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**Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture**  
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**ISSN 1070-8286**

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Tough on the Outside, Mom on the Inside:  
The Social Construction of Policewomen on Reality Television

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyze season one of *Police Women of Maricopa County*, a reality television program that features four women police officers. Theoretically, our analysis is informed by a social construction of gender perspective, and utilizes a thematic, content analysis approach. We find, first, that *Police Women of Maricopa County* depicts the four deputies as responding primarily to order maintenance-type calls, not to incidents involving serious crimes. Second, as the deputies respond, they exhibit strong communication skills and a social work-type of policing style. Third, although the four deputies are portrayed as competent officers, the program offers a distinctly feminized portrait of these officers. Our research has implications for women in policing. However, our research may also be relevant to issues of policing more generally given the current situation wherein police officers have been blamed for the excessive use of force in interactions with unarmed citizens.

## INTRODUCTION

Portrayals of policing have long been a staple in television (Cavender and Fishman, 1998). Although television's dramatic programs initially depicted mostly men, for the past 25 years or so women increasingly have appeared as lead or as supporting characters in dramatic series about the police (Mizejewski, 2004). In the late 1980-early 1990s, when television began to devote so much of its schedule to reality programming, police programs figured prominently in that trend. Much as the police procedural crime sub-genre of early television seemed to offer a back-stage glimpse of policing, reality television police programs also claimed to reveal what police work is really like. A format popularized by *Cops* conveyed a sense that the audience was riding along in the police cruiser (Cavender & Fishman, 1998). Reality television programs also initially depicted primarily male police officers (Monk-Turner, Martinez, Holbrook & Harvey, 2007). Recently, however, reality crime programs have begun to include women officers. Indeed, reality programs like *Female Forces* and *Police Women of Maricopa County* feature women officers. In this paper, we analyze season one of *Police Women of Maricopa County*. We are interested in this program because television circulates images that influence our views about issues ranging from what causes crime and what should be done about it, to how we think about gender generally and, more particularly, how we think about gender in terms of occupations (Wilson, Longmire & Swymeler, 2009; Rabe-Hemp, 2011; Cavender & Jurik, 2012). As women enter occupations like policing that traditionally were foreclosed to them, it is important to consider how television depicts their work situation, especially when television claims to present reality.

Theoretically, we ground our analysis of *Police Women of Maricopa County* in the social construction of gender perspective, generally (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and more specifically as it applies to gendered criminal justice organizations (Martin & Jurik, 2007). We are interested in how this reality television program depicts the work routines of women police officers, their interactions with citizens, and how the series reinforces dominant gender constructions. Our research employs a thematic, content analysis approach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Construction of Gender

Our analysis of *Police Women of Maricopa County* is grounded in the social construction of gender perspective. Gender is seen as neither a fixed biological attribute nor a static role, but rather is an emergent and ongoing accomplishment (West & Zimmerman, 1987). "Doing gender," an ancillary term in this perspective, offers a way for understanding gender as an ongoing social construction (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). To facilitate an understanding of these gender constructions, Connell (2002) created two ideal types for distinguishing gender: hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with heterosexuality and with being authoritarian and aggressive, while emphasized femininity is associated with sociability, sexual receptivity, and marriage and child care (Connell, 2002). Initially, emphasized femininity was seen as juxtaposed with and subordinated to hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, the distinctions between the two gendered ideal types were equated with

different spheres: masculinity was linked to the public sphere such as the workplace, and femininity was relegated to the private sphere such as the home. More recent research has incorporated notions of masculinities and femininities, which reflect the reality that these gender distinctions are neither monolithic nor are they limited to separate spheres (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jurik & Siemsen, 2009).

The social construction of gender perspective has informed numerous sectors of research, including analyses of work organizations. Acker (1991) argues that all organizations have forms of inequality that maintain gender inequality. Of particular relevance to our analysis, the social construction of gender approach has been expanded to analyses of criminal justice organizations, including how gender inflects policing (Martin & Jurik, 2007). The belief that women are less capable of being police officers reflects both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, that is, that policing is a masculine occupation, and that the characteristics that define women prevent them from succeeding as police officers.

