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# Accessing Justice, Evaluating Agency: How 12 Women in Cape Town Perceive Their Local Police Services With Respect to Their Race, Class, Gender, and Geographic Location

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ACCESSING JUSTICE, EVALUATING AGENCY:  
HOW 12 WOMEN IN CAPE TOWN PERCEIVE THEIR LOCAL  
POLICE SERVICES WITH RESPECT TO THEIR RACE, CLASS,  
GENDER, AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for South Africa:

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**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements.....3

Abstract.....4

Introduction.....5

Limitations.....10

Literature Review.....11

Methodology.....19

    Participant Demographics.....21

Glossary.....22

Analysis.....23

    Perceptions of Safety.....23

        Perceptions of safety in the area of residence.....23

        Conclusion.....24

    Class: Mechanisms of Protection.....25

        Alternative safety measures other than the police.....25

        Conclusion.....26

    Police Effectiveness.....26

        General perceptions of effectiveness.....26

        Police presence.....27

        Inadequate training of the police.....28

        Lack of trust in police.....29

        Responsiveness.....32

        Follow up/Results of investigations.....33

        Conclusion.....35

    Race: Its effects and its relationship to gender.....35

        Historical ties.....35

        Race of the policeman: Does it matter? .....36

        Gender and its racialized qualities.....38

        Conclusion.....41

Conclusion.....42

Recommendations for Further Study.....44

Bibliography.....45

    Secondary Sources.....45

    Primary Sources.....46

Appendix: Interview Questions.....48

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## **Abstract**

Policing in South Africa has a long, twisted history that is still evident in some current police practices and especially in the public's perceptions of the police. In addition to historical factors such as colonial rule and apartheid, people's perceptions of the police are also affected by their race, class, gender, and geographic location. Although these factors' can be considered to have an individual effect on perceptions, it is through a complex understanding of how they relate to one another that a true understanding of a person's perception can be reached. The inspiration for this study stemmed from these concepts and its goal was to discover perceptions women in Cape Town have of the police and how these perceptions relate to race, class, gender and location. In order to determine this, two focus groups were conducted – one in Langa that included 7 women and one in Stellenbosch that included 5 women. The focus groups revealed four main themes: women's perceptions of their overall safety, the way that class, as it relates to income, can be used to procure added security measures, that the police are perceived to be completely ineffective, and that race and its connections to gender have a great impact on perceptions of the police and of police treatment. Although the expected outcome of the study was that women would perceive they were treated poorly on the basis of their gender and further, that women in Stellenbosch, as the white upper class, would have a more positive perception of the police than women in Langa, as the black working class, this was not demonstrated by the findings. Instead, the focus groups revealed that all of the women felt unsafe in their areas, regardless of the location and that they believed the police to be totally ineffective, albeit for a variety of different reasons.

## Introduction

Over the past 18 years, the South African Police Service (SAPS) has struggled to redefine policing in South Africa and to separate it from its history. Policing was previously used by the colonial government and the Apartheid government that followed it as a means of enforcing racial segregation and maintaining the government's authority through the controlled movement of people. This legacy continues to infiltrate the SAPS and plays a considerable role in the shaping of people's perceptions of the police along with other factors such as people's race, class, gender, and geographic location. Although each of these arguably has a significant individual impact on how people perceive the police, they must also be considered in combination with each other, as being inseparable and intertwined as they shape each person's perceptions.

These ideas have particular relevance today in light of South Africa's high prevalence of violence and astonishingly high crime rates. Much of the violence that occurs is experienced by women as their gender makes them more vulnerable to crime. This is demonstrated by the incredibly high rates of sexual violence that are characteristic of South Africa. Feminist Alternatives shares that

“violence has become a part of the daily lives of women, with most of it happening with impunity. Sexism and male domination are reflected in the rapes, femicides, forms of gender based and sexual violence and misogyny that have today reached crisis proportions. One in every three women in South Africa is in an abusive relationship. A woman is killed by her partner every six days and there is a rape every 35 seconds” (2011).

This unsettling reality led me to study women in Cape Town's perceptions of the police and how the women feel the police deal with such issues through conducting focus groups in Langa and Stellenbosch. This study will illuminate the effects of the legacy of Apartheid and the decades before in which race, class, gender and location all played and continue to play, a significant role.

