

A Review of *Women Police: Portraits of Success*

By

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Book: *Women Police: Portraits of Success*

Author: Patricia Lunneborg

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Following the 1991 release of the movie *Silence of the Lambs*, many young women inquired about how they could become criminal profilers like Clarice Starling, the novice F.B.I. profiler played by the actress Jodie Foster (one wonders what the attraction was considering the extent of violence in the movie). Many were surprised and disappointed to learn that they would have to become “real police” before they would ever have a chance of receiving training in criminal investigative analysis. Like many in the general public, their conceptions of law enforcement officers were shaped by motion pictures and television. Misconceptions and unrealistic expectations regarding law enforcement careers can discourage otherwise eligible applicants from applying and cause new recruits to drop out of training. The same factors, misconceptions and unrealistic expectations, can produce disappointment and frustration for new and experienced officers, and adversely impact their retention. Obviously, people considering careers in law enforcement can benefit from accurate information about the pros and cons of policing.

The popular media rarely present accurate portrayals of the real lives of women in law enforcement. The majority of books about “real police” are about police *men*. Patricia Lunneborg, the author of *Women Police: Portraits of Success*, has published three previous books pertaining to women in law enforcement: *Women Police Officers: Current Career Profile*; *Women Changing Work*; and *Food, Drink, and the Female Sleuth*. In this latest book, Lunneborg reports the experiences of over fifty female police officers she interviewed. Her intent was to inform readers about the realities of policing for women, and also to offer suggestions for female officers and police administrators to improve programs for recruiting, training, retaining, and promoting women.

Each of the seventeen chapters deals with a separate issue of relevance for readers interested in the pros and cons of law enforcement careers for women. The stories of the 50-plus women who shared with Lunneborg their personal accounts of challenges, frustrations, and accomplishments illustrate the experiences of females in law enforcement who change careers, train, deal with discrimination, attempt to balance family life with patrol responsibilities, seek career advancement, and receive support from fellow professionals and women’s organizations (e.g., the International Association of Women Police). Lunneborg begins and ends each chapter

with brief comments and helpful insights. For example, she discusses how many women invest great time and effort into the job – long hours, extra work, and taking work home – and risk burn out. She emphasizes the importance of vacations, recreation, and relationships with significant others: “If she was going to be good at her job she had to get balanced again” (p. 105). In the final chapter she summarizes the themes derived from the stories of the female officers she interviewed.

From a police psychologist’s perspective, Lunneborgh has produced a book that could fairly well accomplish her stated goals. At times the material seems a bit redundant due to the similarities of experience among the interviewees and little data are presented to provide a context for putting her subjects’ experiences in perspective. The portraits of success are accounts of the experiences of *veteran* officers. For today’s female recruits, things may have changed for the better in progressive law enforcement agencies. Some of the interview subjects’ experiences may not be as relevant, but some of the same experiences may still occur in less diverse and progressive agencies. Other issues such as balancing the job and family responsibilities may be universal and very relevant for many of today’s women police.

The book makes for an interesting reading and is worth the investment of time for those women considering a career in law enforcement, already in law enforcement, or those responsible for recruiting, training, promoting, and retaining female officers.

ENDNOTE

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