

Diversity and Inclusion within Police Firearms Teams

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About this report

Historically white and male, concerns about the demographics of British policing and the extent to which the service reflects the communities it serves, predate but were given renewed focus and energy by the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000. The Act reinforced public authorities' duties to promote racial equality and to develop more inclusive and diverse public institutions. The debate it energised is as important today as it has ever been. It continues to inspire policing policies such as the Police Race Action Plan (National Police Chiefs Council, NPCC, 2022) and the service's Attraction, Recruitment, Progression and Retention Toolkit (NPCC, 2018). Together, these serve as a constant reminder that concepts such as fairness, inclusivity, and diversity, which were at the heart of this inquiry, are required by law and by policing policy in every facet of police work.

While wider questions of police representativeness and of workforce diversity described in the action plan and tool kit referred to above are not addressed directly in this project - the parameters of the research were drawn much more narrowly than would allow for such an examination - the research team recognises that the issues those policies address, provide an important and significant backdrop to this project.

The police institution is scrutinised by its stakeholders, its communities, and by its executive. In this case, in 2018, internal scanning by the National Women's Armed Policing Forum and the Police Firearms Officer Association identified barriers to the recruitment and retention of female officers in firearm units. Concerns that those barriers might have their roots in issues of diversity and inclusivity were acknowledged and taken up by the National Police Chiefs Council's Diversity and Inclusion in Firearms National Group (DIFNG).

The DIFNG tasked a team of researchers from Liverpool John Moores University, to collect and evaluate evidence from authorised firearms officers (AFOs), police officers, and other staff. The team critically assessed: individuals' perceptions of a discrete culture within firearms departments and the extent to which that culture has had an impact, or may impact, on inclusion and diversity in firearms roles; barriers to recruitment of an inclusive and representative armed workforce; and other issues associated with uniforms, equipment, and training. This report presents the team's findings.

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Executive summary

Despite the widespread recognition that the 43 forces who make up the Police Service of England and Wales (PSEW) need to effect change to better reflect the communities they serve; the workforce continues overwhelmingly to be white and male (Home Office, 2022). Though, since 2010, there has been a gradual upward trend in the proportion of officers who identify as an ethnic minority (excluding a white minority), on 31st March 2022, White officers still made up 91.9 percent of the workforce. On that date, there were 11,053 officers from minority ethnic groups (excluding white minorities), making up 8.1 percent of the workforce. Breaking that figure down further, Black officers made up 1.3 percent of the total workforce, Asian officers 3.7 percent, and those identifying as a Mixed ethnic group or another ethnic group 3.1 percent. There were 46,955 female police officers, making up 33.5 percent of officers in the service (Home Office, *Ibid.*).

Statistics on the demographics of firearms teams and authorised firearms officers (AFOs) were not readily available to the research team but, drawing on the work of Jones et al., in 2020, just 29 out of 6584 AFOs identified as Black/Black British. That figure represented 0.4 percent of the AFO population compared with 7.3 percent of the PSEW workforce (Home Office, 2020). Notably, 14 of the 43 Home Office forces did not have a single ethnic minority AFO. The percentage of female AFOs was 9.8 percent compared with 31 percent of the wider population (Home Office, *op. cit.*, p.27).

Methodology

Seeking to better understand the underrepresentation of minority groups and to encourage more female officers to consider joining firearms teams, the Diversity and Inclusion in Firearms National Group (DIFAG) of the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) commissioned a Liverpool John Moores University research team to examine: (i) cultural perceptions of armed units; (ii) the ways in which those perceptions impact diversity within firearms roles; (iii) barriers to recruitment to firearm roles; and (iv) the extent to which issues associated with uniforms, equipment, or training have an impact on achieving an inclusive and representative armed workforce.

The research team framed those requirements in the research question, 'Why are minority groups underrepresented in police firearms teams?' and in a set of research aims. Those were to:

1. critically examine the perceptions of firearms teams' culture among three groups: existing AFOs; former AFOs; and non-AFOs;
2. critically assess cultural barriers to improving inclusion and diversity within firearms teams;
3. critically assess AFO practice to determine whether elements of the role exclude or limit diversity;
4. critically examine whether there are any aspects of uniform, equipment, or training that impact upon diversity and inclusion in firearms teams.

The team collected research data in three ways. First, via a comprehensive review of relevant literature (including secondary data extrapolated from a PSEW survey in the north-west region, carried out in 2020). Second, using an online survey, advertised across the PSEW and other police forces/agencies with armed officer capability, to collect officers' views and experiences. Third, via focus groups that allowed the team to engage with AFOs and to delve deeper into the survey responses. All data were sorted and coded to enable them to be analysed thematically in the context of the existing literature.

Notes on the research environment and sample

Given the continuing dominance of the White Male demographic in the target group, the PSEW and other police departments/agencies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland with armed officers, and the small numbers of respondents in groups outside of that core demographic, inferring every variation in meaning from the data collected is no easy task. Although respondents could select from a much wider range of options, survey responses were grouped according using the labels: 'Male', 'Female', 'Other'; 'White', 'Asian', 'Black', 'Other'; and Straight, Lesbian/Gay; Other. Where the data analysis suggested that a more nuanced explanation of a response was required, that explanation is included in the narrative.

A total of 4,007 respondents completed the survey, which was open to all officers and staff regardless of role. Respondents self-identified as 'Male' (n=2330, 58 percent of the sample),

'Female' (n=835, 21 percent), or 'Other' (n=842, 21 percent). To facilitate statistical analysis, this third group included anyone who did not identify as 'male' or 'female' and those who preferred not to disclose their gender. Hence, the larger number than might be expected. In terms of ethnicity, 3076 (78 percent) survey respondents identified as 'White'; 96 (2 percent) identified as 'Asian'; 34 (1 percent) as 'Black'; 94 (2 percent) as 'Mixed'; and 707 (18 percent) as 'Other'. This third grouping included those who did not disclose their ethnicity. All focus group participants were 'White'.

Focus groups were made up solely of AFOs. The contributions of 11 PSEW officers and two Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) officers were recorded. The survey was completed by officers and staff across the PSEW, and by officers of the National Crime Agency, British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the MDP, Police Scotland, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Of those respondents, 1520 (38 percent) were current or former AFOs; 2487 respondents (62 percent) were not (and never had been) employed in the AFO role.

To ensure that no group was excluded from the sample, the survey collected data about respondents' sexual identity; 2707 survey respondents (68 percent of the sample) identified as 'straight'; 104 (3 percent) as 'lesbian/gay'; and 1196 (30 percent) as 'other'. Again, the 'Other' grouping is higher than one may expect because it includes respondents who identified as: bisexual; aromantic; asexual; fluid; pansexual; questioning; queer; and all respondents who did not disclose their sexual identity (by far, the largest proportion of responses in this group). Focus group members were not asked to state their sexual identity.

It proved impractical to link negative aspects of the firearms role or environment (factors that discouraged engagement) based on ethnicity or sexual identity. The data collected simply would not allow for that; the researchers argue, given the demographic of the target group, that no survey would be able to make those links in a meaningful way. The team believes that other methods such as interviews and observations could make those links and recommends that such methods are incorporated into a longitudinal study it recommends the PSEW commissions as a result of this research.

Findings

The study on which this report is based, answered the research question, ‘why are minority groups underrepresented in police firearms teams? It did so by critically examining; the perceptions of firearms teams’ culture among two groups: current and former AFOs; and non-AFOs; assessing cultural barriers to improving inclusion and diversity within firearms teams; AFO practice (to determine whether elements of the role exclude or limit diversity); and whether there are any aspects of uniform, equipment, or training that impact upon diversity and inclusion in firearms teams.

Attractiveness of the role

A high proportion of the sworn police workforce would never, under ordinary circumstances, consider joining a firearms team. That is true for individuals in all groups; regardless of their gender, ethnicity or sexual identity. Many officers do not want to be armed; some suffer from ill health or have disabilities that restrict their choices; and some lack the fitness required to work in a such a physically demanding role. Realistically, the pool from which firearms teams can draw, probably is less than half the size of the operational police workforce. A frequently cited reason for reluctance to consider the AFO role is the lack of support for officers following a police shooting. That issue should be addressed directly in marketing material, discovery days, and in all other outreach activities.

Pay and rewards

AFOs, believe they deserve greater financial rewards for performing the role. The research team cannot assess the merits of that claim. It should be noted that study indicates there is a stark difference in how officers in the mainstream perceive both the AFO role and AFOs’ deservedness of additional reward for performing it. If the PSEW consider that additional payments to AFOs are merited it will need to manage the payment process sensitively and carefully because this study has shown that such payments could be divisive.

Uniform and kit

A particular concern for Female AFOs. Many have had or are still having to make do with ‘hand me downs’ or Male kit and uniform that does not meet their needs. This is not just a

performance issue; it is a matter of officer safety and well-being. It also is a negative indicator of the value a force puts on a member of its staff.

Work/life balance

Female AFOs left or did not consider applying for the role because they could not reconcile performing it with fulfilling their family or caring responsibilities. Arguably, their services would not have been lost if a mutually agreeable work plan could have been developed and implemented. The challenges of recruiting new staff are such that effective staff retention strategies are of paramount importance. Forces invest so much in AFOs that they are too expensive a resource to lose without ensuring that every possible avenue to retaining their services has been explored. A management review of retention policies that drew inter alia on officers' exit interviews would provide insights that could be incorporated into future policy and practice.

Macho culture

Normatively, culture informs the way people behave, interact with one another, communicate and see the world around them. It is deeply embedded and highly resistant to change. The macho culture is endemic in firearms teams. This research has shown that it has a corrosive effect on the team dynamic; on relations between Male AFOs and AFOs who identify with other groups; and on relations between the teams and officers in mainstream policing. There is an urgent need both for cultural and behavioural change in the firearms environment.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for a cultural audit of firearms teams.
2. There should be a management review of firearms teams' retention policies.
3. There should be a management review of officers' kit and uniform provision, which currently does not meet all individuals' needs.

4. This study represents a snapshot in time. Once the cultural audit has been completed and its results analysed, NPCC should commission a longitudinal study aimed at assessing changes over time in firearms teams' culture and behaviours. Together, these studies will enable the service to target the interventions this research shows so clearly are needed.

Introduction

This study was commissioned by the Diversity and Inclusion in Firearms National Group of the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC). It examines: (i) police officers' perceptions of the culture of armed units; (ii) the ways in which those perceptions impact diversity within firearms roles; (iii) barriers to recruitment to firearm roles; and (iv) the extent to which issues associated with uniforms, equipment, or training have an impact on achieving an inclusive and representative armed workforce. The research team framed that requirement in the research question, 'Why are minority groups underrepresented in police firearms teams?' and in a set of research aims. Those were to:

- 1) critically examine the perceptions of firearms teams' culture among three groups: existing AFOs; former AFOs; and non-AFOs;
- 2) critically assess cultural barriers to improving inclusion and diversity within firearms teams;
- 3) critically assess AFO practice to determine whether elements of the role exclude or limit diversity.
- 4) Critically examine whether there are any aspects of uniform, equipment, or training that impact upon diversity and inclusion in firearms teams?

Outline of the report

After this brief introduction, Chapter 1 explores what is known about the current demographic of the PSEW, occupational police cultures and how said cultures may be upheld. Specifically, the concepts of group dynamics and organisational culture are explored to underpin the analysis of a discrete police firearms culture. Chapter 2 examines the nuances of culture in specialist firearms units. It also assesses issues of uniforms, firearms kit, and equipment. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the report by discussing the study's findings and by making recommendations for future policy and practice.

Chapter 1: Police demographics and cultures

This chapter presents a demographic profile of the UK and of the PSEW. It also reflects on the body of scholarly research on police organisational cultures, which has sought to explain how they may influence the recruitment, retention, and progression of underrepresented groups in policing; specifically in armed units. Thus, the narrative builds the theoretical foundation for understanding police cultures.

1.1 UK and PSEW demographics

The 2011 UK Census reported that the total population of England and Wales was 56.1 million. 48.2 million people (86.0 percent) were from White ethnic groups; 4.2 million people (7.5 percent) were from Asian ethnic groups; and 1.9 million people (3.3 percent) were from Black ethnic groups. 1.2 million people (2.2 percent) had Mixed ethnicity and 0.6 million people (one percent) belonged to other ethnic groups (ONS, 2018). The same census reported that women and girls made up 51 percent of the population of England and Wales, and men and boys made up the other 49 percent. Most ethnic groups had roughly the same male and female populations (ONS, 2018a).

In terms of the demographic profile of the PSEW, on 31st March 2022 there were 140,228 full-time equivalent (FTE) police officers; 46,955 of those officers were female (33.5 percent of the officers in the service) (Home Office, 2022). White officers made up 91.9 percent of the workforce (Home Office, 2022). Black officers made up 1.3 percent of the workforce, Asian officers 3.7 percent, and those identifying as a Mixed ethnic group or another ethnic group 3.1 percent. Since 2010, there has been a gradual upward trend in the proportion of officers who identify as belonging to an ethnic minority (Home Office op. cit., p.1). Though there is not a large disparity between the demographics of England and Wales and the PSEW, it is significant that even though there has been an upward trend in the proportion of ethnic minority officers in the service over the last 11 years, it may be inferred from this data that in this context, despite its efforts, the PSEW does not yet truly reflect all the communities it serves.

1.2 Occupational culture

Police culture has attracted public scrutiny and scholarly research for many years. All organizations have cultures and subcultures that influence staff behaviour. Culture is a natural by-product of the values, expectations, and practices that guide and inform the actions of the organization's members. Many organizational cultures are consistent with legitimate missions and goals and serve as positive influences on those organizations. That is as true for policing as it is for any other profession. In the PSEW, its positives are embodied in behaviours and values such as mutual supportiveness, camaraderie, teamwork, perseverance, empathy, and personal sacrifice. Those shared values enable officers to survive and prosper in what, at times, can be challenging and emotionally draining jobs.

Increasingly, the positives of police culture are being acknowledged in the scholarly literature (see for example: Cockcroft, 2020; Biggs and Brough, 2016; and Crank, 2014). However, it is the negative dimension of culture that has attracted the greater attention. Researchers often have focused on what they have perceived, variously, as police cynicism, conservatism, suspicion, and authoritarianism which have manifested themselves in phenomena such as, 'the code of silence', the 'police wall of silence', 'otherness', and insularity (see for example: Lila *et al*, 2013; Loftus, 2010; Waddington, 1999; and Reiner, 1985; Holdaway, 1983). Some research has recognised that culture is neither universal nor immutable; it can adapt within the service and within departments (Charman, 2017 and Chan, 1996).

1.2.1 Social identity theory

The concept of social identity is significant in any examination of culture. It is particularly important in the context of this study. Social identity theory posits that occupational identity is formed through a process of self-categorization (Tajfel, 1978). An individual associates themselves with group values, rites, and collective behaviour then emphasises those behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs which they perceive as being fundamental to the 'in-group' (Charman, 2020 and Tajfel, *op. cit.* p14). In-group members compare themselves to others outside of the group in the belief, 'we are what we are because they are not what we are' (Tajfel, 1981; p. 323). However, the emphasis on perceived similarities and differences may lead to unfavourable comparisons and then to divisions (Charman, 2020).

The 'otherness' or 'us versus them' concept in policing has been evaluated in a range of different contexts (see for example: James *et al* forthcoming, in the context of fast-track detective recruitment; Adlam, 2010 in the context of police leadership; and White, 2006 in the context of police training). Just like culture, differentiation can be viewed positively; it can sustain a group and contribute to enhancing the self-image of group members while bolstering personal and team confidence (Charman, 2020). Yet, this social process also magnifies the differences of those deemed to be outsiders (Charman, op. cit. p.82). It has been argued that these differences become more sharply exaggerated during the process of categorisation; establishing rigid boundaries of who is 'in' and 'out' (Turner *et al*, 1979).

1.2.2 Representativeness and tokenism

Another lens for interpreting the in/out divide is provided by Kanter (1977). She advanced the concept of tokenism. Where it exists, tokenism can present challenges associated with assimilation, visibility, and the polarisation and isolation of group members (Kanter, *Ibid.*). Assimilation is the process that occurs when minority officers conform to the values and behaviours of the dominant group to 'fit in' (Todak *et al.*, 2021 p.662). Assimilation may be linked with the concept of differential deployment (Westmarland, 2001); where women police are forced into gendered assignments.

Researchers have argued that to be visible, female officers need to work twice as hard as men to prove their capability (see for example: Archbold *et al.*, 2010; Archbold and Schulz, 2008; and Rabe-Hemp 2008). Linking the ideas of tokenism and visibility, Archbold and Schulz (2009 p.62) are critical of the police institution for 'parading' women officers before the public as token members of a police force. In their study, Todak *et al.*, (2021) argued that as a result some women officers believed that they only were promoted/assigned because of their gender. That can have a corrosive effect on individuals' self-worth. Todak and Brown (2019) argue that the negative effect of visibility is more prominent for Black women officers due to intersectional components of race and gender.

