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Attitudes toward women in the Swedish police force

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Attitudes Toward Women In The Swedish Police Force

This study is aimed to investigate attitudes toward women in the Swedish police force. The main question was to see if there were any difference in the answers by men and women. I have tested 58 male and 28 female police officers, with explicit and implicit instruments. The respondents finished a self-report survey containing a scale for attitudes toward women in the police, the Classic Sexism scale and the Modern Sexism scale. To measure implicit attitudes, the implicit association test was used, where the respondents associated pictures of male and female police officers with positive and negative stimuli words. The data were analyzed using multivariate and univariate analysis of variance. The results showed that men and women do differ significantly on both the explicit and implicit measure. Despite this, there were no negative attitudes to be found in the explicit measure. The implicit measure showed that both men and women show a preference for their own gender when it comes to associate gender and competence as a police officer.

Key words: attitudes, prejudice, women, police, explicit, implicit, iat

“The idea is that equal opportunities are a matter only for women. According to the male criteria the women should therefore take care of equal rights as they take care of housecleaning, childcare, laundry and other female business”¹.

Claes Borgström, representative of equal opportunities, wrote the statement² above in the magazine *Swedish Police* (2003). The reason was not to express his thoughts about the equal rights debate within the Swedish police force but rather to shed light on the conservative view on women in *male* workplaces (e.g., The Swedish police force).

In the article he continues: “It’s really pleasant that the investigation on the murder of former minister of foreign affairs, Anna Lindh, is characterized by women. The director of the public prosecution authority Agneta Blidberg, the commissioner of police in Stockholm Karin Götblad, press spokeswoman Stina Wassling represents together with criminal investigator Leif Jennekvist a professional and confident police work”³.

The murder of Anna Lindh attracted much attention by the Swedish society and demands to catch the murderer were raised by the Swedish people. They did not want to see another failure like the investigation on the murder of former Prime Minister Olof Palme, which still to this day is officially unsolved. Claes Borgström emphasises in the article that within the Swedish police force we have competent women to handle large investigations like those mentioned earlier.

Now we know that women are able to serve as police officers, but what about the general opinion within the police force? Do male police officers think that their female colleagues are suitable for the job? What do the female police officers really think of women in policing? What about the attitudes toward one’s own and the opposite gender within the Swedish police force?

¹ Original quotation in Swedish: “Föreställningen är att jämställdhet är en fråga endast för kvinnor. Enligt den manliga normen bör därför kvinnor lämpligen ta hand om jämställdheten precis som städning, barntillsyn, tvätt och andra liknande kvinnogöromål”.

² The statement was written with a tone of irony

³ Original quotation in Swedish: “Mot den bakgrunden är det verkligen glädjande att utredningen om mordet på utrikesminister Anna Lindh präglas av kvinnor. Överåklagare Agneta Blidberg, länspolismästare Carin Götblad, presstaleskvinnan Stina Wessling representerar tillsammans med utredaren Leif Jennekvist ett professionellt och förtroendeingivande polisarbete”.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes held by both gender among the police officers toward female police officers. Are we able to find prejudice against the female gender in the Swedish police? Can we find these prejudices in the Police using and comparing explicit and implicit instruments?

Attitudes are a psychological phenomenon and express the opinions we might have on people and events in the world, and in fact, everyone has attitudes toward something. It can be difficult to measure attitudes because of its abstract nature compared to phenomenon in math, physics or other nature science areas (Allport, 1954; Sjögren, 2005).

A person can evaluate some aspect in the world as favourable or unfavourable to himself or herself, which is the predisposition of an attitude. Attitudes include both an affective aspect of liking or disliking and a cognitive element that describe an object, its characteristics and its relation to other objects (Allport, 1954; Katz, D, 1960).

When discussing the nature of attitudes we cannot escape explaining the meaning of prejudice. Prejudice is a form of attitude and is defined by an overgeneralization of an aspect such as ethnic groups, different professions or gender. A prejudice can be *pro* as well as *con* meaning that prejudice doesn't always has a negative sense despite the sound of it (Allport, 1954).

The family, the soccer team, the math study group or the gender male, they all are examples of groups, or more precisely *in-groups*. Allport (1954) writes that it is difficult to precisely define an in-group. The main characteristic is that a member of an in-group use the term *we* about its members. The *out-group*, on the other hand, is the opponents in a soccer match, it is the other family or it can be the opposite gender to yours. *Between-groups* are able to exist when people from an in-group interact with a member of an out-group.

