vanderhorst, 1996; Seklecki & Paynich, 2007; Zhao, Herbst, & Lovrich, 2001). Based on a national survey of female police officers ($N = 531$), Seklecki and Paynich (2007) found that although respondents generally felt equally as capable as their male counterparts, a significant percentage indicated a work environment that remains hostile to females employed in law enforcement. Theoretical explanations used to explain the hostility toward and the oppression of female police officers include the male peer support model (Franklin, 2007) and the generally masculine organizational culture found within law enforcement agencies (Kingshott, 2009). Research based on these explanations shows that a more feminist orientation, particularly related to leadership, would benefit law enforcement agencies and the female officers employed within.

Specific barriers faced by female police officers include sexual harassment, gender harassment, and gender discrimination, including pregnancy discrimination, which all lead to hostile work environments for women. Sexual harassment may include unwanted sexual advances by coworkers or comments of a sexual nature, whereas gender harassment and discrimination may include negative remarks made about females in general, perhaps referring to weakness or an inability to perform certain tasks, specifically physical tasks, like a man. Gossett and Williams (1998) found that although the female officers in their study felt like progress had been made in lessening negative reactions to females in law enforcement, they still perceived gender discrimination from fellow officers, including superiors, and the communities that they served. More recently, Lonsway (2007) found that such attitudes remain the most common barrier female officers have to overcome. These obstacles begin at the recruitment and hiring phase and may impact a hired female officer throughout her career.

HIRING AND TRAINING

Although agencies are increasing the recruitment of female applicants, especially on college campuses, it is oftentimes difficult for women to overcome the pre-employment physical testing required for most law enforcement agencies. Physical agility and strength testing are used as a way to screen out weak candidates, and historically it has been women

applicants who have been disproportionately screened out through the hiring process (Peak, 2006). In their study of municipal policing hiring practices throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Sass and Troyer (1999) found that the hiring of female applicants was inversely related to the percentage of males already employed by the department and that the higher the proportion of male officers, the more likely the agency was to employ physical fitness testing, known to be a possible impediment for women recruits. Lonsway (2001) indicated that policing is dominated by a "warrior image" of a muscular and strong male officer who uses physical traits to solve crimes and handle dangerous situations. Because they do not fit this stereotype, women are thought to be less capable than their male counterparts. However, as we discuss later, women officers are valued for their ability to use empathy, intelligence, and conversation instead of physical strength and violence to diffuse dangerous situations.

Once through the hiring process, women continue to face discriminatory practices during academy and field training operations. It is important that agencies integrate this training and provide strong female mentors and role models for newly hired women so as to lessen the effects of possible discrimination and harassment. As for assignments, women officers are oftentimes tasked with social service, or traditionally female, roles or are assigned to special investigation units, including child abuse, sex crimes, and school programs, but precluded from traditionally male roles such as SWAT team member, undercover officer, and homicide detective (Peak, 2006).

MERIT AND PROMOTION

Women are also often overlooked for promotions and raises. This could be because of the perception that females cannot perform as well as male officers. This is especially true when it comes to women who have children, as they may be thought of as preoccupied or otherwise distracted by family life and may be perceived as somehow less devoted to their career than male officers.

Lonsway and colleagues (2002) found that, of the agencies they surveyed, 55.9% of the large agencies and 97.4% of the small agencies had no women in top command positions and that a majority (87.9%) of the large agencies had no women of color among their highest ranks. Studies have examined the plight of specifically Black and Hispanic female officers in policing, finding patterns of both racial and gender discrimination perpetrated by fellow officers and supervisors at all phases of their careers, including hiring and promotion (Felkenes & Schroedel, 1993; Martin, 1994; Pogrebin et al., 2000; Schroedel et al., 1996; Zhao et al., 2001). This goes to show that although women may be hired more often than before, they very seldom get promoted to policymaking and supervisory positions.

Although these barriers remain, findings from more recent research have been positive for female law enforcement officers. For example, using

Hall's Professionalism Scale, Carlan and McMullan (2009) compared male police officer respondents to female police officer respondents ($N=1,085$; females, $n=89$) in relation to professionalism, stress, and job satisfaction. Based on their findings, Carlan and McMullan contended that there are not significant differences between male and female officers. Furthermore, the authors discussed the resiliency and psychological fortitude shown by the female officers in their sample. In addition, following her earlier research, Lonsway (2007) posed the question, Are we there yet? This was in reference to the progress that had been made breaking down the barriers for females in law enforcement. Her findings suggested that despite the fact that women continue to constitute a small percentage of officers and that barriers do remain, there has in fact been progress made in bettering the working environment for females employed in law enforcement.

