

## **When sex and race collide in HR decisions: career advancement for women**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women may overcome many entry employment barriers, but often struggle with supplementary barriers as they seek management positions. Gossett and Williams (1998) stated that females face different expectations and additional barriers that contribute to lower female representation in management. Education level, pregnancy, lack of affordable quality childcare, access to transportation, work-life balance, systemic neglect, mental health, ageism, sexism, negative work experiences, and uncertainty are examples of the barriers women endure (Clark & Bower, 2016). Araujo-Pinzon, Alvarez-Dardet, Ramon-Jeronimo, and Florez-Lopez (2017) argued that education did not influence a woman's probability of career advancement. Although some researchers perceive education as non-influential, women continue to battle other barriers that continue to strain her ability to ascend the promotional hierarchy. This case examines a situation in which two individuals—a female Native American, and a Hispanic male—are seeking promotion to an opening. Comparisons of each of their qualifications and backgrounds, as well as the decision made is examined. This case is based on a composite of several situations and individuals that occurred in a police department. Names, nationalities, and specific identifying characteristics have been changed. Any similarity contained herein to actual persons, businesses, events, etc. is purely coincidental and is the responsibility of the authors. Please contact the case authors directly with any concerns.

Keywords: Criminal Justice, human resources, employment, promotion, underrepresentation, sex, gender, race, minorities, equality, hiring, women, females

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## INTRODUCTION

The art of talent acquisition, management, promotion, and retention is increasingly complex and fraught with multiple challenges. Among those challenges are balancing opportunities and fairness in promotion and career advancement, especially for under-represented members within organizations. In this case study, the competition for limited opportunities among under-represented communities within an organization is examined, as a Native American female police officer competes with a Hispanic male police officer for promotion to the open position of Major in the Wayne City Police Department. The primary emphasis on this case will be the underrepresentation of females in organizations. This case is based on a composite of several situations and individuals that occurred in a police department. Names, nationalities, and specific identifying characteristics have been changed. Any similarity contained herein to actual persons, businesses, events, etc. is purely coincidental and is the responsibility of the authors. Please contact the case authors directly with any concerns.

## BACKGROUND

Officer Lehoma Mantooth is excited about her chances in the upcoming round of promotions scheduled to be announced in her department. She has worked for the Wayne City Police Department for just over 13 years. In every way, she has attempted to excel and enjoys an excellent reputation within the police department and in the community she serves. Officer Mantooth, a member of the Choctaw Tribe also has a strong Sac and Fox heritage and is proud of her Native American ancestry. The position for which she is being considered is Major with a span of control of seven other officers that would be under her command should she receive the promotion. In addition to her 13 years of full-time work in the police department, Officer Mantooth has achieved additional training, both certifications and formal academic education. When she was hired, she had a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from a regional university located not far from Wayne City. Since arriving, she has completed an MBA at a private university of reputation in the state, and has completed the major part of the coursework required for a Ph.D. in management from a regionally accredited university from another state. Her personnel file contains numerous certifications, awards, and all of her annual appraisals are excellent with no negative performance noted. At thirty-six, she has earned a reputation as a hard-worker, dedicated to her profession, and volunteers for additional assignments including departmental volunteer work whenever the needs arise. Known affectionally as "Home Girl," or "Homie" by her fellow officers, Officer Mantooth is well-respected as a tough but fair police officer.

Equally excited for his own prospects for promotion to the open Major position is Officer Nicolo Ramiro, nicknamed "St. Nick" by his colleagues. Nicolo is Hispanic having been born shortly after his father immigrated to the United States from Mexico and met his mother twenty-seven years ago. His American mother was also Hispanic as well as half Italian—Nicolo Rossi, the officer's namesake. St. Nick had worked for the department for the past full year, having previously worked for another town, Dibble, Tennessee (population 12,400) police department in another state for two years. Prior to working at the small town police department for those two years, he had worked for six years previously in the Wayne City Police Department. He had resigned and moved to another state where he had worked for two years prior to returning to Wayne City. At twenty-seven he had completed a one-year vocational program in high school

that focused on security and safety, but he had not completed a bachelor's degree. He was well respected by his fellow officers, had a reputation for excellent work habits, and like Officer Mantooth was known as tough but fair. He also regularly volunteered for additional assignments and volunteer duty when needed. His personnel file held several awards of merit and a few certifications completed since his arrival a year before. His annual performance review for the most previous year was excellent, and the reviews from his first six years at the Wayne City Police Department were also excellent. No negative notes were included in his personnel file and St. Nick was a well-liked police officer in the community and the department.

