Assessing the Effect of Gender and Diversity on the Traditional Police Culture

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Note: This is the preproduction version of the accepted manuscript at *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, Volume 19, 2025. The final, published version can be found at https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaf014

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Abstract: Women remain underrepresented in policing, and their effect on the traditional police culture remains understudied. The current study combines survey data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) and National Police Platform to examine differences between the cultural attitudes of women and men, and whether larger proportions of women within law enforcement organizations affect the attitudes of men. We find that men and women officers differ on attitudes related to traditional law enforcement orientations, coercive attitudes, solidarity, and perceived antipathy from the public, but not on cynicism. While we find evidence of nonlinear relationships between police solidarity among men and larger shares of women in their organizations, there is no evidence that their attitudes shift on other measures. We discuss the implications of disparate attitudes in men versus women police officers, as well as the limited effects of representation on the attitudes of men.

Keywords: gender diversity in policing, traditional police culture, police officer attitudes, critical mass theory, community policing, procedural justice

Introduction

Evidence suggests gender diversity in police organizations improves service delivery (Ba et al. 2021; Shoub et al. 2021; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty 2006). Combined with the significant underrepresentation of women in law enforcement, this evidence motivates widespread pushes for greater representation in the field. For example, the 30x30 Initiative aims to increase the representation of women in policing to 30% by the year 2030, create a more inclusive and equitable police force, and address barriers to recruitment and retention (McGough & Roman, 2024). Simultaneously, extensive research explicates traditional police culture as a cult of masculinity (Silvestri 2018), to the point where policing is a go-to example of a patriarchal institution. The culture in police organizations places a variety of barriers in the paths of women, including unwelcoming workplace environments (Cordner & Cordner 2011), a greater risk of termination during probation (Gaub & Holtfreter, 2022), and unequal processes for determining promotions (Huff et al. 2023; Todak, 2023). This type of culture helps explain why, despite ample motivation and fervent calls for diversity, the representation of women in policing remains low.

Research provides important answers regarding the effects of officer gender and police diversity on service delivery, as well as the experiences of women in law enforcement (e.g., Ba et al. 2020, Rabe-Hemp 2008, Shjarback & White 2016). Few studies have examined whether there are gender differences in officer perceptions of police culture. Furthermore, if we assume there is a desire to depart from the cult of masculinity, there is limited understanding of what mechanisms might empower such a departure. Understanding how women and men perceive the culture of policing, and whether a greater representation of women has an impact on organizational culture, deepens our understanding of police culture broadly and informs our

understanding of the effects of the diversification of law enforcement. Drawing on critical mass theory and work on gender diversity in organizations, we evaluate gendered differences in police attitudes and assess whether a greater presence of women is related to the cultural attitudes of officers in an organization. Specifically, we assess whether changes in police culture might occur through purely compositional effects (i.e., women import different attitudes) or via diffusion of attitudes (i.e., greater representation of women affects the attitudes of men).

Police Culture

According to the 2020 LEMAS survey (USDOJ, 2023), 14% of all officers are women and the agency-level average among municipal police departments was 9.5%. Approximately 3.3% of police departments had achieved a "critical mass" threshold, with at least 30% women officers. These numbers are up from 2013, at which time police departments reported, on average, that 8.4% of their sworn police officers were women, while just 1.7% of police departments were at "critical mass" (USDOJ, 2015).[1]

Policing is a male-dominated institution shaped by gender dynamics that prioritize traditionally masculine traits as the epitome of good police work. Known as hegemonic masculinity, this preference results in the domination and elevated success of men, as women receive less respect and are relegated to positions with more limited authority, influence, and pay (e.g., Shjarback & Todak, 2019; Silvestri, 2018; Todak et al., 2021). It is impossible to understand the persistent underrepresentation of women in U.S. policing without accounting for

1 Sheriff's offices reported higher proportions of women and were more likely to achieve critical mass, but are excluded here because many deputies work in jails or courts (not law enforcement). There are also some methodological differences between the 2013 and 2020 LEMAS surveys when asking about gender composition by assignment in sheriff's offices.

the gendered nature of the institution (Goodison, 2022). Indeed, hegemonic masculinity is so deeply ingrained in policing that this underrepresentation has persisted despite decades of external and internal calls for gender diversity in the profession. For instance, following nationwide protests against the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a Ferguson (MO) police officer, the final report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) included a recommendation that police departments should "strive to create a workforce that contains a broad range of diversity including race, gender, language, life experience, and cultural background to improve understanding and effectiveness in dealing with all communities" (pg. 90; see also National Center for Women in Policing, 2001; NIJ, 2019).

The traditional police culture comprises shared values and norms, often characterized by an "us vs. them" mentality and a focus on aggressive enforcement of the law at the expense of other institutional missions like community policing (Paoline, 2000). This culture reflects both occupational and bureaucratic influences. Key elements of this culture include a law-enforcement orientation, cynicism, coercion, police solidarity, and perceptions of antipathy from the public. Traditional police culture positively values the traits and behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity.

The traditional police culture is characterized by a *law enforcement orientation* that emphasizes swift and aggressive crime-fighting tactics such as making arrests, issuing citations, and maintaining control through authoritative techniques (Paoline, 2000). The preference for this approach may undermine alternative collaborative and root-cause approaches that emphasize community partnerships and strategic problem-solving approaches that take a longer and larger view of public safety. In part, these preferences may emerge because traditional law enforcement produces measurable outputs such as arrests made, citations issued, etc.; on the other hand, there

is no metric for ‘crimes prevented’ or ‘relationships built.’ Both formal and informal rewards for high activity on traditional metrics, in addition to general skepticism about the efficacy of collaborative and preventative strategies, incentivizes a law enforcement orientation over alternatives like community-oriented policing and procedurally-just policing (Bittner, 1974).

Cynicism reflects a deep-seated distrust of human motives and the public, which many scholars identify as a defining element of police culture. Niederhoffer (1967) and subsequent studies highlight how officers' cynicism spans organizational functions, fellow officers, and the public. A recurring theme is the belief that citizens are manipulative, immoral, and untrustworthy, which officers see as reinforcing their indispensable role in maintaining order. This view is paradoxical, as noted by Reiner (2010), who describes it as the "Janus face of commitment," where officers must view humanity as contemptible for their mission to be meaningful. This distrust between police and the public is often reciprocal, as officers see public criticism and activism as driven by anti-police bias, while many citizens view the police as untrustworthy (Morin et al., 2017). The secrecy within police culture, described as a "sacred canopy" (Manning, 1977), further reflects and reinforces this distrust, with officers guarding their internal practices from public scrutiny to prevent perceived manipulation or criticism.