The studies discussed in this section suggest that although strengths of women in law enforcement are recognized, female officers continue to face the same barriers they did decades ago. Whether it is perceptions of physical strength, sexual harassment, or covert discrimination based on pregnancy or other gendered experiences, barriers remain to the recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of female officers. Overcoming these barriers is essential for an increased presence of women among the ranks of law enforcement which, as we discuss in the following section, is advantageous for law enforcement agencies.

Advantages to Hiring Female Law Enforcement

Over time, it has come to be recognized that there are many advantages to hiring female law enforcement officers (Lonsway, Moore, Harrington, Smeal, & Spillar, 2003). For one thing, women have been proven to be just as competent, if not better at some roles, than their male counterparts (Carlan & McMullan, 2009; Lonsway et al., 2003). Next, female officers have been found to be less likely than male officers to use excessive force when handling suspects (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2007). This is a positive attribute for agencies looking to lessen their liability and litigation concerns. Although this is the case, female officers are not meek when it comes to confrontation. For example, Paoline and Terrill (2004) found that women in law enforcement are not reluctant to utilize verbal and physical coercion with suspects when necessary.

Lonsway and colleagues (2003) further pointed out that women officers often use a community-oriented style of policing. Community-oriented policing has been praised for improving relationships, lessening tension that may exist between the police and the community that they serve (Correia, 2000; Peak & Glensor, 2002). It has been estimated that more than 40% of violent crime calls to the police involve family and domestic disputes (Strandberg, 1998). Lonsway and colleagues (2003) noted that another advantage to hiring female officers is that they have been found to be better able to respond to

and diffuse domestic and family violence incidents as well as better able to assist victims, as the majority of domestic violence victims are also female. Finally, increasing the number of women in a department will serve to decrease sexual harassment and gender discrimination and bring about valuable changes in policy that impact all officers, male and female. These advantages impact not only law enforcement agencies but the community as well and should be recognized by law enforcement administrators.

In order to not only recruit but also retain female officers, agencies must acknowledge the importance of having female mentors and role models at all levels of the agency. Peak (2006) noted that law enforcement administrators need to be aware of gender integration, the use of female mentors, objectivity in hiring and promotion practices, and other issues related to women officers, such as pregnancy and child care. If these issues are given increased attention, it is likely that the percentage of women at all levels of law enforcement will increase and be retained over time.

Perceptions of Female Officers

Perceptions of female officers impact not only the way in which females working in law enforcement are treated but also the possibility that a woman will choose law enforcement over other career paths. Overall, studies have shown that the general public feels positively about females involved in law enforcement. Bloch and Anderson (1974) found that both male and female Washington, DC residents surveyed generally supported female involvement in law enforcement and felt that females performed law enforcement duties just as well as male officers. Leger (1997) found that respondents were accepting of women in law enforcement positions and felt that females are effective in performing law enforcement duties, including those involving violent encounters and physical ability. Furthermore, Leger found that her sample gave favorable responses with regard to females in administrative and supervisory positions.

Research on perceptions of females in law enforcement has also focused on student communities. Koenig (1978) found that although female students were more supportive, most students had favorable opinions of females in law enforcement. In their study of undergraduate students, however, Austin and Hummer (1999) found that female students, regardless of major, were more accepting of females in law enforcement than male students, including males majoring in criminal justice. What is interesting is that they also found that if the respondent had a relative who worked in law enforcement, he or she was less supportive of females working in the field. Using a sample of 178 undergraduate students, Haba, Sarver, Dobbs, and Sarver (2009) found that criminal justice majors and those students with a stronger feminist orientation were significantly more likely to express support for females working in law enforcement.

