

Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology
I'm still in the Blue Family: Gender and Professional Identity Construction
in Police Officers
 --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	JPCP-D-19-00083R1
Full Title:	I'm still in the Blue Family: Gender and Professional Identity Construction in Police Officers
Article Type:	Original Research
Keywords:	police officers; identity construction; gender differences; gender policies; male professions
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I'm still in the Blue Family: Gender and Professional Identity Construction in Police Officers

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ETHICAL STATEMENT:

1. Funding: The authors declare that they did not receive any funding for this study.
2. Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.
3. Ethical approval: As a retrospective study ethical approval was not required. The authors declare that use of data in this study complies with the law and the national ethical guidelines of Australia.
4. Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study during the original data collection.

**I'm still in the Blue Family: Gender and Professional Identity Construction
in Police Officers**

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I'm still in the Blue Family: Gender and Professional Identity Construction in Police Officers

Abstract

With an increase in gender equality policies and gender balance targets within traditionally male professions, organisations such as the police service are experiencing changing demographics. How these shifts influence the construction of professional identity is unclear. Drawing on focus group data, this study aimed to explore identity construction of police officers across gender using a thematic analysis method. Two themes related to identity construction were found to be common to both male and female police officers: 'Working within a blue family' and 'Being a copper is a job for life'. However, the way in which these themes were articulated differed between male and female officers, with male officers experiencing more difficulty than female officers in terms of positioning their identity within the evolving police culture. The findings from this study have implications for gender policies in the workforce as they suggest that men may experience more difficulty than women in adjusting to a gender diverse workforce, and that professional identity within traditionally male professions is more complex and nuanced than what was previously assumed.

Keywords: police officers, identity construction, gender differences, gender policies, male professions.

1. INTRODUCTION

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Careers are considered a central feature of an adult's identity construction; an occupational identity can bring a sense of belongingness for an individual due to the identification of being part of a specific group. Bayerl *et al.* (2018) argue that such group identity construction goes beyond the association of individuals through recognition by professional bodies and is evident in the sharing of principles and values within particular professions. For Bayerl *et al.* (2018), professional identities reflect shared collective norms and values, and the rules governing these become collective meanings for group members' behaviour. These identities may include the reinforcing of existing gender roles or disruption of gendered expectations within these groups. Examples such as these may be particularly salient within professions that are traditionally associated with a specific gender, such as the police service with traditional masculine norms (Silvestri, 2017). Consequently, this study investigates the professional identities of both male and female police officers.

Existing literature has consistently shown that police officers experience changing levels of motivation and commitment to their professional identity (Lopez & Ramos 2017; McElroy *et al.* 1999; Schaible 2018; Van Maanen 1975). An early study by Van Maanen (1975) conducted a longitudinal examination of the experiences of new recruits and early career police officers and found that motivation and commitment quickly declined in the early years of police work. More recent research indicates that patterns of motivation and engagement remain associated with police rank (Boag-Munroe 2019; Lopez & Ramos 2017; McElroy *et al.*, 1999) and gender (Ahmad, 2019). For example, Ahmad (2019) argued that policewomen in Pakistan experienced low levels of motivation due to gender-related challenges in the workplace, making it easier for the female officers to justify acts of corruption. Outcomes related to strength of identity have also been investigated. When Schaible (2018) explored work related identities among police officers it was found that a