When you, as a member of an in-group, meet a person of the out-group, you most likely hold *stereotypical* beliefs about that person, or in fact about all the persons of *that* group. The stereotypical belief is an overgeneralization just as prejudices. The overgeneralization means that you tend to categorize people in groups instead of seeing them as individuals (Allport, 1954). You might say that all women are weak and tender individuals just because you have met three or four women with those characteristics. When you then meet a woman further on you search for characteristics that fulfil your stereotypical beliefs (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2005), and a vicious cycle of prejudice is spinning.

Sexism is generally understood as prejudicial beliefs based on a person's gender (Campbell, Schellenberg & Senn, 1997), but in many studies sexism is defined as a discrimination or prejudice directed solely against women (Ekehammar, Akrami & Araya, 2000; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Swim, Aikin, Hall & Hunter, 1995). Sexism, like racism, can take many forms. *Benevolent* sexism refers to "subjectively positive orientation of protection, idealization and affection directed toward women" (Glick et al., 2000, p.763). A study by Remington (1983) showed that male police officers, in a police department in USA, thought that their female colleagues were more fragile than men, as working in the field of policing. They became overprotective toward the female police officers, which goes along with the theory of benevolent sexism. *Hostile* sexism is the idea that women are seeking to control men and taking over the authority settings built up by men, a form of anti-feminism. Both forms of sexism are complementary and strengthen gender inequalities (Ivarsson et al., 2005).

Through the years, the socio-political climate has changed people's values and we have become more modern in our way of thinking about women, which is that women have equal status and rights as men. However, due to the new standards in our society we cannot express racial and sexist prejudice openly, because it can lead to legal punishment and rejection from the society (Ekehammar et al. 2000; Swim et al. 1995). Therefore, maybe our new and modern values are misleading.

A study by Ivarsson, Estrada & Berggren (2005) found sexism to be a predictor of negative attitudes toward women in the Swedish armed forces. Together with sexism,

low rank and little or no interpersonal contacts with women in the armed forces are predictors of negative attitudes toward women. Despite the findings of these predictors of negative attitudes, they found an overall positive view on women in the military. This was expected and is consistent with previous findings, but yet surprising. The Swedish society is well known for being especially egalitarian with the respect of women's work roles compared to many nations worldwide. The authors discussed a possible universality in military organisations regarding attitudes toward women in the military (Ivarsson et al. 2005).

The study by Ivarsson et al. (2005) measured the explicit or aware attitudes the respondents had toward women. As well as a person have explicit attitudes, she has unconscious, implicit, attitudes. You can say that implicit attitudes are "manifest as actions or judgements that are under the control of automatically activated evaluation, without the performer's awareness of that causation" (Greenwald et al., 1998, p. 1464; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Dr. Anthony Greenwald developed the *Implicit Association Test, IAT*, which measure implicit attitudes among other things. The major advantage with implicit measures is that it may prevent respondents to lie by self-presentation strategies. That is, the implicit association method is able to reveal, for example, attitudes even for those who do not wish to express certain attitudes (Greenwald et al., 1998).

When being tested with the IAT method, respondents are exposed to two target concepts (e.g., male vs. female photographs) which are to be paired with a set of attributes (e.g., words such as good and bad). The IAT follow a pattern where you first identify the word male with pictures of men and female with pictures of women. Then you are given the instruction to pair pictures of men with the word good and female with the word bad, and then reverse. You are able to have several attributes in the test. The computer program measure your response time to each stimuli-attribute match. The stronger you associate a picture with a certain stimulus the faster to make the association it will get. If you think that women are better than men in some aspect, you will have easier to make that association in the IAT-test. In the result section, you can then see if you are most prone to match men with positive attributes or women with positive attributes, that is pro-male or pro-female (Fazio & Olson, 2003; Greenwald et al., 1998). Now you have the advantage of comparing explicit results with the implicit ones. People who want to be politically correct and declare in the explicit measure that they think men and women are equal in a certain setting, may be *unmasked* in the implicit measure.

In their research, Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz (1998) found that the IAT procedure is sensitive to automatic evaluative associations. That is, the IAT provides a useful technique of measuring implicit attitudes.

There has been quite some literature on the relationship between implicit and explicit measures, some indicating low correlations (Fazio et al., 1995; Greenwald et al., 1998; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000), and some indicating stronger correlations (e.g. McConnell & Leibold, 2001).

Rudman & Kilianski (2000) found low correlations between explicit and implicit measures, as they expected following Greenwald & Banaji (1995). In the study they also found that prejudice against women were more likely to be due to linking men to power and authority than role or trait expectancies of women. Explicit measures showed that women were less negative in their prejudice against female authorities than men were, but using implicit measures showed similar negative attitudes toward female authority, shared by both gender.