Even with these findings, studies such as Kurtz, Linnemann, and Williams (2012) found that law enforcement officers in three midwestern police departments still expected female officers, despite the female officers' preference and skill sets, to tend to children, delinquents, and female victims, much like the police matrons of old. Arguably such results are not surprising if one considers the findings of Rabe-Hemp and Beichner's (2011) study of U.S. print advertisements of police officers in *Police Chief* magazine between 1996 and 2006. Rabe-Hemp and Beichner stated that women were "under-represented and socially excluded from the imagery of crime-fighting; rather, they are portrayed as being in lower ranks, stereotypically as caretakers and nurturers" (p. 63). Although generally research suggests that there exists support for females in law enforcement among undergraduate students, female students may be impacted by the lack of portrayals of women police officers in addition to the hostility facing women interested in a law enforcement career. For example, based on a survey of 256 undergraduate criminal justice students, Yim (2009) found that female criminal justice undergraduates in her sample were significantly less likely to want a career in law enforcement than male criminal justice undergraduates. Although admittedly not a comprehensive explanation for this lack of interest, Yim's findings did indicate that females felt significantly less competent in their ability to be a police officer compared to their male counterparts.

It is well documented that men have traditionally been disproportionately represented in many career fields and that in the past three to four decades female representation has increased greatly. However, as Shelley, Morabito, and Tobin-Gurley (2011) pointed out, there have not been equal strides when it comes to policing. They also pointed out that the current literature does not thoroughly address advancement barriers or retention issues faced by female police officers. The present article seeks to address these issues and others through the implementation of a first-step cultivation theory analysis, a method relatively unexplored by the field of criminology and criminal justice studies to date. In order to better understand the applicability of cultivation theory to the field of criminology and criminal justice, as well as the unique contribution of the current study, the next section provides a brief review of cultivation theory history, traditional mediums, and topics of analysis.

CULTIVATION THEORY

Cultivation theorists maintain that "viewing television gradually leads to adoption of beliefs about the nature of the social world that conform to the stereotyped and selective view of reality portrayed in a systematic way on television" (Woo & Dominick, 2003, p. 110). More specifically, they theorize that there is a cumulative consequence of being exposed to long-term

repetitive messages delivered through television or other media outlets. Developed by George Gerbner in the 1970s, cultivation analysis consists of two discrete steps. In Step 1, large blocks of media content are analyzed to identify the messages delivered by the media source. Cultivation theorists maintain that these messages denote steady patterns in the depiction of specific issues, policies, and topics, many of which are at odds with real-world manifestations (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Utilizing the findings from Step 1, Step 2 entails the development of questions designed to detect a cultivation effect (see Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, for more details). The current study signifies the first step toward future cultivation analyses of female recruits', police officers', and the general public's perceptions of female municipal police officers.

A number of analyses of cultivation studies (see Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993) have determined that the research, as a whole, reveals consistent television viewing effects on perceptions of social reality (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Furthermore, a large number of diverse issues have been examined utilizing cultivation analyses, including topics such as authoritarianism, cultural values, fear of crime, juvenile crime, representations of Blacks and Latinos, violence, and White police officers, among others (F. T. Wilson, Longmire, & Swymeler, 2009). Cultivation theory has also been used to examine an array of television viewing subjects, such as international college students, Israeli students, Chinese college students, and elderly viewers, among others (F. T. Wilson et al., 2009).

Although still debated today, a large portion of recent studies have produced findings that continue to support cultivation theory to varying degrees (see J. Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Diefenbach & West, 2001; Dixon, 2007; Gentles & Harrison, 2006; Goidel, Freeman, & Procopio, 2006; Gutschoven & Van den Bulck, 2005; Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, & Page, 2005; Hetsroni & Tukachinsky, 2006; Nabi & Sullivan, 2001; Reeber & Chang, 2000; Vergeer, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2000; B. J. Wilson, Martins, & Marske, 2005; Woo & Dominick, 2003; Zhang & Harwood, 2002). Furthermore, early criticisms of cultivation theory have been dispelled by being proven faulty (see Gutschoven & Van den Bulck, 2005) or disproved in more recent studies that have addressed and/or controlled for the issues in question (F. T. Wilson et al., 2009).