1 central focus of a police career identity (e.g., strong work centrality) was beneficial in early
2 career officers, however in later career officers this identity was associated with occupational
3 exhaustion.
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7 Professional identity construction is also influenced and shaped by the internal
8 culture/s of the organisation, and the history, context, and responsibilities associated with the
9 roles. Policing requires officers to adapt to high stress working environments (Magnavita &
10 Garbarino 2013) that expose them to physical risk, criminality, situational uncertainty, abuse,
11 and the threat of social, supervisory, media, and political scrutiny (Paoline 2003). It also
12 enables them the use of coercive and potentially lethal power. Common descriptions of
13 values and attitudes typical of traditional police culture include being authoritative and
14 macho, preparedness to be coercive, respect for physical strength and courage, eagerness for
15 excitement, emphasis on autonomy, in-group solidarity and loyalty, hostility towards groups
16 regarded as deviant or threatening, suspiciousness, secrecy, sexism, racism, cynicism, and a
17 commitment to the policing mandate (particularly fighting of crime) and duties (Cordner
18 2017; Crank 2004; Paoline 2003; Paoline *et al.*, 2000). However, Ingram, Paoline and Terrill
19 (2013) suggest that this traditional view of police culture is too monolithic in nature, and that
20 a more nuanced representation is needed to better represent the way in which individual
21 members of the police force adapt to the strains inherent in policing.
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43 Added to this, police forces have been historically (and still are) predominantly male
44 and reflect masculinised values (Silvestri 2017). These have included ideals of emotional
45 control, concealing weakness, the prioritisation of work, and demonstration of toughness
46 (David & Brannon 1976; Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). In addition, different subcultures
47 such as “street cop culture and management cop culture” (Paoline 2003, p. 205) have been
48 identified, with the former more closely aligned with traditional police culture and the latter
49 more focussed on efficiency, accountability, and broader based crime reduction strategies.
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1 The division between these two cultures presents unique identity issues within the
2 organisation, such that lower ranked officers view those in leadership as unrepresentative of
3 the ‘street cop’, lacking credibility, and failing to recognise issues facing frontline officers
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5 (Hoggett *et al.*, 2019).
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9 The important role that physicality and the body plays in the construction of a police
10 identity as identified by Courpasson and Monties (2017) could be considered part of what
11 Prokos and Padavic (2002) refer to as part of a hidden curriculum within the police force that
12 draws upon principles of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity was a term
13 proposed by Connell (2005) to describe practices that perpetuate men’s structural domination
14 and reproduction of inequality. In regard to masculine approaches to policing, Prokos and
15 Padavic (2002) found that within a training academy, male recruits not only held negative
16 views towards women generally, but specifically excluded women officers from police work,
17 and exaggerated the differences between male and female recruits rather than highlighting
18 similarities in approaches. Prokos and Padavic (2002) argued that the presumption that
19 masculine traits are a requirement is what they considered a ‘myth’ of the action-filled and
20 dangerous role of the police officer that is perpetuated across all levels of the police force.
21 Interestingly, Gould and Funk (1998) found that both male and female police recruits
22 reported action-oriented personality traits that may not align with the goals of community
23 policing in situations where negotiation rather than action is required.
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26 Male officers have also been found to show higher levels of anxiety and stress, high
27 moral standards, above average impulse control, and a tendency to be self-reliant and avoid
28 help seeking (Gould & Funk, 1998), personality traits that may lead to problematic
29 relationships between male officers, their peers, and supervisors. While male recruits may
30 appear more certain of their career path in law enforcement than female recruits (Gould &
31 Voulbrecht, 1999), personality traits may result in male officers becoming more frustrated by
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1 the rules, regulations, paperwork, and bureaucracy of policing than their female counterparts
2 (Gould & Funk, 1998). That these types of gendered distinctions are still evidenced within
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4 the police is indicated by the work of Loftus (2008, 2010) with recent research pointing to the
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6 continued existence of an “impervious white, heterosexist, male culture” within police
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8 organisations; as well as by the continued dominance of a ‘cult of masculinity’ within modern
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10 policing (see Silvestri 2017).
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14 As a counterpoint, Dick and Jankowicz (2001) caution against the simple
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16 categorisation of an organisational culture as being either feminine or masculine and argue
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18 that the complex socially constructed nature of these need to be interrogated so as not to
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20 essentialise differences. For Dick and Jankowicz (2001), police culture is not something that
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22 is simply held by individual officers, but instead is a deeper theme operating throughout all
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24 levels of the organisation. Given this complexity, Dick and Jankowicz (2001) therefore
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26 caution against the assumption of taking male and female police officers’ experiences as
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28 homogenous within their gender. They argue rather that we need to go beyond such gender
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30 assumptions and look for the considerable differences within the groups rather than mere
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32 surface comparisons between men and women.
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39 In their research Dick and Jankowicz (2001) were concerned with the intersectionality
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41 of identity components, gender being one aspect and police rank being another. What they
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43 found was that perceived suitability for promotion often appeared to rely on staying late and
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45 conforming with particular working practices, all of which could be considered incompatible
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47 with parenthood. This ill fit between the competing demands resulted in many women
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49 officers leaving the police force to pursue family commitments. Values of individuals
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51 therefore play a central role in career decisions, and Mainiero and Gibson (2018) propose that
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53 women are particularly likely to value work-career balance in midcareer rather than men,
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55 echoing what Dick and Jankowicz describe as the “socio-cultural transmission of gender
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1 differentiated expectations” (p. 197) onto the organisational culture within the police force.
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3 What this creates is an additional challenge for both male and female police officers who are
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5 not prepared to prioritise work over family life because such individuals frequently resign
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7 themselves to unlikely promotion opportunities due to not meeting the perceived cultural
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9 benchmarks of a dedicated officer (Dick & Jankowicz, 2001). Consequently, Dick and
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11 Jankowicz ultimately argue that gender differences need to be understood within socio-
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13 cultural contexts rather than simple intra-organizational comparisons, and the implications for
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15 these taken-for-granted assumptions can be different for male and female officers. While
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17 male police officers may more congruently experience the masculine culture of the police,
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19 those individuals who wish to balance or prioritise other commitments such as family are not
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21 considered sufficiently committed to be considered for promotion. In contrast, while female
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23 officers experience challenges in this masculine culture they also experience more acceptance
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25 and support regarding prioritising other commitments, such as family.
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32 Traditional police culture can therefore present challenges for those entering the
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34 police service who hold different experiences and values, or who may not appear to align
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36 with values such as physicality, heterosexuality, and the prioritisation of work over family.
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38 Beliefs within police organisations and personnel vary on the spectrum from those who
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40 believe policing is for men and so promote masculinised processes and values, to those who
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42 attempt to make the police force more female friendly, seeing women as important in
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44 transforming policing (Morash & Haarr 2012). Female police can feel gender-work identity
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46 conflict in a work-culture that prizes more masculine values (Veldman *et al.*, 2017) whereas
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48 males can devalue qualities associated with females (Prokos & Padavic, 2002) perceiving
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50 them to be less effective (Haake, 2018). Female officers may believe they are as effective as
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52 male officers, or even outperform them, particularly in relation to the more “feminised
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54 forms” of police work (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Yet female police officers can feel frustrated at
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1 being segregated towards lower prestige roles requiring more feminine normed skills, which
2 in turn, can limit career progression (Haake, 2018), additionally female leaders can be viewed
3 as requiring skills above and beyond that of their male counterparts in order to be accepted
4 into leadership roles (Haake, 2018).
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9 Bayerl *et al.* (2018) argue that police officers share a strong and clear collective
10 understanding of what it means to be a police officer. Schaible (2018), however, points out
11 that one should not assume a singular vision for this, and many police officers experience
12 tensions between competing discourses of traditional policing and more modern police work.
13 Schaible (2018) therefore argues that individuals may hold a common strong shared identity
14 of a police officer, but simultaneously hold different and sometimes competing values as to
15 what that looks like in behavioural action. This view is shared by Courpasson and Monties
16 (2017) who propose that such identity work requires the construction of identity through both
17 discursive (what an individual officer says they do) and practical (what they actually do)
18 means. Courpasson and Monties focused on what the construction of a ‘true cop’ looks like.
19 The findings from their ethnography of 39 French police officers identified the importance of
20 concepts such as fitness, intimidation, cleanliness, toughness, and commitment in
21 constructing the ‘true cop’ that became core elements for individuals in constructing their
22 own individual identity as a police officer. Courpasson and Monties noted that changes to
23 work requirements that entailed an increased focus on clerical office-based work challenged
24 officers because it shifted the focus from more physical activities that were previously
25 considered central to the identity construction of a ‘true cop’.
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51 In a study of professional collective identity by Bayerl *et al.* (2018), 149 police
52 respondents from three European countries highlighted values such as professionalism,
53 discipline, being physically well-built, a helper, a protector, a crime-fighter, and team
54 member. Yet despite these values, officers also criticised policing for being old fashioned,
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needing to demonstrate more innovation, stressful, and a thankless task. When taken as a whole, the values mentioned in this study support those associated with traditional police culture and yet also imply a degree of dissatisfaction and that the police force needs to modernise.