What sets police work apart from other professions is the unique authority granted to officers to use physical *coercion* as part of their duties (Brown, 1981). According to Klockars (1985), coercive power defines the very rationale for law enforcement, enabling officers to quickly resolve conflicts that citizens cannot settle peacefully and ensuring that the use (or threat) of force ensures compliance. However, officers vary significantly in their willingness to use physical force to address problems (Muir, 1977). Some justify excessive force with a mission-driven mindset, believing that the ends justify the means, a perspective that becomes

particularly troubling when officers see themselves as soldiers in a moral crusade against crime (Westley, 1970; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

Solidarity refers to a sense of loyalty and camaraderie among police officers, characterized by a sense of shared identity and mutual aid when facing physical or occupational threats (Skolnick, 2011). Studies also highlight officers' emphasis on sticking together as protection from internal or external criticism (Reuss-Ianni, 1983; Brown, 1981). Police officers tend to perceive hostility and a lack of support from the public, making perceptions of *public antipathy* a defining characteristic of police culture (Skolnick, 2011; Niederhoffer, 1967; Muir, 1977).

Together, these elements of police culture—a traditional law-enforcement orientation, cynicism, coercion, solidarity, and perceptions of public antipathy—reflect the overarching "us-versus-them" mentality that is characteristic of police culture (Skolnick, 2011; Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

Gender Differences

Research on gender differences in police attitudes reveals a tension between two primary theoretical perspectives: the "sameness" approach and the "difference" approach (Poteyeva & Sun, 2009). The sameness approach argues that men and women officers are fundamentally similar in their professional outlooks due to shared occupational socialization processes. Policing is known for its deeply entrenched occupational identity, where individual characteristics are subsumed by a collective culture formed through both formal and informal training (Skolnick, 2011; Van Maanen, 1978). Scholars like Martin (1999) suggest that women entering this masculine-dominated environment must "buy into" the prevailing police subculture to gain acceptance. This cultural assimilation results in women aligning their attitudes and behaviors

with their male counterparts, including sharing traits like cynicism and distrust toward the public (Crank, 2004). Early studies supporting the sameness perspective emerged during an era when women were underrepresented and faced immense pressure to conform to masculine norms. However, the applicability of this theory is complicated by contemporary changes in police diversity and recruitment practices, which have led to a more heterogeneous occupational culture where individual differences play a greater role (Haarr, 1997).

In contrast, the "difference" approach posits that gender role socialization leads to distinct occupational attitudes among men and women officers. Proponents contend that women's experiences and values, shaped by social expectations and patriarchy, influence how they perceive and approach their work (Gilligan, 1982). For example, women officers may be expected to prioritize interpersonal aspects of policing, emphasizing de-escalation, service delivery, and community relations over aggressive law enforcement. Men officers, by contrast, are socialized into the "morality of justice," favoring strict rule enforcement and autonomy in their professional practices (Gilligan, 1982).

The gendered dynamics of policing are further complicated by the concept of "doing gender," where officers consciously or unconsciously perform roles to meet social and organizational expectations (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Martin, 1980). Women officers may adopt one of two adaptive styles: becoming *police*women who align with masculine norms of toughness and ambition to gain peer respect, or police*women* who emphasize femininity and acknowledge the limitations imposed upon them (Martin, 1980). These adaptive strategies reflect the ongoing negotiation between gender identity and occupational expectations in a male-dominated profession.

Several studies highlight areas where gender differences emerge, albeit inconsistently. Silver et al. (2017) found no gender effects on officers' adherence to traditional police culture or support for use of force. In contrast, Marier and Moule (2019), drawing from a larger sample, reported that men officers demonstrated greater solidarity, cynicism, and coercion than women officers. Brooks et al. (1993) found that women officers were less oriented toward the use of force compared to men, though no differences existed in their service or crime control orientations. Gau and Paoline (2024) identified heightened perceptions of danger suspicion among women officers. Nonetheless, Worden (1993) observed that White women officers were more optimistic about the public than White men, suggesting that gender may intersect with race in shaping cynicism.

Most research finds no significant gender differences in the context of community policing. Multiple studies consistently report that men and women officers held similar attitudes toward community policing, problem-solving, and neighborhood engagement (Paoline et al. 2000; Pelfrey 2004; Sims et al. 2003; and Winfree et al. 1996). Similarly, research on officers' attitudes toward the public finds no gender-based differences in perceptions of citizen cooperation or distrust (Brooks et al. 1993; Paoline et al. 2000; Haarr 2001; DeJong 2004; and Sun 2002). Women officers also hold more favorable "global" attitudes toward community policing but did not differ from men in their practical views on its implementation (Schafer 2002). In contrast, Haarr (2001) noted that men officers were more likely to develop favorable perceptions of their ability to implement problem-solving policing during field training, perhaps reflecting self-efficacy as a factor for alternatives to traditional policing styles.

Some research suggests that increasing gender diversity within police organizations may facilitate broader cultural shifts. Schuck (2017) established a time-ordered connection between

higher shares of women in agencies and the adoption of community policing strategies. While individual attitudes may not differ substantially by gender, the collective presence of women could influence organizational cultures, priorities, and practices over time. Much evidence suggests the gendered nature of policing shapes the institution in many ways, including the organizational structures of agencies (Heidensohn, 1992; Huff & Todak, 2023; Schuck, 2014a), citizen perceptions of police (Pica et al., 2020; Simpson, 2017), and the quality of interactions between officers and victims (Kennedy & Homant, 1983; Schuller & Stewart, 2000).

Gender Dynamics and Organizational Change

Increased diversity within organizations may change culture through multiple social processes, consistent with the "differences" approach. First, it allows for greater interaction between groups. Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis suggests such interactions could result in attitude changes (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Paluck, Green, and Green 2019). Additionally, critical mass theory suggests that diversity provides more opportunities to identify allies and build coalitions that will bring about change (Kanter 1977). Moyer (2013) suggests two pathways in which more women in organizations could lead to change. First, shared experiences of women could lead them to advocate changes. Existing organizational norms and values may push women to assimilate; however, as the number of individuals who identify with traditionally underserved groups increases (Hindera & Young 1998), there is a greater likelihood of forming a coalition prepared to introduce or advocate changes. Second, the presence of women, particularly as part of stronger, identifiable coalitions, may have an indirect influence. Women's different communication and leadership styles within small groups could lead to others adjusting their preferences (Eagly and Johnson 1990). Here, the interaction between men and women could result in an unconscious shift in cultural perspectives.

