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# Correctional Officers' Perceptions of Equitable Treatment in the Masculinized Prison Environment

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Research suggests that employee perceptions of an organization's support for policies that promote an equitable work environment may differ significantly by race and gender groups. This study examines such perceptual differences and their attitudinal effects on employee experiences within the unique context of a prison setting.

Significant differences in correctional officer perceptions of policies are found to exist by race and gender groups. Contrary to expectations, all race and gender groups perceive strong organizational support for equal treatment policies. Moreover, the work experiences of White males are not negatively affected by perceptions of organizational support for equal treatment as had been hypothesized.

**Keywords:** *correctional officers; prison; equal treatment; job satisfaction; organizational commitment*

Recent Supreme Court rulings on the use of race-based affirmative action policies in the University of Michigan's law school and undergraduate admissions process have reinvigorated debate regarding the value of diversity and the need for equal treatment within the public sphere (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003). This interest in diversity and equal treatment also is reflected in the expanding body of social science research that examines the efficacy of such policies in the workplace (see Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003). Researchers have examined the effectiveness of affirmative action policies to increase diversity in the workplace (Badgett, 1999; Blank, 1985; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995) as well as the organizational benefits derived from a diverse workforce (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Reskin, 1998; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelson, 1993). Other studies have explored the unintended and at times negative consequences of affirmative action policies within organizations, including lowered perceptions of competence by the individual and by coworkers (Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Heilman, Battle, Keller, & Lee, 1998; Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Kravitz, 1995; Nacoste, 1987; Nosworthy, Lea, & Lindsay, 1995).

The extent to which employee perceptions of organizational policies that promote equal treatment influence other work-related experiences is less certain. In what instances might the pursuit of equal treatment within an organization and the benefits that accrue from such a policy lead to employee dissatisfaction or other negative assessments of the organization? This concern is of particular significance to organizations that have exhibited an historical resistance to the integration of women and minorities. This study explored this issue within the prison setting, an organization that although moving toward a professional and more diverse workforce, remains characterized as less than fully receptive of women and minorities within its ranks (Belknap, 1991; Britton, 1997, 2003; Owen, 1985; Pogrebin & Poole, 1997, 1998; Savicki, Cooley, & Gjvesvold, 2003; Stohr, Mays, Beck, & Kelley, 1998). This study examined group differences in correctional officers' perceptions of workplace policies supportive of equal treatment and the effect of these perceptions on the outcome variables of job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment.

## **Literature Review**

## **Perceptual Differences Among Gender and Racial Groups**

The numerous studies examining individual perceptions of policies promoting equal treatment have revealed a complex set of attitudes, experiences, and beliefs that appear to influence individual reactions to the role of affirmative action within an organization. Much of this research has suggested that support for affirmative action and equal opportunity policies was a function of group identity, with perceptions of such policies differing significantly by racial-ethnic group and by gender (e.g., Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Kravitz & Plantania, 1993; Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997). For example, Kluegel and Bobo (1993) and Kluegel and Smith (1983) found women and minorities were more supportive than White males of affirmative action policies. Other research suggested that women and minorities were less likely than White men to believe that their organization supports affirmative action policies (Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Parker et al., 1997). In a similar vein, Camp, Steiger, Wright, Saylor, and Gilman (1997) found that White male correctional officers tended to have exaggerated perceptions of promotional opportunities available to Black male correctional officers within a prison organization.

Researchers noted that group differences in the perception of affirmative action and equal opportunity policies stemmed from a variety of beliefs and concerns, including the anticipated impact of such policies on one's self-interest (Summers, 1995; Veilleux & Tougas, 1989), especially when comparing one's own advancement opportunity to that of others (Camp et al., 1997). Racism and sexism also were found to have had a significant influence on attitudes toward affirmative action policies, with those individuals exhibiting more sexist beliefs (Tougas, Crosby, Joly, & Pelchat, 1995) or racist attitudes (Bobo, 2000; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996) less likely to support affirmative action policies. Beliefs regarding the need for affirmative action policies to address organizational discrimination (Camp et al., 1997; Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Kravitz et al., 2000) as well as beliefs regarding the fairness of affirmative action policies (Heilman et al., 1992; Kravitz, 1995; Leck, Saunders, & Charbonneau, 1996; Slaughter, Sinar, & Bachiochi, 2002) also have influenced support for such policies. In addition, political affiliation (Carmines & Layman, 1998) and political conservatism (Kravitz et al., 2000) were found to be related to an individual's support for affirmative

action policies.