Both Officer Mantooth and Officer Ramiro submitted applications for the open position of Major in the Wayne City Police Department. The position was advertised as requiring five years longevity within the Wayne City Police Department, and excellent reputation and work ethic, as well as necessary officer certifications and qualifications, all of which both officers met. The announcement of the open Major position also had specific language about the organization being an EEOC compliant organization and included the statement: "Qualified women, minorities, and those from historically underrepresented backgrounds are encouraged to apply."

Three letters of reference were also required as part of the application process. Officer Mantooth submitted reference letters from fellow police officer, Dewey Kares, a five-year member of the department, Captain Salvador O'Reilly, a twenty year veteran officer of the Wayne City Police, and retired officer, Dr. Gene Hampton, who was a professor of criminal justice at the local university where she had completed her bachelor's degree. Officer Ramiro submitted letters of reference from the Chief of Police from Dibble, Tennessee, a letter of reference from the state Police Academy Director in the capital, and a letter from the well-respected, recently retired after twenty years of service as Chief of the Wayne City Police Department, Nicolo Rossi.

## THE DILEMMA

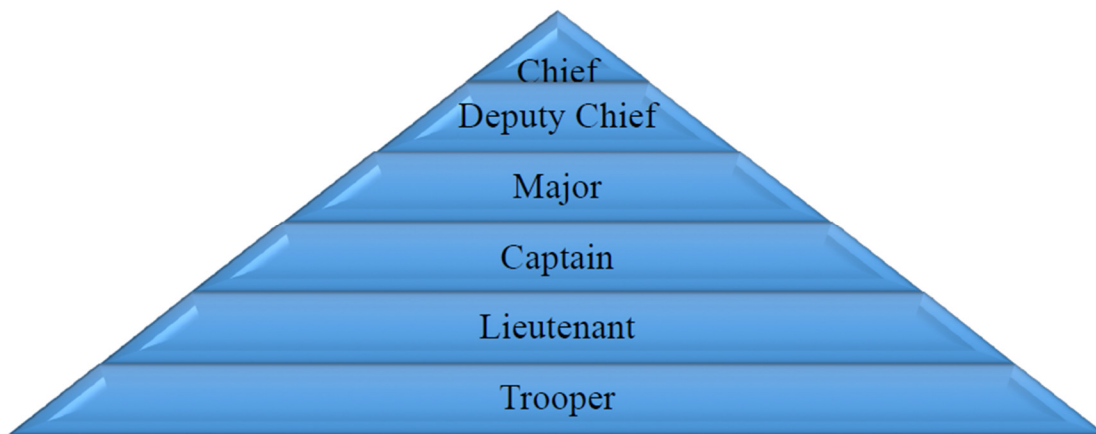
When the HR Officer of the Wayne City Police Department began the review of applicants, she was determined to operate a fair, impartial, and rigorous process. Ironically, only three individuals met the stated qualifications, Officers Mantooth, Ramiro, and a five-year member of the department, Rafe Baker. However, Officer Baker removed his name from consideration after learning through the department's grapevine who the other candidates were. The HR officer set about the process of setting up screening committees and final interview by the newly hired Chief of Police, Cody Beauregard a well-respected leader with seventeen years of experience with the Wayne City Police Department. He had served as Assistant Chief for the past five years and was named by the City Council as the new Chief just six months ago, following the retirement of Chief Rossi.

Though African Americans and Native Americans were historically underrepresented in the Wayne City Police Department, the number of female officers had been unusually low. In nearly a century of existence—the police department had officially formed twenty years after the official founding and incorporation of Wayne City 118 years earlier—only seventeen female officers had served in the police department. Four of those seventeen had been employed as meter maids, limited to issuing parking tickets in the downtown area from 1965-1975. From 1975 to 2015, only four female police officers had served in the department, and they were largely assigned desk duties or dispatch roles. From 2015 to the present, an additional nine

female officers had been hired during the administration of Chief Rossi and he had been a champion for them during his tenure.

Currently, six of the thirty-five police officers employed by the Wayne City Police Department were women, including Officer Mantooth. Former Chief Rossi and the HR officer understood that gender bias affects women in areas such as career advancement opportunities and access to management positions in the workplace and had made concerted efforts to employ and facilitate the advancement and promotion of females in the department. Two of the six current female officers served in the position of Captain, including Officer Mantooth. Two women held the rank of Lieutenant, and two women were employed at the rank of Trooper.