The literature demonstrates that numerous factors including gender roles and police cultures are key to police officer's identity construction, and that these constructions can impact on many aspects of their career, family life, and psychological wellbeing. However, policing ideals and police composition continue to change, with many police departments placing a strong emphasis on gender equality targets (see, for example, Spence *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore timely to revisit the construction of police identity within the context of a police organisation that has a history of progressive gender policy. The aim of the present study was therefore to explore how male and female police officers at various stages of their policing career understand what it means to be a police officer.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

The officers in a large metropolitan police department in an Australian capital city formed the participants in this study. This police department was chosen because of its history of gender inclusion and progression.

We recruited participants through the state police union, which served as the organisational sponsor for the study. Police union membership is very high with over 99% of officers belonging to the union. Therefore, we had confidence that the sample of participating officers would be largely representative of the total population of officers in the organisation. Our announcement message was neutral in tone and presented an opportunity for officers to attend research conversations about levels of engagement with the union and the profession. Announcements for the study were placed on the police union website and

1 were made available to active duty officers and police academy cadets through police union
2 representatives in local service areas. The officers who participated in the study received no
3 compensation, but participation was requested as a service to the profession.
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7 Our participants were police officers at the constable and sergeant stages of tenure, as
8 well as police officer cadets who had just graduated from the police academy. As newly
9 sworn officers, the cadets had been exposed to one year of professional socialisation at the
10 state police academy that included a small number of hours on patrol with experienced
11 sergeants and constables. Though these outgoing cadets had limited operational history as
12 police officers, some spoke of lengthy employment histories, therefore in this sample, 'cadet'
13 was not necessarily indicative of a young adult recruit.
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24 The participants at the constable level reported up to 21 years of active service as a
25 police officer and included men and women. Of the constables, a subset of three male
26 constables came from the UK and thus had extensive overseas experience before entering
27 Australia. Similar to the cadet cohort, some male constables also spoke of established careers
28 prior to entering the police force, therefore officer rank was not necessarily indicative of age.
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34 Females at the sergeant level had between 12 and 15 years of active service as a
35 police officer, whereas male sergeants had a minimum of 15 years and maximum of 40 years'
36 experience. Participants at the sergeant level were also almost evenly split between men and
37 women (see Table 1). In total there were 20 male participants and 14 female participants in
38 this study. In the findings below officers are identified by gender and rank (see Table 1).
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51 **2.2. Procedures**

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53 Having received university-level ethical approval before beginning this research, we
54 conducted seven focus group interviews, each held on different days and times. Each focus
55 group lasted approximately two hours. The five focus groups composed of constables and
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1 sergeants were held at the state police union headquarters, and these groups were: (1) male
2 constables born in Australia, (2) male constables born in the United Kingdom, (3) female
3 constables, (4) male sergeants, and (5) female sergeants. The two remaining focus groups,
4 (6) male cadets and (7) female cadets, were held at the state police academy. Before
5 beginning the focus groups, participants were presented with an information sheet stating the
6 purpose and nature of the research. All participants were required to sign consent forms and
7 were told that the focus group interviews would be recorded using digital voice recorders and
8 later transcribed in a non-identifiable form.
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19 The focus groups were conducted by two researchers, with one researcher asking
20 open-ended questions and the other recording responses on paper as a supplement to the
21 digital recordings. We asked open-ended questions during the focus groups that reflected
22 engagement (defined as a sense of experienced professional activity and a felt sense of
23 dedication) with the police union and the profession and overall police organisation. After
24 discussing the idea of engagement at the beginning of the focus groups we asked the
25 participants to consider engagement and disengagement across all of their professional
26 activities. Accordingly, four basic questions asked of focus group participants: 1) What are
27 reasons for engaging with your work/professional activities through the police department?,
28 2) What are reasons for *not* engaging with your work/professional activities through the
29 police department?, 3) What are reasons for engaging with your work/professional activities
30 through the police union?, and 4) What are reasons for *not* engaging with your
31 work/professional activities through the police union? The researchers supplemented these
32 basic questions with requests for more details based on answers from participants. During the
33 course of the interviews the participants in all of the focus groups began to talk about issues
34 relating to their understandings of what it means to be a police officer. Although this was not
35 the initial focus of the group the discussions surrounding police identity were very rich and
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1 hence the researchers allowed the participants to discuss these issues within the focus groups.

2 Once the interviews were completed the digital recordings were kept on password protected
3 computers and later transcribed using non-identifiable pseudonyms for participants.
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6 7 **2.3. Analysis** 8

9 Data was analysed using thematic analysis due to its flexibility in approaching the
10 coding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun *et al.*, 2014). To aid in the sorting and
11 organisation of data, all transcripts were initially imported into NVivo qualitative data
12 analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, Version 11, 2017) for coding and theme
13 development. This process was approached inductively, allowing the content of the data to
14 guide both processes with an aim to relate the findings to wider theoretical contexts.
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24 Interview transcripts were independently read and re-read by the first and second authors. In
25 order to identify gender-based congruence and differentiation, the coding process initially
26 grouped transcripts according to gender, with later stages of analysis bringing the entire data
27 set together to ensure final themes told a complete story of these gendered experiences.
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34 Coding of data was conducted independently by the first and second authors with
35 extracts of data coded into as many different themes as deemed relevant and applicable
36 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved iteration between statements, data set, and researcher
37 interpretation. Credibility of analysis was then enhanced by bringing together the two
38 researchers to further examine and collate codes based on broader patterns of meanings
39 (Braun *et al.*, 2014). It was at this point that the decision was taken to focus on constructions
40 of identity and the relationship between these constructions and gender as it was clear that
41 these were the prominent themes emerging from the data. Attention was given to congruent
42 meaning-making across genders as well as contradictory understandings and constructions.
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Throughout this process, researcher analysis was documented using notes maintained within NVivo to create an audit trail, which further enhances the trustworthiness and dependability

1 of the analytic process (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Theme development and review occurred
2 through a process of researcher triangulation, with an additional member of the research team
3 reviewing the coded data extracts for each subtheme as a further check of validity and
4 reliability. Discussion with the research team continued throughout these final stages of
5 analysis until all researchers were satisfied that final theme names appropriately captured the
6 essence of each theme, and that these themes were supported by clear and compelling
7 quotations.
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16 **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