Although television has served as the principal medium, cultivation theorists have examined mediums such as newspapers (Vergeer et al., 2000) and video games (Williams, 2006) in recent years. This demonstrates not only that the issues and type of viewers examined have expanded since Gerbner's first inception of the theory but that the mediums explored have moved beyond just television programming (F. T. Wilson et al., 2009; F. T. Wilson & Henderson, 2014). Hendriks (2002) notes, "Gerbner formulated his theory in the late 1960s when three major networks and a public broadcast service dominated television. The invasion of cable and satellite has likely

altered the accuracy of the assumption that all television content is equal” (p. 112). Studies have shown that the effects of cultivation increase in strength when narrow genres of programming are watched (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). Therefore, the findings presented here continue the aforementioned expansion of mediums and analyses of specific genre content. Given that cultivation theory hypothesizes a cumulative impact on a viewer’s perceptions due to long-term exposure to repetitive messages, the present study sought to understand what, if any, repeated messages are conveyed regarding female municipal police officers. Particular attention was given to how often key issues such as sexual harassment, gender harassment, and gender discrimination faced by real-world female police officers are portrayed in the core cop film genre.

CORE COP FILM GENRE

Rafter (2000) pointed out that, prior to the late 1960s, police officers were depicted as foolish patrolmen (keystone cops), tough federal agents, or private investigators. It was during the 1950s and 1960s that film audiences became increasingly attracted to urban police officer depictions while Westerns and noir films lost their appeal. This was in part the result of the public’s call for the police officer to be better educated (Rafter, 2000). One saw a rise in urban disorder and street crime during the 1970s that led to the public supporting the law-and-order perspective (Rafter, 2000). The increasing belief that liberal laws were handicapping police officers from catching criminals created an atmosphere that was amenable to the transition of the traditional western gunslinger to an urban police setting (Rafter, 2000). This transition point is readily marked by the release of *Dirty Harry* (Daley & Siegel, 1971) in 1971, thereby establishing the beginning of what is now known as the cop film genre (Rafter, 2000). The traditional cop film genre would begin to fragment into subgenres in the 1980s and 1990s with the development of buddy cop films, cop comedy films, corrupt cop films, and rogue cop films, among others (Rafter, 2000). However, as F. T. Wilson (2009) pointed out, many of the original defining characteristics of cop films endured, and it is this group of films that this study refers to as the *core cop film genre*.

METHODOLOGY

Identifying the Study Population

The study of social science issues in film has been bound, for the most part, to qualitative observation techniques and/or nonprobability sampling techniques. In an examination of 94 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1996 and 2006 and focusing on social science issues in theatrically

released films, F. T. Wilson (2009) found only one study that attempted to utilize probability sampling. F. T. Wilson (2009) suggested that the lack of probability sampling has been due to the difficult task of identifying clear film populations from which samples can be drawn. Therefore, F. T. Wilson (2009) developed the UFPIM in an effort to alleviate this problem. The UFPIM was designed to help film researchers who wish to utilize probability sampling techniques to make a statistical inference regarding their findings or simply to establish a replicable film population (F. T. Wilson, 2009).

The UFPIM utilizes the Internet Movie Database Power Search (IMDbPS) as part of its three-phase process of identifying specific film populations (for further details, see F. T. Wilson, 2006, 2009). In Phase I of the UFPIM, a definition is developed for the film population to be analyzed based on the relevant literature surrounding the film population in question. In Phase II, the IMDbPS is utilized to identify a base film list. This list is developed by utilizing, at minimum, the IMDbPS search criteria of key words in the movie plot summaries, movie genre (the primary genre with which the IMDbPS associates a film), year (the year or series of years in which a film was released), and key words (for further details, see F. T. Wilson, 2006, 2009). Phase III constitutes a two-stage process, the first of which involves the development of an identification coding sheet designed to further isolate those films that meet the definitional parameters established in Phase I. The second stage involves the examination of plot summaries for all of the films identified in Phase II utilizing the aforementioned coding sheet. In the second stage of Phase III, plot summaries from at least two independent sources, one being the IMDb, are examined to help safeguard the accuracy of the final population. In this study, the UFPIM was used to identify the core cop film population to be examined.

In Phase I of the UFPIM, the first four decades of the core cop film genre were conceptualized as films (a) released in theaters between 1971 and 2011; (b) that take place in the United States; (c) in which one or more actor(s) play the hero, who is an active urban police officer of traditional ranks; (d) in which the hero is either acting alone or acting with a partner in a street cop/detective role; (e) set in the past or present that appears to be reality based. At the end of Phase II, a base film list of more than 500 films was produced. In the first stage of Phase III, the core cop film identification coding sheet was developed. In the second stage of Phase III, more than 1,000 plot summaries from both the IMDb and Amazon.com were evaluated using the core cop film identification coding sheet, resulting in a final population of 130 films.