Kanter (1977) developed the idea that increasing the proportion of women in an organization will change it, and her work subsequently contributed to "critical mass theory" research in multiple disciplines, including political science, public administration, business, and sociology. This literature suggests that as women's relative presence in organizations increases, there are greater opportunities for transformative effects. Kanter classified organizations into four groups based on their minority-majority distribution. In uniform social groups, there is no minority representation (100:0), compared to increases in minority representation in skewed groups (85:15), greater increases in tilted groups (65:35), and finally even in balanced groups (50:50). When minority representation is low, such as in skewed groups, the majority group can control the culture, and individuals from underrepresented groups may have greater visibility and be tokenized, creating higher performance pressures, isolation, and feeling entrapped in roles (Holgersson and Romani 2020). Thus, theory suggests that increasing the relative number of minorities may change the experience for those in marginalized groups and may be a path to changing culture as minorities are better able to form coalitions (Kanter 1977). Importantly, Kanter does not specify a number at which she expects changes to occur. One theoretical threshold, 30%, comes from Dahlerup's (1988) work on women's representation in legislatures (Childs and Krook 2009) and research testing the effects of increasing the number of women in organizations and governing bodies to meet this threshold show mixed results.

Kanter and others tend to assume that women in organizations are fundamentally different than men, are relatively similar to each other, that the perspectives women bring to organizations create the potential for change, and that women's similarities will encourage them to form coalitions. These assumptions raise concerns about the applicability of critical mass to change policing, in line with the "sameness" approach previously discussed. For one,

departments may systematically favor or select officers who align with their values, limiting differences in key beliefs among recruits. Second, if there are differences in cultural beliefs, socialization processes may stifle them and limit the anticipated influence of women (Todak et al. 2022; Simon 2023). Extensive research has documented the dominance of heteropatriarchal masculinity within law enforcement (Lander 2016; Prokos & Padavic 2002; Twersky-Glasner 2005). The gendered socialization that occurs during training reinforces masculine norms and expectations. Thus, increasing the number of women in police departments may not be a powerful enough mechanism to confront police culture.

Moreover, increasing the representation of women—particularly via intentional efforts to diversify—may incite backlash from colleagues within a traditionally masculine institution. When there are only a few minorities in an organization, their presence can be perceived as non-threatening. The same majority, however, may view increases in the presence of traditionally underrepresented groups as a threat to the status quo (Blalock, 1967; Doosje, Spears, & Ellemers 2002; Ellemers, van Knippenberg & Wilke 1990). Extensive research in psychology demonstrates that threats to masculinity lead to compensatory behavior and are often tied to increased identification with masculine traits and willingness to engage in aggression (Babl 1979, Fowler & Geers 2016, Cohn & Zeichner 2006). If men see women as a threat, we may expect them to double down or exaggerate their existing cultural attitudes and behaviors, dampening the effects of new attitudes entering the organization.

There are many compelling reasons to promote gender diversity in police organizations. Research has found that agencies with more gender diversity may be more professional (Shjarback & White, 2016), progressive (Mrozla & Marin Hellwege, 2020), perceived as more legitimate and responsive to citizen complaints (Schuck, 2017; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2016),

and diverse in terms of race and sexual orientation (Nowacki et al., 2021). Schuck's (2018) study further found that in agencies with greater gender diversity, women officers are more likely to report sexual violence victimization at the hands of their peers, and higher clearance rates for these incidents.

Proponents, including the 30x30 campaign, suggest that diversification will also lead to changes in police officer attitudes and the traditional police culture. As we have shown, both empirical and theoretical evidence present inconsistencies. First, it is not clear that policemen and policewomen demonstrate substantially different attitudes. Second, if they do, it is not clear whether those attitudes will influence the broader, entrenched police culture. Third, if they do, it is not clear whether these changes will manifest via purely compositional changes or by affecting the attitudes of men. The current study attempts to address these unresolved questions.

Current Study

Claims that increased gender diversity will generate positive cultural change rest on three testable hypotheses: first, that men and women hold different values and attitudes (Hypothesis 1); second, that these differences can influence the attitudes of men (Hypothesis 2); and third, that a critical mass may be necessary before these effects materialize (Hypothesis 3). This study tests these hypotheses. First, we evaluate whether there are differences between men and women officers with respect to their attitudes towards police culture and the police role. If such differences exist, then any effects on the organizational culture may come via two mechanisms: (1) consistent with intergroup contact theory and critical mass theory, women's attitudes may begin to influence the attitudes of men; or (2) the effects may be purely compositional, where the

organizational culture is simply a weighted function of gender distribution. Therefore, we assess whether the representation of women at the organizational level is associated with differences in the attitudes of men within the organization.

However, the relationship between gender composition and men's attitudes may not be linear. In most agencies, the percentage of women in police departments is extremely modest. Because the proportion of women is so small in so many agencies, it is plausible this proportion must reach a threshold size before affecting police culture. Prior theoretical considerations of attitude change in relation to critical mass considered a 30% threshold, not necessarily as an important empirical "turning point" for attitudes within an organization, but as a relatively round number to consider effects of much greater diversity in context. Overall, just 1.7% of all police departments had achieved critical mass in 2013, and *none* in our sample of agencies in which officers were surveyed, with the highest achieving 26%. Rather than rely *only* on a decidedly theoretical threshold, we empirically examine effects of "critical mass" at lower thresholds within our sample. We test these hypotheses as described below.

Methods

Sampling and Data

Data come from Phase II of the National Police Research Platform (NPRP; Rosenbaum et al., 2016), combined with data from the 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey (USDOJ, 2013) and the Uniform Crime Report (UCR, 2014). Specifically, we analyzed 9,792 officer surveys nested within 70 police departments across the U.S. The NPRP involved a two-stage sampling process, wherein all agencies with 100 or more

employees (determined using data from the LEMAS survey) served as the agency sampling frame. One hundred agencies were randomly sampled..

Within each sampled agency, the Chief emailed invitations to take the web-based survey via Qualtrics to all employees. The mean agency response rate was 37%, which is high for web-based officer surveys (Nix et al., 2017). A total of 16,642 responses were received. Of these, 13,098 responses were completed by sworn personnel, while the remainder were completed by civilian employees, which were removed for this analysis. Responses from Sheriff's offices were omitted because detention deputies could not be disaggregated from law enforcement officers in either the NPRP or LEMAS data. Final sample sizes ranged from 8,334-9,626 for comparison of means tests and 6,398-7,511 for multivariate analyses after listwise deletion.

Summary statistics appear in Table 2. Approximately 15% of the officer sample were women (N = 1,279), permitting stable estimates for this historically under-sampled population. The sample was disproportionately White (79.4%), consistent with national trends in policing. One-third (34.7%) were supervisors. The average respondent was 42 years old and had about 16 years of experience at their current agency. Over two-thirds (71%) held an Associate's degree or higher.