17 The police men and women's discussions concerning their identity as police officers
18 contained two interrelated themes. The first of these related to a sense of belonging and used
19 language that positioned the police service as a 'family' to which each individual belonged.
20 However, there were distinct differences in the way in which the men and women articulated
21 their relationships within this family. The women viewed the police family in a largely
22 positive light, as a place of belonging and security while for the men the police family was
23 viewed as a damaged family that continually lets its members down. The men reported a
24 sense of alienation from this family, but, despite this, they still viewed themselves as having
25 an identity in relation to this family.
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41 The second theme related to individual identity, with the sense that being a 'copper' is
42 an enduring identity internal to each individual member of the police service. This theme,
43 which was prominent in the narratives of both male and female officers, was positioned as an
44 underlying motivation for remaining in the police force despite the difficulties within the
45 organisation.
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53 **3.1. Theme 1: Working within the Blue Family**

54 Conspicuous within all the narratives was a focus on an individual's personal identity
55 as a 'copper' (see second theme below) being linked to an overall identification with the
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police service and with working within the structures of the police service. This noticeable identification with the organisation as a whole was labelled ‘the blue family’. This metaphor of kinship described the nature of the relationship articulated by the participants. The phrase is taken from a statement by Thalia (FCad) where she described that no matter where she was posted in the service ‘I’m still in the blue family’. However, the way in which this relationship was articulated by the female and the male participants differed.

For female participants, the police service is a place where they experience a sense of belonging based on a belief that the organisation treats them relatively well, especially with the changes that have occurred (with the assistance of the police union) to policies that better accommodate female employees. This is reflected in Tanya’s (FCon) statement that

I don’t think there’d be any woman in [Police Service Name] that if they were asked to sit back and analyse the reasons why they would leave ... none of those would relate to being a woman in the job, because our conditions are so good.

This description contrasts with the experiences reported by Prokos and Padavic (2002) where females were implicitly treated as inferior and outsiders. This contrary finding may be due to the broader range of police officer experience of the participants in this study’s sample or may be indicative of organisational or cultural changes that have occurred since the publication of Prokos and Padavic’s study.

It appears that for these female employees, generational rather than gender differences were more prominent:

... the younger generation they question everything ... [they’re] selfish, they [only] want to know about them (Rebecca, FCon).

1 The new recruits' lack of understanding and appreciation for the organisation as a whole was
2 contrasted with the more experienced officers' deeper understanding of their role within the
3 organisation. This was articulated by Tanya (FCon):
4

5
6
7 And one of the things that I notice particularly through my career, getting
8 more and more mature within the organisation is, when I first joined I had no
9 concept of where, how what I did as a police officer out on the road, how they
10 fed into the strategic aims of the organisation. And I think as you go through,
11 and become more knowledgeable about how things link in at high levels,
12 that's when you get some sort of understanding, if I do something here, it
13 affects other people further down the track.
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24 Rank has previously been implicated in identity construction (Dick & Jankowicz, 2001), and
25 this finding was replicated in this study. In this study, higher ranked officers viewed the self
26 as part of an important collective. They recognised a hierarchy within the organisation
27 between the new recruits who are seen as relatively immature and naïve, and those who had
28 been in the organisation longer and therefore felt able to understand the organisation better.
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34 The female participants identified several difficulties and concerns within the 'blue
35 family'. These included frequent restructures, difficulties in securing promotions, and
36 unhelpful communications with management. For example, Rebecca (FCon) described the
37 consultation process followed by the police service:
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46 And it's more, not consultation; it's being told. I believe that consultation is
47 sitting down and discussing. The consultation that takes place that I'm aware
48 of is 'this is what's happening', and 'this is what we're going to bring in'. Not
49 that, well this is what we would like to trial or do something; it's more of a
50 'this is what we're bringing in'. To me that's not a consultation, but they tick
51 the box and call that, yep, we've consulted.
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1 This frustration with the management of the organisation may reflect tension described by
2 Schaible (2018) between the traditional authoritarian policing model and a collaborative
3 community policing model. The individual's identity is experiencing a conflict between what
4 the organisation says they do, and what the organisation actually does. The female constables
5 suggest that for both younger and older generations, regardless of gender, this can create a
6 sense of apathy described by Tanya (FCon):
7

8 ... we're paramilitary still. We've got a hierarchy and we're taught from very,
9 very early on in our careers that you don't question management, you don't
10 question orders, you don't question direction, you, you just do your job.
11

12 This disgruntlement was counterpointed with a sense of ownership and responsibility,
13 where in addition to being aware of these difficulties there was also a sense of being
14 responsible for effecting changes themselves. Membership of supervisory rank enabled the
15 construction of identity that placed emphasis on the position of power afforded to certain
16 officers to influence others (Dick & Jankowicz, 2001). For example, Lisa (FCon) reflected
17 that
18

19 I think that as a supervisor you actually come at it a different way, and you
20 perhaps – I know that from – well just my experience is that I look at things
21 very differently. I look at what motivates my people, and I look at how I can –
22 if they're interested in doing this, and I'll look at the reasons why and I'll look
23 at – I'll actually strategize and look at things completely different as to what I
24 used to do before.
25

26 In this extract, the participant reflects on her own role in motivating and encouraging her
27 fellow police officers and acknowledges that she forms part of the organisation and is
28 therefore able to effect change. Indeed, Jess's (FCon) comments below sum up the women's
29 attitude towards their blue family.
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1 ... it's about the motivating factors of having to do the best we can with what
2 we have, and police are very good at that, very, very good ... we're the
3
4 depression experts here; we'll do what we can with a cardboard box, because
5
6 we have to, because there is [sic] still positive optimistic people working in the
7
8 box factory. There are still people there who see the light at the end of the
9
10 tunnel and see ... that they can do what they can in their work area, and in the
11
12 time or own time, speak to the staff and see what they can do, to manage a
13
14 little group. And then hope that the circles of influence will bubble out, and
15
16 therefore others will start thinking that way too
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22 There was a sense that working for the police service involves working in the best
23
24 interests of all members of the service and that the goal is to improve wellbeing for all
25
26 'coppers':
27