With this literature in mind, how might an employee's perception of organizational support for affirmative action policies or other organizational policies promoting equal treatment influence work-related attitudes and experiences? Few studies have examined this issue directly. As summarized above, much of the research on group differences in perceptions of affirmative action policies within an organization explored predictors of such perceptions as well as their place within broader belief structures. A study by Parker et al. (1997) was one of the few to examine attitudinal consequences of perceived organizational support for affirmative action and equal opportunity policies. Their study examined group differences in perceptions of organizational support for affirmative action policies and the effect of these perceptions on work attitudes (e.g., employee loyalty and satisfaction), on employee belief in distributive and procedural justice, and on career development opportunities. They found that for White men, perceived organizational support for affirmative action policies was not negatively related to work attitudes, as had been hypothesized. In fact, the researchers found that among White men and women, the perception that the organization supported affirmative action policies was linked to increased employee loyalty but had no effect on overall job satisfaction. In addition, a positive relationship between perceptions of organizational support for affirmative action and employee job satisfaction and loyalty was more pronounced for the Black and Hispanic group than for any other racial-ethnic grouping.

Indicative of the complex dynamics of group differences in perceptions of affirmative action policies and in light of previous research, Parker et al. (1997) cautioned against generalization to other settings. The authors suggested that the rather surprising finding regarding White men's positive response to perceptions that their organization supports affirmative action policies was due to the fact that their sample consisted of relatively well-educated individuals working within a governmental organization. Despite this possible limitation, Parker et al. (1997) concluded that their findings, when taken as a whole, suggested that "organizations that visibly support AA/EO and encourage workforce diversity do not run the risk of fostering resentment and increased conflict" (p. 387). The researchers went on to argue that such policies may in fact "be viewed as one

element of a fair and just workplace” (p. 387).

### **The Organizational Context**

Recent research makes it clear, however, that discrimination based on race and gender continues to be problematic in the workplace. According to Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow (2001), sex stereotyping has remained relatively stable during the past 25 years, with instances of sex discrimination being more likely when women apply for jobs in nontraditional careers (Heilman et al., 1992; Jackson, Esses, & Burris, 2001). Studies also have shown that minorities continue to face restricted access to professional jobs (Reskin, 1998). With this in mind and in light of Parker et al.’s (1997) caution regarding the significance of the organizational context, it is important to note that few studies examined individual perceptions of affirmative action policies in a work environment as highly gendered as the prison (see Camp, Saylor, & Wright, 2001; Camp et al., 1997).

The prison environment is an exceedingly masculinized organization wherein the traits of the dominant group (i.e., physical strength and a willingness to use force) are emphasized and valued and where the essential skills for the job are assumed to be masculine in nature. “Simply by virtue of being male, they [male officers] are perceived by supervisors, coworkers, and administrators (and perhaps by themselves as well) as more capable of doing their jobs, as ‘real officers’ and thus, by definition, ‘real men’” (Britton, 1997, p. 813). Women entering such an environment often are subject to ridicule, harassment, and discrimination at the hands of both colleagues and supervisors (Belknap, 1991; Jurik, 1985, 1988; Owen, 1985; Pogrebin & Poole, 1997, 1998; Pollock-Byrne, 1986; Savicki et al., 2003; Stohr et al., 1998; Zimmer, 1986). Minority officers also face resistance in what has been described as a “highly racialized” organization (Britton, 1997, p. 814; see also Owen, 1985). In her study of both men’s prisons and women’s prisons, Britton (1997) reported that a number of White officers equated the implementation of affirmative action policies with the “wholesale hiring and promotion of ‘unqualified’ minority officers” (p. 813). This sentiment has been substantiated in other studies of criminal justice organizations, most extensively in the area of policing (Garcia, 2003; Haarr, 1997; Martin, 1994; Pogrebin, Dodge, & Chatman, 2000).

## **Current Study**

Consistent with previous research suggesting the importance of considering women and minority groups separately when examining issues of affirmative action policies (Crosby & Clayton, 1990; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1994; Parker et al., 1997), the present study examined group differences (White men, White women, minority men, and minority women) in correctional officers' perceptions of organizational support for equal treatment within the work setting. In addition, the study explored the effect of these perceptions on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job stress.