Measures

The NPRP survey includes several items related to traditional police culture and orientations toward police work, in addition to basic demographic and personal characteristics. Data from LEMAS and the UCR were also incorporated since officers could be matched to their agency.

Traditional Police Culture Attitudes

Confirmatory factor analysis was used in order to establish convergent and discriminant validity of multiple survey items from the NPRP. Factor analysis was performed in MPLUS using the WLSMV estimator, given its advantages for polytomous outcomes. Ultimately, these 14 indicators loaded onto five factors (law enforcement orientation, cynicism, coercion, solidarity, and perceptions of public antipathy). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Table 1) suggested very good fit, where RMSEA = 0.037, CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.941, SRMR = 0.032. Multilevel CFA results also demonstrated good fit (RMSEA = 0.018, CFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.972, SRMR Within = 0.036, SRMR Between = 0.096) and are available from the corresponding author.

Law-enforcement orientation was measured via four items that measured the extent to which officers supported alternatives to traditional reactive law enforcement techniques, including procedural justice, community-oriented policing, broken-windows policing, and crime analysis and prevention. To measure opposition to procedurally-just policing, officers were given its definition ("Encourages officers to show respect and concern for citizens and demonstrate fairness in the way they handle their problems"). They were then asked, "What is your view of the procedural justice approach," responding on a scale from 1 (Strongly support it) to 5 (Strongly oppose it). To measure opposition to community policing, officers were first given the following definition, ("Being responsive to community concerns and working in close partnership with the community to solve problems") and asked about their support/opposition on the same 5-point scale. To measure opposition to broken windows policing, officers were given its definition ("Preventing a neighborhood's quality of life from deteriorating to prevent serious crime from increasing") and asked about their support/opposition on the same 5-point scale. To measure opposition to crime

analysis and prevention, officers were given its definition ("Analyzing computerized data to look for patterns, identify offenders, or prevent future crimes") and asked about their support/opposition on the same 5-point scale. These items were averaged into a composite scale measuring *law enforcement orientation*, where higher scores represent *opposition* to community/problem-solving approaches and therefore support for more traditional law enforcement techniques ($\alpha = 0.661$, $\lambda > 0.478$).

Cynicism was measured using three items that captured the extent to which officers expressed distrust of the public (see Table 1 for all items). These items were measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 4 = "Strongly Agree." These items were averaged into a composite scale where higher scores indicate greater suspicion ($\alpha = 0.527$, $\lambda > 0.499$).

Coercion was measured with three items that captured the extent to which officers felt the need to be physical, tough, and aggressive (see Table 1). These items, as above, were measured on a 4-point scale. These items were averaged into a composite scale where higher scores reflect more coercive attitudes ($\alpha = 0.636$, $\lambda > 0.577$)

Police *solidarity* was measured with two items (see Table 1), and measured on the same 4-point scale as above and were averaged into a composite scale where higher scores indicate more police solidarity ($\rho = 0.544$, $\alpha = 0.547$, $\lambda > 0.538$).

Perceptions of public antipathy were measured with two reverse-coded items: "Most people respect the police"; and "The relationship between police and the people of this city is very good." These items were measured using the same 4-point scale as above and were averaged into a composite scale where higher scores indicate more perceived antipathy or less public support ($\rho = 0.672$, $\alpha = 0.672$, $\lambda > 0.707$).

[TABLE 1]

Personal and Demographic Characteristics

In multivariate analyses, several personal and demographic characteristics from the NPRP survey were included as control variables. *Supervisor* status is recorded as a binary variable. Race was dichotomized into a variable named *White*, where 1 = White and 0 = non-White. *Education was* recorded as an ordinal variable, where 1 = H.S./G.E.D., 2 = some college, 3 = two-year degree, 4 = four-year degree, 5 = some graduate courses, and 6 = a graduate or professional degree. *Experience* was measured as continuous variables in years.

Gender Composition and Other Agency-Level Characteristics

Using LEMAS data (USDOJ, 2013), we measured *percent women* as the share of full-time sworn officers within each department that are women. The agency mean of *percent women* from LEMAS was not significantly different than the mean proportion of women responding to the NPRP survey in each agency, suggesting a representative sample (12.3% vs 11.8%, p = 0.220). To test for the relative influence of women officers in supervisory positions, we also measured *percent women supervisors*, which is the share of all supervisors in the department who are women. These two measures of gender composition were correlated at 0.672 and did not produce multicollinearity. *Percent White* measures the share of full-time sworn officers within each department that are White.[2] Because officer attitudes may be a function of work volume,

[2] The agency mean of percent White from LEMAS was not significantly different than the mean proportion of White officers responding to the NPRP survey in each agency (74.9% vs. 72.6%, p = .118).

danger, and crime, we also control for *officer-to-population* ratio (per 10,000 citizens), as well as the *violent crime rate*, re-scaled to violent crimes per 1,000 citizens (UCR, 2013).

Analysis

In the first stage of analysis, descriptive statistics are reported, and two-sample *t* tests are conducted to evaluate whether differences exist between men and women on attitudes and orientations toward police work.[3] To assist the interpretation of substantive differences, especially given the exceptionally large and highly sensitive sample, Cohen's *d* was used to estimate effect sizes.

The second stage of analysis evaluates multilevel linear regression models to examine whether gender is still associated with attitudinal differences in police culture after accounting for other differences (such as education, assignment, and race). Furthermore, men-only models allowed us to explore whether an agency's gender composition is associated with men officers' cultural attitudes. Finally, we tested whether and where critical mass is achieved via nonlinear modeling. Specifically, we squared the *percent women* and *percent women supervisors* variables in another series of multilevel regression models to evaluate whether there may be a quadratic relationship between gender composition and men's attitudes (see Figure 1).[4]

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[3] Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum tests and corresponding effect sizes were evaluated because most variables were measured using Likert scales. However, the patterns of significance were the same and nonparametric effect sizes were similar, as they tend to be with very large samples. Therefore, the more familiar and interpretable *t* tests and Cohen's *d* are reported here. Nonparametric results are available from the corresponding author.

[4] We also explored log-linear relationships, with similar findings.

Multilevel models were estimated because officers are clustered within agencies; within an agency, officers tend to be more similar to each other on unobserved variables, which multilevel models address with an agency-level error term (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). All predictors were grand-mean centered. All regression analyses were conducted in Stata 18MP using robust standard errors.[5]

[FIGURE 1]

Results

Comparisons of means (Table 2) showed several significant and substantive differences between the attitudes of police men and women. Women were consistently less coercive than their peers: all three coercion items were statistically significant between men and women ($p < 0.001$), with effect sizes ranging from 0.146 to 0.276. Women were significantly less likely to embrace the traditional police solidarity/blue wall, with effect sizes of 0.143 and 0.340. They tend to perceive significantly *more* antipathy from the public, with effect sizes of 0.171 and 0.117. While there were no gender differences in support for crime analysis, women were significantly less likely to oppose procedurally just policing ($d = 0.175$), community policing ($d = 0.153$) and broken windows policing ($d = 0.121$). Only measures of *cynicism* were consistently similar between men and women.