### Gender and Policing

In the U.S. and in most other countries, policing traditionally was a male occupation. There was an early exception: Women's Police Bureaus existed as an adjunct to the police force in the U.S. and in other countries including Brazil and India. The women in these Bureaus specialized in matters involving women and children that were akin to social work duties (Schulz, 2004). There was a degree of gender essentialism in these Bureaus in that women, seen as matrons, were believed to be intrinsically suited to such nurturing work, and that men lacked any such skills (Kurtz, Linnemann, & Williams, 2012). Women's Bureaus largely disappeared in the 1930s. However, women entered policing in a less specialized, more general way in the 1960s/1970s. Social movements (women's and civil rights) figured into this change, but perhaps the most prominent factor that facilitated women's entry into policing was federal legislation enacted in 1972: Title VII of Civil Rights Act. Title VII amended the 1964 Civil Rights Act and modified recruiting and eligibility requirements, and prohibited discrimination in hiring practices (Kurtz, et. al., 2012; Wilson & Blackburn, 2014). Title VII meant that women could no longer be excluded from careers like the police.

Notwithstanding the significance of Title VII, women encountered problems as they became police officers. Women were the subject of negative stereotypes that portrayed them as physically and emotionally too weak to be competent officers (Martin & Jurik, 2007). For this reason, and also because of the small number of women officers, scholars continue to characterize policing as a masculine occupation (Silvestri, 2003; Brown, 2007). The culture of police organizations continues to be a masculine culture that perpetuates a male-centric view of what it means to be a police officer. Women officers live within this culture and must accommodate it (Miller, 2002; Chan, Doran & Marcel, 2010). One form of accommodation is the argument that women bring special skills to the job that distinguish them from men. These include communication skills that help reduce conflict in interactions with citizens (Wilson & Blackburn, 2014). Women officers are thought to use excessive force less often and to be less confrontational than men (Evans & Davies, 2014). These skills fit well within trends toward community policing, an approach wherein the police are charged with improving public relations, problem solving, and building trust (Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Kurtz, et. al., 2012). Interestingly, however, police women are not necessarily more likely than men to be supportive

in interactions with citizens (Kurtz, et. al., 2012).

Even though women now perform general police duties, their presence has capped at about 12 percent of sworn officers and they remain lodged in lower echelons of rank (Cavender & Jurik, 2012; Wilson & Blackburn, 2014). Some scholars argue that police women are still type cast by the early social work duties that characterized Women's Bureaus (Kurtz, et. al., 2012), while others see these limitations as relating to the social construction of gender (Martin & Jurik, 2007).

## Media & Gender

In addition to organizations that reinforce definitions of gender, in contemporary society the media are an important institution that circulates images that reinforce gender stereotypes. The media reproduce the gendered differentiations that perpetuate stereotypes and facilitate inequality (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Carrabine, 2008). In terms of criminal justice depictions, police officers on television usually have been men who exuded a hyper-masculinity (Surette, 2010; Evans & Davies, 2014). After decades of such treatment, television programs began to feature women in strong lead roles such as police officers that had been closed to them. *Cagney & Lacey* aired in the 1980s and broke new ground in its depiction of women patrol officers. Story lines included traditional police narratives, but also matters that might be of interest to women such as sexism in policing (D'Acci, 1994). The series paved the way for *Prime Suspect*, a British police series that also aired in the U.S. on PBS. *Prime Suspect* featured stories that addressed sexism in the police force and other social issues (Cavender & Jurik, 2012).

Perhaps as a result of these classic programs, series that feature women cops have become more commonplace on television, and their characters are depicted as physically competent and capable in their police roles (Evans & Davies, 2014). At the same time, aspects of emphasized femininity persist: actresses who portray these cops tend to be young women who dress in a provocative manner, and who exhibit nurturing and affectionate personas (Detardo-Bora, 2009). Analyses of films about police women reach similar conclusions: women characters are competent, but they are depicted as nurturing in their interactions (King, 2008). Moreover, the barriers that disadvantage real police women, such as the masculine police culture, are rarely addressed (Wilson & Blackburn, 2014).

The same trajectories for women in television characterize the history of reality television programming, in general, and in terms of policing programs. Ouelette and Hay (2008) note that, for women in the workplace on reality television programs, there is still an ongoing production of femininity that is maintained through physical appearance, charm, and personality. In terms of series such as *America's Most Wanted* and *Cops*, mostly men were depicted as police officers. Women were more likely to appear as criminals or as victims, and the portrayals of women victims were inaccurate (Carmody, 1998). Policewomen now appear more frequently in reality television, but their presence does not necessarily challenge the view that policing is a masculine occupation. In her analysis of *Female Forces*, a reality television program that features women officers, (Rabe-Hemp, 2011) concludes that their depiction reinforces dominant gender constructions. However, Rabe-Hemp (2011) notes that a more recent program, *Police Women of Maricopa*, promises more of an action-oriented reality television program, in which extant gender constructions may not prevail. She calls for an analysis of this program. We now offer such an analysis.