Based on the limited research that has examined these issues and the historical resistance faced by women and minorities entering the prison organization, the following was hypothesized:

1. Perceptions of organizational support of equal treatment in the workplace will vary by racial and gender group, with White men perceiving the highest level of organizational support for such policies.
2. Among White men, higher levels of perceived organizational support for equal treatment policies will be associated with decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment and increased job stress.
3. Among White women and male and female minority groups, higher levels of perceived organizational support for equal treatment policies will be associated with increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment and decreased job stress.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The entire population of employees in all 10 adult state prisons in a Southwest state received a self-administered "Quality of Work Life" survey as part of the Department of Corrections' efforts to assess employee perceptions of the prison organizational climate. Along with the questionnaire, employees received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey and a self-addressed envelope, which facilitated the anonymous return of the questionnaire to the Departmental Research Unit. Employees were allowed to complete the survey while on duty. Analyses were based on the 2,637 correctional

officers who responded to the survey, which represented 55.2% of all officers surveyed.<sup>1</sup>

The respondents were predominantly male (73.1%) and ranged in age from 17 to 69, with a mean age of 35. Of the 2,637 respondents, 68% of the participants self-reported their race as non-Hispanic White, and 32% identified themselves as Hispanics/Latinos or African Americans.<sup>2</sup> Length of employment and education data were collected using categorical response sets. The median length of employment for these participants was between 1 and 4 years (36%), with a significant portion of the sample employed less than a year (26.3%). The median level of education was a high school degree (58.4%).

The analyses examined group differences in the effect of perceived organizational support of policies and procedures for equitable treatment on three workplace experience outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Group differences were examined by the correctional officers' self-reported racial categorization (minority vs. White) and gender (male vs. female) groups. Descriptive statistics for each of the four groups are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Participant Demographic Characteristics by Race and Gender Group**

Characteristic	Group											
	White Males (n = 1,308)			White Females (n = 498)			Minority Males (n = 657)			Minority Females (n = 174)		
	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%
Age	36.3	11.0		36.2	9.4		33.3	9.4		32.7	8.4	
Tenure (years employed)												
Less than 1 year			23.9			30.1				26.9		37.4
1 to 4 years			34.0			34.5				40.3		38.5
5 to 9 years			22.9			23.7				18.7		14.4
10 to 14 years			10.6			8.6				8.1		6.9
15 to 19 years			6.2			2.0				4.7		1.1
20 years or more			2.3			1.0				1.2		1.1
Education												
GED			11.2			16.3				8.7		15.5
High school			59.4			54.2				65.3		58.0
Associate degree			16.4			16.7				18.4		19.5
Bachelor degree			10.2			10.4				4.6		4.0
Master's degree			1.5			0.8				0.8		1.1
Ph.D.			0			0				0.5		0



## Measures

*Dependent variables.* Scales of job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment were created to measure officers' perceptions of the work environment. Although most scale items were previously used by other researchers, scale items were factor analyzed and tested for internal reliability. Job Satisfaction was operationalized by a six-item Likert-type scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and was based on items previously used by Hepburn and Albonetti (1980), Hepburn (1985), and Griffin (2001). This scale measured the extent to which officers enjoyed their duties and experienced feelings of satisfaction at the end of the day (see the appendix for all scale items).

Job stress was operationalized by a five-item Likert-type scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and was based on items previously used by Crank, Regoli, Hewitt, and Culbertson (1995). This scale measured the extent to which an officer perceived that his or her work environment led to negative emotional experiences, such as tension and frustration. Organizational commitment was operationalized by a 10-item Likert-type scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and was based on items previously used by Mowaday, Steers, and Porter (1979). This scale measured the extent to which an officer felt loyal to the state's Department of Corrections and intended to remain employed with the department.

*Independent variables.* Organizational support of workplace policies promoting equal treatment was measured by an eight-item Likert-type scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ). This scale measured officer perceptions of organizational efforts to promote equal treatment using policies and procedures to target universal issues of cultural diversity, unfair treatment of women and minorities, equal access to merit increases and promotion, and organizational censure or sanction of sexual harassment. Additionally, one item in this scale pertained to the respondent's perception of his or her own ability to be treated fairly by the organization.<sup>4</sup>

*Control variables.* Age, tenure at institution, and education level were used as control variables. Gender and race were inherently controlled because of the modeling

strategy employed. All variables were the result of self-classification by the officers. The racial groups included in this analysis were White and minority (those officers who self-identified as African American or Hispanic officers). Both tenure at the institution and education level were ordinal scales with categories listed in Table 1.

## **Analyses**

Analysis of variance was first used to examine whether between-group differences (race and gender groups) existed in the independent variable of perceptions of organizational support for equitable treatment policies. Second, the study examined the bivariate correlations between the independent variable, perceptions of organizational support for equitable treatment policies, and the three dependent work experience variables. Third, ordinary least squares multiple regression was used to determine the effects of perceptions of organizational support for equitable treatment policies on each of the three work experience outcomes by race and gender group. Finally, z tests were employed to determine whether significant magnitudinal differences existed between groups in the effect of organizational support for equitable treatment policies on each work experience outcome.