Nosek (2005) mapped four moderators between implicit and explicit evaluations. In his work, he concluded that our behaviour is under the influence of both intentional and unintentional causes, explicit and implicit. The difference seems to be what goes on in our mind versus how we interpret the very same. The relationship between the explicit and implicit appears to be a function of presentation for social and personal purposes (*self-presentation*), the *strength of our evaluations*, the extent to which evaluations are

represented with a simple, bipolar structure (*dimensionality*) and the extent to which our evaluations are perceived as distinct from normative responses (*distinctiveness*). To have knowledge about these moderators, Nosek means that we might have an opportunity to keep some control over those parts of our mind that we do not really know of.

Following Rudman & Kilianski (2000) I associate policewomen with female authority, but historically women were not allowed to serve in the police force due to the view of their lesser physical as well as psychological traits compared to men. Behavioural studies on policemen and policewomen on the streets reveal no differences in their task performance. There are researchers who believe that women actually bring a different set of values and attitudes to policing, but too little research has been done to verify such statements (Worden, 1993). Balkin (1988) found that, despite that women perform equally to men in the field of policing, the view on female police officers were negative. The attitudes were dependent on how they perceived sex- and work roles.

According to the study by Worden (1993) and Balkin (1988), men and women perform equally in the field of policing, but is such a view shared by the men and women in the Swedish police? This study examines the implicit and explicit attitudes of policemen and policewomen toward their female colleagues. In Sweden, we have a modern view on equal rights among men and women, and especially in the police force where a great deal of effort is invested to create a force with a variety of people. I expect the explicit attitudes toward women in the Swedish police force to be positive by both genders, and that there will not be any significant differences in the answers between the sexes. However, measuring sexist beliefs, I expect men to have greater sexist beliefs than women do, this because sexist beliefs are pointed directly and solely toward women.

The implicit instrument (IAT) measure whether the respondent see a man or a woman as most competent as working in the field of policing. Here I expect the respondents, male and female, to see a male police officer as most competent, contrary to the explicit measure expectancies. This is because of the historical view that men are more naturally seen as a police officer compared to women, that is, I believe that it is easier to associate men with competent policing.

Method

Respondents

I held my experiment with 86 (100%) active police officers in Sweden. Of the police officers 58 persons (67%) work in outer duty, 12 (14%) work with investigative duty and 16 (19%) work in leading positions. 58 (67%) of the respondents were male and 28 (33%) were female officers which gives a quite fair image of the sex distribution in the Swedish Police across the country. The respondents age ranged from 25 years to 59 years, with an average age at 36 (SD=8). The respondents came from five different precincts in the south of Sweden, Malmö (Davidshall), Malmö (Rosengård), Kristianstad, Lund and Ystad.

Survey

The respondents were instructed to complete a survey containing a letter of introduction briefly explaining the purpose of the study, instructions, ethics and two explicit instruments measuring attitudes toward women. The survey also contained questions about the respondent's age, gender, years in service and in what area of policing they work for. Thirty questions were to be completed, and the items from both scales were mixed together.

To investigate the attitudes toward women in the Swedish police force a scale developed originally for the military was used, namely the *Attitudes toward Women in the Military scale* (Hurrell & Lukens, 1994). Ivarsson et al. (2005) translated the scale into Swedish to investigate the Swedish armed forces in a study. Together with my tutor

(Holmberg, 2006) we revised the scale to suite a police context (see survey). The scale was selected because of the traditional male-cultural context similar between the military and the police.

“Women have as much as men to offer the community in policing” is an example of the questions in the scale. The scale consists of 11 items with a five point likert scale ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

To directly measure *competence in policing* items 2, 6, 10, 15, 20, 23 and 25 from the survey were selected (Cronbach's Alpha = .81).

The respondents also answered *The Swedish classical and modern sexism scale* (SCMS) developed by Ekehammar, Akrami & Araya (2000) which is constructed out of the *Old-fashioned and modern sexism scale* (Swim et al., 1995) to fit a Scandinavian context. The scale consists of 15 item aimed to measure classic and modern sexist ideologies (Ekehammar et al., 2000; Ivarsson et al. 2005). “I prefer a male boss over a female” and “Discrimination toward women is no longer a problem in Sweden” are examples of the questions in the scale. The items were presented with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*)⁴.

Classical sexism were measured using items 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11 and 12 (Cronbach's Alpha = .54). Modern sexism were measured using items 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24 and 26 (Cronbach's Alpha = .77).

Implicit association test

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald et al., 1998) was assessed to measure implicit or unaware attitudes toward female and male police officers. The stimulus material consisted of 10 photographs and 5 pair of words. 25 photographs, representing male and female police officers in various situations, were collected from the Internet. Together with my tutor (Stenberg, 2006.) we chose, after discussion, 5 male police- and 5 female police photographs⁵.