Men and women were also significantly different in many of their personal/demographic characteristics. For instance, women were less likely to be White (70.2%) than men (78.5%),

[5] Given the modest reliability coefficients, each indicator was also modeled as a discrete outcome and converged with the broader patterns herein.

were about a year younger, and had more education. They were also slightly less likely than men to work in patrol or hold supervisory positions, where they were relatively more likely to work in investigations, youth services, and central administration.

[TABLE 2]

According to multilevel regression models (Table 3), the general pattern of gendered differences in attitudes persists even when controlling for individual and agency characteristics: women were less likely to adopt a traditional law enforcement orientation (b = -0.111, p < 0.001). Women were also significantly less coercive than men (b = -0.155, p < .001), support significantly less police solidarity (b = -0.195 , p < 0.001), and perceive more antipathy from the public (b = 0.140, p < 0.001). Thus, the results reported in Tables 2 and 3 provide support for Hypothesis 1, suggesting that men and women differ with respect to police culture on *law enforcement orientation, coercion,* and *police solidarity*. Nonetheless, there were no substantial differences on *cynicism*, and women perceive *more*, not less, antipathy from the public.

[TABLE 3]

The results in Table 4 address Hypothesis 2 by evaluating the effect of agency and supervisor gender composition on men's attitudes in both linear (Models 1, 3, 5, 7, 9) and nonlinear models (Models 2, 4, 6, 8, 10). Larger proportions of women officers had no direct association with men's attitudes. The share of women *supervisors* in the department was associated with a significant *increase* in coercive attitudes among men (b = 0.646, p < 0.01). There is no evidence that women police officers improve the hegemonic police culture, refuting a linear relationship for Hypothesis 2.

[TABLE 4]

A nonlinear measure of *percent women* has an association only with *police solidarity*: as the share of women officers increases, there is an exponential reduction in police solidarity among men (b = -13.665, $p < 0.01$), with an inflection point around 13% women. This relationship is visualized in Figure 2. *Police women supervisors* was associated with an exponential *increase* in cynicism among men (b = 7.216, $p < 0.05$). Given the large and sensitive sample and the number of relationships under examination, these significant findings warrant caution. Across 10 models, few relationships are significant, and only one in the hypothesized direction. Thus, we find very little support for Hypothesis 3.

[TABLE 4]

[FIGURE 2]

Discussion

There is some reason to believe that a hypermasculine organizational culture may undergo shifts as organizational demographics change, particularly if the representation of minority groups approaches a critical mass. Our results satisfy a key assumption of critical mass theory: that women are distinct from men in terms of their cultural and workplace attitudes (Hypothesis 1). Nevertheless, we did not find that men's attitudes were affected by agency-level gender composition, whether measured as percent women sworn, or percent women supervisors (Hypothesis 2). There was also limited evidence of a critical mass inflection (Hypothesis 3), with two caveats: no agencies in our sample had reached the theoretical critical mass threshold of 30% women, with the highest achieving 26%; and police solidarity falls among men as the share of women in an agency exceeds about 13%.

There has been some speculation that men and women in policing may *not* differ in their norms and values, whether due to self-selection into the profession, recruitment processes that maintain a hegemonic culture, socialization processes within the academy and agency, or universal, gender-neutral aspects of policework (such as danger and coercive authority) that lead to normative coping mechanisms characteristic of the traditional police culture. To the extent that this study finds several noteworthy differences between the attitudes of men and women on aspects of police culture, claims of similarity on norms and values may be overstated. Women are significantly less likely to adopt traditional law enforcement orientations, significantly less coercive, and significantly less likely to endorse a culture of police solidarity than men, consistent with evidence that they use less force and commit fewer violations of policy and law (e.g., Garner et al., 2002; Cubitt et al., 2022). They are also more likely to support community policing and procedurally-just policing. Nonetheless, they are just as cynical as their counterparts. And troublingly, they perceive *even less* support from the public than men. This speaks to the skepticism and hostility that women may perceive not only from their colleagues, but also from members of the public.

These results are meaningful for several reasons. First, they are consistent with prior evidence that women use less force and commit fewer acts of procedural injustice (e.g., Lonsway et al., 2002), suggesting that attitudes about police work correspond to behavior in the field, and providing a plausible attitudinal mechanism for those findings. Furthermore, our findings build upon evidence that police officers' norms are not a "monolithic" response to the operational and organizational peculiarities of police work (Paoline & Gau, 2018)—since men and women share these experiences—but are rather also a function of one's own identity and associated experiences.

Our results, however, do not support the idea that women's relatively more favorable attitudes about police work are associated with the attitudes of men they work with, with the caveat that an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. While we observe few linear or nonlinear relationships between gender composition and shifts in attitudes, women's representation in American police departments is so small that we may lack data necessary to empirically examine critical mass effects, should they exist. Therefore, the results of this study suggest one of two possibilities: either that changes to an agency's culture stemming from gender diversity may be entirely driven by compositional effects, or the diffusion of attitudes from women to men requires far more women than has been achieved to date. This may mean that critical mass as an approach to change the attitudes of men is only available to a small percentage of departments–namely, those with an already considerably high percentage of historically underrepresented officers on the force (Nicholson-Crotty et al. 2017). Gendered components of these organizations are embedded over years, sometimes via direct hostility and sometimes via unconscious social categorization and ingroup biases or preferences (Reskin 2000). There is often a general bias toward the status quo in the face of reform (Fernandez & Rodrik 1991), particularly for the more powerful group within an institution. Those in more powerful groups may be more apt to categorize others, more likely to act on stereotypes stemming from categorizations (Reskin 2000), and more likely to stereotype when their powerful status is under threat (Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske 1998). Thus, men likely focus heavily on protecting the status quo, perhaps by ignoring information that runs counter to stereotyped expectations or by calling attention to information that confirms stereotyped beliefs (Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske 1998) about enhancing gender diversity in policing. If further attempts to enhance gender diversity in policing lead to more careful protection of the status quo by men,

internal organizational conflict may come in the form of disengagement from efforts to increase diversity, highlighting negative stereotypes of groups who threaten traditional values, or biased assessments of some officers' suitability for the organization or profession, all of which further undermine the advancement of women and minorities in positions where they are traditionally underrepresented (see Davis & Hassan 2024).