## **Results**

### **Perceived Organizational Support of Equity Policies**

To determine whether the officers' level of perceived organizational support of policies that promote fair and equal treatment were invariant by gender and race, descriptive statistics of these perceptions were examined across four groups of officers: White males, White females, minority males, and minority females. Analysis of variance results demonstrated that the between-groups variance in the perceptions of organizational support for equity was statistically significant,  $F(3, 2581) = 10.353, p \leq .001$ . That is, on average, each of the four groups did not perceive the organizational support for equitable treatment policies in an equivalent manner.

**Table 2**  
**Perceived Organizational Support for Equal Treatment**  
**by Gender and Racial Group**

Gender and Race of Officer	Perceived Organizational Support for Equal Treatment		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
White male	1,282	3.54	.59 <sup>a,b,c</sup>
White female	491	3.40	.67 <sup>a</sup>
Minority male	518	3.42	.66 <sup>b</sup>
Minority female	132	3.37	.70 <sup>c</sup>

Note: Identical superscripts denote statistically significant differences at  $p < .05$  as indicated by Student's *t* test.

In addition, *t* tests were subsequently used to determine the source of invariance within the independent variable. Statistically significant differences between group mean levels of perceived support are indicated with superscripts in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, White males viewed their correctional organization as significantly more supportive of equal treatment policies ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) than did each of the other three officer groups. Minority females viewed the organization as least supportive ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .63$ ), but their perceptions were not significantly different from that of White females ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) or minority males ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = .66$ ). Similarly, the difference in perceived organizational support of these policies between White females and minority males was not significant. These results confirm Hypothesis 1, which suggested the existence of between-group variation in perceptions, with White males perceiving significantly greater organizational support for equity policies than other race-sex groups of correctional officers.

### **Relationship Between Organizational Perceptions and Work Experiences**

Bivariate correlations examined for the entire sample of correctional officers demonstrated that those officers who perceived their workplace policies and procedures to be supportive of a fair and equitable work environment also experienced a greater level of job satisfaction ( $r = .459$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ), a greater level of organizational commitment ( $r = -.597$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ), and a lower level of job stress ( $r = -.346$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ). Given the potential influence of other factors on work experiences, multivariate analyses were conducted.

Ordinary least squares multiple regression models were used to test the effect of

the officers' perceptions of organizational policies on each of the three work experience outcomes, controlling for age, tenure, and education level. Separate models were conducted for each of 4 demographic groups (White males, White females, minority males, and minority females) for each of the 3 work experience outcomes, resulting in 12 separate regression models. Results from these models are displayed in Table 3.<sup>5</sup> As indicated in Table 3, perceptions of support for workplace policies promoting equal treatment had a statistically significant effect on all three work experiences for each group. Similar to the relationships demonstrated by the bivariate correlations, results from the multiple regression models demonstrated that perceived organizational support for equitable treatment policies was a statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment. In addition, these models demonstrated that the directional effects of these relationships were invariant by race and gender groups. The resulting beta coefficients, associated standard errors, and amount of variance explained in each of the regression models are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Effect of Perceptions of Organizational Support for Equal Treatment on Responses to Work Environment (J3)**

Officer Group	Job Satisfaction			Job Stress			Organizational Commitment		
	$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$\beta$	SE	$R^2$	$\beta$	SE	$R^2$
White male	.609	.03 <sup>*a,b</sup>	.247	-.486	.04 <sup>*</sup>	.143	.793	.03 <sup>*c,d</sup>	.376
White female	.521	.04 <sup>*a</sup>	.273	-.419	.06 <sup>*</sup>	.171	.689	.04 <sup>*c</sup>	.468
Minority male	.470	.04 <sup>*b</sup>	.223	-.408	.05 <sup>*</sup>	.147	.722	.04 <sup>*</sup>	.432
Minority female	.588	.07 <sup>*</sup>	.316	-.566	.09 <sup>*</sup>	.272	.658	.07 <sup>*d</sup>	.432

Note: Identical superscripts denote statistically significant differences at  $p < .05$  as indicated by z test. Beta coefficients indicated simultaneously control for education, age, and tenure.

\* $p < .01$ .