During the examination process, several of the films were subsequently excluded for a variety of reasons. Eight films could not be located and were determined to be out of production. The three films *Electra Glide in Blue* (Guercio, 1973), *The Indian Runner* (Philips & Penn, 1991), and *Partners in Crime* (Bergman, Lusting, Harris, & Warren, 2000) were excluded because the films involved police officers who were not working in a municipal

capacity. In addition, two films were excluded because they did not fit into one of the required genre categories. Upon viewing, it was determined that the film *The Black Marble* (Capra, Wambaugh, & Becker, 1980) was a comedy and the film *God Told Me To* (Cohen, 1976) fell more appropriately into the horror film genre. The film *The Onion Field* (Coblenz, Wambaugh, & Becker, 1979), although dealing with the shooting of police officers, primarily focused on the justice system rather than law enforcement. The films *Unstoppable* (Jacobson, Wedaa, & Carson, 2004) and *Gone Baby Gone* (Ladd, Rissner, Bailey, & Affleck, 2007) were excluded because the leading heroic characters were not law enforcement officers. Lastly, the films *Wild Things* (Liber, Jones, Peters, & McNaughton, 1998) and *Cement* (Paul, Pasdar, & Monjo, 1998) both were excluded due to the fact that the police were not portrayed as heroes in any way. Therefore, due to the fact that eight films could not be located and an additional ten films were excluded for various reasons, the final population for the first four decades of the core cop film genre totaled 112 films. Although F. T. Wilson (2009) presented the UFPIM as a tool by which researchers can now identify an entire population of films and subsequently draw samples, in this study the entire core cop film genre population was examined.

Analysis

In this study, content analysis was used as a collection device for descriptor variables (i.e., race and gender of police officers), and qualitative analysis was used to examine scenes in which female municipal police officers were presented. Content analysis can be defined in numerous ways. As Wimmer and Dominick (2003) described it,

Walizer and Wiener (1978) define it as any systematic procedure devised to examine the context of recorded information; Krippendorff (1980) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their context. Kerlinger's (2000) definition is fairly typical: Content analysis communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. (pp. 140–141)

Schutt (2004) defined *content analysis* as a research method for systematically analyzing and making inferences from text.

For this study, we adhered to Berg's (2001) argument that "content analysis can be effective in a qualitative analysis—that "counts" of textual elements merely provide a means of identifying, organizing, indexing, and retrieving data" (p. 242). Rather than using content analysis as a reductionistic positivistic tool, we used it as a tool to help understand the patterns of police depictions in core cop films. Therefore, the 112 films represented the units of analysis in the present exploratory descriptive analysis of female police officer depictions.

Each of the 112 films was examined to determine both the quantity and quality of female police officer depictions. Specifically, films were viewed and film jackets were referenced in order to determine whether a film portrayed a city/municipal female police officer in the leading or joint leading role. Specifically, *leading role* was defined as top billing both in the list of credits on the film jacket and in the context of the film when viewed. *Joint leading roles* included those instances in which the actress portraying the female police officer received secondary billing but was portrayed or even described as a costar in the film.

Detailed notes were taken in regard to how the female police officers were portrayed based on both the literature associated with real-world police officers and independent observational notes. Specifically, using the literature as a base, we attempted to identify which of the aforementioned barriers, including sexual harassment, gender harassment, and gender discrimination, all of which are known to lead to hostile work environments for women, were depicted in the films. *Sexual harassment* was loosely defined as including unwanted sexual advances by coworkers or comments of a sexual nature. *Gender harassment* and *discrimination* were defined to include negative remarks made about females in general, including referring to weakness or an inability to perform certain tasks, specifically physical tasks, like a man. In addition, although it was not initially identified or defined as an issue to be observed upon viewing the films, a pattern of portraying female police officers with what can best be described as a variety of mental health or emotional issues became apparent. So although it was not an anticipated issue for observation before beginning this study, we felt that the issue deserved to be noted. Therefore, this study is different from prominent studies of female police officer portrayals in the past (i.e., Hale, 1998) in that this study focused directly on portrayals of city/municipal female police officers in lead roles.