Zimmer (1988) notes that the concept of tokenism has been incorporated widely into studies of women who work in non-traditional jobs. She argues that many women's negative job experiences and their inability to achieve equality, can be attributed to their

token status; their low proportion in a workplace dominated by men (Zimmer, op. cit., 1988 p.64). Studies by Archbold and Schulz (Ibid.); Stichman *et al.*, (2010) and Gustafson (2008) all disclosed performance and visibility pressures on women officers that the researchers attributed to their underrepresentation.

Kanter (Ibid.) argues that women's positions in male-dominated organizations will improve if the size of the group is substantially increased to reach a tipping point of 15 percent of the workforce; at which point women's token status is eliminated. She argues that this is evidenced by the fact that they begin to experience fewer workplace problems and higher levels of social acceptance. Kanter (Ibid.) also argued that once the tipping point is reached, minority group members' perceptions of their work environments as places offering opportunities for promotion, favourable job assignments, and career advancement, also increases.

The notion of a 15 percent tipping point has been explored in the police milieu. Researching in police institutions where the proportion of women officers was below that point, Kimmel and Gorley (2003) found that women would take a new assignment if they were offered it but were less satisfied with it. They believed their jobs were less important than those being undertaken by women in police departments with female representation at or above the tipping point. Moreover, they would not recommend a career in policing to a friend. Archbold and Schulz (2008) found that in similar circumstances, women's motivation to accept specialist assignments was low; even when they were encouraged to apply for them.

Some studies have indicated the positive benefits of representing minority group members effectively. For example, Rows and Ross (2015), found that representation can build community trust. The work of Lasley *et al.*, (2011), pointed to its help in develop community partnerships. White and Escobar's study highlighted that it may increase cultural understanding). While Sklansky (2006) indicated its propensity to improve competencies. Other researchers have emphasised its significance in improving the integration of LGBT+ identities into police occupational culture (Colvin, 2012; Panter, 2018).

1.3 Discourses associating diversity with police cultures

1.3.1 Race and culture

In biological terms, race refers to categories of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics but it is argued that is an over-simplification that limits debate on its significance in modern society. Kinouani (2021) argues that the term is a social and historical fabrication or construct linked to colonial and imperial ways of viewing and organising the world. Cousins (2019) argues that race and racism are major factors in the construction of identity; particularly when the environment is made up of a white majority. The notion of 'race' as a social construction has become commonplace in sociological literature (Holdaway 1997). Holdaway argues that studies into the social construction of race, that make links between theoretical ideas and empirical research (especially at the level of work organizations) are lacking and are much needed (1997).

Two of the most significant and influential judicial inquiries into police and community relations in policing's history, the Scarman Inquiry (1981) and the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), highlighted the need for policing to examine its cultures to identify and to eliminate cultural bias and racisms. Both led to extensive and wide-ranging examinations of police relations with the Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority communities and to the scrutiny of police diversity practices more broadly (McLaughlin, 2007). Those processes are continuing today.

Policing remains an overwhelmingly white, heterosexual, male-dominated occupation (see for example: Heidensohn 1992; Walklate, 2000; Brown, 2007; Brown *et al.*, 2020; Shears, 2020). Foster (2003) argued that this poses important challenges for those who do not correspond with that norm because of their gender, ethnicity, or sexuality. Many other scholars have argued for recognition of the racism, bias, traditional white norms, and stereotypical assumptions that exist within police cultures. Chakraborti and Garland (2015) argue that acknowledging the existence of police cultures can facilitate a more nuanced understanding of cultural bias and its influence upon police-minority relations' (2015, p.122). In her study, Loftus (2008) identified the harassment and exclusion of minority ethnic groups in the police organizations as a central and problematic feature of police culture (Loftus, 2008).

1.3.2 Culture and gender

As a professional endeavour, policing predominately is perceived as masculine (see for example: Heidensohn, 1992 and Brown, 2007). Dodge *et al.*, noted that 'the social organization of policing is replete with norms and values that embody traditional forms of masculinity' (2011 p.700). Silvestri argued that police work is defined by the culture as a role only 'masculine men can accomplish' (2003, p. 31). While Westmarland's study found that male officers viewed themselves as 'hero protectors' (2001 p.27). West and Zimmerman argued that the masculine profession of policing reflects 'socially gendered perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures' (1987 p.126).

Researchers have argued that due to the nature of the job, police culture has always been synonymous with hypermasculinity and dichotomous gender role regulation (see for example: Panter, 2018; Colvin, 2012; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Loftus, 2008; and Westmarland, 2001). Some researchers believe that hegemonic masculinity's social construction and manifestation in policing can be seen in work assignments based on desirable performance traits which limits female officers to 'women issues' (e.g., domestic violence, child abuse investigations, sex crimes, etc.) and male officers to 'male issues' (e.g., firearms, tactical units, drug enforcement, etc.) (see for example: Barlow and Barlow, 2000 and Westmarland, 2001). Westmarland (2001) found that gender representation within specialist units exaggerated the aspects of police culture based upon which they were gendered.

Masculine police subcultures have been researched widely because of their putative links to the disadvantaging of women police (see for example: Brown and Heidensohn, 2000; Brown *et al.*, 2019; Silvestri, 2017; Rief and Clinkinbeard, 2020; and Westmarland, 2001).

Researchers have highlighted how the recruitment and retention of women in policing can be stunted both by internal and external factors (e.g., gendered processes, gender socialisation, and masculine police subcultures) (see for example: Brown *et al.*, 2019; Corsianos, 2009; Brown, 2007; and Garcia, 2003). In the literature women have been perceived as less capable of meeting physical demands (see for example; Prenzler and Sinclair, 2013 and Brown and Fielding, 1993); assigned to gender-specific roles (see Garcia,

2003; Westmarland, 2001; and Martin, 1999); denied promotions (Brown and Silvestri, 2019).

It has been argued that perceived threats to the masculine police ethos explain rigid adherence to occupational gender norms (in terms of male behaviour versus female behaviour, male physicality versus female physicality, and so on) (see: Panter, 2018 and Miller *et al*, 2003). Those norms may be validated negatively through the subordination of women, heterosexism, genderism, authority, control, and competitive individualism (Panter, *Ibid.*). Researchers have argued that the capacity for bias is confirmed by lack of social acceptance of trans feminine, effeminate gay male identities, and femininity in general in policing (see: Panter, 2018; Colvin, 2012; Messerschmidt, 1996; and Connell, 1995).

The findings of a recent inspection of the PSEW by its oversight body suggest that policing's problems run even deeper. HMICFRS (2022 p.2) reported that 'an alarming number of female officers and staff [surveyed] ... alleged appalling behaviour by male colleagues. Their allegations included sexual harassment and serious sexual assault'. The inspectors concluded that 'far too many women had at some stage in their career, experienced unwanted sexual behaviour towards them'.

1.3.3 Culture and sexuality

Within social environments, cultural factors that impact perceptions of heteronormativity (the binary assumption of two genders, and heterosexual sexuality) are important when examining hypermasculinity. Hypermasculinity is related to hegemonic masculinity in how 'maleness' is situated as a dominant social position of acceptance. In other words, hegemonic masculinity reinforces the notion that maleness is a dominant social position compared to 'femaleness' (Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; and Connell, 1995).

Masculinity is not a unitary construct; the lines separating masculinity and hypermasculinity can be drawn in different places on a male-gender-role continuum depending on cultural context (Brown, 1988). Hypermasculinity typically can be adopted with male or, rarely, female constructs as a reaction to repudiation of feminine aspects of oneself (see Panter,

2017 and Brown, 1988). It adds another layer of complexity to understanding: LGBT+ police occupational biases and how sexuality intersects with perceptions of gender and desirable performance traits. This is heightened in occupational environments where hypermasculinity (e.g., policing), or hyperfemininity (e.g., nursing) exist (Panter, 2018).

Historically, within both American and British policing, LGBT+ identities have reported homophobia in the workplace (see: Panter, 2018; Jones and Williams, 2013; Colvin, 2015, 2012, and 2009; and Burke, 1994, 1994a; and 1993) and transphobia (see: Panter, 2018 and 2017). Colvin (2009) found that a significant proportion of the gay and lesbian officers in her sample, reported widespread mistreatment by fellow officers. That included: being treated as an outsider (51 percent); tokenism (43 percent); feelings of social isolation (48 percent); homophobic talk (67 percent); repeated harassment (34 percent); and retaliation (25 percent).

British transgender police officers told Panter that colleagues, variously, had labelled them, 'bull-dyke; fag-hag, he-she, shim; queer faggot, he-she; faggot, tranny; and sissy faggot' (2018 p.172-3). Panter noted that the terminology used was more aligned with homophobia than with transphobia (Panter, *Ibid.*). She argued that LGBT+ officers, uniquely, may face heightened intersectional components of bias and occupational rejection when pursuing a career in hypermasculine roles (e.g., firearms, traffic, etc.), or refuse even to pursue certain roles altogether (*Ibid.*).

Perhaps counter to some of the foregoing narrative, Panter (2017) also found that some LGBT+ people may be specifically drawn to policing because of the established foundation of rigid perceptions of heteronormative gender performance. She found that in some, very rare, circumstances, it bolstered the self-esteem of officers who regulated their gender presentation in occupational environments centred on binary gender performance expectations (i.e., heteronormativity) (Panter, *Ibid.*). However, Panter (*Ibid.*) warned that gender androgyny, or non-conforming heteronormativity, often is not accepted within police cultures due to perceptions of a failure to adhere to group culture or to traditional job assignment expectations (as also reported by Westmarland, 2001). Panter (2018) argues

that may explain why some members of the LGBT+ police community, report different experiences with bias during employment across different assignments.

Due to LGBT+ non-binary conformity, LGBT+ officers are frequently perceived as a direct threat to socialised perceptions of occupational 'masculine' and 'feminine' job performance expectations (see: Panter, 2018 and McCarthy, 2013). Panter (Ibid.) argues that an assignment that is perceived to be hypermasculine in nature, relies upon additional rigid social regulation of how women and men express their gender and how they act in those roles. She argues that this may explain why gay men and trans women report higher incidents of occupational bias and acceptance within certain job roles compared to masculine of centre lesbian women and trans men (Ibid.).

1.4 Pay and rewards

Reform of police pay and rewards in the modern era, began in 1963 with the publication of the report of the Sheehy Inquiry (Loveday, 2013). Sheehy recommended *inter alia* performance-related pay and incentives for officers working in the roles most valued by the public. Since that time, pay reform has frequently been on the Home Office's agenda for policing (Tonge *et al*, 2010). Competence-related payments to officers were introduced in 2003 and this scheme was quickly followed by others that rewarded officers in priority policing roles (such as firearms units) (Tonge *et al*, Ibid.). Discretionary additional role-related payments to officers were significantly curtailed and then largely ended following the Winsor Review of policing in 2011 (Winsor, 2012).

1.4 Summary

Issues of culture, race, identity, gender, and sexuality in policing, have been scrutinised and researched for many years. Though positive values and behaviours (embodied *inter alia* in loyalty, teamwork and personal sacrifice) may endure; matters of identity, inequality, unfairness and exclusion are central to any critical analysis of the policing milieu in the modern era. Particularly in the context of relations between the service's dominant white heterosexual majority and minority groups. Kanter's theory that the social dynamic shifts at the 'tipping point' (when the minority group makes up at least 15 percent of the population)

is worthy of further examination. Relevant to this analysis is that, as of 31st March 2022, 8.1 percent of the workforce identified as a member of an ethnic minority group and that in 2020, 9.8 percent of AFOs were women. However, it also should be acknowledged that in March 2022, 33.5 percent of officers in the PSEW were women and, because of the uplift in officer numbers, the proportion of women in the service continues to increase. Kanter's theory provides a useful basis for further discussion even if it may not be a magic formula to solve policing's ills in this regard.

Chapter 2: Firearms team demographics, occupational discourses, and nuances of police sub-culture(s)

This chapter will examine those components of police culture that are structurally and dynamically unique within armed units. Additionally, it focuses on potential barriers to increasing minority representation in firearms teams.

2.1 Authorised Firearms Officers (AFOs)

Figure 2.1 shows that in 2021 there was a total of 6,643 AFOs and Specialist Firearms Officers (SFOs) in England and Wales (Home Office, 2021). AFOs make up the bulk of that number. Ordinarily, they patrol in Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs) as support for everyday operational policing. AFOs qualify for the role by undergoing training and passing the National Handgun Qualification Shoot. Though they may also be trained on other weapons (College of Policing, 2014).

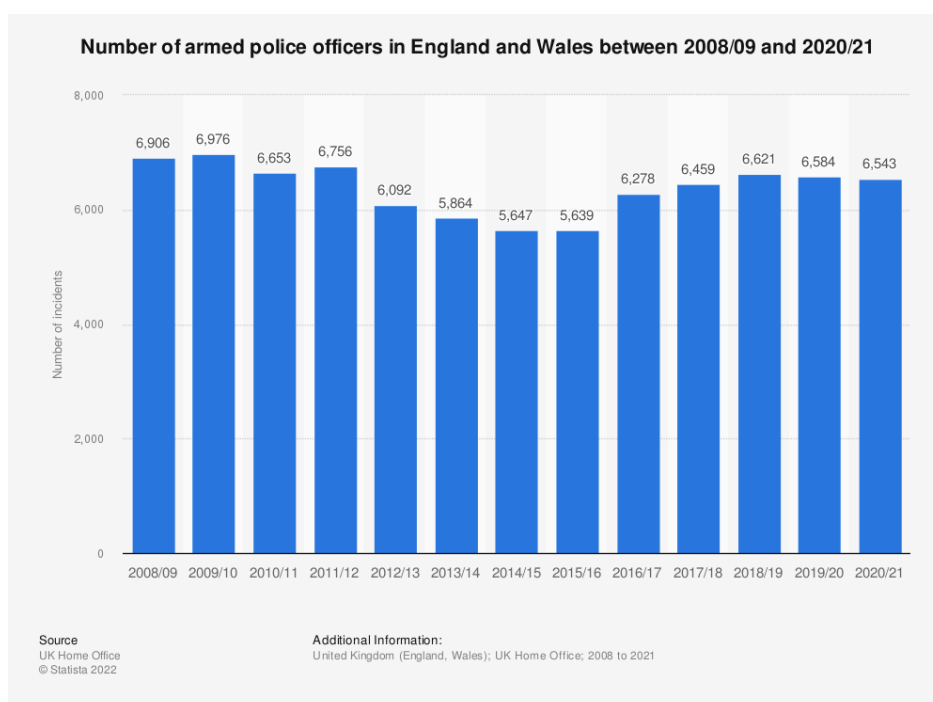


Figure 2.1 - Armed Officers in England and Wales 2008-2021

Source – Home Office, 2002

SFOs are AFOs who have undergone advanced training to respond to hostage-taking and other high-risk situations. Recently, the role of Counter-Terrorist Specialist Firearms Officer (CTSFOs) has been introduced. CTSFOs receive additional training to respond to organised crime groups and terrorist incidents. CTSFOs also provide training to AFOs and SFOs (Clark-Derby, 2019).

Firearms teams lack the diversity of mainstream police units. Jones *et al.*, (2020) reported that in the 35 forces that responded to their inquiry, there was a total of 29 black AFOs. Fourteen forces did not have an AFO from a minority group (*Ibid.*). The researchers also assessed AFO training. They reported that the pass rate for Black officers was 10 percent lower than it was for White candidates. They also reported evidence of a gender imbalance in their sample.

Data extracted from the NPCC report 'National Armed Policing Demographic Data for 2021' and made available to the research team, indicated further gender and minority population group imbalances. Ninety-five percent of firearms instructors were male; 98 percent of CTSFOs were male; and 94 percent of ARV officers were male. In 2021, on average, male AFOs stayed twice as long in post as female AFOs. In terms of the proportion of officers from minority groups, the data provided by the police was similar to that collected by Jones *et al* (2020). Of 2353 AFOs surveyed in their study, only 7 percent identified as a member of a minority group.

2.2 Firearms culture

Researchers have contended that the creation of numerous specialist units is synonymous with the creation of discrete subcultures (see for example, Loftus, 2009). Some view this as no more than adaptation as officers move from omni-competence in mainstream policing to specialised departments (see for example Cockcroft, 2019; Loftus, 2009; Chan, 1996; and Manning 1993). See Roberts and Innes (2009) for an example of this adaptation by officers joining a firearms team. Glomseth and Gottschalk (2009) studied the culture of specialist police units in Norway and found that subcultures emerged naturally from the tasks the units performed.

Other researchers have noted that the culture of police firearms work developed as a product of the dangerous and stressful environments officers encountered daily in their professional lives (Garabarino *et al.*, 2012 and Marques-Quinteiro, 2013). Kraska and Kappeler (1997) identified a distinct militaristic culture, in police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams in the USA. They reported officers' preoccupation with danger, their pleasure in engaging in paramilitary activities, and their perception that they were an elite form of the police.