*Figure 1. Wayne City Police Department Occupational Career Ladder (Hierarchical Progression)*



Women may overcome many entry employment barriers, but more often struggle with supplementary barriers as they seek management positions. Gossett and Williams (1998) stated that females face different expectations and additional barriers that contribute to lower female representation in management. Education level, pregnancy, lack of affordable quality childcare, access to transportation, work-life balance, systemic neglect, mental health, ageism, sexism, negative work experiences, and uncertainty are examples of the barriers women endure (Clark & Bower, 2016). Araujo-Pinzon, Alvarez-Dardet, Ramon-Jeronimo, and Florez-Lopez (2017) argued that education did not influence a woman's probability of career advancement. Although some researchers perceive education as non-influential, women continue to battle other barriers that continue to strain her ability to ascend the promotional hierarchy.

Barriers differ for individuals depending on the circumstances. Women have a higher probability of being promoted into higher-risk positions as well as encountering a lack of support or authority to accomplish job-related goals (Glass & Cook, 2016). Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires organizations to provide fair and equal opportunities as designated, once a female gets promoted, she often experiences a shorter tenure as compared to male peers. In other words, women have a lower probability of holding a senior management position than men do, as well as lower working hours and wages (Holst & Friedrich, 2016).

As true in many fields, men have dominated the law enforcement realm since the beginning of police work. A woman's presence in police work began in the late 1800s as matrons to aid incarcerated women as well as juveniles (Riseling, 2011). By 1913, there were

only 13 female police officers in the United States. Then, in the 1950s, policewomen grew to 2,600 nationwide (Snow, 2010). But, in the 1960s, women began to venture into other aspects of law enforcement.

Today, there are more women in policing than at any time throughout history. As of 2011, female representation increased from approximately two percent to 12 percent (Schuck, 2014). Despite an increase in the employment of female police officers over the past decades, women still lag in command and management positions in most American law enforcement agencies (Archbold & Hassell, 2009; Sims, Scarborough, & Ahmad, 2003).

According to Snow (2010), women were not allowed to participate in the promotional process until the early 1960s when lawsuits brought about a change in the procedures. This change allowed women to compete with men for higher ranks within the department.

Unfortunately, women who have the desire to promote and achieve these management positions encounter significant demands (Yu, 2015; Wolfram & Gratton, 2014). The biggest challenge facing female officers is the resistance displayed by male officers in attitudes toward women in policing (Hughes, 2011).

Currently, there is a dearth of research about female managers in law enforcement. Archbold and Hassell (2009) advised that little to limited research exists on the promotion of female police officers. Guajardo (2016) suggested that there is a gap in literature with respect to female officers to management positions in police agencies and explains that ranks from lieutenant to chief to commissioner all classify as supervisory or management positions. Commonly, the organizational chart of law enforcement agencies mirrors a military structure that transcends the roles of commissioner, chief, deputy chief, major, captain, lieutenant to trooper. This hierarchy gives authority to the highest-rank and title (Guajardo, 2016).

The Wayne City Police Department, which was established nearly a century ago, has grown tremendously and follows a military formation. The current statistics of females within the police department validate that the women in the Wayne City Police have slowly obtained access into management positions, but they remain underrepresented. Balancing sex division in management levels might lead to better problem solving and decision making since men and women often have different perspectives and emotional quotients.

Ward and Prenzler (2016) stated that through mentoring, managers could apply support networks to focus on issues the officers confront, prepare reasonable adjustments or corrections, and provide advancement through development training to enrich the contributions of women in law enforcement. Support networks may also reduce policy issues and perceived barriers as well as develop interview skills to improve recruitment, retention, and progression of women in department. Cohen and Broschak (2013) discovered that the manner in which organizations structure jobs specifically for certain employees impacts representation of women. For instance, they argued that *who* moves in and out of positions as well as *which* positions exist causes an organization's union to react by enacting aggressive tactics to help women as well as other underrepresented groups overcome barriers (Martin, 2014; Cohen & Broschak, 2013). Organizations should work intentionally to remove obstacles that affect women and other underrepresented groups.

## THE DECISION

All personnel decisions within the Wayne City Police Department are by department policy announced publicly, but outside of official notifications and promotion ceremonies, no

justification is required by the Chief or the HR officer. Following a screening committee of three officers, an interview by the HR officer, and a final interview by the Chief of Police, all promotions for the year were announced through the HR officer and a promotional ceremony for awarding of certificates and uniform decorations was held. Among the announcements, the position of Major was announced. Officer Nicolo Ramiro was congratulated in the public ceremony. As two area television reporters taped the event for the evening news, a photographer from the Wayne City Herald, the local newspaper, took a picture of the smiling Major Ramiro with Chief Beauregard. Officer Mantooth, standing to the side of the packed room politely applauded as retired Chief Rossi beamed with pride from the back row.

## QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the Wayne City Police Department's decision? Explain.
2. How would you advise Officer Mantooth to proceed following the announcement of Officer Ramiro's promotion?
3. After answering the first two questions, answer them again considering the following:
  - a. What if Officer Mantooth was a Caucasian woman? Would you change your mind?
  - b. What if Officer Ramiro was an African American? Would that impact your view?
4. What role did retired Chief Rossi likely play in the current Chief's decision? If he had not been related to Officer Ramiro, would that affect your views of the situation?
5. What type of obstacles or barriers impact career progression?
6. What are the primary characteristics that contribute to career advancements?
7. Are women and other underrepresented groups pitted against each other when opportunities for advancement arise within organizations?
8. How should HR and managers balance the desire to recruit, retain, and advance women within organizations, specifically those with a poor history of support for women?

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## TEACHING NOTES

This case is appropriate for courses in Human Resources, Training and Development, Organizational Development, and Criminal Justice.

### Learning Objectives

1. Identify and discuss arguments supporting and opposing efforts to intentionally promote under-represented groups within an organization.
2. Articulate the ethical decision-making process relative to promotions and career advancement.
3. Present a well-argued case for justifying HR decisions relative to promotion of one person over another.

### Questions

1. Do you agree with the Wayne City Police Department's decision? Explain.  
Student responses will vary. Students should be encouraged to evaluate the logic behind the police department's answer and provide well-reasoned rationales based on the facts. Critical thinking and logic should be evident in their explanations.
2. How would you advise Officer Mantooth to proceed following the announcement of Officer Ramiro's promotion?  
Responses will vary according to the student's maturity and experience level. Instructors should carefully review responses to keep students focused on the ethical consideration instead of the emotional response to the issue under discussion. Students should consider issues of retaliation and hostile work environment that Officer Mantooth could encounter if bad advice is given. Various courses of action may include scheduling a meeting with the HR department or in the case of a unionized shop, consideration of review by the union.
3. After answering the first two questions, answer them again considering the following:
  - a. What if Officer Mantooth was a Caucasian woman? Would you change your mind?
  - b. What if Officer Ramiro was an African American? Would that impact your view?If students change their mind when the identities of the two officers are changed, they should articulate sound legal reasoning or admit their own bias. Response to these questions will depend on individual student opinions. Consistency in rationale should be exhibited alongside sound ethical and legal bases.
4. What role did retired Chief Rossi likely play in the current Chief's decision? If he had not been related to Officer Ramiro, would that affect your views of the situation?  
Student responses to this question will depend on individual opinions of retired Chief Rossi and his relationship with the two officers. Nevertheless, retired Chief Rossi likely played a role in the decision due to his relationship to Officer Ramiro—either directly or indirectly. The administration making the decision may feel as though there will be repercussion for not choosing the retired Chief Rossi's preference that they "owe" him for previous favors. Students can be further engaged on the realities of nepotism and ethical decision making processes and the necessity of well-articulated HR policies and procedures.
5. What type of obstacles or barriers impact career progression?

Numerous obstacles or barriers will be listed. For example, students may mention education level, pregnancy, lack of affordable quality childcare, access to transportation, work-life balance, systemic neglect, mental health, ageism, sexism, negative work experiences, and uncertainty as basic obstructions. However, for male dominated workforces, students should be more specific and mention, the “boys club,” the “glass ceiling,” adverse or hostile environments, explicit and subtle harassment, skewed physical fitness assessments, double standards as well as a lack of support and opportunity.

6. What are the primary characteristics that contribute to career advancements?  
Students should consider how assorted characteristics contribute to career advancement. Students should understand that a characteristic of one person may not work well for another person. However, there are primary characteristics such as self-belief and determination along with effective knowledge-based and communication skills.
7. Are women and other underrepresented groups pitted against each other when opportunities for advancement arise within organizations?  
Answers to this question will vary, but generally students will agree that women and other underrepresented groups are pitted against one another. Even though organizations have been trying to improve diversity within their organization, this action continues with women and other underrepresented groups blocking opportunities for each other.
8. How should HR and managers balance the desire to recruit, retain, and advance women within organizations, specifically those with a poor history of support for women?  
HR and managers should focus on new techniques that will make a systemic change for the better of the organization. For example, an organization can start with small adjustments to recruiting, retaining, and advancement of women by modifying the distribution of work assignments, creating a mentoring program, and establishing a diversity committee.