## SYNOPSIS

*Police Women of Maricopa County (PWMC)* is a reality television series that features the exploits of four women police officers in Phoenix, Arizona: Kelly Bocardo, Amie Duong, Deb Moyers, and Lindsey Smith. They are deputies (patrol officers) with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. *PWMC* is a part of a larger reality television franchise that includes depictions of police women across the U.S. *PWMC* resembles reality television programs like *Cops* in that it conveys a sense that the audience is riding along with the officer. As in *Cops*, the deputies frame the incident with their own description of events. However, *PWMC* differs from programs like *Cops* in that it focuses exclusively on women officers, and also because the camera accompanies them both on patrol and in their off-duty lives.

According to FBI statistics (2010c), there are 1345 women in Arizona who are sworn police officers. Accordingly, the four women depicted on *PWMC* are in essence a representation of this larger group of police women. The deputies are all mothers with children ranging in age from infants to young adults. Deputy Moyer and Deputy Bocardo are depicted as happily married; Deputy Smith and Deputy Duong are depicted as proud single mothers. The women appear to be diverse in terms of race/ethnicity.

## METHODOLOGY

We were interested in understanding how *PWMC* depicted the four women deputies. This interest informed our methodological approach. We analyzed *PWMC* using a thematic content analysis, an approach that is akin to ethnographic content analysis (ECA) (Altheide, 1987). ECA entails a qualitative analysis although it can include numerical measures and research protocols. However, there are no pre-conceived variables and no hypothesis testing. Rather, ECA is a more reflexive, emergent approach (Altheide, 1987).

To facilitate our analysis, we used a DVD compilation of season one of *PWMC* (2010). The DVD compilation contained 11 one hour episodes. Although we watched all 11 episodes, we analyzed only nine of them. The 10<sup>th</sup> episode featured corrections officers, not police officers, and the 11<sup>th</sup> episode was a recap of what the program producers deemed the season's top ten calls. The nine episodes that we analyzed contained all of the original *PWMC* episodes that featured the four women deputies. We began by watching several episodes of *PWMC*. During these initial viewings, we noted themes of interest and also developed a code sheet that was oriented to recording more numerical data. We revised this instrument as we watched episodes until we were satisfied with a final version. Although we had only a small data set, we did work to insure reliability. During this early phase, we discussed how to code the data as well as issues that might arise, and also discussed the emergent themes of interest. We essentially trained on practice viewings of the program until we were in agreement about how to record the data, and that our data collection was reliable (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005). The first author watched the episodes and recorded the more numerical information such as the nature of the calls to which the deputies responded, and the sex and race/ethnicity of the citizens who were involved in the calls. For the more emergent themes, we followed a two stage process (Altheide, 1987). In stage one, as we watched episodes, we paid close attention to how the deputies interacted with citizens, including their language and tone, as well as their own explanations for

the action. In stage two, we moved back and forth between these observations and the literature. This allowed us to consider empirical and theoretical links. The two themes that emerged that were the most notable to us were how *PWMC* constructed policing, what we call policing style, and how the program constructed gender, what we call feminizing the police.

.Thus, our research focused on the nature of the calls, policing style, and the feminization of the police in *PWMC*. We turn first to an analysis of the daily routines of these deputies.

## RESULTS

### Nature of the Calls

*This is a gritty no-holds barred glimpse into the rough and tumble underbelly of one of America's largest and busiest metropolitan areas (Promo for Program)*

*PWMC* was somewhat unique in its depictions of the types of calls to which the deputies responded. Of course, the promo noted above promises what purports to be a tough program set in a large urban area, Maricopa County, Arizona with a population of 3.8 million people (2010 Census). Instead, *PWMC* features order maintenance-type calls. Table 1 presents the types of calls that these women deputies handled on the program.

**Table 1** *Number and Percentage of Offense Types (N=76)*

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	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Violent Crime</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>5</b>
Aggravated Assault	(2)	3
Sexual Offense	(1)	1
Robbery	(1)	1
<b>Non-Violent Crime</b>	<b>(65)</b>	<b>86</b>
Traffic Violation <sup>1</sup>	(19)	25
Domestic Disturbance	(10)	13
Warrant for Arrest	(10)	13
CPS Related	(7)	9
Drugs	(4)	5
Car Accident	(4)	5
Suspicious Activity <sup>2</sup>	(4)	5
Vandalism	(2)	3
Human Smuggling	(2)	3
Theft	(2)	3
Simple Assault	(1)	1
<b>Other<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>(7)</b>	<b>9</b>

Note: Percentages have been rounded and may not equal 100

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<sup>1</sup> Traffic violations included: speeding (3), expired tags/registration, tinted windows, no turn signal, driving recklessly (3), suspended license (2), red light running, suspicious activity (5), and an elderly man driving golf cart with an open container.