Dodge *et al.*, (2011) examined perceived physical barriers, skills, and expectations that arise from the forms of hyper-masculinity and male camaraderie within SWAT teams. Examining 202 American police officers' opinions about women on SWAT, they found that male officers were more likely to believe that females lacked the both the strength and the skills needed to serve on tactical units. They concluded that SWAT teams were 'entrenched in masculinity' (2010 p.707). The researchers argued that the male officers resented the presence of women on SWAT teams because they represented threats to the exclusivity of the assignment, male camaraderie, and the subculture of the unit itself (Ibid.).

Mackay (2016) examined female experiences of their assignments to a UK firearms team. She saw social identity theory in action. The team was 'close knit [and] professional' but some female officers saw themselves as outsiders; isolated from the main group of male officers who socialised together and trained together in the gym to create what one respondent called 'an unspoken bond'. Women officers perceived this dynamic as reinforcing an unacknowledged hierarchy that, in turn, led to women being treated unfairly (for example, men put their friends first when overtime or annual leave was requested) (op. cit., p.72). Mackay noted that women believed there were unwritten rules that only became apparent when they were judged to have transgressed them. Women believed that they had to work harder than men to be accepted by the in-group. She reported that one of her respondents said that women had to be a part of the 'male officers' clique' to progress in firearms (op. cit., p.78). She concluded that the outward appearance of a supportive and inclusive workplace also could be a smoke screen for a more negative and secretive culture and that supervisors were key to effecting real change (Ibid.).

Also, in a UK firearms team setting, Cain (2011) found further evidence of social identity theory in action with in-group/outsider behaviour manifest in AFO elitism. Cain observed that rather than being perceived as elitist, membership of the firearms team brought status and was an important determinant of members' social identity for individuals (Ibid.). She argued that though to many (particularly women) elitism was an unattractive quality, some outsiders were drawn to the team because of its elitist reputation and its difficulty to get into (op. cit., p.147). Significantly in the context of this study, Cain noted that women who adapted to the firearms subculture, for example by emphasising masculine aspects of their identity (some of Cain's female respondents referred to themselves as 'tomboys') were well regarded and accepted by the in-group (op. cit., p.168). She observed that the women officers in her sample identified themselves 'first as firearms officers, secondly as policewomen and thirdly as women (op. cit., p.164).

Arguably, Cain's research adds weight to Rabe-Hemp's (2009) observation that female officers identify as police officers first, and as women second. That is to say that the women observed by Cain and by Rabe-Hemp, seemed to reject normative stereotypes of femininity in ways that broadened their work opportunities but reinforced traditional gender differences. That is an interesting observation that merits further attention but it may not be generalisable to all women officers. For example, Martin (1999) found that policewomen accepted their existence in male-dominated work cultures while emphasising their femininity (passivity, emotions, etc.).

In the modern era, researchers have gained high levels of access to the police and, increasingly, empiricism is the norm in policing research. Over the course of 22 'ride-alongs' with ARV crews in two English police forces, Clark-Darby (2019) observed a distinct firearms culture with officers enjoying the challenge and excitement the work brought. In the context of female underrepresentation on firearms teams, he argued (as Westmarland had done in 2001) that men's masculinity is reinforced by their cultural environment. Clark-Darby posited that a critical factor was that there were not enough women to interrupt the cycle of reinforcement. He argued that as 'the cycle continues; ...for women on the outside, it becomes less attractive to want to apply for that unit in particular' (op. cit., p.126).

Dodge *et al.* (2010) US study assessed mainstream officers' perceptions of SWAT teams. Female officers were more likely to believe that a SWAT subculture would exclude them, while male officers were more likely to believe that women should not be on SWAT teams at all. Female officers reported on the macho subculture; the researchers concluded that the 'intrinsic masculine nature of the assignment' would discourage them from applying to a SWAT assignment (op. cit., p.226). A large proportion of female officers in their sample said that they believed that women welcome in the boy's club (op. cit., p.227). The reluctance of women officers to apply for firearms assignments previously has been reported by others (see for example: Simon, 2019; Coulson, 2006; Sargent, 1995; and Coffey, 1991).

2.3 Structural barriers to recruitment to firearms teams

2.3.1 Shift work and family life

Babcock and Laschever (2009) found that a lack of family friendly policies in male-dominated organisations can inhibit women from career advancement. Todak *et al.* argued that women with children and elderly dependents preferred the patrol role because of the unpredictable nature of firearms assignments. They preferred to 'accumulate seniority to earn rights to the best shifts' (2021 p.660). Several studies have concluded that due to a lack of childcare assistance and family-oriented policies, women have chosen not to apply for promotions or assignments to specialist units (Todak *et al.*, 2022 and 2021; Charlesworth and Robertson, 2012). Dodge *et al.* found that regardless of the tactics employed by some caregivers, 'promotions to leadership positions and special assignments, particularly SWAT teams, remained elusive' (2011; p.702).

2.3.2 Physical health

Historically police officers, as an occupational group, have reported higher incidences of musculoskeletal injuries, with lower back pain being the condition reported most frequently (Nabell *et al.*, 2007). Burton *et al.* (1996) found that heavy ballistic protection vests and equipment belts were significant causes of musculoskeletal injuries. West's (2019) study found that male and female bodies responded differently to load carriage and that manifested itself in posture. Kyoung An's (2010) study found that female officers wearing unisex ballistic vests experienced constant pressure at the bust causing discomfort and a reduced range of motion. Niemczyk *et al.* (2020) concluded that bras and ballistic vests are

mutually incompatible in their functions. Anatomically contoured ballistic vests provide more comfort and better protection for women (Niemczyk *et al.*, 2020; West, 2019; and Mahbub *et al.*, 2014).

Bradley *et al.* (2021), surveyed 96 UK firearms officers to identify health and well-being concerns. Respondents reported that their specialist equipment (such as, body armour, firearms, and so on) placed strain on their musculoskeletal system. That strain was exacerbated by repetitive dynamic mechanical loading, prolonged static loading, and localised stress during firearm handling. Similar issues have been reported by: Vera Jimenez *et al.*, 2020; Larsen *et al.*, 2018; Campbell *et al.*, 2013; and Ramstrand *et al.*, 2016); and Larsen *et al.* (2018).

Bradley *et al.*, (Ibid.) found that in 12 months, 31 percent of their sample reported an injury. The most common was muscle strain but severe injuries (for example, trapped nerves, prolapsed discs, torn ligaments, ruptured muscles) accounted for 29 percent of the reports (Ibid.). Male officers reported a significantly higher injury rate than female officers with females' injuries more likely to be caused by equipment overuse or prolonged sitting in a vehicle.

2.3.3 Mental health

Purba and Demou reported that police officers are exposed to higher levels of psychological stress than the general population (2019). Planche *et al.*, (2019) noted that the stress was even higher in specialist tactical units due to their occupational demands. Demou *et al.*, (2020) found that specialist firearms officers routinely face challenges that uniquely affect mental health. Those include operational trauma, job role responsibilities, working hours and heavy workloads. Disclosing mental health problems has been described as 'career destroying' because of the inherent cynicism, lack of empathy, and macho culture of the workforce (Bell and Eski, 2016 p.95). Contreras-Negretti argued that a pervasive hegemonic masculinity normalises a 'silence of distress' (2019 p.11). Arguably, this could be magnified within firearms teams.

2.3.3 Physiological factors and shooting performance

In the PSEW, armed policing is an exclusive assignment reserved for experienced, skilled and highly proficient officers in the peak of health. AFOs must maintain their fitness to nationally recognised standards throughout their assignment. If officers fall short of those standards, their AFO duties are restricted until they can prove their fitness for the work. In that context, gender and physiological differences between officers may be significant. Studies have indicated, variously, that differences in physiology affect trigger finger endurance and shoulder strength. In turn, that affects shooting performance negatively (see: Brown *et al.* 2021; Orr *et al.*, 2021; Muirhead *et al.*, 2019; Kayihan *et al.*, 2013; and Rodd *et al.*, 2010;

Anderson and Plecas, (2000) and Morelli *et al.*, (2017) found that officers with larger hands and longer trigger fingers had greater grip strength. Studies by Muirhead *et al.*, (2019) and Orr *et al.*, (2017) found that officers with greater strength had a smoother and more controlled trigger pull during shooting. Blaskovits *et al.* (2016) and Brown *et al.* (2021) attributed the lower levels of shooting performance of females (compared to males) to differential grip strength. The researchers found that the combination of heavy trigger weights and the absence of minimum grip strength requirements resulted in poor shooting performance. Though it was not the researchers' intention, what could be interpreted as a gender stereotype has been challenged by other researchers.

Leyk *et al.* (2007) found that female performance was comparable to male officers when grip strengths were equivalent. They argued that grip strength could be improved by increasing strength training. Brzycki's examination of male and female world-record performances in powerlifting found that the gender differences in strength were not as significant when body weight was taken into consideration (2004 p,16). Brown *et al.*, (Ibid.) recommended that those with lower grip strength should be given the opportunity to improve through training. Moreover, that police agencies should consider reducing trigger pull weight to accommodate all armed officers.

2.3.4 AFO uniforms

It has been argued that workplace uniforms are a crucial marker for workplace identity (Strand *et al.*, 2022). Strand *et al.* (Ibid.) argue that uniforms make visible those who may

otherwise not fit into a homogenous collective. Often, emphasis is placed on how the uniform is worn and how it fits, which may dictate whether an individual belongs to a uniform collective, or subgroup. Strand argues that this consequently and perhaps unintentionally may exclude women or other bodies 'not defined as the 'standard' male' (op. cit., p.4). Arguably, uniforms do not only influence police culture and social interactions; their visual attractiveness and aesthetics influence recruitment. Panter (2018) argued that gendered police uniforms, as opposed to unisex uniforms, could hinder police recruitment of LGBT+ identities. In Panter's study (Ibid.), fit and function issues were topics of discussion for officers across all the police assignments and agencies she surveyed. Even small visual deviations from the dress code could contribute to the identification and magnification of gender differences in ways that limited acceptance and cohesion. This was particularly true in hypermasculine environments (Panter, Ibid.).

Aside from their practical elements, AFO uniforms are signifiers of difference. In Canada, Blaskovits *et al.*, (2022) assessed public perceptions of a variety of police uniforms. They found that officers dressed in tactical gear were more prepared, stronger, and more confident than the same officers dressed in standard patrol uniforms. Conversely, the same group of officers was perceived as more intimidating, aggressive, more prejudiced, uncaring, rude, and corruptible when compared to officer in patrol uniform.

Police officers' perceptions of the uniforms worn by fellow officers seem to have received little attention. One such study was conducted in Australia in 2022. The research participants were members of Queensland Police (Simpson and Sargeant, 2022). The researchers, found that officers who identified with a 'warrior-like' image of the police were more likely to favour military-type uniforms characterised by dark colours and load-bearing vests rather than uniformed polo-style shirts with no vests. The researchers found that officers wearing a polo shirt without an external vest were perceived as less competent and less professional by police colleagues (Simpson and Sargeant, Ibid.). They argued that a police vest may be an important part of police officer identity (Ibid.).

Both female and male officers, have reported dissatisfaction with traditional uniforms designed for the male 'standard body' (see for example, Coltman *et al.*, 2021 and Niemczyk

et al., 2020). Standard uniforms may be less fitting and less functional for female bodies, or non-standard male bodies.

2.3.5 Weapons and holsters

AFOs firearms normatively are visible to the public for practical (easy access when needed) and symbolic (visible sign of authority and power) reasons (Nhan, 2019). Nhan argues that visibility comes at 'the cost of strained relationships with the community' (op. cit., p.72). Yesberg *et al.*, (2021) found that in their study that the public reacted more negatively to armed police than to their unarmed colleagues. Respondents rated armed officers as unapproachable and less trustworthy.

There also is the dynamic known as the 'weapons effect'; a phenomenon in which the simple presence of a weapon in a social situation is presumed to cause people to behave more aggressively (Berkowitz and LePage, 1976). Other researchers have criticised Berkowitz and LePage's work (and questioned whether the weapons effect exists) because of their questionable methodology and the challenges that other researchers seemed to have faced in replicating their experiments but Benjamin concluded, on the basis of his meta-analysis of the extant weapons effect research, that there is 'tentative evidence that the mere presence of weapons does influence aggressive thoughts and appraisals' (2019 p.6). Ariel *et al.*, (2019) found that City of London Police officers who were carried Tasers were significantly more likely to be assaulted by suspects than officers without Tasers.

From a kinematics standpoint, studies have indicated that weapons carried in standard hip holsters affect performance, decrease mobility, and may be the cause of back pain (Larsen *et al.*, 2019 and 2016). Larsen *et al.* (2016) found that occupational loads carried by police have a significant effect on gait kinematics and kinetics; discomfort while driving vehicles was increased when a standard hip belt system was worn. Conversely, pressures in the lower back were reduced when wearing a load-bearing vest and relocating items away from the waist (ibid.). Campbell *et al.*, (2013) argue that as there is no difference between hip and thigh holsters in terms of shooting performance and pistol draw times, AFOs' comfort should be given greater priority.

2.3.6 Headwear and other kit

There is scant evidence that AFO headwear or any other piece of kit limit the appeal of the role to potential recruits. There seems broad acceptance of the fact that there a balance must be achieved between cultural and religious needs and officers' safety and wellbeing, Hughes (2010) reported that some forces had been able to make accommodations that do not upset that balance but, at least in 2010, there was no protective headwear for AFOs other than the standard issue. There is even less research in this context on respirators, facial hair and religious belief requirements, or on medical conditions such as (e.g., pseudofolliculitis barbae (which disproportionately affects Black identities). Studies on facial hair and usage of FFP3 and N-95 masks have shown that beard length is a factor in fit and function (see De-Ynigo-Mojado *et al.*, 2021 and Prince *et al.*, 2021).

2.4 Police shootings

Fatal police shootings are rare events (Manolias and Hyatt-Williams, 1993). However, as McFarlane and Amin (2021 p.1777) highlight, 'the circumstances...are often amplified by high-levels of mainstream and social media reporting; causing significant public concern'. In some cases, that also has escalated community tensions, damaging police and community relations and has even led to civil disorder. That certainly was true in the cases of Jean Charles de Menezes (2005), Azelle Rodney (2005), and Mark Duggan (2011).

Individual police officers have no special status in law when they discharge a firearm. Their conduct is governed by the same law as any other citizen. That means they have no legal protections if the degree of force they have used is unreasonable in the circumstances as they believed them to be (Clapham, 2017). Under the Police Reform Act 2002, police forces in England and Wales have a statutory duty to refer to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), a death during or following police contact where there is an allegation or indication that police contact, directly or indirectly, contributed to the death. The IOPC investigates the circumstances of all referrals and decides whether to investigate the death. Between 2018 and 2019 there were three fatal shootings that were investigated independently by the IOPC (IOPC, 2021). In none of those cases, was an officer prosecuted.

2.5 Summary

The literature confirms the existence of a distinct culture in police firearms teams. In itself, that is natural and unproblematic. A positive and cohesive organisational culture is important in terms of performance, officers' job satisfaction and staff retention. It also is a significant factor in group identity. Historically, like the police institution of which they are a part, firearms teams have been made up of white men. As the demographics of Britain and the PSEW are changing, firearms teams are evolving and their membership is changing but women are underrepresented in firearms teams. The teams have only a few members who identify with a minority group. The teams are less representative of the communities they serve than the PSEW, which is itself, not yet representative of the diversity of Britain's communities in the modern era.

The extant literature suggests that firearms culture, which some perceive to be macho (gendered) and exclusive, is a barrier to recruitment. Particularly to the recruitment of women. The other notable barriers to recruitment that are reported in the literature, is what potential applicants see as the challenge of achieving a healthy work/home life balance. This particularly is an issue for those with caring responsibilities. In terms of retention, there is some evidence of women's dissatisfaction with kit (particularly the fit of body armour) and of resistance of the male in-group to them as incomers; manifest in the perception that the former were disadvantaged as a result. The fact that on average, male AFOs stay twice as long in post as female AFOs may be relevant in that context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology underpinning the research design. It is structured as follows: first, the design of the overall project is described; second the research aims and objectives are outlined; and finally, the data analysis is explained.

Note that ethical approval for this study was granted by Liverpool John Moore's University Ethics Committee (21/LCP/012) and (22/LCP/010). As a condition of that approval, all participants consented to participate in the study on the proviso that their contributions were anonymous. The research team has respected their wishes. Where participants' contributions are included, the participant is referred to by a number assigned by the research team (and by a description of their role if that can be attributed).

3.1 Research design principles

Both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected. An interpretive approach was used to conduct an in-depth exploration of the Diversity and Inclusion in Firearms National Group's brief, to better understand the underrepresentation of minority groups in firearms teams.

3.1.1 Research context

Despite the widespread recognition that the 43 forces who make up the Police Service of England and Wales (PSEW) need to effect change to better reflect the communities they serve; the workforce continues overwhelmingly to be white and male (Home Office, 2022). Though, since 2010, there has been a gradual upward trend in the proportion of officers who identify with an ethnic minority group (excluding a white minority), on 31st March 2022, White officers still made up 91.9 percent of the workforce. On that date, there were 11,053 officers from minority ethnic groups (excluding white minorities), making up 8.1 percent of the workforce. Breaking that figure down further, Black officers made up 1.3 percent of the total workforce, Asian officers 3.7 percent, and those identifying as a belonging to a Mixed ethnic group or another ethnic group 3.1 percent. There were 46,955 female police officers, making up 33.5 percent of officers in the service (Home Office, *Ibid.*).