28 ... we all know how to be police officers, we all know how to do our jobs, we
29
30 go through varying levels of being better craftsmen at traffic or at operations
31
32 or being a detective that sort of stuff. That's the stuff that you know how do
33
34 really, at the back of your hand and that [Police Service Name] can teach you
35
36 how to do that. It's everything else, all the HR all the management of people,
37
38 conflict resolution, managing change, motivation, performance managing, all
39
40 this stuff that we really miss out on, which after doing a lot of studies has
41
42 really opened my eyes to a whole different way of looking at your job and
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44 looking at people who you work with and for and who work for you. (Lisa,
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51 FCon)

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53 This narrative highlights that female officers de-emphasised the task and action-based roles
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55 previously identified in the literature (e.g., Corder, 2017; Courpasson & Monties, 2017;
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1 Prokos & Padavic, 2001), instead focusing on the significance of group maintenance and the
2 pursuit of group goals as part of the collective blue family identity.
3

4 This sense of the wider organisation as interrelated and mutually dependent was not
5 reflected in the male police officers' narratives of the 'blue family'. Instead, for the male
6 officers, the family of police officers was considered to be operational police who positioned
7 themselves in opposition to and fighting against an uncaring and monolithic police
8 organisation, who were not seen as family. For the men there was a belief that management is
9 disconnected with the experiences and values of its officers. This was articulated by Noah
10 (MCad)
11

12 I mean you see this drunk guy leaving a pub walking to his car and you stop
13 him actually before he gets into his vehicle and you tell him don't do that, it's
14 a stupid idea and he goes okay and gets a taxi. Essentially you helped
15 someone, you've prevented crime, you've done all the above things, but
16 because you haven't actually fined him or arrested him the odds are your
17 management [will say] you're not really doing anything.
18

19 The male officers valued the identity of being a 'good cop', which meant arresting
20 'bad guys' and helping 'good guys'. It was clear from narratives such as Noah's that the
21 values that motivated this sort of pre-emptive policing was not perceived as a shared value
22 within the organisation. In this context, 'organisation' refers to elements of the police force
23 that are viewed as detached from the lived experience of the officers. This lack of
24 congruence between officers' experiences and organisational values as presented by
25 'management' reinforces findings by Hoggett *et al.* (2019) that police leaders often fail to
26 embody the group identity. The feeling of being alienated from the organisation permeated
27 the male narratives. This deep sense of alienation and despondency was articulated by Troy
28 (MCon):
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1 ... we work for the weakest police force in Australia. We work for a police
2 force that bends to the will of the government ... we have no backing from
3
4 [Police Service Name] and I will say that all day every day; it doesn't bother
5
6 me.
7

8
9 In this extract, Troy draws a clear distinction between 'the police service' and 'we' (the
10 individuals working in the police service) viewing the lack of support from the service as
11
12 'weak'. As previously noted, constructions of copper identities tend to focus on concepts
13
14 such as toughness and strength (e.g., Cordner, 2017; Paoline, 2003; Rawski & Workman-
15
16 Stark, 2018), whereas weakness is often associated with femininity (Prokos & Padavic, 2002)
17
18 and viewed as an inadequate notion for policing (Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). Yet
19
20 interestingly, this was not a narrative that led to a distinction between male and female police,
21
22 but rather united 'coppers' as a group alienated from the organisational hierarchy who were
23
24 failing to live up to the collective identity of 'copper'. For example, Trent (MSer) described
25
26 his dismay at the lack of support from the police service provided to a police officer who had
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28 attracted negative media attention.
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36 What I found embarrassing and I was angry about is that they were prepared to
37
38 hang a senior sergeant out publicly ... What I found sad is what this
39
40 organisation demands of us – integrity. They did not do it then.
41
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43 As with Troy, in the extract above Trent also draws a distinction between 'they' (The Police
44
45 Service) and 'us' the officers, and between the values held by each. This distinction is made
46
47 even more bluntly by Troy (MCon) later in the interview:
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49

50 ... the big boys upstairs don't give a fuck ... and that's why you are getting
51
52 this big divide.
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55 For the men, the 'they' from whom they are alienated appears to include all members of the
56
57 Police Service who are not doing operational policing duties regardless of gender:
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1 Another thing you've got to realise that there's plenty of people in [Police
2 Service Name] that are not doing the operational stuff, and we see them with
3 their feet up, with their lattes, and they're doing – they're getting the same
4 money for doing a quarter of the work, and they get their life a hell of a lot
5 easier. We're only talking about the operational staff (Matthew, MSer)
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11 In contrast to these out of touch 'latte sipping'¹ members, the core blue family are the officers
12 on the street. The officers are positioned as performing under extremely stressful and risky
13 conditions. The senior operational members feel a real sense of responsibility towards these
14 'real coppers' and feel that 'our job as a sergeant now, is to take all the pummelling from the
15 top and then try and stop it and filter it to the junior staff, so that they just don't give up and
16 run off' (Matthew, MSer).
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27 Despite the differences between the way in which the men and women describe their
28 relationship with the police service as a whole, the narrative presented above suggests that
29 there are core similarities in the way in which they view this blue family. Firstly, within the
30 family there is a sense of a fractured identity where their operational experiences as police
31 offers are contrasted with the expectations from senior management who are perceived as
32 self-indulgent and inept. While the men view themselves as agentless in an adversarial
33 relationship, the women tend to believe that there is some agency that can influence the
34 organisation:
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45 ... the rank of Sergeant has the most influence over organisational change. Not the
46 managers at the top, they get told all this; they can't necessarily change it, but the rank
47 and file of the supervisor, which is that Sergeant (Jess, FCon)
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59 ¹ In Australia 'latte drinkers' denotes a class distinction, latte drinkers are most likely white-collar office
60 workers.
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Secondly, both female and male police officers share the belief that individual police officers have a responsibility towards one another, and especially that senior police officers have a duty to protect newer recruits. As stated by Matthew (MSer), his job is to ‘keep them alive out there’.