Given these obstacles, attitudinal shifts seem unlikely, particularly if one expects those changes to happen via diffusion of attitudes from women to men. Instead, our results suggest that modest changes to aspects of traditional police culture may come from changing the composition of departments such that women import new and different attitudes into the profession. Women could import approaches to policing that are more supportive of community policing and procedural justice, and less aligned with the traditional cultural values of coercion and police solidarity. Thus, more women may reduce the traditional "us versus them" approach to policing. To be clear, this has not happened to date. A path toward cultural change that relies on value transmission places a significant burden on a traditionally underrepresented group to maintain their differences in assessment of traditional, masculine police culture, even as expectations of assimilation may grow stronger. Researchers and police departments often frame masculinity as neutral, traditional, taken-for-granted aspects of culture (Prokos & Padavic 2002; Portillo, Bearfield, & Humphrey 2020), leaving members of non-traditional groups to resolve issues of culture and equity. This begs the question of what police leaders and departments can do, if anything, to increase the likelihood of diffusion of attitudes from women officers to other members or structural aspects of the organization. For example, organizational leaders play a crucial role in ensuring that new values can seep into existing practices *and* in communicating the value, benefits, and effectiveness of reform-minded policy changes. Otherwise, there is

immense pressure on departments to achieve change only via compositional changes, leaving leaders more focused on successful recruitment and retention efforts while already facing understaffed departments. The importance of leadership is also highlighted in contact theory, where attitude changes is more likely to occur when it is supported by leadership. Moreover, Childs and Krook (2009) argue that critical actors are more effective at creating institutional change than critical mass.

Several limitations may be addressed in future research. First, limited variability in gender composition leaves our evaluation of critical mass unresolved. Though our results indicate little relationship between gender diversity and agency-level attitudes, future research is needed to explore potentially higher critical mass thresholds. Second, our analytical approach is cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, which does not allow us to consider whether a change in gender diversity within an organization leads to changes in men's attitudes within that same organization. Agencies with less traditional cultures may be more likely to recruit, hire, and retain women, either through intentional efforts or because they are less rigid in what they expect from an onboarding or socialization process.

This study underscores the differentiated attitudes toward police work between men and women officers. Despite these differences, there is insufficient evidence that higher percentages of women correlate with significant changes in attitudes among men. This suggests that calls for increased gender diversity in policing depend upon either compositional change alone, or much higher thresholds of representation than most departments currently reach. Gendered norms in policing are deeply entrenched and resistant to change, suggesting that significant compositional shifts may be necessary but insufficient on their own to reform traditional police culture. There

may be a need for more strategic, systemic approaches to fostering change within police departments, rather than relying solely on increased representation of women.

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Fig. 1: Theoretical "critical mass" relationship between police attitudes and gender composition

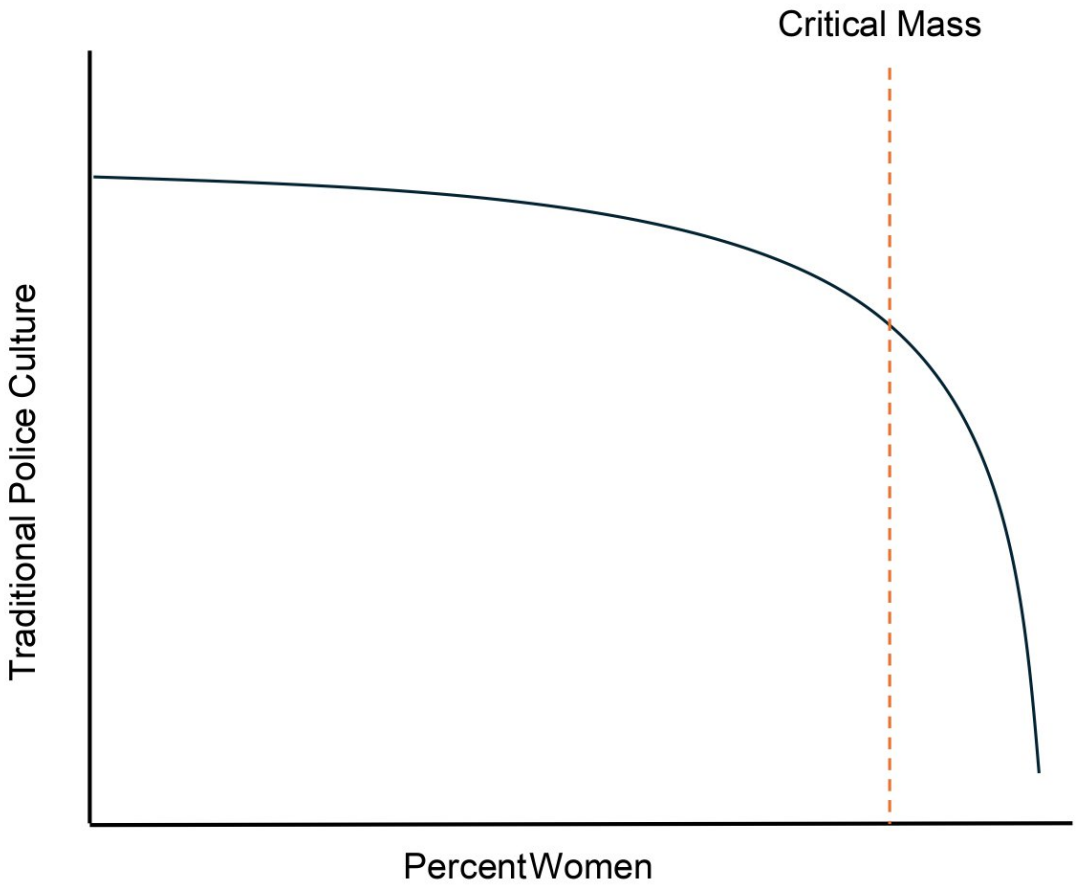
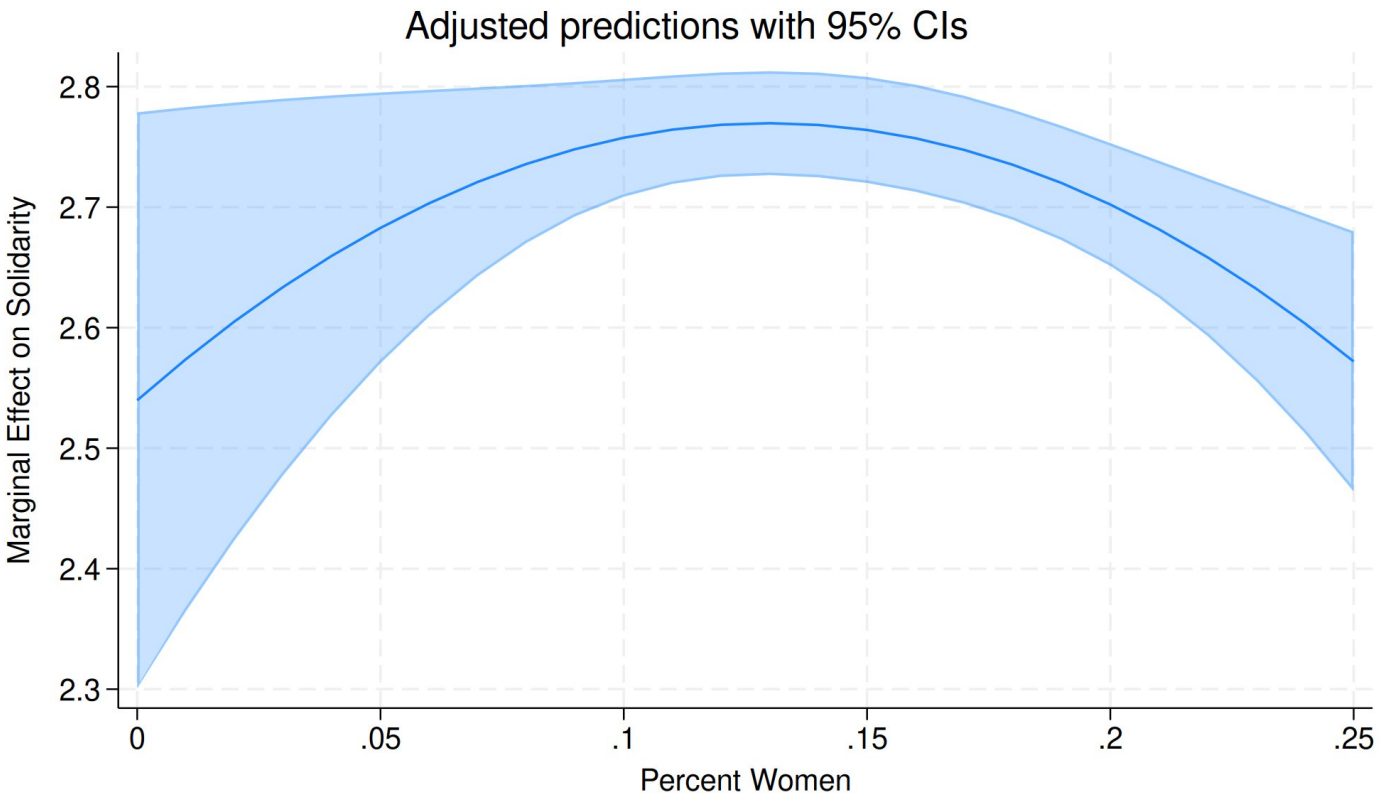