<sup>2</sup> Suspicious activity included: a woman flagging down cars, a man peaking in windows, men hanging around a broken down vehicle and a man staggering down the street.

<sup>3</sup> The "other" category included: an animal hit and run, a welfare check, no light on bicycle, helping a minor with mental disabilities, a woman who called for psychiatric help, and two stand-off situations.

As we see in Table 1, the four deputies responded to very few violent crime calls. Indeed, only 4 of the 76 calls (5 percent) depicted in the *PWMC*'s first season were for violent crime. Two of these were assaults: one was a battery between a husband and wife; the other was a fight that culminated in a shooting. According to the Uniform Crime Reports for Maricopa County, assault is the most common violent crime (FBI, 2010b). The deputies were far more likely to respond to non-violent crime calls: 65 of the 76 (86 percent) calls were of this nature. Traffic violations were the most frequent call (19 or 25 percent of 76 calls), which is not surprising since these were patrol officers.

Domestic disturbances and serving arrest warrants were next in frequency; each category comprised 10 of the 76 calls (13 percent) during the season that we observed. The domestic disturbances typically were family disputes. Descriptive examples augment the numbers. In one case, Deputy Smith responded to a call about a father fighting with his teenage daughter. Deputy Smith took the daughter to a group home for adolescents (Episode 5). In another case, Deputy Duong was called to a house where a woman reported that her roommate was urinating on her while she slept (Episode 3). No one was charged. Indeed, there were no criminal charges in most of the cases in the domestic disturbance category. With the arrest warrants category, the four deputies served warrants for matters such as drugs, shoplifting, probation violations, and traffic violations. In every warrant call, a group of deputies was involved in serving the arrest warrant. Usually, male deputies accompanied one of the four women who were featured in *PWMC*.

The deputies dealt with Child Protective Services (CPS) issues in 7 calls (9 percent of total calls). Six of these calls involved fathers who had failed to pay child support. In the other call, Deputy Bocardo removed an infant from the home because the father was reportedly a convicted child molester (Episode 1). CPS calls are consistent with the heritage of Women's Police Bureaus

Other calls in the non-violent crime category related to an array of incidents including suspicious activity such as a woman flagging down cars, a man peeking into windows, men hanging around an abandoned car, vandalism, human smuggling, and simple assault (a teenage girl was fighting with her boyfriend's grandmother). According to the Uniform Crime Reports, such non-violent crimes were the most frequent offense in Maricopa County (FBI, 2010b). A general category of "Other" calls comprised a range of incidents including no light on a bicycle, an animal hit and run, helping a minor who was mentally disabled, a woman who called for psychiatric help, and two stand-off situations.



**Table 2** *Number and Percentage of Offenders by Race and Sex (N=76)*

<b>Sex of Offender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	(56)	74
Female	(16)	21
Unknown	(4)	5
<b>Race of Offender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Caucasian	(37)	49
Hispanic	(25)	33
African-American	(8)	11
American Indian	(1)	1
Asian	(1)	1
Unknown	(4)	5

In Table 2, we present the sex and the race/ethnicity of those citizens who were the principle figures involved when one of the deputies responded to a call. Seventy-four percent of the principle figures in the calls were men, which, interestingly parallels UCR arrest data: males comprise 74 percent of arrests (FBI, 2010a). Moreover, most of the principle figures in these calls were Caucasian; this also parallels UCR arrest data (FBI, 2010a). While official statistics do not include a Hispanic category, we coded 33 percent of the principle figures depicted in the *PWMC* calls as Hispanic. This figure closely resembles the population demographics of Maricopa County. African-Americans comprised the third largest category of principle figures: 11 percent.

Television cops are most often depicted as dealing with serious crime (Cotter, deLint, & O'Connor, 2008; Surette, 2010). In this regard, the calls depicted on *PWMC* are a more accurate reflection of the work of patrol officers who spend much of their time intervening in disputes, providing services to citizens, and doing administrative work (Perlmutter, 2000; Robinson, 2011). Our findings about order maintenance calls are consistent with results reported by Rabe-Hemp (2011) in her analysis of *Female Forces*. Both of these reality television programs that feature women emphasize order maintenance policing. These depictions may support Reiner's (2010) claim that television police shows change as the real world of policing changes, for example, in an era of community policing.