The specific objectives of this study are twofold. First, the study sought to determine the general perceptions of the police held by women in Langa and Stellenbosch. Second, the study

aimed to uncover how the women in these areas perceived that their race, class, gender, and location to affect their treatment by the police and why this was the case. In this study, I expected to find first, that women would perceive the police treated them poorly as a result of their gender and second, that women in Stellenbosch, as members of the white upper class, would have a more positive view of the police than women in Langa, as members of the black working class. Instead, I found that regardless of where the women live, they all felt unsafe and agreed that the police were completely ineffective, although they gave different explanations as to why this was the case.

This argument is demonstrated through four main themes that make up the sections of the paper. The first section addresses women's overall feelings of safety in their local communities. The second considers class, in terms of its socio-economic implications, and how it relates to women's ability to afford supplemental safety measures other than the police. The third discusses women's perceptions of police ineffectiveness and the reasons behind them. The final section looks at race as a factor that women perceive affects interactions with the police and how it is related to issues of gender.

The findings of the study are based on two focus groups that I conducted – one in Langa and one in Stellenbosch. In Langa, 7 women aged 18-57 participated in the focus group. In Stellenbosch, 5 women aged 54-69 participated in the focus group. The themes discussed above were those that were most prevalent in the interviews and appeared to be the most relevant and important to the women who participated.

Brief histories of Langa, Stellenbosch, and policing in South Africa serve to further contextualize my findings. Stellenbosch is a town about an hour from Cape Town, located in the heart of the country's wine lands. Stellenbosch got its name in 1679, when then governor of the Cape, Simon Van Der Stel, named it after himself (Honey). It is also known as Eikestad, which

means “town of Oaks” in Afrikaans. Dutch settlers who discovered the land was quite suitable to agriculture settled Stellenbosch quickly. The produce Stellenbosch grew was used, in the early years, to feed the crew on board the ships that sailed around the Cape of Good Hope on their way to other Dutch colonies in the East (Our Story). Soon, Stellenbosch became covered in grape vines and is still known today for its world-class wines. The University of Stellenbosch was founded there in 1918, and up until recently it was an exclusively Afrikaans-speaking institution. According to Chet Fransch, a professor there, the University “became the center of Afrikaans” and was thus fundamental to the identity of the Afrikaner (Fransch). The residents of Stellenbosch are primarily white as it was deemed a white’s only area during the struggle years, yet there are a great number of people of other races in the area. According to Victor, there are about 25,000 white residents, 23,000 coloured residents, 15,000 black residents and 28,000 students who are of many different races. Although the populations of coloured and black people are sizeable, the majority of them live in separate areas from the white residents (Honey).

Langa is a township on the outskirts of Cape Town and was established following an influenza epidemic in the slums of Cape Town in 1918 that prompted the City Council of Cape Town to create another location in which Africans could live (Wilson & Mafeje 1963). Wilson and Mafeje point out that Langa was created specifically “because people were living in squalor and the medical authorities were pressing for slum clearance, but [Langa was] also planned as [a] *segregated* [area], to which Africans would be confined” (1963). The township was officially opened in 1927 following four years of building (Wilson & Mafeje 1963). Today the residents of Langa are still virtually all black. There are visible class differences among the residents of Langa, with some living in informal shacks on the edges of the township and some living in renovated two story houses or driving fancy cars.

The history of policing in South Africa and its evolution over time is another important contextual factor. According to John D. Brewer, the National Party's rise to power in 1948 is often cited as the defining moment of many aspects that still plague contemporary policing, yet many of these features have a much longer history (1994, p. 4). Brewer believes that an understanding of modern policing in South Africa must be "properly located in the failure of the SAP to transcend its origins as a colonial force" (1994, p. 4). The colonial model of policing includes four basic components. First, policing was centralized into a national force that was controlled by the state. Second, the police were considered to be "agents of the government rather than the law, lacking political autonomy and independence" (Brewer 1994, p. 6). Third, the police focused on controlling its citizenry to maintain the government's authority rather than on fighting crime or servicing the community. Fourth, policing was "divorced from the location population" in that the local people were not recruited for jobs (Brewer 1994, p. 6). Instead, the majority of police officers belonged to the settler group, making them primarily white. In this way, policing became central to the colonial state and this later translated into the apartheid state (Brewer, 1994, p. 7). Mark Shaw confirms the SAP were the major enforcers of apartheid laws and thus, the defenders of the apartheid state (2002, p. 11). The SAP's strategy included preventing crime "in white areas not by reducing it in black areas but by preventing the uncontrolled movement of black people, who were considered to be its perpetrators" (Shaw 2002, p. 1). This was done through Pass Laws among many other things. It follows that "if racial segregation meant crime prevention, then along the divide between the races stood the police" (Shaw 2002, p. 1). This last point is integral to the current relationship many South Africans have with the police. Despite the changes made in policing since the end of Apartheid in 1994, the legacy of the SAP and its enforced policy of racism continue to resonate throughout the country. This may be partially because those who were in charge of the change to the new force, the South African Police Service, or SAPS, which