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, perceived organizational support for equal treatment policies had a positive effect on job satisfaction, a positive effect on organizational commitment, and a negative effect on job stress for all four groups. The hypothesized negative effect of equitable treatment policies on job satisfaction among White males did not occur. Furthermore, the hypothesized negative effect of perceived organizational

support for equal treatment policies on organizational commitment among White males was not supported. Also contrary to Hypothesis 2 was the finding that perceived organizational support for equal treatment policies was found to reduce job stress among White males. In sum, there were no differences between White males and the other three officer groups in the directional effects of perceived organizational support for equal treatment policies on work experience outcomes. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was rejected, and Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Although the coefficients were directionally invariant across groups, magnitudinal differences may exist. If group differences in the magnitude of effects within each work experience outcome are statistically significant, this result would indicate a difference in the robustness of the impact of perceived fairness on that work experience outcome. The z test statistic, which was suggested by Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero (1998) as the most appropriate statistical technique for this comparison, was used:

$$Z = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{SEb_1^2 + SEb_2^2}} .$$

Results demonstrated four statistically significant between-group differences at the .05 level for two work experiences outcomes: job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The magnitudinal impact of perceived organizational support for equitable treatment policies on job satisfaction was found to be significantly more robust for White males as compared to both White females and minority males. There were no significant magnitudinal differences in the coefficients between White males and minority females.

With respect to the organizational commitment outcome, significant magnitudinal differences existed in the impact of perceived organizational support of equity policies on officers' organizational commitment. Specifically, significant differences existed between White males and both White females and minority females. In contrast to the job satisfaction out- comes, no differences existed between White males and minority males or between minority males and females. It is interesting that there were also no statistically significant differences between any groups in the magnitudinal effects of

perceptions of organizational support for equal treatment policies on job stress.

## **Discussion**

This study examined racial and gender differences in correctional officers' perceptions of the organization's support for policies that promote a fair and just work environment and the effects of these perceptions on three measures of correctional officers' work experiences: job satisfaction, job stress, and organizational commitment. It was hypothesized that perceptual differences exist within racial and gender groupings, with White males assessing most strongly the prison system's support for such equal treatment policies. In addition, the study hypothesized that among White males, those who believed most strongly that the organization supported policies of equal treatment would report lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment and higher levels of job stress. Last, it was hypothesized that among female officers and male minority officers, increased perceptions of organizational support for equal treatment policies would result in increased levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while having the opposite effect on job stress. Support was found for some but not all of the hypotheses.

## **Assessment of the Organization**

In general, the findings provide strong evidence of significant differences in the subjective appraisal of the organization's support for equal treatment by race and gender grouping. Supporting previous research (Camp et al., 1997; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Parker et al., 1997), White male officers reported a greater perception of organizational support for equal treatment policies than any other group of officers. Given that the bulk of prior qualitative and quantitative research on the correctional setting suggests that the prison organization emphasizes the "values, stereotypes, and biases of dominant identity groups (defined in part by gender and race-ethnicity)," which are then "codified in organizational systems, processes, and procedures," it could be argued that White male officers believe there is little need for such policies, so any effort on the part of the institution would be perceived as supportive (Parker et al., 1997, p. 378). Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the belief that an organization supports equal opportunity

and treatment allows the individual to maintain personal beliefs regarding fairness and equity (Dovido, Mann, & Gaertner, 1989). More important, maintaining this belief of fair treatment within the workplace allows White male employees to “attribute the poor career mobility of women and racial-ethnic minorities to internal (e.g., lack of ability, experience, or motivation) rather than external (e.g., the existence of organizational discrimination) factors” (Parker et al., 1997, p. 377). Maintaining such a belief also may minimize an individual’s concern that one’s status group is perceived as having “gained at the expense of another group, either through direct exploitation or by passive acceptance of privilege” (Branscombe, 1998, p. 168).

### **Interpreting Officers’ Positive Perceptions**

Much like Parker et al. (1997), this study did not find that White male officers’ responses to the work environment were affected negatively by their perceptions of organizational support for equal treatment. The hypothesis regarding the relationship between perceptions of organizational efforts to promote equitable treatment and officer response to the work environment reflected the belief that White male officers would interpret policies regarding equal treatment as unnecessary, unfair, and/or promoting the advancement of unqualified personnel, thus leading to higher levels of stress and lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Absent data regarding potential situational influences (e.g., experience with past discrimination or reverse discrimination), this study does not examine the subjective processes by which officers assess the organization’s efforts. Given the rich body of qualitative research on the prison organization, however, several interpretations regarding this unexpected finding are suggested.