Of course, these depictions are a far cry from *PWMC*'s promos about four women deputies who patrol the "rough and tumble" streets. Notwithstanding the nature of the calls, *PWMC* uses production techniques to intensify the drama of its depictions. Camera work, the soundtrack, and musings from the deputies about "what dangers might happen" even on order-maintenance calls make *PWMC*'s renderings more dramatic for television. Despite the heightened drama, the incidents depicted on *PWMC* may seem unusually tame when compared to the more violent crimes that are a staple on cop dramas and some reality television shows. *PWMC*'s tame depictions, although accurate, may make it appear as if these women deputies do not deal with the tough cases.

### Policing Style

*From gang busts to car chases, PWMC shows the harsh and harrowing reality of females in law enforcement (Promo for Program)*

Real police officers spend most of their time performing social service-type functions, although television programs typically depict them in a law enforcement, crime fighter mode (Robinson, 2011). We found that *PWMC* depicted the four deputies in the performance of social service functions, and engaging in a social worker-style of policing. *PWMC*'s depiction of the deputies was consistent with the literature that portrays women officers as having unique skills, in particular, that they are effective communicators (Martin & Jurik, 2007; Evans & Davies, 2014; Wilson & Blackburn, 2014).

The deputies on *PWMC* exhibit communication skills although they do not use academic language in describing their approach to citizen encounters. Rather, they describe what one deputy called their "gift of gab." Regardless of the label, their communication skills are depicted as de-escalating conflict. An example of these communication skills occurs when Deputy Smith has to deal with an irate traffic violator. A man stopped for making an improper turn signal quickly became combative. He critiqued Deputy Smith's own driving, then claimed that the traffic stop was due to racial profiling, and finally threatened to take her to court. Deputy Smith was never forceful and did not even raise her voice during the interaction. She remained calm and ended the interaction by wishing the man "a great weekend [and a] happy Friday" (Episode 4). Another call exemplified this less combative approach, but juxtaposed it with the style of policing exhibited by a male officer. Deputy Moyer was called to assist a male deputy who was about to arrest a drunken woman who had been passed out. After the male officer awakened her and began to administer a field sobriety test, the woman became argumentative and cursed the officer. He grabbed the woman's hands and said, "Now, I'm not going to take that; now, you're just going to jail." He added, "And I'm not full of shit, you are." Deputy Moyer intervened. She called the woman "sweetie" and talked to her as if speaking to a friend. Later, Deputy Moyer explained her approach by saying, "Sometimes you just have to show a bit of compassion." In this incident, the male deputy refused to tolerate any insulting behavior, but Deputy Moyer interacted with the woman "to save her from going to jail" (Episode 6). The approach is reflective of what Rabe-Hemp (2008) calls "an ethic of care."

Deputy Moyer's comment about compassion, especially when conjoined with the sorts of calls that dominated the duty shifts, adds an important dimension to the style of policing exhibited by the deputies on *PWMC*: their communication skills were employed as a form of

social work. *PWMC* depicted the deputies as performing social services as they directed their efforts at helping people. Deputy Duong acknowledged this function when she noted that “80 percent of my time is spent being somewhat more of a social worker than catching bad guys.” Immediately after making this comment, Deputy Duong was dispatched on a call that involved a 17 year old boy who had a mental disability. She consoled the boy, speaking to him as if speaking to a child. He was ultimately admitted to a hospital for psychiatric care. Deputy Duong came across as a caring, sensitive officer on a call that was in the nature of social work (Episode 6).

Another call reinforced this social work style among the women deputies and, again, juxtaposed it with the policing style of the male deputies. Deputy Smith was dispatched on a call wherein male officers were trying, unsuccessfully, to calm an unruly 14 year old girl. Upon arriving on the scene, Deputy Smith asked to have a “woman-to-woman” talk with the girl. She took the teenager aside and asked her what had happened. The girl admitted that she had gotten mad at her little sister and had been hitting her. Deputy Smith adopted a social worker-type role, and, rather than charging the girl with assault, offered to help her to find professional support. Employing communication skills, Deputy Smith acted as a mediator for the girl and her family. She even told the father that this is what they (the officers) are for (Episode 5).