Fig. 2: Agency gender composition and police solidarity



Latent Variable	Indicator Name	Survey Item	β	SE	α
Law Enforcement Orientation	Oppose PJ Policing	What is your view of the procedural justice approach?	.690	.021	.661
	Oppose Comm. Policing	What is your view of the community policing approach?	.837	.014	
	Oppose Broken Windows	What is your view of the Broken Windows approach?	.478	.015	
	Oppose Crime Analysis	What is your view of Crime Analysis & Prevention?	.515	.018	
Cynicism	Distrustful	Officers have a reason to be distrustful of most citizens.	.704	.009	.527
	Misunderstood	The public doesn't understand what it means to be an officer.	.569	.01	
	Media Unfair	The media treat the police unfairly.	.499	.015	
Coercion	Aggressive	It is more useful to be aggressive than courteous.	.799	.008	.636
	Physical	Some people can only be brought to reason the hard, physical way.	.597	.011	
	Tough	If officers don't show they're physically tough, they will be seen as weak.	.577	.01	
Solidarity	Stick Together	Officers need to stick together—police can't count on anyone else to protect them.	.830	.015	.547
	Loyalty	Loyalty to other officers should be one of the highest priorities	.538	.013	
Perceptions of Public Antipathy	(Dis)Respect	Most people respect the police. (reversed)	.840	.014	.672
	(Bad) Relationship	The relationship between police and the people of this city is very good. (reversed)	.707	.017	

Notes: All loadings significant at $p < .001$. $\chi^2 = 949.042$, RMSEA = .037, CFI = .957, TLI = .941, SRMR = .032. n = 9,670.

Table 2: Summary statistics and comparison of mean differences between the attitudes of men and women in policing.

	Total Sample			Men			Women						
	Mean	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean Diff.**	**SE**	**p-value**	**Cohen's d**
Oppose PJ Policing	1.777	.937	9,241	1.794	.943	7,261	1.631	.852	1,248	-.163	.029	.000	.175
Oppose Comm. Policing	1.999	1.010	9,626	2.012	1.013	7,405	1.858	.938	1,268	-.154	.030	.000	.153
Oppose Broken Windows	1.887	.937	9,469	1.892	.941	7,364	1.779	.855	1,259	-.112	.028	.000	.121
Oppose Crime Analysis	1.985	1.006	9,342	1.979	1.000	7,380	1.945	.972	1,263	-.035	.030	.251	
Distrustful	2.247	.731	9,183	2.244	.733	7,391	2.254	.718	1,262	.009	.022	.683	
Misunderstood	3.270	.636	9,162	3.276	.633	7,412	3.235	.653	1,272	-.041	.019	.032	.065
Media Unfair	3.042	.829	9,097	3.040	.833	7,380	3.050	.799	1,261	.010	.025	.700	
Aggressive	2.716	.846	9,171	2.736	.848	7,378	2.605	.827	1,266	-.131	.026	.000	.154
Physical	2.330	.799	9,119	2.365	.802	7,370	2.145	.763	1,265	-.220	.024	.000	.276
Tough	2.444	.727	9,117	2.458	.726	7,383	2.351	.724	1,264	-.106	.022	.000	.146
Stick Together	2.528	.861	9,194	2.545	.864	7,342	2.422	.825	1,258	-.122	.026	.000	.143
Loyalty	2.881	.713	9,093	2.915	.705	7,347	2.674	.725	1,258	-.241	.022	.000	.340
(Dis)Respect	2.451	.762	9,210	2.422	.756	7,407	2.590	.772	1,268	.167	.023	.000	.171
(Bad) Relationship	2.513	.748	9,114	2.478	.746	7,394	2.679	.727	1,263	.201	.023	.000	.117
Control Variables													
White	.794	.404	8,511	.808	.394	7,179	.716	.451	1,247	.092	.012	.000	.229
Education	3.556	1.392	8,812	3.495	1.359	7,392	3.871	1.378	1,274	.376	.041	.000	.276
Age	42.319	8.533	8,395	42.441	8.514	7,086	41.557	8.625	1,241	-.884	.262	.001	.104
Experience	15.847	8.357	8,334	15.889	8.441	7,038	15.558	7.914	1,232	-.332	.258	.199	
Patrol Assignment	.433	.495	8,848	.440	.496	7,360	.384	.486	1,272	-.057	.015	.000	.114
Supervisor	.347	.476	8,955	.358	.479	7,399	.292	.455	1,273	-.065	.014	.000	.137
Agency-Level Variables													
Percent Women	.149	.053	9,476	.145	.053	7,176	.164	.051	1,255	.019	.002	.000	.363
Pct. Women Supv.	.112	.059	9,057	.109	.059	6,880	.124	.055	1,177	.015	.002	.000	.260
Percent White	.723	.182	9,523	.733	.178	7,209	.693	.185	1,261	-.040	.005	.000	.225
Officer:Pop. Ratio	23.313	9.348	9,523	22.964	9.186	7,209	24.736	9.908	1,261	1.772	.284	.000	.191
Crime Rate	6.755	3.963	9,779	6.653	3.981	7,418	7.138	3.801	1,279	.484	.120	.000	.122