was created by combining the country's 11 police agencies, were senior managers of the SAP and thus, the previous enforcers of apartheid (Shaw 2002, p. 29). In addition, an emphasis on improving the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of the public had the effect of overshadowing the actual restructuring of its procedures and approaches to crime. President Mandela and other notable figures praised the police and suggested the public see them as their protectors, but this was not enough to change the reality on the ground (Shaw 2002, p. 29). Years later, President Thabo Mbeki recognized this failure and promised to combat crime by addressing structural inequalities and poverty, but his efforts did little to reduce crime or improve the quality of policing (Shaw 2002, p. 38). This history correlates directly to the current situation with regard to policing in South Africa. It is reflected in the perceptions of women interviewed in this study and is likely perceived by the general public to have a great impact on the present condition.

## **Limitations**

I was able to learn a considerable amount about women's perceptions of the police and how they are affected by various factors such as race and gender, despite the short time frame of the study. In the month long time period during which research was conducted and this report was written, I managed to gain much understanding and produce an analysis of the perceptions of the twelve women I interviewed in the focus groups. The women in the focus groups provided insightful answers to the interview questions, and despite my inexperience as an interviewer and as the facilitator of a focus group, I was able to use my analytical skills to interpret them and uncover the themes. The women all made valid contributions to the study even though I struggled at times to distinguish their voices and attribute quotes to them when transcribing. A considerably well-rounded view of women's perceptions of the police was expressed, even with the lack of different age groups represented in the focus group in Stellenbosch.

## Literature Review

Crime is a major issue in contemporary South Africa. There exists a fairly strong consensus among South Africans – and people world wide – that the South African Police Force (SAPS) is failing to deal with this proliferation of crime adequately. Many argue further, that factors such as race, class, and gender affect the way the police chose to deal with crimes. In addition, crime statistics are often used by the police in an effort to dispel the fear of crime, when in fact they create fear and associate victimhood with certain identity categories, only scaring people more and causing them to identify themselves as part of a vulnerable population, perpetuating the cycle. Several personal accounts of those affected by crime as well as one man's account of his yearlong study of the SAPS give a tangible quality to these ideas. In essence, the majority of crimes in South Africa are inexplicably linked to its citizens' race, class, gender and other identity categories and the SAPS are not dealing with it appropriately. The literature discussed below demonstrates the current debates on these issues.

Comment [EM1]:

To understand the crimes that are being committed, it is crucial to understand the concept of intersectionality that often plays a role in why a crime is committed by or against a certain person. Intersectionality refers to the way in which a person's race, class, and gender, among other factors, are interrelated and affect how that person is characterized and is treated by others (Yuval-Davis 2006). This concept was historically raised by Bell Hooks in her 1981 book, *Ain't I a Woman*. She tore down the idea of Western feminists that women and blacks were thought of in separate categories and argued for her rights both as a woman and as a black person (Yuval-Davis 2006). An excerpt from the report of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women's Global Leadership links this idea of intersectionality to the South African context and to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid that continues to unfold. The report states that an

“Intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of marginalized women attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination. It addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like” (Center for Women’s Global Leadership quoted in Yuval-Davis 2006).

~~In South Africa, the difficulties people face and the crimes that proliferate are undoubtedly connected to these intersections of race, class, gender, and ethnicity as they relate to the historical structures of apartheid and colonialism.~~ In some cases, different social divisions like race or class tend to be “naturalized,’ to be seen as resulting from biological destiny” linked to different genetic traits and characteristics, and this, in turn, tends to “homogenize social categories and treat all who belong to a particular social category as sharing equally the particular attributes (positive or negative) specific to it” (Cohen quoted in Yuval-Davis 2006). Yet, in the South African context and worldwide, attributes of social categories are experienced at different levels and are affected by the other social categories that the person identifies with. ~~Thus, each person is positioned differently based on the degree to which each social category they embody is represented and enacted.~~ These social categories cut across all lines – it is not just a matter of the “powerful” versus the “powerless” or the “advantaged” versus the “disadvantaged” (Yuval-Davis 2006). ~~Yuval-Davis believes it is much more complicated than that. She alludes to the fact that people are affected in different ways by the different facets of their identities and the way those identities come together to create a unique character (Yuval-Davis 2006).~~ ~~All South African are affected in different ways by the different facets of their identities and the way those identities come together to create a unique character. Yet, in many cases today, certain intersections compound a person’s vulnerability to perpetrate or fall victim to crimes.~~ ~~Thus, w~~hen evaluating crime and the way the SAPS deal with it, it is absolutely essential to consider intersectionality and how it affects people.