This idea of helping to solve people’s problems, especially family problems, was a frequent theme throughout the season. This theme is seen in a case wherein Deputy Bocardo was dispatched to deal with a fight between a teenage girl and her boyfriend’s grandmother. In this case, both the girl and the grandmother were arrested for simple assault. Deputy Bocardo’s reaction was, “This is another family mess that we’re in here trying to fix.” Although the incident resulted in arrests, it exemplified calls that dealt with family issues and that entailed more of a social work orientation than the crime fighting-style of policing usually seen on television.

*PWMC* promos promised an aggressive style of policing, and some vignettes did show the four deputies talking tough or engaged in confrontational interactions with citizens. At the same time, *PWMC* featured women officers who it depicted as having communication skills that male officers seemingly lacked. The program reinforced the idea that these skills have an important place in policing: they helped to de-escalate conflict. *PWMC*’s portrayal is consistent with recent analyses of reality television crime programs that show women officers in a nurturing role (Rabe-Hemp, 2011) or as caregivers (Calais and Szozda, 2006).

While *PWMC* presents an accurate portrayal of what patrol officers do on duty, their “women’s skills” seem to be very different from what appears to be “real policing,” that is crime fighting, that usually appears on television crime programs. Moreover, these special skills were deployed on calls involving families (especially women and children), which may signal a feminizing of these women’s work routines. We turn to this issue in the next section.

### Feminizing the Police

*These women stand shoulder to shoulder with the toughest men in law enforcement (Promo for Program)*

In this section, we discuss how *PWMC*’s depictions of the four deputies might reinforce dominant views about women generally and of policewomen more particularly. That is,

notwithstanding its claim to present these four deputies as tough, no nonsense cops, *PWMC* presented stereotypes that centered their femininity.

*PWMC* highlighted the off-duty lives of Deputies Borcardo, Duong, Moyer and Smith. While programs like *Cops* mainly feature the working lives of policemen and only occasionally present their off-duty lives, *PWMC* showed a sense of work/life balance in the deputies. Some scenes showed the women engaging in community activities. In one scene, for example, the camera followed Deputy Bocardo in her off-duty hours as she donated clothing for underprivileged children. Here we not only see her commitment to charity, the scene also involved children as do so many of the vignettes. Deputy Bocardo became very emotional as she discussed these kids who were less fortunate than her own children (Episode 7). Other vignettes maintained a focus on children as they highlighted the women at home engaging in domestic sphere activities such as reading bed time stories to their kids, attending their sporting events, baking, or cleaning house. Some vignettes were accompanied by exposition. For example, a vignette that showed Deputy Smith cleaning her house included explanatory comments. "Being a single mom is hard, it really is. Doing this job is difficult in itself and then you throw in there that you're raising two boys..." As the vignette continued she added, "My job is dirty and messy and I refuse to keep my house that way" (Episode 6).

Often, these domestic sphere sensibilities bled over into their work life. Rather than keeping their private lives separate from their work lives, the four deputies frequently mentioned their children and their families as an aspect of their on-duty lives. An example occurred on a call where Deputy Bocardo stopped a car for hitting another vehicle. The driver was a 16 year old boy who had no driver's license. Deputy Bocardo let him go with a warning, but called his mother who was supposed to punish the boy for driving with no license (Episode 8). On another call, Deputy Smith sympathized with a father who was raising five kids on his own. After taking care of the police business, she turned the conversation to parenting issues and commended the father for being able to take care of so many kids. She told him, "I've got two by myself and I pull my hair out. I don't know how you're doing it with five" (Episode 5).

Another example of the private life of a mother bleeding over into the work life of a police officer occurred when Deputy Moyer answered a call that involved a pedestrian hit-and-run; the victim was a teenage boy. Deputy Moyer said that the situation made her think of her own kids, and how it would affect her if it had been her child lying in the street. She expressed her heartbreak for the child and said that she wished that she could "take away the pain from him" (Episode 3). In this and in other vignettes, the compassion and social work-type approach that these deputies exhibited was framed as an extension of their private lives as mothers.

In addition to these glimpses into their off-duty lives, *PWMC* used some production techniques that augmented its focus on the deputies as women. In one production technique, the deputies directly addressed the camera, and by extension, the audience. The technique resembles a device in reality television shows like *Survivor* in which an individual is separated from the group and seemingly communicates directly (and privately) with the audience. In *PWMC*, this technique entailed a studio setting away from the streets wherein the deputy confided in the audience, often sharing her private thoughts. Rabe-Hemp (2011) refers to these as "confessionals." Some confessionals were on camera; others were voiceovers.