Table 3: Multilevel regression of police culture attitudes on gender and control variables

	(1) LEO	(3) Cynicism	(5) Coercion	(7) Solidarity	(9) Antipathy
Woman	-.111***	-.020	-.155***	-.195***	.140***
	(.022)	(.017)	(.020)	(.018)	(.017)
White	.153***	.083***	.127***	.041*	.073***
	(.031)	(.013)	(.016)	(.021)	(.020)
Education	-.038***	-.023***	-.015**	-.026***	-.030***
	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)
Experience	-.001	-.008***	-.010***	-.008***	-.008***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Patrol Assignment	.135***	.094***	.080***	.187***	.033*
	(.022)	(.015)	(.017)	(.018)	(.013)
Supervisor	-.180***	-.098***	-.161***	-.213***	-.144***
	(.026)	(.016)	(.030)	(.023)	(.019)
% Women	.276	.303	-.344	-.299	.579
	(.504)	(.310)	(.289)	(.389)	(.597)
% Women Supv.	.208	.185	.705**	.558	-.206
	(.426)	(.281)	(.254)	(.327)	(.503)
Officer:Pop. Ratio	.006*	.004	.002	.007**	.013***
	(.003)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.004)
Crime Rate	.011	.008*	.014***	.014*	.034***
	(.006)	(.004)	(.003)	(.006)	(.007)
Constant	1.884***	2.843***	2.501***	2.721***	2.485***
	(.020)	(.016)	(.013)	(.015)	(.028)
Random Effect SD	.109***	.099***	.073***	.088***	.187***
	(.010)	(.009)	(.012)	(.012)	(.015)
Residual SD	.637***	.497***	.572***	.615***	.569***
	(.018)	(.006)	(.008)	(.007)	(.011)
N	7,508	7,511	7,507	7,499	7,511
LL	-7,312	-5,452	-6,491	-7,029	-6,499
χ^2	299.951	560.517	501.398	502.604	414.154

*Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*

Table 4: Multilevel regression of men's attitudes on linear and nonlinear measures of agency gender composition and supervisor gender composition

	(1) LEO	(2) LEO	(3) Cynicism	(4) Cynicism	(5) Coercion	(6) Coercion	(7) Solidarity	(8) Solidarity	(9) Antipathy	(10) Antipathy
White	.155***	.155***	.076***	.076***	.125***	.125***	.033	.033	.068**	.068**
	(.034)	(.034)	(.016)	(.016)	(.018)	(.018)	(.023)	(.023)	(.025)	(.025)
Education	-.039***	-.039***	-.023***	-.023***	-.017***	-.017***	-.027***	-.027***	-.032***	-.032***
	(.006)	(.006)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)
Experience	-.000	-.000	-.009***	-.009***	-.010***	-.010***	-.007***	-.007***	-.008***	-.008***
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Patrol	.146***	.146***	.088***	.088***	.076***	.076***	.180***	.180***	.028	.028
Assignment	(.023)	(.023)	(.014)	(.014)	(.018)	(.018)	(.020)	(.019)	(.016)	(.016)
Supervisor	.190***	-.190***	-.104***	-.104***	-.175***	-.175***	-.225***	-.224***	-.145***	-.145***
	(.029)	(.029)	(.015)	(.015)	(.031)	(.031)	(.024)	(.024)	(.017)	(.017)
% Women	.348	.308	.218	.227	-.325	-.325	-.282	-.375	.613	.617
	(.507)	(.495)	(.354)	(.308)	(.274)	(.295)	(.419)	(.362)	(.605)	(.615)
% Women^2		-2.872		-8.957		-1.350		-13.665**		4.899
		(5.624)		(4.844)		(5.015)		(5.250)		(8.752)
% Women	.142	.087	.206	.197	.646**	.644*	.539	.405	-.243	-.235
Supv.	(.427)	(.447)	(.296)	(.292)	(.248)	(.264)	(.344)	(.328)	(.513)	(.506)
% Women		-1.423		7.216*		1.030		1.406		-3.655
Supv. ^{2}		(5.113)		(3.476)		(3.312)		(3.289)		(7.138)
Officer:Pop.	.008*	.008*	.004	.006**	.003	.003	.008**	.010***	.012**	.011**
Ratio	(.003)	(.003)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.004)	(.004)
Crime Rate	.010	.010	.008*	.007	.014***	.014***	.014*	.012*	.034***	.035***
	(.006)	(.006)	(.004)	(.004)	(.003)	(.003)	(.006)	(.006)	(.007)	(.007)
Constant	1.899***	1.911***	2.843***	2.844***	2.525***	2.525***	2.750***	2.781***	2.459***	2.457***
	(.020)	(.024)	(.017)	(.025)	(.012)	(.021)	(.015)	(.023)	(.028)	(.035)
Random	.110***	.110***	.102***	.099***	.069***	.069***	.090***	.083***	.185***	.185***
Effect SD	(.011)	(.011)	(.01)	(.010)	(.011)	(.011)	(.013)	(.012)	(.015)	(.016)
Residual SD	.645***	.645***	.497***	.497***	.575***	.575***	.616***	.616***	.569***	.569***
	(.018)	(.018)	(.006)	(.006)	(.008)	(.008)	(.007)	(.007)	(.010)	(.010)
N	6,398	6,398	6,400	6,400	6,396	6,396	6,389	6,389	6,400	6,400
LL	-6,310	-6,309	-4,648	-4,646	-5,559	-5,559	-6,007	-6,004	-5,547	-5,547
χ^2	263.896	269.615	496.053	497.809	318.527	347.063	234.294	296.740	280.771	293.450

*Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.*