4 Doing ‘the Job’

The earlier examination of recruitment amply demonstrates the way in which local autonomy and the consequent discretion allowed in recruitment and selection can generate informal organisational practices which circumvent the equal opportunities legislation. The effect of this is, as we have seen, to restrict the number of women joining the service. This chapter is concerned with what happens to those men and women who do become police officers, and examines the experience of doing ‘the job’.

Focusing on the constraints and dilemmas which surround the employment of women in the service, it seeks to compare and contrast the expectations, experiences and attitudes of men and women actually employed on police duties. Deployment issues are examined from the point of view of the impact that the provisions of the Act have had on the role of policewomen. As such it examines the extent to which the operational role of women has changed in reality as a result of integration. Because of their symbolic importance, part of this examination will inevitably be concerned with those attitudes and beliefs which are cited by police officers as ritual ‘evidence’ of the unsuitability of women for an equal role in policing. However, whilst these will contribute to the substance of this commentary, a fuller discussion of the nature and extent of these attitudes is postponed until Chapter 7. The practical issue dealt with here is the role which women both want and/or are able to fulfil since the Act and whether the reality of integration matches these expectations.

As discussed earlier, the legislation had considerable implications for the police service. In effect, it meant that there was no longer to be any distinction between the way in which men and women were deployed on police duties. Instead of being specialists in those tasks felt to be suitable to the ‘feminine nature’, women were to be employed as generalists undertaking all aspects of police work, including patrol duties. In effect, the Act represented the first legal redefinition of the policewoman’s role since her formal acceptance into the service, even though some limited extension had already begun in a piecemeal fashion in various individual forces. Neverthe-
less, it paved the way for integration and meant the abolition of the
traditional division of duties; duties which were rooted in the classic
classic stereotype of the feminine gender role, originally fought for and
accepted by policewomen over half a century earlier.

The feelings that prevailed nationally at the time of integration
have already been discussed, and at this stage it is important to restate
the fact that many women as well as male officers were against the
change. The various reasons for policewomen's opposition have been
discussed in Chapter 1. However, before going on to examine the
reality of integration in Medshire it seems pertinent to establish
current feelings towards the change even though, as Lock has
commented, 'some women like integration; others do not. Just how it
is working is another story'. At the very least this will allow some
evaluation at a local level of the degree to which integration has been
accepted, as well as providing a backdrop against which deployment
issues can be considered. It will also allow an examination of any
change of attitudes between those men and women who joined the
service before integration and those who have joined since. It will
allow a test of the hypothesis that recent male recruits share their
older male colleagues attitudes which, in turn, are less positive
towards a fully integrated role for women than those of female police
officers. Indeed, the way in which 'it is working' may to some extent
depend upon the degree to which integration has been accepted.

ROLE PREFERENCES

For comparative purposes the role preference questions developed by
Southgate and included in his questionnaire survey of policewomen
in five police forces (Merseyside, Hampshire, Durham, North Wales
and Wiltshire) were used. This survey was conducted in 1977 in order
to assess the views of policewomen (no policemen were surveyed)
towards integration. It compared the replies of women who had
joined before and after the implementation of the Act. By comparing
this data with information from the present study, some estimate of
the way in which attitudes have changed can be made.

As shown in Table 4.1, a third of all the men and women surveyed
in Medshire were in favour of a fully integrated role for women,
compared with 40 per cent in favour of a modified role (in which
women take on similar duties to men except where violence is