Some of *PWMC*'s confessionals were of the "you never know what could happen" variety that were designed to heighten the possibility of danger. However, most included deeply emotional reactions to situations and they often dealt either with the deputies' own kids or with

kids they encountered during calls. For example, the incident that involved the hit and run victim that prompted Deputy Moyer to reflect on her own children was made in a confessional (Episode 3). Similarly, in the vignette about the single father of five children, after Deputy Smith told him how impressed she was, she added (in confessional), “I just wanted him to know that somebody cared” (Episode 5). In the vignette about the 16 year old driving with no license, Deputy Bocardo noted during a confessional that she was a “softy when it comes to children. If I see this kid is making the effort, then I am more okay with making the effort as well, and letting this kid go with a warning” (Episode 8). These confessionals extended the private sphere to include us, the audience. Even when they referenced police work, the confessionals emphasized these deputies’ femininity.

*PWMC* signaled the femininity of these deputies in a variety of ways. The program privileged the heteronormativity of the deputies: all are married or have children, and the emphasis on their children was a constant refrain in the series. Their heteronormativity was maintained through their interactions with the citizenry. In one call, a man flirted with Deputy Duong. Rather than being offended, she treated this as a compliment, and one that was commonplace. She said, “If I had a hundred dollars for every time some drunk guy tried to flirt with me and hit on me, I wouldn’t have to work...I’d be a millionaire” (Episode 5). Their heteronormativity was reinforced via their physical appearance as well. The four deputies all exhibited stereotypic feminine grooming: long hair; fake nails; make-up. These stereotypically feminine depictions were most apparent in *PWMC*’s studio segments although they also were subtly present in their on-duty calls as well. A combination of production techniques, i.e., flattering lighting and the well-coiffed deputies, is a marker of an emphasized femininity.

*PWMC* drove home its emphasized femininity in one vignette in particular. The four deputies appeared together on a “women’s television talk show” in New York City. The two female talk show hosts focused more on the domestic sphere of the deputies’ lives than on their police work. The hosts elicited a discussion about the deputies “soft side,” which mostly entailed comments about their children. At one point, however, one of the hosts asked about policing, specifically about situations when the women must confront a stronger man. Deputy Moyer answered, “I think it is just the gift of gab that we have...you are having to be able to think quick on your feet and the gift of gab is a great thing to have.” The host remarked, “You guys are all tough guys and you have to be because it’s the job. The kind of job asks you to be this person.” Interestingly, the reference is to the women as “tough guys.” Also, the characterization suggests that the women are not inherently this person—they cannot be because they are women—but rather that it is a persona that they don, like their uniform, when they are on-duty (Episode 9).

One interesting interaction during this talk show featured the display of the pink handcuffs that the women deputies use on the job. Indeed, throughout the season when the women made arrests they used the pink handcuffs. The talk show hosts called them “girly” handcuffs—as if pink symbolized the deputies’ femininity—and actually asked to wear them as if they were a fashion accessory. After trying them on, one host exclaimed, “You are so fashionable.” The deputies then displayed diamond rings and their “real jewelry” for the hosts. The handcuffs, like the other jewelry, were markers of their femininity that were reinforced in the “girl talk” with the program hosts.

Thus, even as it promoted these deputies through “tough guys” language, *PWMC* consistently emphasized their femininity through standard cultural markers: frequent references

to their children, references that framed their working personality as deputies; their appearance, especially in the studio confessionals; the nature of their interactions with citizens; their pink handcuffs. The point is not that deputies cannot be women who enjoy their femininity, but rather that *PWMC* portrays them in a manner that reinforces dominant portrayals of femininity even amid the structure of a reality television police program.

## CONCLUSION

After years of dramatic and reality programming that featured men as police officers, women have begun to appear with increasing frequency as cops on television. Women are a staple on dramatic police programs as lead or ensemble characters, and with programs like *PWMC*, audiences now see depictions of the working routines of women officers. Our research analyzed what audiences actually see when they watch a program like *PWMC*. We found, first, that *PWMC* depicted the four deputies as responding mostly to order maintenance-type calls. The presentation is an accurate account of typical police calls, and also accurate in that women are police officers. However, research does note that, when compared to their actual numbers in law enforcement, women are over-represented as police officers on television (Evans & Davies, 2014).

Second, we found that the deputies on *PWMC* exhibited effective communication skills as they engaged in a social work-style of policing. The deputies themselves characterized their police routines as social work. They commented on their helping activities, and referenced the importance of compassion and their “gift of gab.” They linked their working personality as police officers, not to the adrenaline rush of the chase, but to their status as working mothers.