Statistics on the demographics of firearms teams and authorised firearms officers (AFOs) were not readily available to the research team but, drawing on the work of Jones *et al.*, in 2020, just 29 out of 6584 AFOs identified as Black/Black British. That figure represented 0.4 percent of the AFO population compared with 7.3 percent of the PSEW workforce (Home Office, 2020). Notably, 14 of the 43 Home Office forces did not have a single ethnic minority AFO. The percentage of female AFOs was 9.8 percent compared with 31 percent of the wider population (Home Office, *op. cit.*, p.27).

3.1.2 Research question and aims

Seeking to better understand the underrepresentation of minority groups and to encourage more female officers to consider joining firearms teams, the Diversity and Inclusion in Firearms National Group (DIFAG) of the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) commissioned a Liverpool John Moores University research team to examine: (i) police cultural perceptions of armed units; (ii) the ways in which those perceptions impact diversity within firearms roles; (iii) barriers to recruitment to firearm roles; and (iv) the extent to which issues associated with uniforms, equipment, or training have an impact on achieving an inclusive and representative armed workforce.

The research team framed those requirements in the research question, ‘Why are minority groups underrepresented in police firearms teams?’ and in a set of research aims. Those were to:

1. critically examine the perceptions of firearms teams’ culture among two groups: current and former AFOs; and non-AFOs;
2. critically assess cultural barriers to improving inclusion and diversity within firearms teams;
3. critically assess AFO practice to determine whether elements of the role exclude or limit diversity;
4. critically examine whether there are any aspects of uniform, equipment, or training that impact upon diversity and inclusion in firearms teams.

3.1.3 Research instruments

The team collected research data in three ways. First, via a comprehensive review of relevant literature (including secondary data extrapolated from a PSEW survey, carried out in 2020 in the north-west region). Second, using an online survey, advertised across the

PSEW, to collect officers' views and experiences. Third, via focus groups that allowed the team to engage with AFOs and to delve deeper into the survey responses. All data were sorted and coded to enable them to be analysed thematically in the context of the existing literature.

3.2 Research environment and sample

Statistics on the demographics of firearms teams and authorised firearms officers (AFOs) were not readily available to the research team but, drawing on the work of Jones *et al.*, in 2020, just 29 out of 12,572 AFOs identified as Black/Black British. That figure represented 0.2 percent of the AFO population compared with 7.3 percent of the PSEW workforce (Home Office, 2020). Notably, 14 of the 43 Home Office forces did not have a single ethnic minority AFO. The percentage of female AFOs was 9.8 percent compared with 31 percent of the wider population (Home Office, *op. cit.*, p.27).

A total of 4,007 respondents completed the survey, which was open to all officers and staff regardless of role. Respondents self-identified as 'Male' (n=2330, 58 percent), 'Female' (n=835, 21 percent), or 'Other' (842, 21 percent). To facilitate statistical analysis, this third group included anyone who did not identify as 'Male' or 'Female' and those who preferred not to disclose their gender. Hence, the larger number than might be expected. In terms of ethnicity, 3076 (78 percent) of survey respondents identified as 'White'; 96 (2 percent) identified as 'Asian'; 34 (1 percent) as 'Black'; 94 (2 percent) as 'Mixed'; and 707 (18 percent) as 'Other'. This 'Other' grouping included those who did not disclose their ethnicity. All focus group participants were 'White'.

Five focus groups were made up solely of self-selected AFOs. The contributions of 11 PSEW officers and two Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) officers were recorded. Six respondents were Male and seven were Female. The survey was completed by officers and staff across the PSEW, and by officers of the National Crime Agency, British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the MDP, Police Scotland, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Of those respondents, 1520 (38 percent) were current or former AFOs; 2487 respondents (62 percent) were not (and never had been) employed in the AFO role.

To ensure that all viewpoints were represented, and no group was excluded from the research sample, the survey collected data about the sexual identity of respondents; 2707 survey respondents (68 percent) identified as 'straight'; 104 (3 percent) as 'lesbian/gay'; and 1196 (30 percent) as 'other'. Again, the 'other' grouping may be higher than one may expect because it includes respondents who identified as: bisexual; aromantic; asexual; fluid; pansexual; questioning; and queer. It also included all respondents who did not disclose their sexual identity (by far, the largest proportion of responses in this group). Focus group members were not asked to state their sexual identity.

3.3 Data analysis and emergent themes

Quantitative data were extracted from the survey, compiled and sorted using a statistical package for the social sciences for descriptive analysis (SPSS). Once data was downloaded, it was coded into numerical values for the purpose of frequency analysis (Elliott et al, 2006). Respondents were given the option of including an additional free text response. Many respondents chose to do so, and their contributions provided rich qualitative data that was a significant aid to understanding and, ultimately, to answering the research question. Focus group sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The transcripts went through a rigorous process of checking against the digital record to ensure accuracy. All the research data were analysed thematically. They were categorised and coded to enable a systematic analysis not only of research participants' experiences but also the meaning of those experiences in the context of the research question. To evidence the rigour of this process, researchers adopted Braun and Clark's (2006) '6 step' framework.

The data collected were analysed thematically. The following themes emerged from that process: AFO demographic and the attractiveness of the role; career progression; work/life balance; culture and representativeness; kit and equipment; and pay and rewards.

3.4 Summary

The chapter described the context of the research, set out the research questions and aims, and explained the methods used to collect, filter, and analyse data. It identified the themes

that emerged from that process. Data relevant to those themes are first reported and then discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter reports the research teams' findings thematically. Given the continuing dominance of the White Male demographic in the target group, the PSEW and other police departments/agencies in Great Britain and Northern Ireland with armed officers, and the relatively small numbers of respondents in groups outside of that core demographic, inferring every possible variation in meaning from the data collected was no easy task. Ultimately, although respondents could select from a much wider range of options, survey responses were grouped using the labels: 'Male', 'Female', 'Other'; 'White', 'Asian', 'Black', 'Other'; Straight, Gay/Lesbian; Other. In the narrative that follows, where the analysis of the data suggested that a more nuanced explanation of a response is required, that explanation is included.

4.1 Theme 1: AFO demographic and the attractiveness of the role

4.1.1 Officers physical health and fitness

The shift in the demographic noted by many respondents in this study is not yet reflected in the literature nor is it evident from the quantitative data collected in this study. Of 1520 AFO respondents, 1470 identified as 'White' (97 percent) and just 107 (7 percent) as 'Female'.

Table 4.1 – physical health (all respondents)

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	425	10.6	10.6	10.6
	No	2818	70.3	70.3	80.9
	Prefer not to say	764	19.1	19.1	100.0
	Total	4007	100.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.0		
Total		4008	100.0		

Survey respondents were asked whether they suffered from health problems or disabilities, which had lasted, or were expected to last, at least 12 months. The research team inferred that would preclude respondents from undertaking AFO duties, which require a higher level of fitness than officers in mainstream policing. If that inference is correct, up to 11 percent of the sample (425 respondents) would be unable to carry out AFO duties regardless of their career aspirations. That figure could be even higher; 764 respondents (19 percent of the sample) preferred not to comment on their health/disabilities.

AFO work requires high levels of fitness and motivation. Survey respondents were asked to comment on the proposition that they would be concerned about the enhanced fitness test that AFOs must pass to be employed in the role.

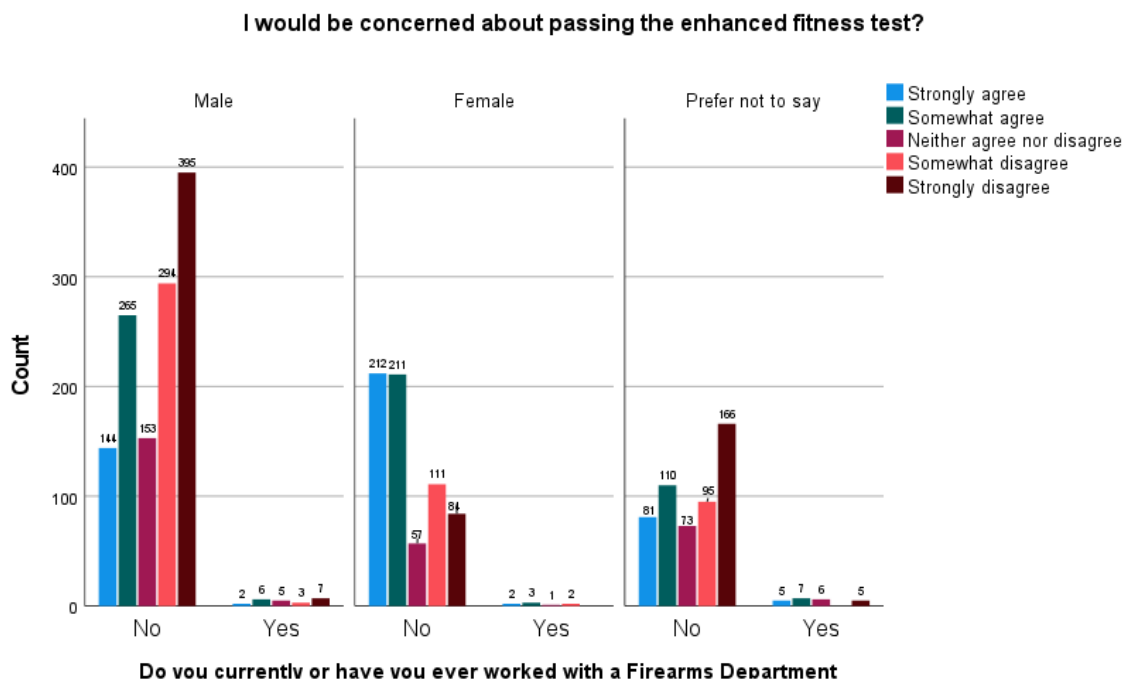


Figure 4.1 – Concerns about passing the EFT (sorted by AFO/Non AFO and gender)

As Figure 4.1 shows, just a few AFO respondents expressed concerns about their ability to past the enhanced fitness test but a high proportion of Non AFOs strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition. That figure was highest by far in the Female category; 66 percent compared to 33 percent in the Male category and 37 percent in the Prefer Not to Say

category. A Female AFO said the test was ‘a massive obstacle to females joining the department’. They called for it to be ‘gender and age specific’.

4.1.2 Interest in becoming an AFO

Survey respondents were asked to comment on the proposition that they were interested in becoming a firearms officer.

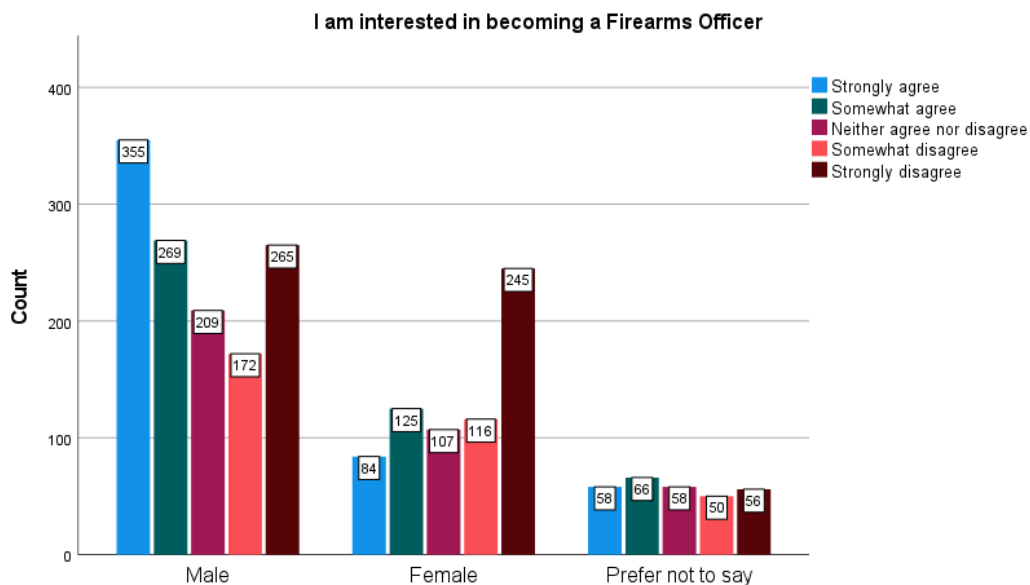


Figure 4.2 – Interest in becoming a firearms officer (Male/Female/PNTS)

As Figure 4.2 shows, more Males reported that they were interested in the role than females; 49 percent of Male respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition, compared with 31 percent of Females. Notably, 56 percent of Females, compared with 36 percent Males, strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition. A Male AFO seemed to sum up the views of many respondents when they said that the work did not suit everyone; they did not believe it possible for the service to make a career in Firearms ‘appealing for all’.

Figure 4.3 shows that when responses to the same question were sorted by ethnicity, there were some differences between groups. That is acknowledged. It also should be

acknowledged that the small numbers of responses in the Mixed, Asian, Black, and Other groups, makes interpreting those differences in a meaningful way, difficult. Whether there is a need for further analysis of this data depends on a value judgement that cannot be made by the research team.

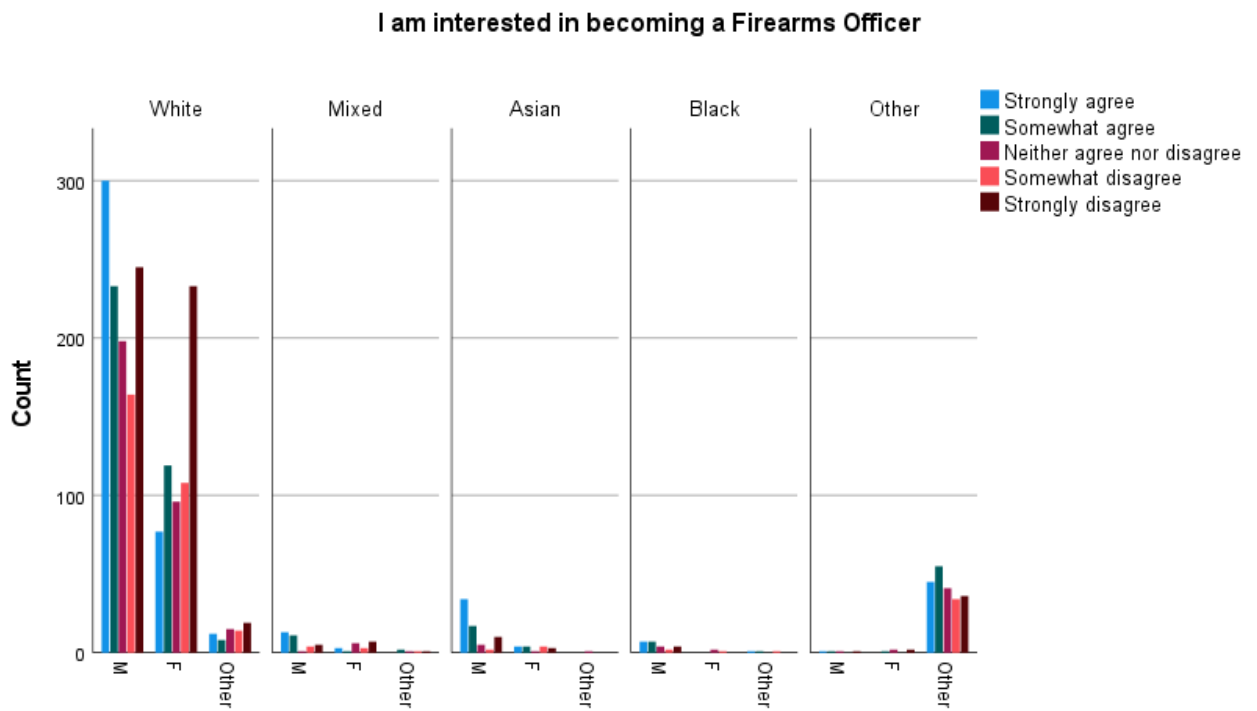


Figure 4.3 – Interest in becoming a firearms officer (by ethnicity)

Survey respondents selected factors which motivated or demotivated them in their consideration of a posting to a firearms team (from lists provided by the research team). The highest ranked choices in each case are shown in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. Popular choices emphasised positive aspects of the role such as, the opportunity to meet a new professional challenge. As Table 4.2 shows, respondents said they valued the prospect of working in a fun, exciting, positive, team environment that tested their professional and physical abilities and allowed them to prove their mettle. However, when respondents were given a free choice of stating what attracted them to the role, 158 Male Non AFOs said that officers' primary motivation was to escape the daily drudge (as they saw it) of response policing. Two

Females and nine members of the 'Other' group cited the same wish to 'escape' response policing.