The photographs were then to be associated with various stimuli words. In the first session, the respondents were only instructed to pair the photos with either “male” or “female”. They were instructed to associate positive words with male police pictures and negative words with female police pictures in one block and make the reverse association in another, the order of these being counterbalanced across subjects. The test consisted of seven blocks. The stimuli words used in the IAT were *Competent vs. Incompetent*, *Strong vs. Weak*, *Secure vs. Insecure*, *Suitable vs. Unsuitable* and *Capable vs. Incapable*. When the test was completed, the program calculated a value, D, for each respondent.

Apparatus

The IAT was completed on a computer. The computer used for this experiment was a Fujitsu Siemens AMILO laptop computer, Intel Pentium 2.00 Ghz, 2.00 GB RAM, 256 MB graphic card. The respondents viewed the 17” widescreen display from a distance of about 65 cm and gave responses with the left- and right key.

Procedure

I travelled the south of Sweden, in December 2006, visiting the five different precincts. The procedure and conditions were very similar in all five places. After setting an appointment with a leading person in the precinct, I showed up at a station and received a room, usually a kind of conference room. Police officers were then told to come in to the room where I sat, to do the experiment. They came two at a time, one person started doing the IAT test on the computer, and the second person started filling out the survey, a system that will minimize possible sequence effects. When they both were done, they switched tasks, and when they had completed both tasks, they were free to go, informing the next two persons in line to enter the room.

⁴ Some of the items in both explicit instruments were revised

⁵ See examples of photographs used in the IAT in the appendix

With the survey, they were only given the instructions to read the letter of introduction and then start. With the IAT test, they read instructions on the computer screen and then received additional oral instruction from myself. All respondents received the same oral instructions.

The data were arranged and analyzed in SPSS. The explicit scales were transformed, to the scope -1 to +1, for the cause of being comparable to the IAT (D) score. A negative value, just as in the IAT, implied a positive attitude toward women and equal rights⁶.

Results

A one-way between-groups MANOVA was performed to investigate gender differences on the attitudes toward female police officers. Four dependent variables were used: working competence (yx), classic sexism (ksx), modern sexism (msx) and IAT (D) (see Table 1). The independent variable was gender. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted, that is, the data is valid for further testing. There was a statistically significant difference between males and females on the combined dependent variable:

$F(4, 79) = 10.10$; $p < .001$; Wilk's Lambda = .66; partial $\eta^2 = .34$.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables.

	Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
IAT (D)	Male	.29	.36	57	.19	.40
	Female	-.25	.48	27	-.40	-.10
yx	Male	-.56	.33	57	-.64	-.49
	Female	-.80	.15	27	-.91	-.70
ksx	Male	-.59	.24	57	-.65	-.53
	Female	-.72	.18	27	-.81	-.64
msx	Male	-.21	.34	57	-.30	-.19
	Female	-.72	.34	27	-.60	-.33

When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately (univariate anova), I used a Bonferroni adjusted alpha value ($.05 / 4 = .0125$). Despite the new lower alpha value, all dependent variables reached statistical significance (see table 2).

High values (+) indicate a negative attitude toward women and low values (-) indicate a positive attitude toward women. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that both men and women think that women are competent to serve as police officers though men have significantly higher values than women do. Both genders had low scores on both classic and modern sexism scales indicating that they do not have sexist beliefs though men have significantly higher values than women do. The IAT (D) results indicated that men believe that men are the most competent sex to serve as a police officer and women believe that a woman is the most competent.

⁶ *Equal rights* was measured by the sexism scales

Table 2.

Univariate analysis of variance. Predicting gender differences in attitudes toward female police officers.

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial eta²</i>
IAT(D)	(1, 82)	34.41	.000	.30
yx	(1, 82)	13.11	.001	.14
ksx	(1, 82)	6.84	.011	.08
msx	(1, 82)	9.93	.002	.11

Discussion

From the explicit measures, I could not find any prejudice or negative attitudes toward women's competence as serving in the Swedish police force. The low values on both men and women indicated that I was quite correct in my reasoning, but I cannot fully accept my hypothesis, there were in fact significant differences between the sexes. The low values go along with the reasoning about a new and modern society with equal opportunities for men and women in Sweden. Presenting these results indicates that the police force has invested quite some effort in creating a variety of gender, and made it work. The positive attitudes reported goes along with previous findings in Sweden (Ivarsson et al., 2005) and a study by Koenig & Juni (1981) conducted in USA, were they, among other things, found that a female police officer has a more positive attitude toward females and female police officers than males do.