Third, we found that *PWMC* feminized the four deputies. Several aspects of the program contributed to their feminization. One aspect entailed depictions that emphasized traditional markers of femininity such as make-up and hair styles. *PWMC* feminized the deputies through production techniques such as the extensive use of off-duty footage that portrayed them as mothers who often were very emotional when describing their children or children with whom they came in contact on the job. The presentation reinforced older notions of femininity in terms of definitional elements such as sociability, motherhood, and the private sphere (Connell, 2002). Rabe-Hemp (2011) reported a similar focus on parenting discussions in her analysis of *Female Forces*, another reality television program that featured women deputies.

*PWMC*'s emphasis on order maintenance calls supports Reiss' (1971) classic description of the police as a social service institution, as well as Carrabine's (2008) observation that reality television programs now feature “everyday” crimes. At the same time, although some *PWMC* promos mentioned that the deputies were working moms, many promised what audiences have come to expect: action-oriented fare. For example, a promo showed one of the deputies posing with an assault rifle. In another promo, we ride with a deputy at a high rate of speed as she responds to a call. *PWMC* focused on women deputies, but to a degree it perpetuated the male standard as a default in policing. For example, one promo noted that “this feisty Latina is out to prove that she's as tough as the next guy” and another said “these women stand shoulder to shoulder with the toughest men in law enforcement.” Moreover, like other police television programs, *PWMC* does not address the importance of the male-centric police culture or the other barriers that confront women police officers (Kurtz, et. al, 2012; Wilson & Blackburn, 2014).

As a reality television program, *PWMC* was consistent with trends in this form of programming. As other research notes (Moore, 2014), in reality television programs about policing, the police frame the vignettes. In *PWMC*, the deputies explained the significance of what is happening. *PWMC* exemplified a hybrid format of programming: observational segments were intercut with confessional scenes wherein the participants addressed the camera and shared their inner feelings (Andrejevic, 2004). Confessionals are increasingly commonplace on reality television, and they privilege an almost therapeutic discourse that transforms the private into the public sphere (White, 2002). *PWMC*'s use of traditional markers of femininity such as make-up and personality supported scholarship that concludes that the production of femininity is an ongoing endeavor for women depicted in the workplace on reality television (Ouelette & Hay, 2008).

Even as *PWMC* depicted competent police women, it reinforced what Coltrane and Adams (1997) call "patterned framing" by invoking media frames that tend to reproduce gender differentiation. Gender inequality begins with gender differentiation, especially when such distinctions are made to appear as natural (Coltrane & Adams, 1997). Carrabine (2008) agrees that television promotes stereotypes that maintain the status quo.

### Implications

Our analysis of *PWMC* is relevant for public policy. First, if we want to increase the numbers of women in policing, we must understand how women officers are presented on television. These depictions may be the first impression that prospective officers encounter as they consider career choices. Second, in an era when we hear so many stories about the questionable use of excessive force, understanding more about how women police appear to avoid these controversial practices is a necessity. Television depictions of alternative styles of policing are an important step. Moreover, our findings are relevant, not only to women in policing, but to women in other traditionally male occupations such as lawyers or women in the military who serve in combat. Women's entry into these formerly all-male fields is significant, but it is essential that we know how the media depict these occupational shifts and the degree to which the depictions alter or reinforce the dominant social construction of gender.

### Limitations

There are limitations to our analysis of *PWMC*. Although detailed, ours is an analysis of one season of this reality television program. Moreover, notwithstanding its reality claims, *PWMC* is a television program, not an unfiltered mirror of reality. Reality programs may not be scripted to the degree of dramatic programs, but they still are a constructed reality. Producers and directors decide what to film and how to edit it, and, in so doing, create a narrative that tells the story that they want to tell (Andrejevic, 2004). Confessionals contribute powerfully to that narrative. Thus, when we see a woman deputy exhibit more compassion toward a citizen than does a male deputy, we are seeing one small slice of that interaction that was perhaps selected for airing because it fit the narrative that the editor wanted to present, not necessarily because it is a representation of all such interactions.

## Future Research

Future research might emphasize analyses of multiple reality television shows that depict women police officers, and, for example, compare those that feature women with those that purport to offer more general depictions of the police. It might also be useful to analyze audience responses to a program like *PWMC* to ascertain if such programs make it more likely that a woman who is interested in law enforcement might pursue such a career. Finally, it might be fruitful to interview women who are police officers to see if such programs influenced their career choices, and, if yes, how they feel about such programs after they have been on the job.

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