Table 4.2 - Motivators to join a firearms team (all Non AFO survey respondents)

Motivator	Number of Responses
Role seen as presenting a professional challenge	2063
Day-to-day job activities look exciting/fun	1841
Opportunity to obtain certification in firearms/advanced driving	1678
Training looks fun/exciting	1677
Previous military experience or firearm experience	1640
Physicality of the training/assignment	1472
To be a part of the culture of firearms	1315
To be a part of a team	1252

Table 4.3 – Demotivators to join a firearms team (all Non AFO survey respondents)

Demotivators	Number of Responses
Scrutiny following a police shooting	2441
Not wishing to carry a firearm	2072
Role too physically demanding	1513
Training is too difficult and/or long	1503
Culture/reputation of firearms units	1436
Too much responsibility	1408
Selection process too competitive	1014

As Table 4.3 shows, a sizeable number of respondents, 2072 (just over half of all those surveyed) do not want to carry a firearm; this is a key finding from the survey. Respondents *inter alia* see the role as carrying too much responsibility and as being physically too demanding.

4.1.3 Scrutiny following a police shooting

Notably, 2441 respondents selected 'scrutiny following a police shooting' as the greatest demotivator, or disincentive, to considering joining a firearms team and this meant it was the highest ranked of all selections. The following were typical of responses that expressed respondents' concerns about how they might be treated following a police shooting: 'The potential life changing consequences and stress if you were to shoot someone is a big factor in putting people off' (Male AFO); 'There is far too little support of firearms officers following a shooting... That is the sole reason I would never join a firearms unit' (Female Non AFO); 'Until firearms officers receive more protection when actually discharging a firearm as they are taught to do then officers will be discouraged from joining' (second Female Non AFO); 'The force looks like it supports firearm discharges but once it goes wrong the person at the bottom will always be blamed' (Male Non AFO); 'The physical risks of being a firearms officer are acceptable to me. The risk of hounding from the press, the IOPC and others in the event of a death or injury are not' (second Male Non AFO); and 'Street cops don't want to apply as they know as soon as there is an incident the job will drop them like a stone' (third Male Non AFO).

4.1.4 Training environment

The topic of training attracted a sizeable number of responses; both as a motivator (1677 responses) and as a demotivator (1503 responses). Though many respondents in all groups seemed to relish the opportunity to participate in physical activities in a team environment, many Male and Female AFO respondents complained about the persistence of an 'old school', militaristic mentality in the initial training environment.

The following quotes from Female AFOs help capture some of the tensions in that environment. One said they found the training environment, 'very intimidating; macho'. A second said that trainers did not provide support for women and a third that firearms

trainers perpetuated a 'jerk' mentality. A fourth said that firearms training was 'toxic and it remains the same today as it was 10 years ago'. A fourth said that the inspector rank was limited in its ability to change culture because they also were 'assessed by trainers who hold so much power to keep old school bullying practices in place'. They said, 'Bullying from instructors is commonplace and accepted' and 'sexist behaviour from senior ranks is ignored'. A fifth said, 'The day-to-day role does not match the training expectations... the training curriculum gives trainers the licence to "beast" recruits. Not acceptable... and puts people off applying as they hear horror stories from previous applicants'.

The following quotes from Male AFOs evidence that they shared their female colleagues' concerns. One said that the training environment in their force was 'bullying, misogynistic, and toxic'. A second said the Macho culture among firearms trainers was 'difficult to deal with'. A third said 'Firearms instructors... treat you in a disgraceful way'. A fourth said that trainers' teaching methods, as much as their attitudes, were a 'significant blocker' to officers wanting to join the unit; 'training methods need to adapt to be more instructive and supportive'. A fifth said trainers needed to establish a true learning environment; they said that trainers should hold a professional teaching qualification. A sixth said that the culture and reputation of the training department was a 'big barrier'; 'Much more emphasis was needed on how trainers deliver feedback and ... teach in a constructive manner'.

There was some dissent from these views; though it was in the minority. A Male AFO said, 'Instructors may at times have been critical, but that is an important part of their role, they are training people in the use of firearms and tactics where things must be done correctly from a safety point of view'.

4.2 Theme 2: Career progression

Opinion was divided on the proposition that joining a firearms team will benefit a respondent's career progression. As Figure 4.4 shows, just 33 percent of Male respondents and 20 percent of Female respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition. Proportionately more Female respondents than Male respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition (49 percent compared with 33 percent).

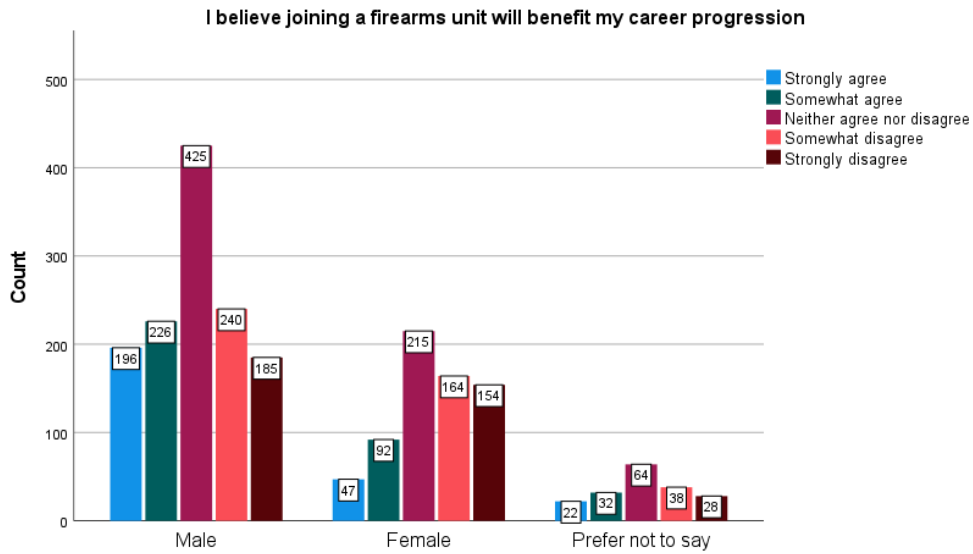


Figure 4.4 – Career benefits of joining a firearms team

This topic did not attract as much commentary as others. A Male former AFO said that they had left the unit because of the lack of opportunities for promotion. They said, ‘If there were opportunities to progress my career ... I would have stayed there but quite simply there are not’. A Male AFO said that there was a lack of promotion or development opportunities and therefore no career progression. A Female AFO said that forces should look to retain officers on promotion. That also would have the benefit of closing gaps in the representation of Female and other minority groups in armed policing. The same Female AFO said that their unit had lost five Female AFOs on promotion in a single year. Many survey respondents and some members of the focus groups highlighted retention of Female AFOs as an ongoing issue.

Some AFOs reported that the dominant demographic of the role was changing rapidly. Focus group respondents, highly experienced AFOs, said that the traditional demographic of teams was changing. Joining firearms was no longer a case of filling ‘dead men’s shoes’ - the days of officers ‘joining and never leaving’ were a thing of the past because there are ‘no career Bobbies anymore’ and it is less attractive compared to other opportunities the service offers. Therefore, there is a ‘fight to find skilled labour’ (AFO supervisor).

A second AFO supervisor said that the supply of new recruits was limited because all forces/agencies were 'fishing for firearms officers from the same pond'. That meant that AFOs who saw an opportunity in another force, sometimes were encouraged to take it; creating a 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' dynamic.

Taking a rather different tack, a Male AFO said that they had begun to see that the service was recognising that experienced AFOs were 'some of the best cops' and therefore, 'good promotion material'. They said, 'firearms has traditionally not been a place where you felt you could develop your career but that is starting to change in ways that make firearms more attractive [to the service as a source of potential supervisors/managers]'. Of course, the corollary to that was that it was 'compromising units' capacity'.

A Male AFO suggested that the service should consider fast-track recruitment schemes as recently had been trialled in respect of detective recruitment. A second Male AFO said that in some forces, new officers are being given the opportunity 'from day one' to have their interest in becoming an AFO in their force, supported. A third Male AFO said that some forces were pursuing a similar policy, in the shape of 'discovery days', with positive results.

4.3 Theme 3: Work/life balance

The AFO role makes extra demands on police officers in terms of their physical fitness and their ability to work long and unsocial hours. Inevitably, that can take a heavy toll on private and on family lives and that was the case for members of all groups who participated in this study. As Figure 4.5 shows, a total of 1159 respondents, strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition that there is a lack of flexible working practice in firearms teams; a total of 667 respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition; the greatest number of respondents, 1626, neither agreed nor disagreed with it. As Figure 4.6 shows, respondents in all groups broadly are content with their shift patterns.

There is a lack of flexible working practices associated with being a firearms officer

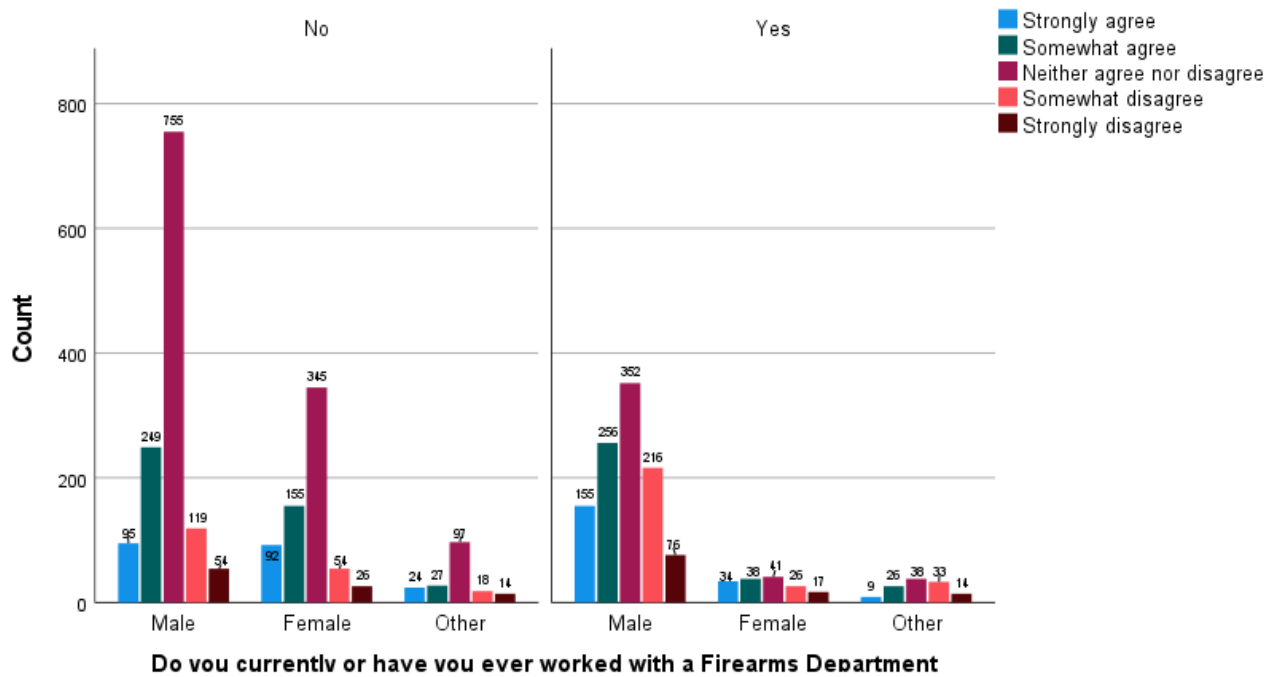


Figure 4.5 Flexible working practices (sorted by AFO/Non AFO groups and by gender)

That is not to say there was no criticism of the work in this context. A Male AFO said that the centralisation of firearms units was problematic; they said that ‘if this was split across Force, it would be more appealing to more staff’. A Female AFO said that their pattern was ‘appalling’, their rest days were ‘all over the place and minimal’ A second Female AFO said that they believed that more flexible working would help to retain staff in firearms units. A third, said that there were regional variations; it depended on where officers were located. They said that for example, the shift pattern in their force was ‘terrible’; they favoured working longer hours (and fewer days).

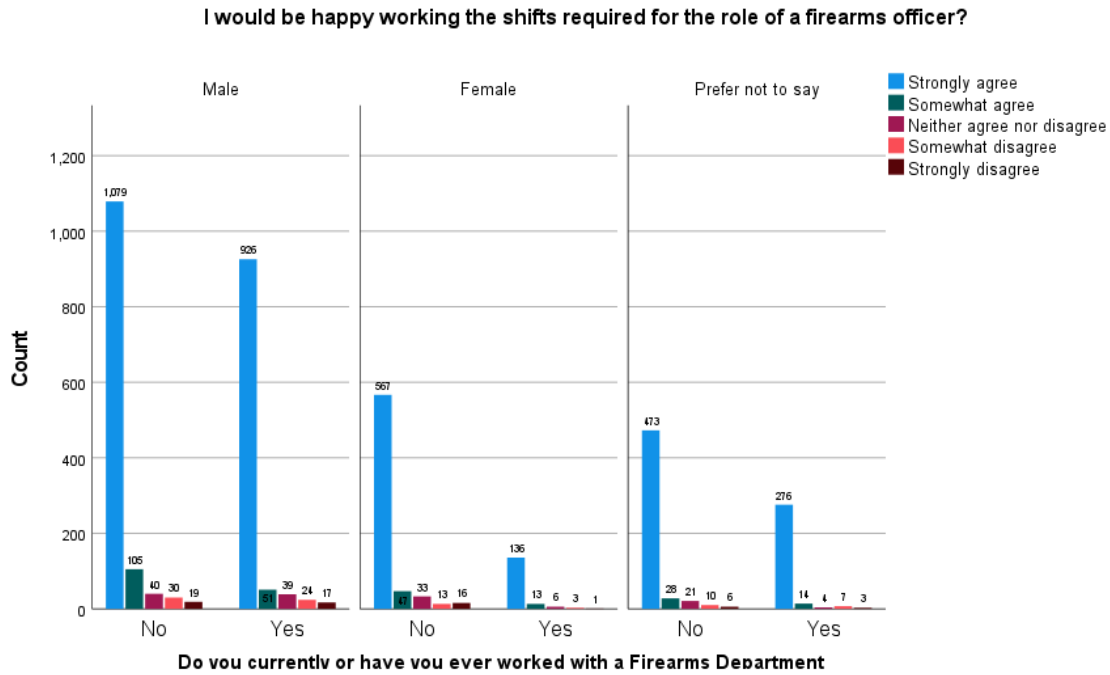


Figure 4.6 – AFO shift work (sorted by AFO/Non AFO and gender)

It is recognised universally that in British society, women carry the out the bulk of child caring responsibilities. Female respondents were disappointed that those needs had not been met or worried that they would not be catered for. A Female AFO said that they had left the AFO role because as a single mother they had found the 12-hour shifts unsustainable (this of course also is germane to the issue of retention). They said that the working pattern was not ‘family friendly’ and that ‘exercising at 5 am just to get something in was not healthy’. They were ‘glad they were off the unit’.

It was clear that for some the role was not an option. The following were typical of Female Non AFO responses. One said, ‘Now I have young children, I couldn't see the training being possible around childcare needs and the shift pattern doesn't appear to offer the flexibility I have in my [current] role. A second said the location of the bases was incompatible with family life. A third said, ‘As mother of four children there is no way could I commit to the hours’. A fourth said, ‘Job shares are unheard of, and flexible working is rare. Adverts need to indicate that flexible working could be an option to encourage mothers to apply’. A Non

AFO respondent from the Prefer Not to Say group said that women do not work in firearms units because 'bosses won't do work plans for women. They would rather move them out of the unit. Women with children are seen as a liability'. A Female former AFO said, 'I am now a single mother... there is no flexibility to accommodate a balance with home life sadly.

These findings mirror those of the police's own survey of firearms teams in 2020. In that case, one Female AFO respondent said, 'There is no flexibility for working parents and you are regularly kept on past your duty'. A second said, 'I was considering applying for firearms, but I had a baby and I think ... it would be difficult for me to arrange childcare'. A third said, 'I am a mother to a young child. I just don't think it's a role that could fit with my home life'.

4.4 Theme 4: Culture and representativeness

Questions about the culture and representativeness of police firearms units were central to the commission of this study. Many respondents in all the survey's groupings forcefully made the point that the AFO role was/should be achieved on merit with complete disregard of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual identity. That viewpoint was typified by a Male AFO who said that 'It matters not if you're male or female, gay or straight or what religion you are as long as you are the best person for the role' and by a Male Non AFO who said, 'I don't care if all sections of the community are represented in a Firearms Unit, what's important is that the most capable and effective individuals are recruited. It is better that lives are saved by a non-diverse unit than not saved by a diverse one'. Several survey respondents made the point that the PSEW is not truly representative of society. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that the diversity of its firearms teams would be sub-optimal.

4.4.1 *The macho environment*

The data collected in this survey demonstrates that firearms units continue to be perceived as male dominated and macho environments (Figures 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9). That seemed to be a live issue for respondents. Certainly, the topic attracted more comments than any of the others explored in this chapter. That the units are Male dominated environments is a matter of fact; that is represented in Figures 4.7 and 4.8.