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In summary, this theme related to the way in which the police officers positioned their identity within the police organisation. Though Prokos and Padavic (2002) argued that the emphasis on masculine traits within police training can create a gendered division within the force, this was not apparent among participant narratives. Participants did not explicitly emphasise gender in their construction of professional identity, but rather saw themselves as part of a ‘blue family’ Instead, this finding reflects more recent scholarship (Schaible 2018; Silvestri 2017) suggesting that a more nuanced understanding of the role of gender in police identity is required. Thus, although the participants did not explicitly mention gender as part of their identity construction, there were distinct gender differences in how they constructed the ‘blue family’ identity. For the more senior female officers, identity centred on their contribution to the organisation as a whole with importance placed on human resource skills such as leadership and professional development. In contrast, the men expressed an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy not based on gender but rather a negative leadership climate created by an elitist senior management team who did not share their values. In summary, while there was a sense of alienation from the organisation as a whole, there was also a sense of group identification with other police officers and with the sense of belonging to a clearly articulated and identified as part of the ‘us’ narrative.

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3.2.Theme 2: Being a copper is a job for life

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The second theme relates to individual identity as a copper, rather than identifying with other individuals within the police organisation. For both men and women, there was a sense that part of the appeal of the police service was the stability offered by being a police

1 officer. For Renee (FSer) ‘There’s job security because I know I’ve got a job for life if I want
2 it there’, a sentiment echoed by Lisa (FCon): ‘[joining] was all about security, I wanted a
3 security of employment, security of my future’. However, this idea of job security was seen
4 by some as potential weakness; joining the police service simply for employment stability
5 provides insufficient motivation to remain in the police service. This concern was expressed
6
7 by Simon (MCon) one of the participants who had previous policing experience from the UK:

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14 people are joining more, it’s a job until a next job comes up ... Talk to some
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16
17 people now it’s well if something else comes along I’ll just jump ship and off I
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19
20 go. So you’re never going to retain these sorts of people.

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22 There is a sense for both men and women, that unless police work is entered into for the right
23 reasons and with the right attitude, individuals will not remain within the service. In terms of
24 identity, there are two factors that we identified as crucial to being able to become a ‘lifer’
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There is a sense for both men and women, that unless police work is entered into for the right reasons and with the right attitude, individuals will not remain within the service. In terms of identity, there are two factors that we identified as crucial to being able to become a ‘lifer’ copper. First, there is a sense that in order to be a copper it is necessary to care for the community at large:

34 Lynda (FSer): I guess it’s different for everyone, but it’s ... that community
35
36
37 desire to help the community usually for a lot of people.

41 Aiden (MCon): Because at the end of the day, regardless of everything that
42
43
44 happens to me I’m here for a reason and that is to put something back into the
45
46
47 community, I mean that’s my driving force.

51 Noah (MCadet): We sort of want to make an impact on our society,
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53
54 essentially. We’re here to enforce laws and sort of keep people safe as well as
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56
57 we can, I think that’s a characteristic that we all sort of possess and sort of just

1 have a positive change and sort of make it a safer place, as corny as that
2
3 sounds but ... I think that's sort of what we aim to achieve.

4
5 Though altruism as a motivation was clearly a shared value by both male and female police
6
7 officers, implicit in Noah's narrative are masculine values of power and protection (Bayerl *et*
8
9 *al.*, 2018). All three statements effectively describe this first aspect of a copper's identity
10
11 that positions coppers as being 'the good guys' who are out there to protect the public from
12
13 'the bad guys' – a sentiment that is well expressed by Trent (MSer):

14
15 .. 99% of our work ... is dealing with that 35% of the population and growing,
16
17 that 35% of population who have a drug problem, or who have an alcohol
18
19 problem, who have got mental disabilities or psychological disorders ... that's
20
21 the people that we mix with, that's our focus group. Now ... 65% of the
22
23 population, we know they exist, we know they're there, but we don't
24
25 necessarily have a lot to do with them.

26
27 The second aspect of this identity reinforces existing beliefs that a police officer's role
28
29 is largely dominated by time spent with dangerous criminals (Cordner, 2017; Crank, 2004;
30
31 Paoline, 2003; Paoline *et al.*, 2000; Prokos & Padavic, 2002). This identity construction also
32
33 emphasises the toughness required to work in the difficult situations created by the '35%'.
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37 This is a view expressed by men and women. For example, Lynda (FSer) described the rigour
38
39 that is required:

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41 [some of the new recruits are] wrapped up in cotton wool, so suddenly when
42
43 they go out into the big wide world and ... and you're living in, you're seeing
44
45 how other people live, a lot of people can't cope with that.

46
47 While Hayden (MCadet) speculated that:

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49 people that leave, short-term, then probably always destined to ... you know
50
51 like, there's some people out there that are just not mentally up to it, they're
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1 just weak and you know, just like you know, they don't get stuff done they'll

2 just crack the shits or they're not willing to put in the effort.

3
4 In this instance both male and female officers refer to the strength in the form of
5
6
7 psychological resilience rather than physical strength as part of the core identity, with the
8
9 clear inference that weakness equates to incompetence. In this sense, it could be argued that
10
11 female officers are adopting the masculine culture within which they are required to operate
12
13 (Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Prokos & Padavic, 2002), and as such the participants did not display
14
15 significant gender differences in how they related to this aspect of police identity. The idea of
16
17 a particular profile of character and innate ability to be a police officer is echoed by Troy
18
19 (MCon):
20
21

22 I think it's very true, is that you don't become a copper. You're born one. You
23
24 just find out later that you are. Because to do this job, and to do for any length
25
26 of time has nothing to do with what you learn or what you know. It's who you
27
28 are.
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34 This suggests a vocational orientation to be a copper effectively positions police identity as
35
36 something that is generated internally and is linked to personal identity. As Gould and Funk
37
38 (1998) previously found, action-oriented personality traits were typical of both male and
39
40 female police officers, suggesting the existence of a police identity transcends factors such as
41
42 gender, rank or satisfaction with the organisation. However, in our study this vocational
43
44 dedication seemed to be most vulnerable for the male participants. Some males, mostly at
45
46 constable level, articulated a growing dissatisfaction and discomfort based on a perceived
47
48 lack of organisational support, as stated by Troy (MCon):
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52 I've worked in places where I've had guns pointed at me. I've had rocks
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54 thrown at me. I've had commendations of merit because I've had to pull
55
56 people out of fires, and this police force has done nothing for me, other than
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1 give me a pay cheque every fortnight. I made a decision a long time ago ...