FINDINGS

In the first four decades of the core cop film genre, 15 of the 112 films examined were identified as portraying a woman in either a sole or a joint leading police officer character role (see Table 1). The first two decades (1970s and 1980s) produced only three of these films: *The Enforcer* in 1976 (Daley & Fargo, 1976) followed 11 years later by the films *Under Cover* (Golan, Globus, & Stockwell, 1987) and *Fatal Beauty* (Kroll & Holland, 1987) in 1987. The film *The Enforcer*, the third of five *Dirty Harry* films, represents the only film that addresses directly the aforementioned barriers (physical abilities and sexual/gender harassment) facing female police officers from both fellow officers and promotion boards. This differentiates *The Enforcer* from the remaining 14 films, which portray female officers who have

TABLE 1 Core Cop Films Depicting Female Police Officers in Lead or Joint Lead Roles by Year of Release

Core cop film	Year of release	Lead role	Joint lead
<i>The Enforcer</i>	1976		X
<i>Fatal Beauty</i>	1987	X	
<i>Under Cover</i>	1987		X
<i>Blue Steel</i>	1990	X	
<i>A Stranger Among Us</i>	1992	X	
<i>Lethal Weapon 3</i>	1992		X
<i>Striking Distance</i>	1993		X
<i>Copycat</i>	1995	X	
<i>Bodily Harm</i>	1995	X	
<i>Lethal Weapon 4</i>	1998		X
<i>Oxygen</i>	1999	X	
<i>The Bone Collector</i>	1999		X
<i>Angel Eyes</i>	2001	X	
<i>Dragon and the Hawk</i>	2001	X	
<i>Suitable for Murder</i>	2008		X

apparently already overcome some of these barriers. *The Enforcer* is the only film that directly addresses concerns or beliefs as to whether or not female police officers can handle police work, both physically and/or emotionally. Inspector Kate Moore, played by Tyne Daly, ultimately proves herself to the male chauvinist Inspector Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) by saving Callahan's life on two separate occasions: once by shooting a suspect who is about to shoot Callahan and again by getting shot and dying while saving Callahan.

In only one of these films, *Fatal Beauty* (1987), is the female police officer portrayed as the sole police officer leading character. *Fatal Beauty* also represents the only film in the first four decades of the core cop film genre in which the sole or joint police officer leading character is an African American female. Whoopi Goldberg, who plays undercover police detective Rita Rizzoli, portrays a female whom the male police officers fear, given her hypermasculine nature and willingness to place herself and others in harm's way. Despite her demeanor, she still faces sexually harassing comments from fellow officers, which are quickly shot down through her immediate responses. Rizzoli is portrayed as becoming a drug detective and having a special place in her heart for drug addicts. It is revealed in the film that, growing up, she came from what she describes as a family of beautiful people who always reminded her she was ugly. This situation led to her dating someone, becoming pregnant, and having a child at the age of 14. After discovering that the father only went out with her on a dare, she becomes further traumatized and turns to drugs. Ultimately, when she returns from making a drug run one day, she finds that her daughter has found her stash and died as a result. As we demonstrate later, this film arguably starts a trend of leading female police officer characters with damaged pasts or other

personal issues that, in many cases, lead them to police work. The remaining 80% ($n = 12$) of those films in which a female police officer is portrayed as either the sole or joint lead character were released after the year 1990. Therefore, there are few portrayals of female police officers as leading characters during the first 19 years of the core cop film genre.