Dictionary definitions of the term machismo (from which the word macho is derived) highlight that it is associated with traditional ideas about male behaviour but for many, in the modern era, the term suggests male dominance and aggression and a belief in men’s superiority over women. Few would disagree that it is an undesirable quality in policing.

Some AFOs said that they, personally had not suffered because of the culture. A Female AFO said that in their view the unit had got a ‘a bad reputation’ for its culture but they had ‘always felt included, valued, and part of the team’. A second said that the service had taken ‘great steps forward with all aspects of inclusion’ over the last 15 years. Another said that their experiences over an extended period had been positive but they acknowledged that firearms teams needed to work on ‘certain aspects on inclusion and... need to stamp out the macho, “jobs for boys” attitude’. In their view, women’s needs were given insufficient consideration. For example, ‘training and development after a female has been off on maternity leave needs work’. This was a point reinforced by a Female former AFO who said, ‘My maternity return was difficult, and it appeared easier to side-line [me] to promotion instead of regaining AFO qualification [I was] overlooked for other male colleagues’.

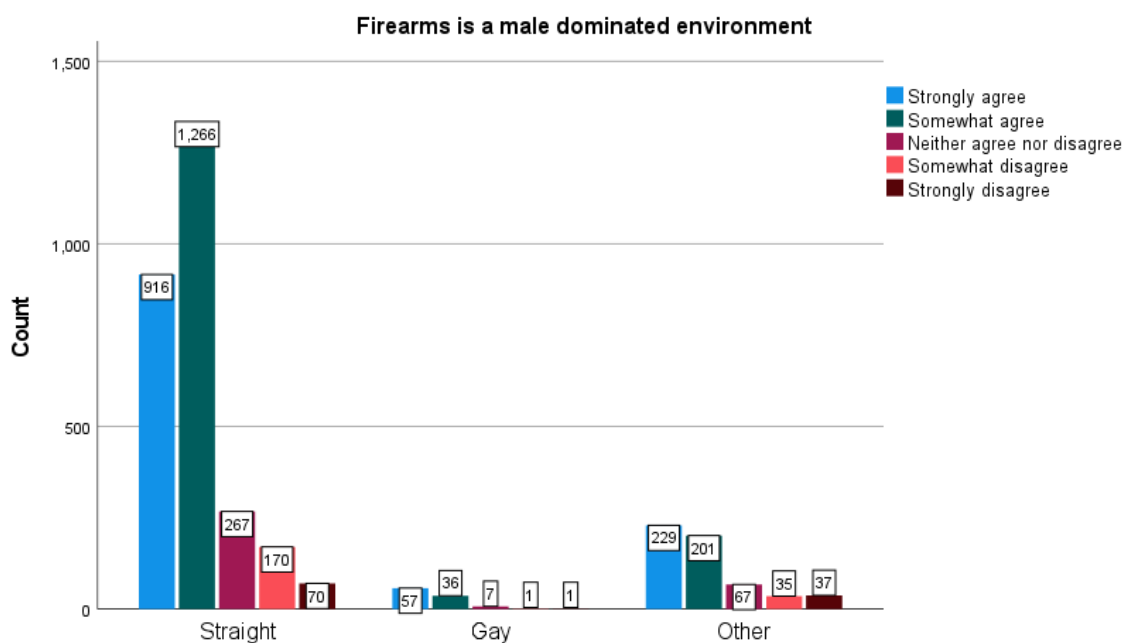


Figure 4.7 – Firearms is a male dominated environment (All respondents)

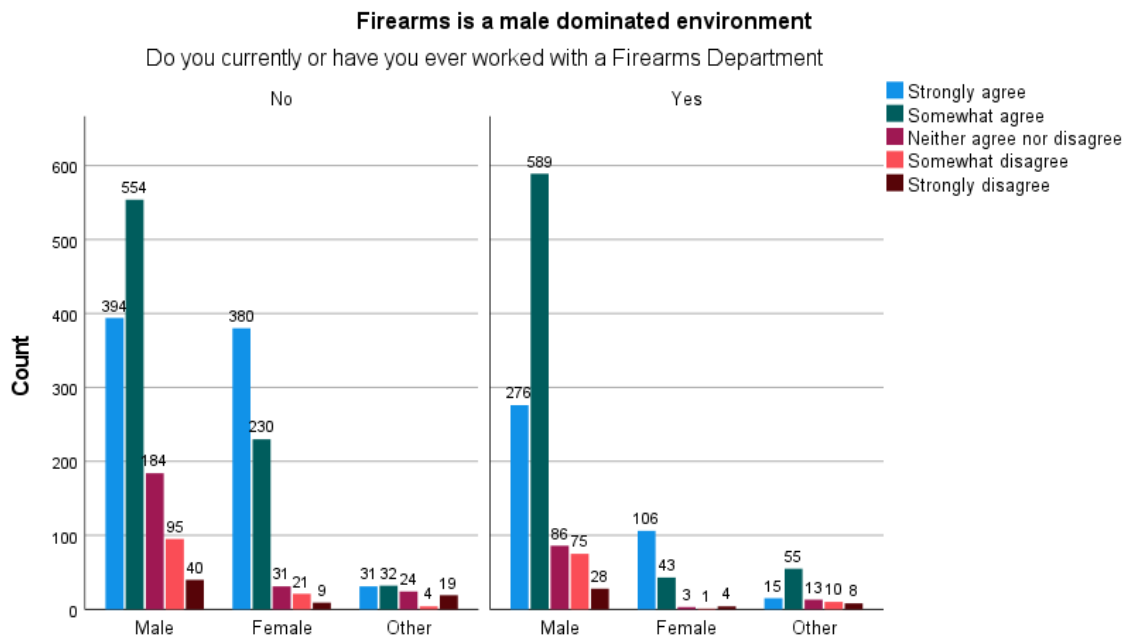


Figure 4.8 – Firearms is a male dominated environment (sorted by AFO/Non AFO and gender)

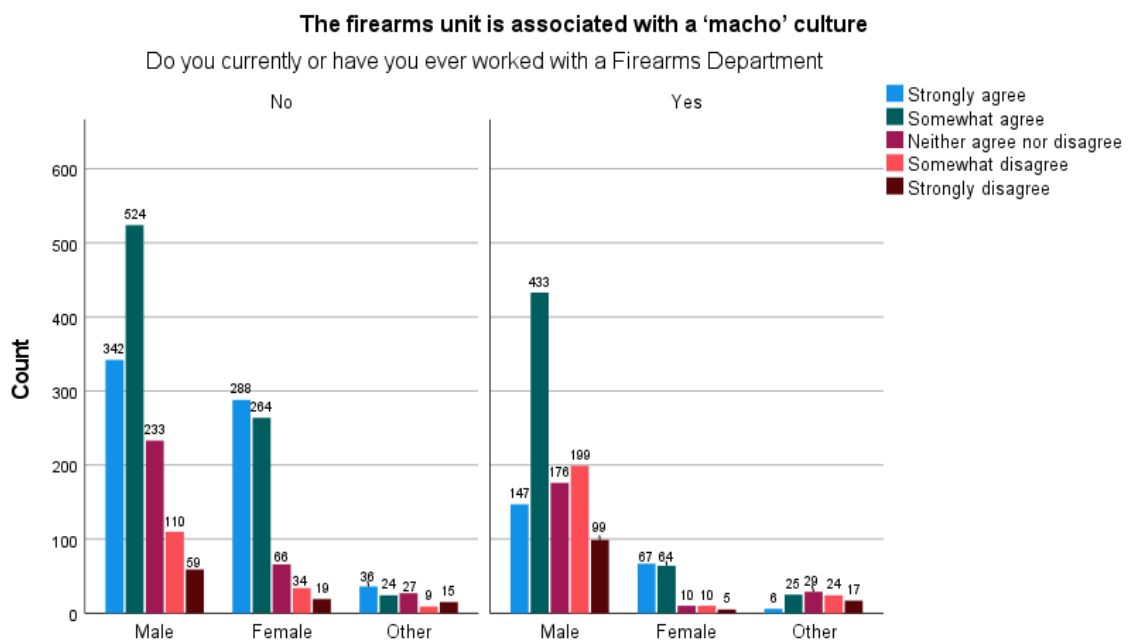


Figure 4.9 – Firearms unit associated with a macho culture (sorted by AFO/Non AFO and gender)

As Figure 4.9 shows, there is a substantial body of opinion across all gender groups that firearms work is associated with a macho culture. Some differences in agreement with the proposition can be seen when gender and role are factored in; 54 percent of Male AFOs strongly agreed or agreed with it; 68 percent of Male Non AFOs strongly agreed or agreed with it. Notably, 84 percent of Female AFOs and 82 percent of Female Non AFOs strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition.

Some AFOs argued that the macho attitude could, on occasions, translate to discriminatory behaviour. A Female AFO said that AFOs 'see themselves as a brand... [that] is encouraging of the macho sexist culture'. A second Female AFO said that 'not everyone is treated as equals'. A third, said that firearms units are, 'extremely macho and heavily male dominated environments'. Females had to 'fit in' and differences were not accommodated. A fourth also evidenced that women officer had to fit in. If they did not, they would be 'exiled'.

Two AFOs who preferred not to state their gender, added their commentary on the issue. One said that firearms was a 'difficult environment to work in if you do not become part of the problem'. The second, said that the culture was exclusive, 'toxic and disgusting'. They said that non AFO managers should be brought into the units to 'fix the culture' and to get rid of the 'bad behaviours that exist'. A Non AFO who preferred not to disclose their gender said that there was 'a long-standing culture of bullying, sexism and elitism within firearms'.

A Former Female AFO said that they found themselves scrutinised more than male colleagues and 'had to jump through more hoops' to prove themselves. A second, said that they left the role 'due to the toxic male environment'. They said they 'never felt [they] could report anything as there was no female supervision'.

Again, these were not views expressed only by members of a single group. A Male AFO said the image portrayed by firearms units when deployed to assist other officers could be, 'quite embarrassing and not in keeping with the culture of a modern police force'. A second said they had not seen any real attempt at dismantling the macho culture. A third said that there were 'a lot of great people on the firearms unit... [but] if you ever called out anyone of the "Old Guard" or showed any weakness or emotion... you would be ostracised'.

A Male former AFO said that they found the culture 'unbearable... an ego serving exercise for many where one's worth is based on how long they have served in firearms'. Remaining in the unit was 'incongruent' with their values and they left. A second, said that the AFOs in his force were 'rude and arrogant'. They saw unarmed officers as 'lesser'. The same respondent said that there also was 'a big issue with bullying and favouritism', which caused them to leave the unit.

The impact of AFO's behaviour is felt beyond the teams. A Female Non AFO said that firearms units present an 'ableist behaviour and mentality' that is unchallenged by forces and their leaders' They said the units operated in a '1970s policing environment'. A second Female Non AFO described the units as 'elitist and unapproachable', seeming to 'deliberately set themselves apart and... keep themselves apart from [other units]'

4.4.2 Diversity in firearms teams

Assessed using the most basic of indicators, the demographics of their staff, firearms teams are not as representative of the communities they serve as the service would like. That also is recognised by staff. As Figure 4.10 shows, 26 percent of Straight Male respondents, 55 percent of Straight Female respondents, 69 percent of Gay men respondents, 77 percent of Lesbian women respondents, 40 percent of Other Male respondents, and 66 percent of Other Female respondents, strongly agree or agree with the proposition that there is a lack of diversity in firearms teams.

A Male AFO said that firearms units recognised that fact and were trying many different approaches to make the role more attractive and to improve diversity but they had found that 'the lack of diversity across the service means that... the pool of diverse officers is limited; firearms has to compete with every other department across the force. Some respondents argued that considerable efforts already have been made to deliver a diverse and representative firearms workforce but those efforts had failed because of the culture. A Female AFO said there was, 'a lot of great work going on to try and increase representation within firearms roles'. However, that often was 'blocked or not supported by those... embedded in the macho culture'. They said that the instructors were too 'old school' and reluctant to embrace change and diversity. Elaborating on that point, a third said, 'until you

change the culture, bullying and discrimination at management level... you will never be able to be fully inclusive or represent the community the police serves’.

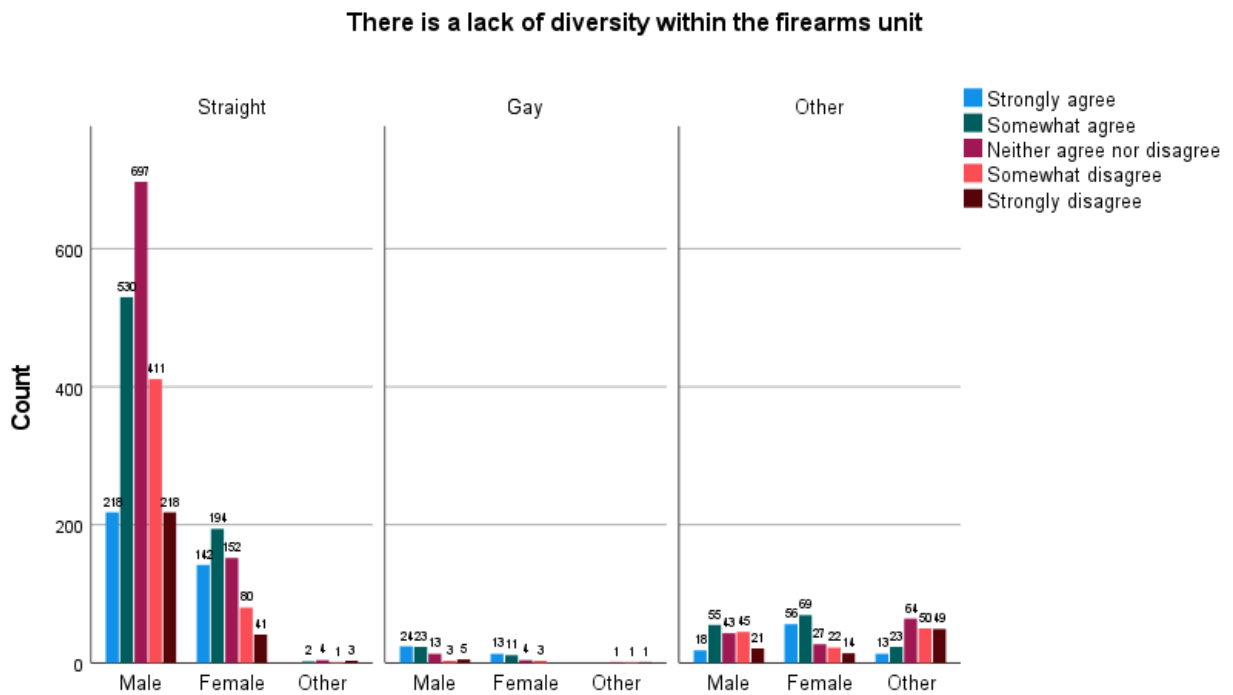


Figure 4.10– Lack of diversity in firearms units (sorted by gender and sexual identity)

A Female AFO said that it was important to ‘get numbers up in relation to diversity’ but it was just as important to make people feel included’. They said that ‘command teams are positive about increasing diversity but the culture of officers and supervisors needs to change’. There should be training on inclusion and emotional intelligence so that the discussion of taboo subjects [including the menopause] was encouraged and inappropriate language challenged. Another said that their force spent a lot of time asking women to apply for the role but did ‘nothing’ to support them through that process. Another said that firearms will continue to struggle with diversity and equality if forces do not make reasonable adjustments for females.

Typically, Male officers were more optimistic about the direction in which firearms teams are traveling. A Male AFO said that ‘historically’ the AFO role was performed by the ‘macho white male’ but this was changing ‘for the better’. A second said they had joined ‘an entirely white male department with one white female’ Now, nine years later, there were 10 female AFOs and ‘many officers from ethnic backgrounds’. A third said that the culture problem was perceived to be much greater than in fact it was because the command teams were ‘basing their opinions on what they experienced 15-20 years ago, rather than what is currently going on... they are just too far out of touch’. However, a fourth said that within their force, ‘the whole structure of firearms requires a revamp in order to recruit a more diverse team’.