2 which was I used to owe this job everything; I loved it, and now it owes me.

3
4 What is not clear from this research, however, is whether organisational factors or vocational
5 orientation drove these male participants to even closer association with the blue family who
6 provided the identity reinforcement not provided by the organisation. This finding links to
7 police personality studies (Gould & Voulbrecht, 1999; Gould & Funk, 1998) suggesting that
8 the personality traits of male officers may lead to higher levels of frustration in relation to
9 organisational demands than their female counterparts.
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19 In summary, and as previous research suggests (e.g., Bayerl *et al.*, 2018; Courpasson
20 & Monties, 2017), participating police officers tended to express a clear vision of what it was
21 to be a cop, and thus part of the family, and what it was to not be a cop, 'weak' cadets and
22 management. Thus, this theme covers aspects of identity that relate to individual identity as a
23 copper, rather than identifying oneself as part of a group (as demonstrated in the first theme).
24 Despite previous findings suggesting that a 'true cop' identity focused on the masculine traits
25 of police duties (e.g., Courpasson & Monties, 2017), these police officers tended to think
26 about their police identity more broadly. Both male and female respondents identified
27 external and internal aspects of their identity, including a long-term commitment to being a
28 police officer, a motivation to serve the community, and the typically tough imagery of
29 dealing with 'the bad guys'. Though Schaible (2018) argues that such identities are
30 conflicting and create dissonance, police officers in our study seemed comfortable with being
31 both tough 'law enforcers' and caring cops creating a positive impact on their community.
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51 Despite these police officers understanding the many and varied aspects to their
52 identity as a cop, the more experienced and senior officers tended to create differentiation in
53 role identity between 'cops for life' and the younger generation who view policing as 'a job'.
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1 suggested that this was a mental toughness rather than a focus on physicality as emphasised
2 in past research. In this sense, the decades old warning issued by Dick and Jankowicz (2001)
3 was well heeded in our current analysis of identity in a contemporary police service, where
4 gender appeared to be less influential than generation (older generation of police officer
5 versus young cadets) in relation to identity construction.
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11 **4. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

12 While this research has highlighted some important intersecting influences on the
13 identity construction of police officers, some limitations are acknowledged. Despite the
14 overall sample size exceeding qualitative guidelines (see Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2016),
15 and maximum focus group numbers reflecting modal recommendations for group size, we
16 noticed richer and more detailed individual stories tended to be captured in the focus groups
17 with fewer participants and this may have resulted in a somewhat restricted understanding of
18 identity construction from those new to the police service. As previous findings suggest that
19 there may be differences in the individual identity construction of more senior police
20 compared with new recruits it is important to examine these variations in detail.
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36 Demographic detail including participant age, and role within the police force was not
37 collected. Though some participants shared data of this nature during focus groups this was
38 not consistent across all participants. It is therefore possible that contextual differences may
39 have existed across or between groups. For example, there may have been few participants
40 working in operational policing which could have led to less emphasis being placed on the
41 masculine traits associated with the role and a broader understanding of the organisational
42 goals.
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53 It should also be noted that while the police department in this study was chosen in
54 part due to its progressive and inclusive policies toward female officers, participants were not
55 directly asked questions regarding gender in the police service. It is possible that explicit
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1 questioning on gendered experiences may have revealed a more pronounced gender-based
2 narrative. Further, gender policies within this police service may not be representative of
3 police departments within Australia or internationally. Future research should consider
4 studying police officers from diverse locations and departments to identify if any
5 organisational structures or policies directly influence professional identity construction of
6 police officers, particularly whether differences in gender policies impact on these
7 constructions.
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17 While previous research tends to suggest that males thrive in a seemingly hegemonic
18 masculine culture of policing (e.g., Prokos & Padavic, 2002), this examination of experiences
19 tended to suggest that it was the senior female officers who more positively embraced the
20 organisational structures of the police department, while the male officers were experiencing
21 dissonance between their identity construction and the bureaucratic aspects of policing. Our
22 research suggests that a changing police department that embraces gender inclusion as this
23 one appeared to, may in fact create greater difficulty for males who may not access the same
24 important buffers as the female officers (e.g., social support, shared system of values, positive
25 leadership climate), thereby increasing the risk of police burnout particularly among males.
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Though organisational culture was not an explicit focus of this study, replacing or modifying traditional hegemonic masculine culture within police departments may reduce barriers to females joining the profession. However, this necessary cultural shift may come at the cost of increasing male police officers' sense of abandonment by the organisation. As police services continue to implement gender equity strategies, this paper suggests existing organisational gender norms should be considered in the cultural change management strategy. Doing so, the service can take a preventative approach to reducing stress, increase change acceptance, and strategically support staff wellbeing in the transitional period. This paper suggests that

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police men may be at more acute risk of psychological distress and may require specific gender-informed support strategies to assist with the adjustment.

While beyond the remit of this paper, it must be acknowledged that conceptualisations of gender are evolving. Police services must now consider the roles and needs of individuals entering the police force who identify with non-traditional or non-binary gender labels, such as transgender officers (see for example, Panter, 2018). This evolution marks a significant departure from previous research and merits attention in the future.

In summary, this research highlighted similarities and differences in the professional identity construction of male and female police officers in an Australian state police service. It found that while there were gender differences in the way in which male and female officers related to the police service, these gender differences were not as pronounced in these interviews as was expected based on existing literature and suggests that many factors other than gender play a role in constructing professional identity. This may highlight the importance of intersectionality in the construction of identity. In addition, the study found that while previous research suggests that female police officers struggle to adjust to a hegemonic masculine policing culture, in this research it was male officers, rather than female officers, who felt most alienated by the prevailing organisational culture and norms within the police service. This provides fertile ground for future research to explore the ways in which male police officers are re-positioning their own identity in the face of a changing expectations regarding what it means to be a police officer.