First, perhaps White males do not perceive policies as providing an advantage at the expense of the individual or their reference group. Indeed, Parker et al., (1997) suggest that men might have positive reactions to affirmative action policies when such policies are perceived as contributing to a feeling of group pride. A sense of group pride, however, is not supported by the vast majority of studies examining the nature of the organizational culture of the prison. Historically, women and minorities have faced considerable opposition to their entry into the corrections field (Belknap, 2001). Women,

in particular, have encountered resistance from a largely White male in-group that questions the legitimacy of a woman's place (outside of administrative duties) in the prison organization (Hemmens, Stohr, Schoeler, & Miller, 2002). Arguably, the entry of women into the correctional organization nullifies the hypermasculine conception of the role of prison guard. It then becomes more difficult to maintain "the ideological connection between masculinity and physical strength fundamental to occupational masculinity" (Britton, 2003, p. 182; see also Zimmer, 1986). This desire to closely align one's self-image with the dangerous and macho occupational role should be understood as a significant "psychological benefit of the job" (Martin & Jurik, 1996, p. 67). Thus, resistance on the part of White males to integration and questions regarding the competency of women and minorities may very well serve an important instrumental function. According to Branscombe (1998), "the most direct means of achieving a positive social identity involves portraying one's in-group as better than an out-group" (p. 168). When the nature and value of the in-group's role within the prison is assailed, in-group pride becomes a divisive force.

A second, closely related explanation suggests that White men are not negatively affected by organizational efforts to support equal treatment because they themselves need to believe in the concept of equality in the workplace. As noted previously, maintaining the belief of equitable treatment within the organization allows White male employees to attribute the lack of apparent success of women and minorities in the organization as a function of the individual's limitations, not those of the organization. This, in turn, supports the notion that the individual is wholly responsible for all positive outcomes.

An equally valid interpretation of male officers' failure to be negatively influenced by perceived organizational support for equal treatment is "the gap between policy and practice" (Britton, 2003, p. 192). White men are not threatened (thus their work experiences are not negatively influenced) by policies that appear to support the integration of women and minorities because these policies do little to influence the informal network that supports the interests of the dominant group. In her study of men and women working as prison officers, Britton (2003) found a general consensus among all officers regarding the importance of personal networks to facilitate workplace



opportunities. Regardless of race or gender, officers spoke openly about the importance of developing informal relationships with supervisors and administrators to secure promotions. According to Britton (2003), such advocates or “daddies” are powerful men who have the ability to influence the organization’s promotion and reward structure to benefit those with whom they share a personal relationship. Bias is introduced into this networking process as White men represent the vast majority of those in supervisory and administrative positions and White officers have greater access to informal ties through informal socializing segregated along racial and gender lines.<sup>6</sup>

Women and minorities, on the other hand, may not have the opportunity to develop, much less benefit from, these important social contacts. According to several studies of correctional organizations, women often are excluded from traditionally masculine social activities (e.g., fishing, drinking, and golfing), where significant networking takes place (Belknap, 2001; Britton, 2003; Pogrebin & Poole, 1998). Women appear less likely to socialize outside the workplace, wary of the sexual innuendos that seem to be part of an occupational culture characterized by a “cult of masculinity” (Pogrebin & Poole, 1998, p. 119). Additionally, women believe they have less time to socialize with fellow employees outside of work because of family responsibilities (Belknap, 2001; Britton, 2003). Minority men, although not facing gendered boundaries restricting interaction with the dominant group, still appear to lack access to networking opportunities afforded to White male officers. Studies of corrections and policing organizations indicate that informal contacts tend to be racially segregated (Britton, 2003; Haar, 1997; Morash & Haarr, 1995; Owen, 1985; Pogrebin et al., 2000). When examined in this context, these findings suggest that White men may not feel threatened by equal treatment policies in an organization where informal practices outweigh formal policies. For women and minorities, access (the acquisition of recognition and rights) has increased, yet their influence (the ability to use the rights and gain advantage and power) within the organization has remained negligible (Belknap, 2001).

### **Differences by Race and Gender**

Clearly, female minority officers have a very different perception of organizational efforts to support equal treatment in the workplace. Of the four groups, minority women

were least likely to support the belief that individuals were treated in an equal and consistent manner regardless of race or gender. This finding is not surprising given the body of literature that, although small, consistently has identified the marginalized experience of minority women in criminal justice occupations. Scholars have conceptualized the experience of being both a woman and a minority in a largely White male-dominated occupation as being doubly marginalized (Belknap, 2001; Martin, 1994; Pogrebin et al., 2000). Minority women face resistance when male officers question women's physical abilities and the appropriateness of women working in a symbolically masculine job. In addition, minority women face resistance because of lack of toleration for cultural differences. This is an experience unique to minority women, as they have no means by which to identify with the in-group—they are neither White nor male. The status of minority female officers provides them little commonality with those in power, thus limiting their ability to build influence and advance within the organization. Of interest as well is the finding that White female officers were more similar to minority women than White men in their perception of organizational support for equal treatment. This suggests that gender is the predominant moderating factor, which is not surprising given the overtly masculine culture of the organization.