Even after 1990, only 58% ($n = 7$) of the remaining 12 films portray a female as the sole leading police officer character. These films include *Blue Steel* (Pressman, Stone, & Bigelow, 1990), *A Stranger Among Us* (Golin, Sighvatsson, Rosenman, & Lumet, 1992), *Bodily Harm* (Curtis & Lemmo, 1995), *Copycat* (Milchan, Tarlov, & Amiel, 1995), *Oxygen* (Stern & Shepard, 1999), *Dragon and the Hawk* (Cypser & Grove, 2001), and *Angel Eyes* (Canton, Samaha, & Mankoki, 2001). In five out of the seven films (*Blue Steel*, *A Stranger Among Us*, *Bodily Harm*, *Copycat*, and *Oxygen*), the female lead character is portrayed as having had a romantic relationship. Romantic relationships constituted having dated or married a fellow police officer, most of whom were portrayed as being or having been the female's senior officer. This is a distinct change from the three films produced prior to 1990, in which no romantic relationships are portrayed. Sexual harassment is only clearly portrayed in two of the seven films, *A Stranger Among Us* and *Angel Eyes*, and in both films the harassment is in the form of verbal comments from both fellow officers and the general public. Both Jennifer Lopez as Officer Sharron Pogue in *Angel Eyes* and Melanie Griffith as Detective Emily Eden in *A Stranger Among Us* portray female officers who seemingly accept the harassment as part of the job and oftentimes respond with derogatory comments themselves. It is interesting that not one of the seven portrayals depict the female officer as lacking in physical agility or strength. Lastly, at least five of the films depict the leading female character as having varying degrees of personal issues. In *A Stranger Among Us*, Melanie Griffith's character is portrayed as taking unnecessary risks in the field, ultimately connected to her desire to earn her retired police officer father's love and support. Similarly, Jennifer Lopez (*Angel Eyes*) portrays a character who became a police officer to protect people, a feeling that is revealed to be rooted in her childhood when she watched her father beat her mother. A similar scenario is depicted in the film *Blue Steel*, in which Jamie Lee Curtis portrays rookie police officer Megan Turner. During the film, Turner states that she has always wanted to be a police officer, but the storyline arguably could lead one to believe that her career path may have been strongly influenced by watching her father verbally and physically abuse her mother. In addition, Maura Tierney (*Oxygen*) portrays a female police officer who is addicted to being abused by strangers in her private life. She is portrayed as begging for permission to see and subsequently going to an unidentified individual who provides her with alcohol and who burns her with cigarettes.

Of the remaining 42% ($n = 5$) of the 12 films released after 1990, each portrays a female in a joint leading role with a White male police officer. These five films are *Striking Distance* (Milchan, Thomopoulos, Lowry, &

Herrington, 1993), *Lethal Weapon 3* (Donner, Silver, & Donner, 1992), *Lethal Weapon 4* (Silver, Donner, & Donner, 1998), *The Bone Collector* (Bregman, Stroller, Bregman, & Noyce, 1999), and *Suitable for Murder* (Nagy, Watkins, & Watkins, 2008). In both *Lethal Weapon 3* and *Lethal Weapon 4* Rene Russo plays Internal Affairs Detective Lorna Cole, sharing lead status with Mel Gibson (Martin Riggs) and Danny Glover (Roger Murtaugh). Cole is portrayed as a female equivalent of the highly volatile Riggs character, both of whom are thrill-seeking police officers who oftentimes place themselves in situations of mortal danger that most police officers would never consider. Ultimately, Cole and Riggs become romantically involved and get married. In the three remaining films, *Striking Distance*, *The Bone Collector*, and *Suitable for Murder*, Sarah Jessica Parker (*Striking Distance*), Angelina Jolie (*The Bone Collector*), and Ali Faulkner (*Suitable for Murder*) portray rookie female police officers under the tutelage of senior male police officers, and in all three films the female officers become romantically involved with their male counterparts. However, at least one of these characters is not without some sort of commitment issue. In *The Bone Collector*, Jolie's character is portrayed initially as having commitment issues with a male partner whom, it is insinuated, she uses for sex only. In addition, in the five films, the only distinct portrayal of harassment of any sort, also verbal in nature, occurs in *The Bone Collector* when Officer Amelia Donaghy, portrayed by Angelina Jolie, is demeaned and dismissed by senior White police detectives for doing her job correctly.

CONCLUSION

Despite the sheer scarcity of core cop films that portray female municipal police officers in lead or joint leading roles, the 15 portrayals described here reveal three distinct trends. First, there is an apparent reliance or past reliance on older and/or senior male police officers, given that 7 out of the 12 films produced after 1990 involve female officers having intimate relationships with such officers. This number increases to 9 of 12 films if one includes *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992) and *Lethal Weapon 4* (1998), in which intimate relations exist but are between officers of nearly the same age and rank. Second, one sees 8 of the 12 films produced after 1990 portraying female police officers as being emotionally or mentally scarred, insinuating that females who become police officers have something wrong with them. Third, many of the known barriers that female police officers face in the real world either are not addressed (e.g., physical agility/strength, denial of promotions, female police officers who are mothers, among others) or are downplayed (i.e., sexual harassment) and depicted as something that should just be accepted as part of the job.