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Table 1

Abbreviations identifying rank and gender

Police rank and gender	Abbreviation	N
Female Cadet	FCad	7
Male Cadet	MCad	8
Female Constable	FCon	4
Male Constable	MCon	8
Female Sergeant	FSer	3
Male Sergeant	MSer	4

Response to reviewers

Reviewer	Comment	Author response
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 3. I don't really understand what this sentence means. Line 48-49</p> <p>When Schaible (2018) investigated whether a strong occupational identity among police officers impacted on views towards community-oriented policing, it was found that a central focus of a police career identity was something that was evident in early career officers.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 4. First line Gender-related (needs a hyphen)</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 4. Lines-17-19, you don't need both "use of" and "usage."</p> <p>It also enables them the use of coercive and potentially lethal usage of power.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 4, line 27.</p> <p>Common descriptions of values and attitudes typical of traditional police culture include being authoritative and macho, preparedness to be coercive, respect for physical strength and courage, eagerness for excitement, emphasis on autonomy, in-group solidarity and loyalty, hostility towards groups regarded as deviant or threatening, suspiciousness, secrecy, sexism, racism, cynicism, and a commitment to the policing mandate (particularly fighting of crime) and duties (Cordner 2017;</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.

	Crank 2004; Paoline 2003; Paoline <i>et al.</i> , 2000).	
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 7 line 24</p> <p>Traditional police culture can therefore present challenges for those entering the police service who hold different experiences and values, or who may not appear to align with values such as physicality, heterosexuality, and the prioritisation of work over family.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 7 line 32, the highlighted part of the sentence below doesn't fit grammatically with the first part of the sentence.</p> <p>Beliefs within police organisations and personnel vary on the spectrum from those who believe policing is for men and so promote masculinised processes and values, to those who see women as playing important roles in transforming policing, and the values they often bring, and attempting to make the police force more female-friendly (Morash & Haarr 2012).</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 7 line 41</p> <p>Female police can feel gender-work identity conflict in a work-culture that prizes more masculine values (Veldman <i>et al.</i>, 2017) and equally male police can resent organisational accommodations implemented to assist females (Haar, 1997), while devaluing qualities</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.

	<p>associated with females (Prokos & Padavic, 2002) perceiving them to be less effective (Haake, 2018).</p>	
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 8, line 41</p> <p>clerical office based work (add hyphen)</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 8, line 49</p> <p>The sentence below is a little clunky, and too long with the second half tacked on.</p> <p>In a study of professional collective identity by Bayerl <i>et al.</i> (2018), 149 police respondents from three European countries highlighted values such as professionalism; discipline; and being physically well-built, a helper, a protector, a crime-fighter, team member; however, they also criticised policing for being old fashioned, needing to demonstrate more innovation, stressful, and a thankless task.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 9, line 7</p> <p>Add comma between wellbeing and with</p> <p>impact on many aspects of their career, family life, and psychological wellbeing with</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 12, line 41</p> <p>Add hyphen between meaning making.</p> <p>Attention was given to congruent meaning making across genders as well as contradictory understandings and constructions.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.

Reviewer 1	Just a general note, don't use "whilst" sometimes, and "while" other times. Be consistent.	This has been checked and use is now consistent.
Reviewer 1	<p>Page 27, line 15, this sentence didn't really make sense to me. What should not be an excuse?</p> <p>Nonetheless, counselling and redeploying can reduce this effect, and it should not be an excuse to challenge masculinist hegemony.</p>	This has been amended in the manuscript.
Reviewer 2	Generally, the topic is interesting and the interviews gleaned interesting statements from the officers. However, the researchers failed to collect demographic data for the participants beyond gender, rank, and total number of each as they comprised the interview groups. Ultimately, there was no way to analyze the information in relation to those who provided it.	Previous literature has shown that data such as years of service can provide relevant context within which to analyse the data (see for example Schaible, 2018). Previous literature has also highlighted the role of rank as significant in officers understanding of identity. We argue that rank provides sufficient context for the analysis of this data. Whilst rank tends to correlate with years of service, we have included additional information in relation to self-reported years of service by participants.
Reviewer 2	In the authors' conclusions, causality is assumed – essentially that interviewees held certain beliefs and these beliefs or their experiences related primarily to their gender. Because no data was collected to analyze, outside of the answers to the questions, there is no way to assess other factors, such as if the participants who felt abandoned by their agency were of one generation as compared to those who felt a positive sense of belonging, who may have seen from another generation.	The issue of potential age related differences (based on rank) has been addressed through the inclusion of self-reported age, years of service, and/or career experience that indicates that the cadet group did not vary significantly from others in terms of representing a different generation (I.e., there existed a mixture of age groups).

<p>Reviewer 2</p>	<p>Just under half of the references were notable older publications, between 12 and 45 years old. The authors relied heavily on older literature, especially from 1998-2002 to present gender differences in policing. Currently in the U.S., women comprise between 20 and 25% of law enforcement officers, which was not true 12 years ago, and was certainly untrue 45 years ago. Yet, the authors point out that their focus group interviews yielded information that was different from the research from decades ago. An example of this is on page 14 where the authors note that the work of Prokos and Padavic (2002) was in contrast to the authors' current findings in that differences were previously based in gender and current differences in how females are treated in this police agency are based, rather, on generational differences.</p>	<p>Additional more recent references have been added.</p> <p>In addition, in the discussion section text has been modified to indicate places where differences between the existing literature and the current study may be due to the age of some of the literature, and more recent citations have been included in the discussion section to support the arguments made.</p> <p>It should be noted that the major thrust of the discussion has not changed, as the conclusions drawn rely on a mix of older and newer literature.</p>
<p>Reviewer 2</p>	<p>I also noted some language that appeared to contain gender bias that should be pointed out to the authors. Perhaps the root of the statements is from the literature they cite or perhaps some re-wording could improve how these read? On page 6, the authors discuss Dick and Jankowicz (2001) "concerning the appropriate focus for women not being solely that of career." Secondly, on page 7, the authors comment how women have had to navigate and adopt masculinized and feminized behaviors, and have had to align themselves with the "dominant" police culture.</p>	<p>Instances highlighted have been amended in the manuscript.</p>

	<p>There are assumptions here that women have to change significantly with regard to stereotypical gender behaviors, although the policing profession tends to attract men and women who have many traits in common already. More discussion and clarification is required at a minimum.</p>	
Reviewer 2	<p>The authors note that the sample sizes in the group are limiting (between 3 and 8 in the groups).</p>	<p>This section has been rewritten to clarify the authors' intentions. Group sizes are acceptable based on recommended guidelines, however the authors wish to acknowledge that smaller groups provided richer data.</p>