Crime statistics often reinforce the idea that crimes are committed by or against certain people or responded to in certain ways by police as a result of intersectional identities that characterize those involved. [In the South African context,](#) this can be demonstrated by a section of the Commissioner of Police's 2002-3 report, that mentions that a disproportionate amount of serious "'contact' crimes occur in a few 'township precincts,'" specifically those with much urbanization, poverty, informal settlements and long-term unemployment (SAPS quoted in Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). In this [context/environment](#), where the country is largely still racially segregated, "whites and Indians suffer attacks on their property, blacks and coloureds, attacks on their person." Although these are not exclusive rules, "patterns of crime and victimhood" typically fall along racial and class lines in today's South Africa. [According to Comaroff and Comaroff,](#) another problem is that crimes are underreported in South Africa, a fact that is exacerbated by historical factors that lead citizens to mistrust the law, by the belief that few are convicted, and by unequal capacity of SAPS bureaus ([Comaroff & Comaroff](#) 2006). Adding to the mix is the new focus on victim surveys throughout the world has had the effect, especially on South Africans of instilling a culture of fear and making people more aware of their potential to become victims. Thus, although the surveys may enhance crime statistics in terms of shifting the focus from perpetrators to victims, the effects this has on people may not be worth it. [Comaroff and Comaroff point out that a f](#)ocus on crime statistics with respect to location can do the same [\(2006\)](#). The use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to pinpoint areas where crime is most prevalent can cause people trauma when for example they read in the newspaper: [that](#) "Women living in Johannesburg, Soweto, and Vallrand should exercise extra caution because in these areas between 43 and 216 women are raped for every 100,000." (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006) The authors point out this example of a headline that aims to reduce risk for citizens actually scares them more by linking their potential victim status to their identity – in this case

their race and location. On a similar note, unnecessary fear is often created by people themselves. One epic story can come to “signify collective trauma” and “intensify a sense of citizenship in communities of identity” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). In this way, for example, a crime against one black woman can easily be interpreted to mean that all black women are unsafe. On the other hand, a crime against someone of a white privileged background can make the country unite despite its people’s differences in identities. When Leigh Matthews, a 21-year-old white woman who was the daughter of a Johannesburg businessman disappeared, the whole country rallied around the story. Ironically, it is around these events that the nation unites as the idea of a collective “traumatized citizenry” transcends difference, “if only for an instant” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). Yet this obscures the patterns of crime that are, in actuality, truly influenced by race, class, and gender. ~~The reality is more accurately rooted in a statistic, as demonstrated by a statistic~~ released by the SAPS in 2003-4: the ratio of homicides in Khayelitsha compared to those in Camps Bay was 358:1 that year (Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). ~~Comaroff and Comaroff show that crime statistics can have a great impact on which aspect of a person’s identity make them more susceptible to be affected by crime, or at least what aspects lead them to perceive this is so. It is shown that crime statistics support the idea that the intersectional aspects of a person’s identity greatly dictate the person’s likelihood of being affected by crime.~~

Next, it is important to look at examples of how those who are victims of crime, often as a result of their identities, are treated – or more accurately, mistreated – by the police. Christine Varga’s study on commercial sex workers (CSWs) in Durban painted a horrific picture of the police. Varga mentions “extortion, incarceration, rape and other forms of violence from police” threatens the CSWs in Durban daily (1997). She adds that most of the women in the study had been arrested by or experienced violence from the local police or other law enforcement officers at some point during their time as CSWs (1997). In addition to prostitutes, lesbians are another

group who generally fear the SAPS and are mistreated by them. In an article about corrective rape by Tanya Farber, the survivor interviewed mentions “I did try to report this at the police station... but you know the process of lesbians in police stations. You stand on your own there” (2011). This particular survivor likely feels this way because so many perpetrators of corrective rape, or rape in general, are not prosecuted. This is evidenced by the second part of the series by Farber, in which she interviews a perpetrator of corrective rape. When Farber asked him if he is worried that someone will report him for his crimes, he says: ‘If she wants to go to the police, she can go. They have never stopped me before and I am not scared of them’ (2011). [Farber suggest that a](#) Although in many cases the police know exactly who committed the crime, they do not take any action against the perpetrator [\(2011\)](#). This leaves the victim, who in most cases of rape is a woman and many times a poor, black woman, to deal with the consequences on her own. Her intersectional social categories such as her race and gender, and sometimes her sexuality, make her a more likely victim and less likely to get her justice through police services that are supposedly available to her. In these examples, and the extended example that follows, intersectional identities clearly play a significant role.