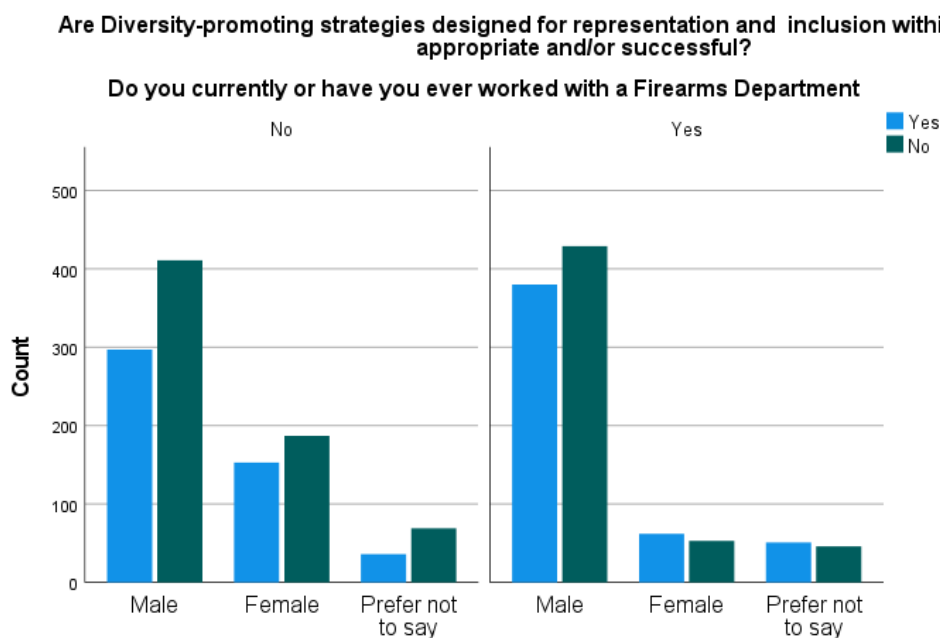


Figure 4.11 – Are diversity-promoting strategies appropriate (sorted by AFO/Non AFO and by gender)

A Male AFO said that the service should ‘not try to force the role upon anyone in an attempt to achieve a better diversity score’. A second said that the diversity of units is ‘on the up’ as a result of societal change. A Male AFO who self-declared as a member of an ethnic minority group said they wanted to achieve success based on their own ability and ‘would never

expect any positive discrimination’ for any role.. A Female AFO said, there is ‘no such thing as positive discrimination. It’s discrimination either way’.

Figure 4.11 shows clearly that most respondents in all three of the Non AFO groups and in the Male AFO group, do not believe the diversity-promoting strategies pursued by the service have been effective. By small margins, the Female AFO group and the Other AFO group disagree; these groups believe they have been effective. Typical comments on the service’s efforts in this regard were that they were misdirected and could be counterproductive. A Male AFO said that they didn’t think any ‘advertising campaign’ or ‘internal media drive’ would ever change the dynamic. A Female AFO said the level of campaigns to encourage females and underrepresented groups has ‘gone too far’ and risked alienating members of the dominant group.

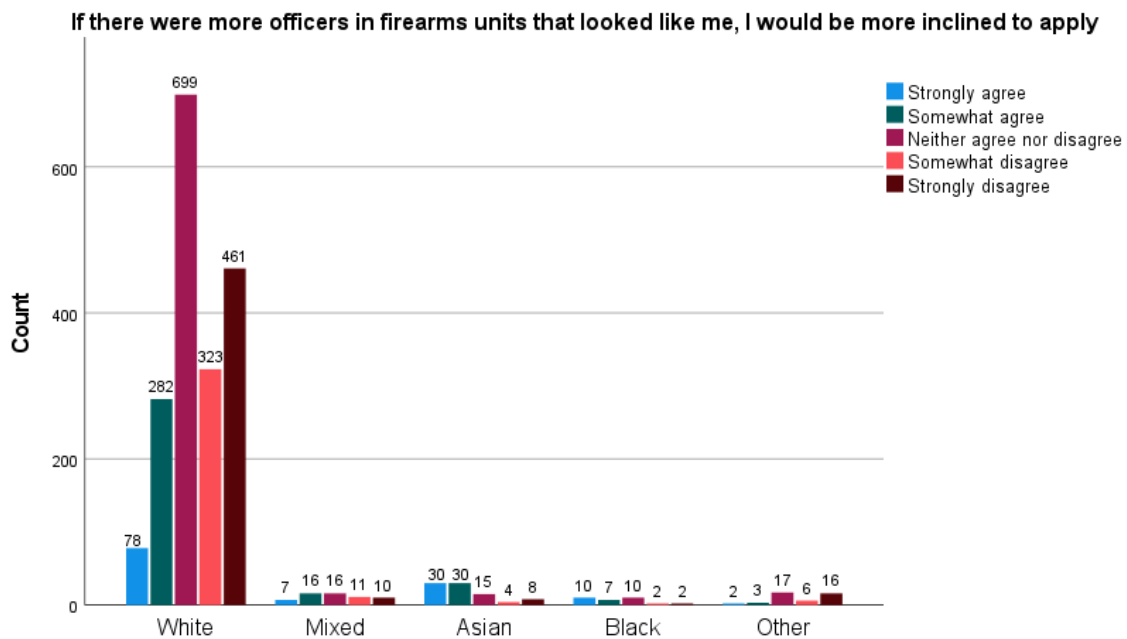


Figure 4.12 – If more officers in firearms units looked like me, I would be more inclined to apply (sorted by ethnicity)

As Figure 4.12 shows, when asked to respond to the proposition ‘if more firearms units looked like me, I would be inclined to apply’, 20 percent of White respondents, 38 percent of Mixed respondents, 70 percent of Asian respondents, 55 percent of Black respondents and 11 percent of Other respondents, strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition.

Figure 4.13 shows that when responses to the same proposition are sorted by sexual identity, 15 percent of Straight respondents, 41 percent of Gay respondents, and 25 percent of Other respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition.

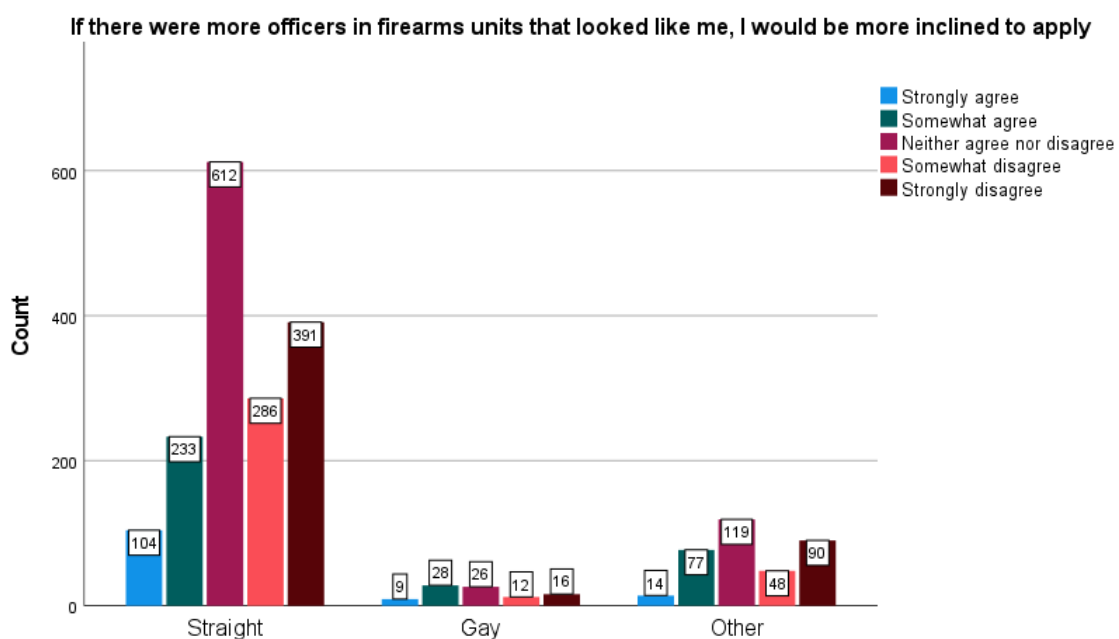


Figure 4.13 – If more officers in firearms units looked like me, I would be more inclined to apply (sorted by sexual identity)

4.5 Theme 5: Kit and equipment

Kit and equipment; particularly as to whether items are suitable, appropriate, and safe for all officers, has been a perennial issue for AFOs and their managers. By its nature, much of the kit (such as body armour, ballistic helmets, weapons, and so on) can be heavy and cumbersome. Armour and ancillary equipment can be uncomfortable to wear for the

extended periods of duty commonly undertaken by AFOs. Figures 4.14 and 4.15 report, respectively, the survey responses to the propositions ‘the AFO kit is comfortable’ and ‘the equipment required to be carried on the AFO uniform is too heavy for me to wear’.

Figure 4.14 shows that a broad spread of opinion in all groups. Proportionally more members of the Female and Prefer Not to Say groupings, strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition than respondents in the Male grouping. A Female AFO said that Females were underrepresented in firearms units because of ‘the application process and the uniform. Although it is unisex, it does not accommodate [all women]’. A second Female AFO said that ‘firearms bosses are narrow minded dinosaurs who refuse to make changes to kit to fit the changing environment around them’. A Female AFO said that they found themselves ‘battling to get uniform and kit that fits and is suitable; even when it was available to purchase online’ A second said the kit was ‘totally impractical for a female officer and even worse when working in plain clothes’. A third said that they ‘struggled to get uniform to fit’ but their department ‘arranged for a special order of uniform and some bespoke items to be made to fit me’.

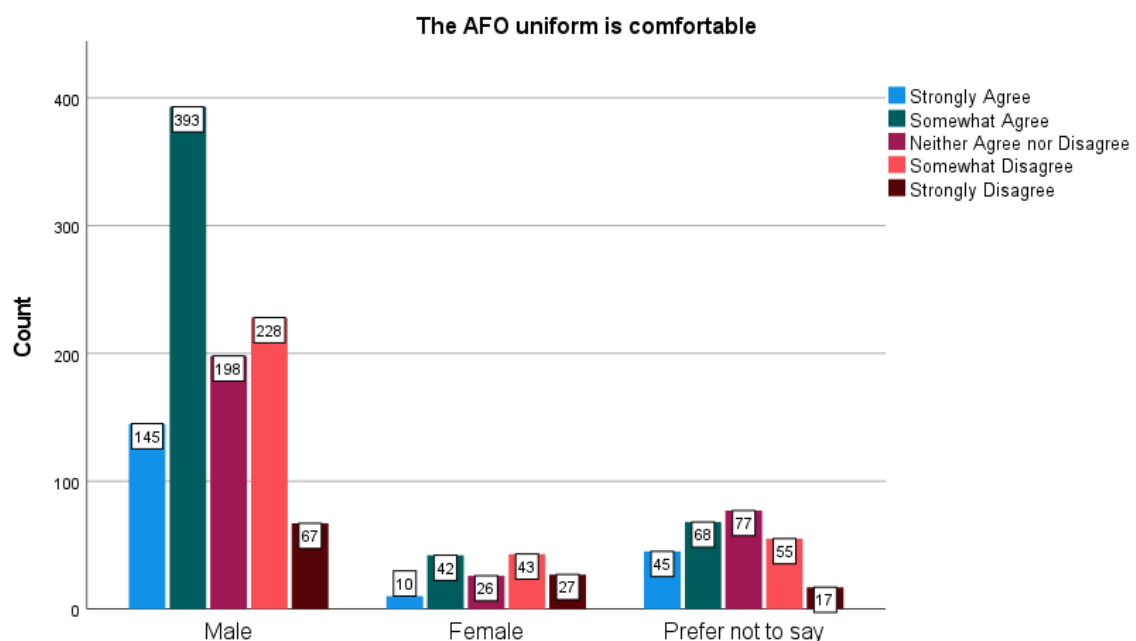


Figure 4.14 - The AFO kit is comfortable (sorted by gender)

Figure 4.15 shows that Male respondents seem to cope with the demands of carrying the AFO equipment better than those in the Female and Prefer Not to Say groups. A Female AFO said, 'The kit you are required to wear will ultimately limit female applications... due to being expected to carry the same weight as a male... I understand that the kit is designed for protective purpose however, there is a culture of one size fits all that is not acceptable'. The same respondent asked why the body armour available to CTSFOs was not made available to standard AFOs when it was obvious they would benefit from it.

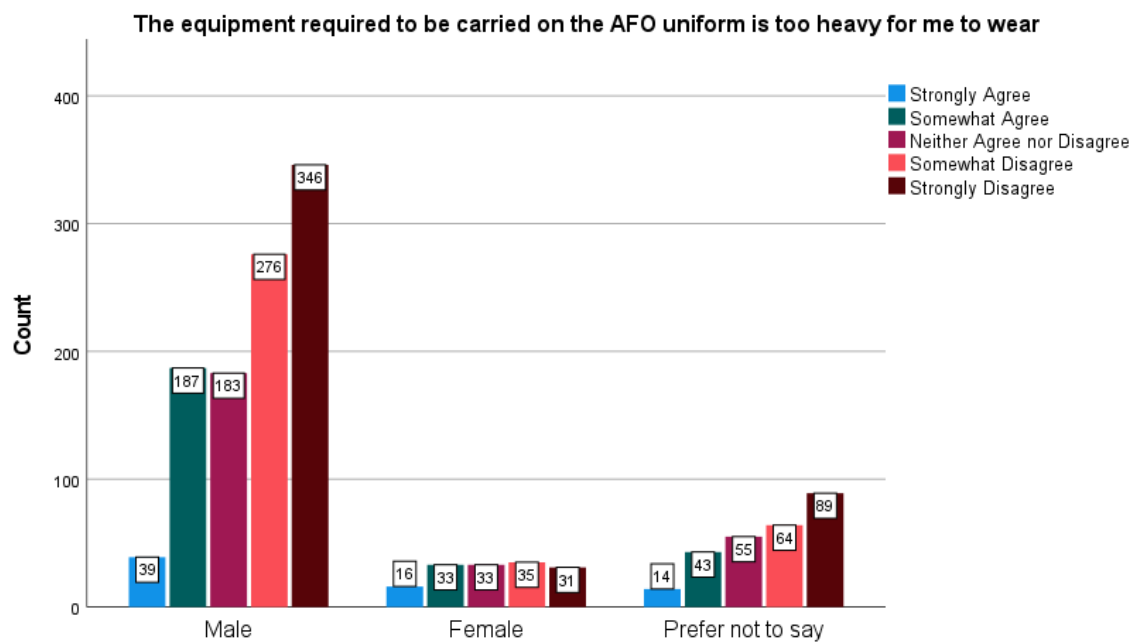


Figure 4.15 - The equipment required to be carried on the AFO uniform is too heavy for me to wear (sorted by gender)

A Female Non AFO said that they were issued unsuitable uniform on a firearms course. A Female AFO said that she knew of at least three Female AFOs who were issued male body armour at the beginning of their initial firearms course. They said that this left Female officers 'open to various injuries and causes aggravation which leads to being stressed about an extra 'thing' that you shouldn't have to be stressed about'. A second Female AFO said

that when they trained as an AFO, they had to wear an old stab and tactical vests that had belonged to a 6-foot, big build male. They were ‘uncomfortable and really hindered my ability to comfortably train... tactical vests had attachments in the wrong place... Very disappointing to be honest’. A second Female AFO said their department was ‘very slow to get female officers kit that fits their bodies. This has caused it difficult for me to carry all the kit without extreme discomfort’. An AFO who preferred not to state their gender said, ‘The body armour is too heavy and not fit for purpose, as it is causing injuries’.

4.6 Theme 6: Pay and rewards

The subject of bonus or targeted payments for officers in priority posts has been a topic of discussion for many years. Currently, AFOs are not paid any more than unarmed officers.

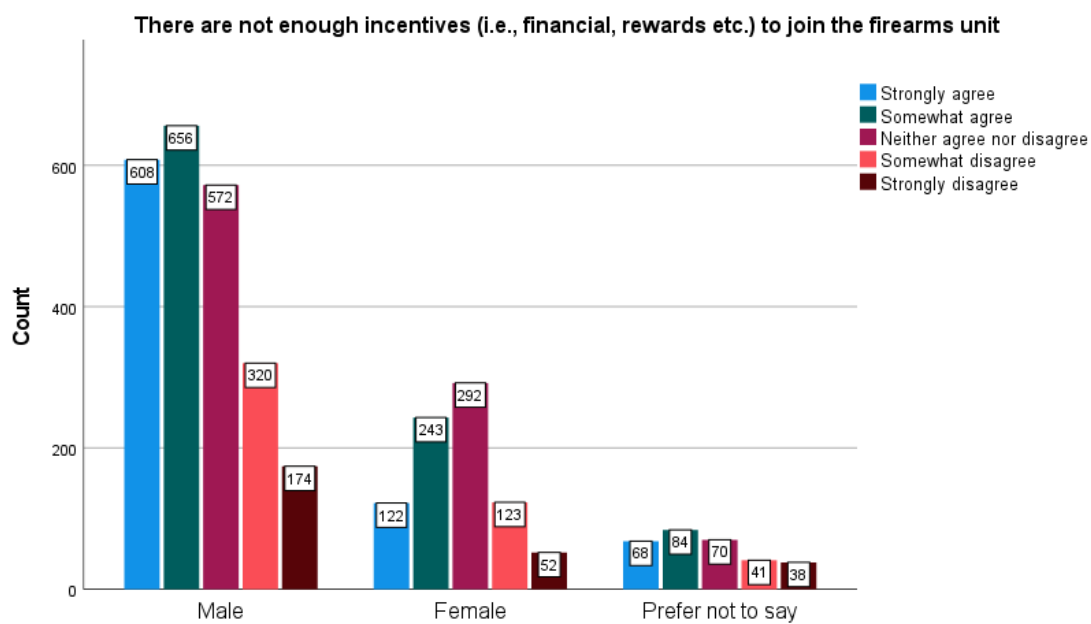


Figure 4.16 – There are not enough incentives to join the firearms unit (sorted by gender)

Figure 4.16 shows that in each of the three gender groups, the largest proportion of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition that there are not enough incentives to join the firearms unit.