Self-report surveys have limitations since the respondents are aware of what their results mean. They can lie to make themselves or their organisation look good, or they can have a wish about being very liberal and egalitarian and answer in conformity with how they wish to be. As I mentioned in the introduction, to express any racist attitudes may lead to legal punishment or resentment by the society.

Cronbach's Alpha for the items representing Classic sexism was lower than .70 indicating that not all items measure the same phenomena. The Classic sexism scale might be out of date with its old-fashioned formulations of questions e.g., "I prefer a male boss over a female". I believe that to measure sexism now days we have to use more modern, and up to date, scales like the Modern sexism scale, also used in this study.

Because of the limitations, mentioned above, with explicit measures I used an implicit measure as well, IAT. The results for the IAT were the clearest ones in the study. I was once again wrong in my hypothesis, men and women do not see a man as the most competent sex to serve as a police officer. Instead, it seems that the respondents favour their own gender when it comes to this matter. The assumption that the history among the police force as a male-dominated work place would generate people to see a man as a front figure for the police is very wrong. This partly goes along with the theory that we live in a new and modern society out of a woman's perspective.

The IAT has limitations as well. The test is under development though the version in this study is quite up to date and frequently used among researchers all over the world. I believe that in the future we have even more secure methods of measuring implicit attitudes.

During the testing of respondents, I noted that the instructions for the IAT sometimes were hard to follow. Maybe the respondents should read a more extensive instruction sheet before attaining the test. Not all people are familiar with using computers as well, which might create a disturbing variable.

The most interesting in the study is that men's explicit and implicit results differ from each other. This might indicate that there still today, 2007, exist beliefs, by men, that men are the most competent police officers and that women, as Claes Borgström (2003) ironically stated, "...should take care of housecleaning, childcare, laundry and

other female business". However, these beliefs, or attitudes, are not aware for the men but rather unaware according to the results of the measures used in the study. They wish to be liberal but might have implicit negative attitudes, which may influence decision-making. In a promotion scenario for example, a man can be chosen in front of a woman because of these implicit attitudes that favour men (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2005). This can also be interpreted in an opposite way. Since women have an implicit preference for women, the promotions can be due to the gender of the recruiter or interviewer. However, this particular study is aimed to the attitudes toward women.

Now we want to know why these implicit attitudes that favour men over women exist. Without scientific evidence, we can only philosophize about the reasons, which might influence further research on the underlying causes.

To create a variety of people in different organisations and create equality between sexes men have to make sacrifices that benefit women. With this statement, I assume that men are the dominant gender, as it is in the Swedish police force⁷. To make certain sacrifices might create frustration, which in turn leads to a negative view toward women.

Women have a lot to prove, there is no doubt about it. Moreover, I do not mean that they have to run faster than men in the track lane or lift more weights on the bench press, but rather to show, like in the investigation on the murder of former Minister of foreign affairs, Anna Lindh, that they are competent to handle police matter just as well as men do. Now they are doing it, they prove themselves competent all the time and attitudes are changing. If we compare the view on female police officers now and fifty years ago, we can note a remarkable change for the better.

To further create more positive attitudes toward women, quota systems are not the method to use. Instead, everyone should be tested on equal conditions. In Sweden today women have easier conditions on the tryouts to the police academy than men have. There is also some preference for women to be selected for the cause of creating equality among the sexes in the police force. It may start right here, when people send their applications to the police academy. Even when men are not working as police officers, they begin their careers making sacrifices that benefit women. My suggestion is that attitudes toward female police officer can be more positive if we all have equal pre-conditions. To be seen as individuals instead of a member of a group, as Allport stated, would be positive for men as well for women within the police force.

Compared to USA, Sweden has a more egalitarian view on women in policing. This study compared to Balkin (1988) and Remington (1983) show quite some differences in attitudes toward female police officers, although there are several years between the conduction of the studies. The possible universality of attitudes, in the armed forces around the world, discussed by Ivarsson et al. (2005) may not be shared between the police forces across nations. If this is the case, Sweden is way ahead of others in creating equality in the police force.

This study is, as far as I know, the first and only one of its kind. Equality among people is a highly debated subject in Sweden now days, and therefore of immediate interest. The Swedish police have now some research on attitudes toward women, and to further make improvements for equality I suggest more research on this topic, within not only the police force but also in all organisations, male dominated as well as female dominated. It could be of great interest to, explicitly, test what attitudes female police officers have toward male police officers.

⁷ In 2005 the Swedish police officers consisted of 78% men and 22% women

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Appendix



Fig. 1. Examples of photographs used in the IAT.