A recent example that occurred at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) highlights the concept of identity’s role in the choice of victims and the responses of the local law enforcement quite vividly and points out the [prejudices in another field—the media discrepancies in the way it is reported by the media](#). The Mail & Guardian reported “members of the University of the Western Cape’s rights group Gayla UWC claim security failed to intervene in an assault of a transgender student” (SAPA 2012). The article mentions that a security guard stood by while the student was attacked by a group of three people. It then goes on to quote Glen Matthyse, a Law student at UWC as well as a gay rights activist who said “campus security allowed the assailants into a student residence to hide” after the assault, which he described as “severe.” Matthyse also

added that “A Constable Smith from Bellville South Police Station grinned and chuckled when I tried to explain what happened... When I asked him about this he said it was a form of ‘stress relief’ (SAPA 2012). This article enumerates that something is clearly wrong with the law enforcement at the University and it’s choice to condone the assault, yet this is merely implied. Another online article about the incident described the event in somewhat different terms. Mambaonline.com, which describes itself in its Twitter page as “South Africa’s leading gay lifestyle website,” was much more critical of the event than the *Mail & Guardian*. It mentions three victims rather than one and explicitly states that they were “victimized because of their gender identity” (Mambaonline 2012; Mamba 2012). The headline of this article compared to the first is starkly different as well. “Trans Bashing at Western Cape Varsity” it screams (Mamba 2012). The details of the first article were elaborated on in the second, and the scene was described to be much more bloody. The second article describes the harassment of Glen Matthyse and two friends. They were allegedly denied the use of the women’s toilets and say they were “groped and verbally abused by other students. ‘We were being called ‘moffies,’ ‘faggots,’ and izitabane,’ said Matthyse” (Mamba 2012). After this one of Matthyse’s friends was grabbed and assaulted. This assault is what the first article discusses, having left out the other parts included by Mambaonline.com. It is shown that the *Mail & Guardian*, a more widely read public newspaper, chose to report only parts of the story, perhaps to appeal to the greater community, which likely reacts to assault more violently than it would to explicit gender based violence. Mambaonline.com, on the other hand, framed the article completely differently, with a focus on the LGBT community and how its members face harassment and assault as a result of their identification with a certain sexuality or gender, something with which its readers likely identify. This example of one story being told in two very different ways demonstrates the way incidents are [reported by different media sources that value different things and suggest different](#)

~~things about the police force and its treatment of people. twisted and obscured, which can lead to them being downplayed, facilitating a multilayered system of mishandling—first on the part of the security guard involved in the incident and next on the part of the news source that reports it. Thus, situations such as this shed light on the degree to which, the prejudices held by many law enforcement officers are shared by the public and dictate which issues have value and how they are dealt with and reported. This, in turn leads some people, like those responsible for the Mambaonline.com article, backs up to assert~~ the claim that police officers, and in some ways, South African society at large, is failing to protect its citizens who fall victim to crime.

With this in mind, a glimpse into the world of the SAPS is useful in deconstructing the corruption and mistreatment on which many argue it is built. One issue author Antony Altbeker raises in his study of the SAPS is the moral dilemma of being a police officer when it comes to reporting your fellow officer. Either the officer reports his colleague and risks being cast out or is forced to look himself in the mirror each day and know he has failed in his duties. This leads even the most honest cop to cover for his fellow officer (2005, p. 228). Some officers even justify the criminal behavior of other policemen and –women and cite the “deficiency of their salaries” as the cause for resorting to crime (2005, p. 232). In addition, the overwhelming amount of crime in South Africa leads many officers to draw the conclusion that they might as well benefit from a situation if they know they can not fix it (2005, p. 240). The fact that the “formative years” of many current policemen and –women’s careers were during apartheid can not be discounted either. Although many of the officers Altbeker interviewed did not admit it, the “invisible scars” remain and the effects of those incredibly influential years continue to infiltrate the departments (2005, p. 242). Yet, despite all the factors that might help explain the behavior of the police in today’s South Africa, many officers do still condemn internal corruption. One mentioned ‘a [police station] is a funny place to work and a lot of things go wrong. But you can’t let people use