In addition, this study found that perceptions of organizational efforts to promote equal treatment significantly influence all responses to the work environment for each group. Only in the case of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, however, did the degree to which perceptions of equal treatment policies influence work responses vary significantly by group. The finding regarding job stress supports previous research suggesting that the job-related characteristics surrounding the position of correctional officers have a more robust impact on job stress than the individual characteristics of the officer (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004).

Of the four groups examined, White male officers reported the most robust impact of perceptions of equal treatment on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Also contrary to the hypotheses is the finding that White male and minority female levels of job satisfaction are similarly influenced by perceptions of equal treatment. How might we reconcile this finding given the earlier result that these two groups differ significantly in their belief regarding the extent to which the organization promotes equal treatment? It

is probable that group perceptions of the function of the policies differ as well. According to Branscombe (1998), "because members of high- and low-status groups are motivated by different goals, either to legitimize their group's superior position or challenge their group's disadvantaged position, strategies for maintaining a positive social identity will differ" (p. 168). Arguably, these two groups, which represent the high- and low-status groups within this prison organization, may very well identify these policies as a type of strategy or potential strategy for obtaining very different goals. For the in-group, the perception that the organization supports equal treatment reaffirms one's existing belief that a level playing field indeed exists, that the success of the in-group is deserved and not the result of "passive acceptance of privilege" (Branscombe, 1998, p. 168). For the low-status group, the perception of organizational commitment to equity in the workplace, although perhaps unfulfilled, indicates at minimum - recognition of the problem and the potential for change in the future. In each instance, such a belief in equity in the workplace has a significant positive influence on officer job satisfaction.

The findings also suggest that reported levels of organizational commitment among male officers, regardless of race or ethnicity, are influenced similarly by perceptions of equitable treatment and that this effect is found to be more robust than that of all women officers. Again, the data do not allow for an assessment of the psychological processes or motivations influencing perceptions of the organization. However, when examining more closely the issue of commitment to the organization, it appears to tap into a sense of loyalty and pride. What this suggests then is a significantly more positive effect along gender lines as a result of minority men feeling accepted into the masculine organization more so than women of any race or ethnicity (see Vallas, 2003).

### **Limitations and Implications**

Of course, it must be kept in mind that these findings and subsequent interpretations are subject to several limitations. As mentioned previously, this study did not assess the situational context, such as an individual's previous experience with discrimination, or other factors such as sexist or racist attitudes that may influence officer perceptions. The data do not include objective measures of variables that may be

related to perceptions of fair treatment and equal opportunity within the organization. For instance, the data do not provide information on the number of minority hires or recent promotions (see Camp et al., 1997), nor do the data incorporate a measure of racial diversity within the work group (see Camp et al., 2001).

This study does add significantly to the body of research that examines the effect of individual perceptions of organizational support for equitable treatment on several important officer responses to the prison work environment. The findings support the notion that organizational support of fair and equal treatment does not necessarily result in a backlash effect from those who would not appear to benefit from such efforts. Nor do such organizational efforts appear to result in less satisfaction and more stress among correctional officers. Perhaps such a negative response was not found because the study made use of a more global conception of equal opportunity and fair treatment within the workplace, avoiding such terminology that likely would elicit a negative reaction (e.g., affirmative action, quotas). Clearly, however, further research is warranted, specifically focusing on prisons and other criminal justice organizations whose unique historical context would suggest an inherent resistance on the part of the in-group to the integration of those considered to be outsiders. As noted by Lutze and Murphy (1999), "the social setting of prison is an arena in which ultramasculine sex-role stereotypes are promoted and must be confronted, whether or not the individual inmate or staff member subscribes to such beliefs or behavior" (p. 727). The policies implemented within this prison organization reflect a formal effort to promote the equal treatment of all employees. The perceived disjuncture, however, between the resistance faced by women and minorities entering the prison organization and the support of the in-group of organizational efforts to promote equality within the workplace is disconcerting. Future research must examine the extent to which formal efforts to promote a diverse workforce within a just and fair work environment are circumvented by informal efforts to maintain the status quo. Without such efforts, meaningful participation and retention of female and minority officers within the prison organization will remain limited.