This study is not without its limitations. One of the limitations of this study, and of most studies of film, is that some films were missed. Upon

completion of this study we realized that we had missed at least one film that met the parameters of the core cop film genre definition and contained a female municipal police officer in the leading character role: *Murder by Numbers* (Crystal, Hoffman, & Schroeder, 2002). If this film had been included, it would have only served to further substantiate the findings. In this film, Cassie Mayweather, played by Sandra Bullock, has a reputation of sleeping with her partners and then pushing them away because of apparent commitment issues. Her nicknames among her male counterparts are "Hyena" (because the female has a pseudo-penis) and "Scorpion" (because of her stinging comments). Similar to the other female municipal police officers depicted, she too became a police officer because traumatic events in her past left her scarred emotionally. Specifically, she was beaten by an abusive spouse and, when she attempted to leave, her husband stabbed her 17 times and dumped her body on a country road. She points out that she is scarred in the sense that she sees him in every case and every guy she dates. When asked by her partner if she ever received help for the trauma she states, "Yeah, I became a cop." So here again is a female municipal police officer being depicted as regularly sleeping with colleagues and becoming a police officer because of being emotionally scarred from past traumatic events.

Another limitation of this study is that, by focusing only on films in which the leading or joint leading character is a municipal police officer, we may have excluded some notable depictions. An example of this would be the film *Fargo* (Coen & Coen, 1996), which contains the depiction of a female municipal police officer character. This film was excluded due to the fact that the character of Officer Marge Gunderson (Francis McDormand) is technically considered a supporting role. The leading role in this film is actually Jerry Lundegaard (William H. Macy), who is arguably overlooked because of the strong and/or more relatable performance by Francis McDormand. The character of Officer Marge Gunderson does not appear in the film for the first 33 minutes and only appears for a total of 34 minutes of the 98-minute film. This said, future researchers may want to expand the scope of roles examined beyond that of lead or joint lead character in order to capture significant supporting character depictions such as this one.

So although it is possible that some films escaped our analysis, it is our belief that we have examined a large enough portion of core cop films released between 1971 and 2011 that we can state that there are specific trends in the characterization of female municipal police officers. According to cultivation theory, such depictions would cultivate a perceived social reality in which females only become police officers if they are scarred and intimacy with male colleagues is the norm. Therefore, given the findings of this study in conjunction with the issues faced by female police officers in today's society, additional analysis is justified, in regard to both further content analyses of large media blocks to determine whether the findings of this study are consistent and the progression to the second step of cultivation analysis.

As was noted earlier, cultivation analyses have examined a wide variety of issues, television viewer types, and genres while at the same time increasing their specificity in these categories. Such studies have also expanded to other media formats. Given the ever-expanding mediums through which films can be accessed (e.g., movie rentals, television programming, on-demand rentals, the Internet, cell phones), it is our contention that the impact of theatrically released films is no longer relegated to the movie theater. In fact, we argue that, upon leaving theaters, theatrically released films quickly become integrated into television programming and are arguably becoming more influential. It is therefore time for specific analysis of films to occur. This said, future researchers should not ignore the potential impact of standard television programming (DeTardo-Bora, 2009) and its role in the cultivation of female municipal police officers. Many current primetime portrayals of female police officers, such as Detective Kate Becket from the television show *Castle* (Marlowe, 2009–2013), who became a police officer because her mother was murdered, and Detective Olivia Benson of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (Wolf, 1999–present), who became a police officer because she was the child of a rape, suggest that many of the findings identified in this study will most likely be found in examinations of regular television programming.

Furthermore, there has been little, if any, examination of the applicability of cultivation theory among criminology/criminal justice majors and criminal justice professionals, such as police officers. We argue that the examination of such portrayals could prove to be a key variable in better understanding public perceptions as well as trends in choice of major, law enforcement recruitment, job expectations, and subsequent retention issues in regard to females and other minority groups.

This study is only the first step in understanding the overall implication of female police officer depictions in theatrically released films and media in general. We emphasize that, in order to properly explore this area of research, the first steps of cultivation analysis must be broken up by municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement officer portrayals. It is understandable that the general public may not make the technical distinction between different levels of law enforcement like those who study law enforcement do. However, we would argue that it is imperative that the distinction be made when conducting analyses of law enforcement portrayals in order to establish hard foundational data that can be compared to real-world law enforcement research that does make the distinction. Future research should therefore endeavor to utilize cultivation theory to examine films and other media formats, such as television, that portray female law enforcement officers at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels. Subsequent second-step cultivation analysis studies should focus on how portrayals of females impact the perceptions of female police officers, their fellow officers, and the general citizenry of the communities in which they serve.

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