A male AFO said that it was 'unbelievable' that firearms officers 'do not receive additional pay, allowances or expenses for the huge amount of training and responsibility they have to take on'. A second, said that AFOs 'are expected to perform a multitude of roles placing extra stress and pressure on their mental health, they get no recognition for the extra responsibilities and dangers they face'. A third said that the pay was 'ridiculous' for the role. A third said the service needed to offer a financial incentive to recruit more AFOs and to retain the ones it has; 'the level of responsibility for firearms officers in comparison to back-office staff and general front-line officers is unfair without an incentive'. A fourth said that a 'pay review for specialist roles is required'.

4.7 Summary

Issues of concern to all AFO respondents (particularly those in the Female and Other groups) are practical matters such as uniform and kit, training (more precisely, the teaching style), pay and rewards, and achieving a satisfactory work/life balance. Female AFOs and officers in the wider service said that the units perpetuate a macho culture. The role is unattractive to a large proportion of its potential recruits; just over half of Male respondents, less than half of those in the Other group, and less than a third of Female respondents, are interested in taking up the role. When issues such as officer health and fitness are factored in, the pool of potential recruits shrinks even further. Respondents ranked highest; scrutiny following a police shooting and unwillingness to carry a firearm, as significant barriers to recruitment. In terms of motivation to join a team; respondents ranked highest, the professional challenge the role presents. However, it must be highlighted that many respondents said they were attracted to the role because it offered them an escape from the pressures of operational policing. In other words; for many, the push factor outweighs the pull.

Chapter 5 Discussion, conclusions, and recommendations

Introduction

This final chapter critically assesses the research findings against the background of the extant literature. It interprets and describes the significance of those findings in relation to what was already known about the demographics and culture of police firearm units and explains the new understandings and insights that have emerged from this study. The chapter concludes this report by reflecting on the extent to which the research question has been answered and the research aims achieved. It concludes with a set of recommendations for future policy and practice.

5.1 Discussion

Issues of concern to all respondents in this study (particularly those in the Female and Other groups) were practical matters such as uniform and kit, training (more precisely, the teaching style employed by the trainers), pay and rewards, and achieving a satisfactory work/life balance. These matters will be discussed before the report moves on to what researchers will argue are their most significant findings. Those relate to the attractiveness of the role to potential applicants and to the macho culture of firearms units and the impact of that culture on the achievement of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

5.1.1 Uniform and kit

Many studies have recognised that kit and equipment; questions about their appropriateness, suitability, and safety are perennial issues for AFOs (particularly Female AFOs) and their managers (see for example, Blaskovits *et al.*, 2022; Coltman *et al.*, 2021; and Niemczyk *et al.*, 2020). The fit and function of a uniform is important not just for the obvious practical reasons but because they are indicators of group identity and belonging (Strand *et al.*, 2022 and Panter, 2018). It reasonably can be inferred that, beyond the practicalities, when individuals are provided with ill-fitting uniform or sub-optimally functioning kit, that also could mark out the wearer as different; an 'outsider' or as someone at the margin of the group. In turn, that may influence group and social interactions.

In this study, Most AFOs were satisfied with their uniform and kit (see Figures 4.14 and 4.15). Most Female AFO respondents reported that forces were accommodating their needs (in one case, their employer had gone as far as purchasing bespoke kit and uniform for the officer) but there was sufficient criticism from others in that same group (see Section 4.5) to infer that there remain gaps in provision that need to be filled. Panter (2018) found that in hypermasculine environments such as firearms teams, even small visual deviations from the norm could identify and magnify gender differences in ways that limited acceptance and cohesion. The authors of this report argue that those deviations also are significant in the contexts of diversity and inclusion.

5.1.2 Training and teaching style

AFO respondents (in all three gender groups) complained about a militaristic mentality in the initial training environment. The concept of socialising new recruits into military or police life through processes of conditioning is well understood (see for example Van Maanen, 1972 and Bourne, 1967). It has long been a feature of police training in the UK. However, it also has been recognised that trainees' confidence can be shaken at the gap between pre-entry expectations and reality (Sato, 2003).

AFO candidates/trainees want forces to find a compromise between 'Old school' methods and modern teaching and learning styles. Current methods were disparaged by respondents in all three gender groups. The majority view was that a more participative teaching and learning style that more obviously met the needs of candidates/trainees in a modern police service, was needed.

5.1.3 Pay and rewards

This is an emotive topic in any setting. Certainly, it has been a hot topic in policing since discretionary and priority payments were ended in 2011. The research team understand *a priori* that some forces make additional payments to AFOs. However, the levels of payment and the factors that contribute to qualification for those payments are unknown to the research team. Many respondents felt that AFOs were underpaid and under-rewarded for the role they perform. That was reflected in Figure 4.16, which showed that in each of the three gender groups, the largest proportion of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with

the proposition that there were not enough incentives to join the firearms unit. Those views need to be balanced against those expressed exclusively by the Non AFO grouping.

Members of which considered the AFO role to provide an easier ride than that experienced by the typical patrol officer. To them, the role is unworthy of further payment. There always is a risk that the implementation of a discretionary payment scheme could be divisive for staff relations (Hanley 2005). Given the comments of many Non AFO respondents in this survey, the researchers argue that division would be inevitable.

5.1.4 Work/life balance

This research revealed that most respondents are content with their shift pattern but many felt the role did not otherwise offer the flexibility they needed. Though not exclusively an issue for the survey's female respondents, more Females than Males cited the achievement of a satisfactory work/life balance to be a challenge, which is consistent both with the data collected by the service in its 2020 survey and with the extant literature. Researchers have found that the lack of family friendly policies can inhibit women from seeking advancement in male-dominated organisations (see for example Dodge *et al*, 2011 and Babcock and Laschever, 2009). Studies also have concluded that the lack of childcare assistance and family-oriented policies have discouraged women from applying for promotions or specialist assignments (See for example, Todak *et al.*, 2022 and 2021; and Charlesworth and Robertson, 2012).

Mirroring the findings of the police's own research into firearms teams in 2020, this study found that some women had left, or had not considered applying for, the role because they felt that they could not reconcile performing it with fulfilling their family or caring responsibilities. The researchers recognise that AFOs need to work long hours (often at short notice) and must maintain their physical fitness to a high standard. That makes achieving that balance rather difficult; if not in some cases, impossible. However, the implicit message from Female former AFOs was that they would have stayed with their units had a mutually agreeable work plan been developed and implemented. Given the challenge of recruiting AFOs, their retention must be a priority for forces. The research team believe that a management review of officers' exit interviews would provide insights that could be incorporated into future policy and practice.

5.1.5 Attractiveness of the AFO role

This study has shown clearly that in 2022 many police officers did not want to carry a firearm and were not interested in the AFO role. That applies across all groups; no matter what respondents' gender, ethnicity or sexual identity. The authors of this report highlight that their findings represent a snapshot of views and opinions at a single point in time. Officers' views and opinions are fungible; they are subject to change as the environment changes. Externally, the prospect of change is linked to the perceived level of threat to the state, to communities and to officers themselves. It is hypothesised that as the level of threat increases, more officers of all genders and from all ethnic and sexual identity groups will be attracted to the AFO role. Conversely, as it recedes volunteers will be fewer in number. In ordinary circumstances, the police have no control over that dynamic.

Given that considerable numbers of respondents in this study said they were medically or mentally unfit for AFO work and/or were not confident they could pass the enhanced fitness test; a requirement for all AFOs, the service would need to make extensive structural and cultural changes and a considerable financial commitment to improving the health and fitness of its sworn workforce if it wanted to enlarge substantially the pool of officers available for AFO work. In principle, it is in the service's power to effect those changes but they would be costly; the impact on the wider workforce unpredictable; and the outcomes uncertain.

It is against that background that this report assesses the AFO demographic and the representation of minority groups in firearms units. Drawing on the work of Jones *et al.*, the research team understands that in 2020, just 29 of the service's AFOs identified as Black/Black British, representing 0.4 percent of the AFO population (of 6584) compared with 7.3 percent of Black/Black British officers in the PSEW workforce (Home Office, 2020). Just 7 percent of AFOs identified as a member of a minority group (Jones *et al.*, *Ibid.*). Notably, in 2020, 14 of the 43 Home Office forces did not have a single ethnic minority AFO. The percentage of female AFOs was 9.8 percent compared with 31 percent of the wider population (Home Office, *op. cit.*, p.27). These figures evidence the underrepresentation of women and individuals who identify with a minority ethnic group in the AFO workforce.

In 2020, neither the Home Office nor Jones *et al* collected data on sexual identity. In this study, 2707 survey respondents (68 percent) identified as 'straight'; 104 (3 percent) as 'lesbian/gay'; and 1196 (30 percent) as 'Other'. The 'Other' grouping included respondents who, in rather small numbers, identified as: bisexual; aromantic; asexual; fluid; pansexual; questioning; queer; and all respondents who chose not to disclose their sexual identity (by far, the largest proportion of responses in this group). Highlighting one of the limitations of the survey method for collecting data, the research team respects completely, respondents' decisions to opt for the 'prefer not to say option' but it should be recognised that as a result of so many choosing that option, inferring the maximum amount of meaning from the data was problematic.

Proportionately more Male respondents reported they were interested in the role than Female respondents (49 percent compared to 31 percent). Notably, 56 percent of Female respondents compared with 36 percent of Male respondents, strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposition they were interested in the role. We infer that most women officers do not want to be AFOs. When the results were sorted by ethnicity, the research team was able to identify some slight differences in responses but low numbers in the Mixed, Asian, Black, and Other respondent groups, made interpreting those differences in a meaningful way, impractical.

When respondents were asked to rank the factors that attracted them to the work, the 'professional challenge the role presents' placed top of the list. However, it is highlighted that the ranking exercise was based on forced choices. When respondents were given the freedom to answer as they wished, many said they were attracted to the role because it offered them an escape from the day-to-day pressures of operational policing. This sentiment was substantiated by the many negative comments recorded by the Non AFO group about AFOs' attitudes and behaviours; typified by one that AFOs spend their time, 'eating chicken at Nando's and talking about tattoos'.

Police shootings are rare events, but a very high number of survey respondents (2441) ranked 'scrutiny following a police shooting' as the greatest barrier to recruitment. Non AFO respondents were concerned about the post-event investigative process but also that

should they be subject of an investigation, they would not be supported by their employers. The research team do not know what measures the PSEW has taken to ameliorate officers' concerns, but it seems obvious from this study that more needs to be done to explain both the post-event investigative process and the support that is available to officers who are the subject of an investigation.

Some AFO respondents told the research team that their forces were assessing new ways of identifying potential recruits and encouraging them to consider becoming AFOs. The research team understands that this includes 'talent-spotting' new recruits to the service at outreach events (such as 'discovery days'). Another suggestion in the same vein was to swell the ranks of the AFO workforce, by launching a fast-track recruitment scheme as recently has been used by forces across England and Wales to recruit detectives. These initiatives are worthy of further consideration; some forces who employed fast-track schemes did have success in filling gaps in their detective ranks. However, as James *et al* (2019) found, the schemes put huge pressure on forces' human resources and training departments and even on the investigative teams they were designed to help. The shortage of skilled, experienced, detectives able to act as mentors for the new detectives meant that some recruits were left to 'sink or swim'.

5.1.6 Macho culture and its impact on the diversity of firearms units

Perhaps the most telling data that emerged from the survey was that 84 percent of Female AFOs and 82 percent of Female Non AFOs strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition that 'firearms units are associated with a macho culture'. Notably, 54 percent of Male AFOs and 68 percent of Male Non AFOs also strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition. Many of the comments made by respondents in this study about that culture and the impact it has had on them, will make difficult reading for the report's recipients. Particularly when they consider the survey results and respondents' comments in the light of the convictions of AFOs Wayne Couzens and David Carrick, and the ongoing investigations in the Metropolitan Police into 800 officers suspected or accused of sexual offences and/or domestic violence (BBC News, 2023).

The authors of this report highlight that the data they collected did not allow them to assess the currency of some of the respondents' comments or the impact of any measures taken by the service to address officers' attitudes and behaviours. However, the survey results imply that, substantially, the comments reflect the contemporary environment. The authors cannot point to direct evidence of the culture impacting on the diversity of the teams but argue that, on balance, these findings do not suggest there is easy access to the 'in-group'.

Debby Mackay's (2016) research in a UK firearms team (one of just a handful of empirical studies in that environment) suggests that social identity theory can shine a light on the firearms team dynamic. The theory posits that occupational identity is sustained through group values, rites, and collective behaviour that members believe to be essential identifiers of the dominant 'in-group'. McKay found that some female AFOs saw themselves as outsiders; isolated from the male in-group, disadvantaged and ultimately treated unfairly. In terms of the theory, they were tokens. Kanter (1977b) argued that members of the token group were likely to have negative workplace experiences directly as a result of their low numbers. However, as the numerical proportions within a group shifted and reached a tipping point (as little as 15 percent of the population), their social and professional experiences would change. Six years on, this study confirms the validity of McKay's findings.

There have been many studies into the impact of tokenism on female police officers (see for example, Gustafson, 2008; Archbold and Schulz, 2008; Krimmel and Gormley, 2003, Taylor-Greene and del Carmen, 2002; and Martin, 1980). All these studies found evidence to support Kanter's theory even if the researchers were not always comfortable with her 15 percent benchmark (criticised by some as arbitrary). It is argued that the tipping point exists but that it is determined by variations in the professional and/or social setting. Drawing upon that research, the authors argue for a longitudinal study that would allow for the analysis of change over time in firearms teams' culture and dynamics.

5.2 Conclusions

The study on which this report is based, answered the research question, 'why are minority groups underrepresented in police firearms teams'? It did so by critically examining; the perceptions of firearms teams' culture among two groups: current and former AFOs; and

non-AFOs; assessing cultural barriers to improving inclusion and diversity within firearms teams; AFO practice (to determine whether elements of the role exclude or limit diversity); and whether there are any aspects of uniform, equipment, or training that impact upon diversity and inclusion in firearms teams.

It proved impractical to link negative aspects of the firearms role or environment (factors that discouraged engagement) based on ethnicity or sexual identity. The data collected simply would not allow for that; the researchers argue, given the demographic of the target group, that no survey would be able to make those links in a meaningful way. The team believes that other methods such as interviews and observations could make those links and recommends that such methods are incorporated into a longitudinal study it recommends the PSEW commissions as a result of this research.

A high proportion of police officers would never, under ordinary circumstances, consider joining a firearms team. That is true for individuals in all groups; regardless of their gender, ethnicity or sexual identity. Therefore, it is germane to assess why that is so. Many officers do not want to be armed; some suffer from ill health or have disabilities that restrict their choices; and some lack the fitness required to work in a such a physically demanding role. Realistically, the pool from which firearms teams can draw, probably is less than half the size of the operational police workforce. A frequently cited reason for reluctance to consider the AFO role is the lack of support for officers following a police shooting. That issue should be addressed directly in marketing material, discovery days, and all other outreach activities.

Other significant barriers to AFO recruitment identified were:

Pay and rewards – AFOs believe they deserve greater financial rewards for performing the role. The research team cannot assess the merits of that claim. It should be noted that this study indicates there is a stark difference in how officers in the mainstream perceive both the AFO role and AFOs' deservedness of additional reward for performing it. If the PSEW consider that additional payments to AFOs are merited it will need to manage the payment process sensitively and carefully because such payments could be divisive.

Uniform and kit – A particular concern for Female AFOs. Many have had or are still having to make do with ‘hand me downs’ or Male kit that does not meet their needs. This is not just a performance issue; it is a matter of officer safety and well-being. It also is a negative indicator of the value a force puts on a member of its staff.

Work/life balance – Female AFOs left or did not consider applying for the role because they could not reconcile performing it with fulfilling their family or caring responsibilities. Their services would not have been lost if a mutually agreeable work plan could have been developed and implemented. The challenges of recruiting new staff are such that effective staff retention strategies are of paramount importance. A management review of retention policies that drew *inter alia* on officers’ exit interviews would provide insights that could be incorporated into future policy.

Macho culture – Normatively, culture informs the way people behave, interact with one another, communicate and see the world around them. It is deeply embedded and highly resistant to change. The macho culture is endemic in firearms teams. This research has shown that it has a corrosive effect on the team dynamic; on relations between Male AFOs and AFOs who identify with other groups; and on relations between the teams and officers in mainstream policing. There is an urgent need both for cultural and behavioural change in the firearms environment.

5.3 Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for a cultural audit of firearms teams.
2. There should be a management review of firearms teams’ retention policies.
3. There should be a management review of officers’ kit and uniform provision, which currently does not meet all individuals’ needs.
4. This study represents a snapshot in time. Once the cultural audit has been completed and its results analysed, NPCC should commission a longitudinal study aimed at assessing

changes over time in firearms teams' culture and behaviours. Together, these studies will enable the service to target the interventions this research shows so clearly are needed.

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