## Appendix

Job Satisfaction (alpha = .79)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
I like the duties I perform in my job	3.69	0.89	1 to 5
I am satisfied with my present job assignment	3.55	1.0	1 to 5
At the end of the day, I usually feel that I have done something especially well	3.29	1.0	1 to 5
If I had the chance, I would get a job in something other than what I am doing now <sup>a</sup>	2.89	1.2	1 to 5
I enjoy most of the work I do here	3.71	0.84	1 to 5
If I had to do it all over again, knowing what I know now, I would take the same job again	3.33	1.1	1 to 5
Scale	3.41	0.72	1 to 5
Job Stress (alpha = .80)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
When I'm at work, I often feel tense or upset	2.81	1.2	1 to 5
I usually feel that I am under a lot of pressure when I am at work	2.73	1.1	1 to 5
There are a lot of things about my job that can make me pretty upset	3.28	1.2	1 to 5
A lot of times, my job makes me very frustrated or angry	2.95	1.2	1 to 5
My work environment allows me to be attentive yet relaxed and at ease <sup>a</sup>	3.18	1.1	1 to 5
Scale	2.99	0.85	1 to 5
Commitment to Organization (alpha = .89)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
There is much to be gained from staying with Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC)	3.27	1.1	1 to 5
If I remain in corrections, I would prefer to remain with ADC	3.48	1.0	1 to 5
I am proud to be employed by ADC	3.59	1.0	1 to 5
I am currently looking for another job outside ADC <sup>a</sup>	3.62	0.95	1 to 5
I owe a great deal to ADC	2.89	1.1	1 to 5
Deciding to work for ADC was a very positive move on my part	3.34	1.1	1 to 5
Most of the time, ADC is managed very well	2.47	1.1	1 to 5
If given the chance, ADC would take advantage of me <sup>a</sup>	3.14	1.1	1 to 5
When meeting new people, I am proud to tell them that I work for ADC	3.22	1.3	1 to 5
I feel a sense of loyalty to ADC	2.62	1.1	1 to 5
Scale	3.17	0.79	1 to 5
Perceived Organizational Support for Equal Treatment (alpha = .76)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Policies and procedures here promote cultural diversity among ADC employees in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender	3.29	1.1	1 to 5
Women and minorities have equal access to merit recognition and promotion opportunities (the same as men and nonminorities)	3.67	1.1	1 to 5
People here have are treated fairly regardless of their race or gender	3.36	1.2	1 to 5
Policies and procedures here create standards so that decisions are fair and consistent	3.12	1.1	1 to 5
I feel that I have good opportunities for promotion within the department	3.46	1.0	1 to 5
Policies and procedures provide opportunities to appeal or challenge a decision	3.23	1.0	1 to 5
Allegations of sexual harassment are taken seriously by management	4.10	0.90	1 to 5
Anyone who treats women or minorities unfairly will receive meaningful sanctions	3.47	0.90	1 to 5
Scale	3.46	0.64	1 to 5

Note: For job satisfaction, items are coded as 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. For job stress, items are coded as 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. For commitment to organization, items are coded as 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*. For perceived organizational support for equal treatment, items are coded as 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *uncertain*, 4 = *agree*, and 5 = *strongly agree*.

a. Denotes reversal.

## Notes

1. Some significant differences were found when comparing the demographic characteristics, job classification, or institutional location of those who responded to the survey with those who did not respond. Employees who were female, older, held longer tenure, held higher level positions, or held security-oriented positions were more likely to respond. Response rates varied between 43.9% and 75.3% at the 10 institutions, with an average response rate of 58.4%.

2. Given the low numbers of correctional officers (less than 2%) who indicated they were of Asian or American Indian descent, these individuals were excluded from the analysis.

3. With the exception of the Equality in the Work Environment scale, all scales used in this study were informed by scales from previous studies. Some items were altered to incorporate the name of the local agency or to update wording. All items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*), with some recoding of items such that higher numeric values represented a higher level of the variable measured (e.g., higher level of stress, more positive attitude toward the quality of supervision). Confirmatory factor analyses and reliability analyses verified the integrity of all scales. Only items that loaded on a single factor were used to construct each scale. Alpha reliability coefficients are reported in Table 1. All scale items are listed in the appendix.

4. An examination of interitem correlations demonstrated that an individual's perspective of his or her own opportunities paralleled his or her more global perceptions about the effects of these policies in general.

5. Table 3 reports only the beta coefficients and standard errors for the independent variable perceived organizational support for equity policies, obtained in each of the 12 separate regression models. Age, tenure, and education were entered in each equation as control variables, and their effects are not reported here.

6. An examination of the larger study reveals the following breakdown by racial/ethnic and gender grouping for supervisory personnel (major, captain, lieutenant, and sergeant): 59.7% White male, 28.5% minority male, 9.7% White female, and 2.1% minority female.

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