that as an excuse. There is no excuse for corruption.' He added that when one policeman proves to be corrupt "everyone in the community looks at that man and says, 'You see. The police are corrupt.' It is very bad for us when that happens" (Mdakane quoted in Altbeker 2005, p.246). This same officer displays articles of corruption in the force alongside triumphs of the department on the walls of the station, and in doing so takes a stance against the practice. Unfortunately, however, much corruption still exists within the SAPS and many of the above factors contribute to the police's continued mistreatment of South Africans, especially those who fall victim to their vulnerable identities.

Ultimately, the [current debates available in literature in the global, national and local arenas point to the fact that the](#) SAPS is failing South Africans who fall victims to crimes perpetrated against them as a result of the intersectional identity they represent. Unfortunately, the SAPS even reinforces these vulnerabilities by discriminating against victims in many cases. The use of crime statistics, whatever their original intention, has failed to calm a public that is scared both by itself and sometimes by its law enforcement structures. The corruption of the police force is deeply rooted and partially upheld by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid from which it spawned. The factors that inhibited freedoms during apartheid, such as race, class, and gender, still have a huge impact on people and perpetuate difficulties in accessing justice. This literature led me to believe that women would feel particularly mistreated by the police as a result of the way that many are victimized both physically and psychologically by crime statistics and reports. It also led to an assumption that white, upper class women would have a better perception of the police than black, working class women, given the history and the current trends of violence and crime. The study that resulted was based on these two assumptions after reviewing the literature.

## **Methodology**

The methods I chose to use in this study were designed to investigate the expectations outlined above. To get an accurate picture of the women's perceptions of the police, I conducted one focus group in each area. I chose to do focus groups to allow the women participating to bounce ideas off one another and therefore, generate a productive and insightful conversation.

I first contacted both my host mother from Stellenbosch and my host mother and host sister from Langa and asked them to speak to some of their friends, family members, or neighbors who would be interested in participating in a focus group. Each host mother arranged a date and time with the other women they found to participate and then I arranged the focus groups around these dates. I conducted the first focus group in Stellenbosch in the home of my Stellenbosch host family on Friday, November 16, 2012. Five women aged 54-69 participated. I conducted the second focus group in Langa in the home of my Langa host family on Sunday, November 18, 2012. Seven women aged 18-57 participated. The positive side of asking my host families to select the women for the focus groups was that the participants knew each other and thus felt sufficiently comfortable sharing their thoughts on the issues I raised. The negative side was that, particularly in Stellenbosch, the only women my host mother was able to get commitments from for the specific date of the focus group were all in the same age range. It turned out that there was an event in Stellenbosch that day that prevented the other women she invited from being able to participate. Even so, the focus group produced a lot of valuable information.

The technique I used in the focus groups was to pose a question to the group and guide the conversation, letting the women voice their opinions and prompt each other to divulge their stories. This method worked well and the major strength was that I got a lot of great information from a bunch of subjects. The downside was that I found it difficult to attribute all of the

information to a specific person while I was transcribing because there were so many voices and I wasn't familiar enough with all of them to pick them apart. Yet, even though I had some difficulty distinguishing the voices, the women still answered the questions and made valid contributions to the study.

With respect to keeping the study within the appropriate ethical limits, I made every effort to pose the questions in an open-ended and hypothetical way. I did not explicitly pry into the women's personal experiences but allowed them the space to share their stories where they felt comfortable. Therefore, the women who chose to tell stories did so because they chose to do so, rather than because I pressured them. Yet, it is important for me to recognize my relative position of power in the situation and how that may have affected the answers the women gave. In Langa, the fact that I am white may have played a role in how the black women chose to respond to me. In both locations, the fact that I do not speak the local language, be it Xhosa or Afrikaans, affected the way I was able to understand and interpret some of the comments made by the women. Overall, the fact that I conducted this research with women of cultures and backgrounds that were different from my own may have affected the way I presented myself as a researcher or interviewer and may have an impact on the way I have written up my findings.

Participant Demographics

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>RACE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>YEARS IN LOCATION</b>
A.M.	20	Black	Langa	7
F.N.	20	Black	Langa	20
K.D.	19	Black	Langa	15
N.M.	18	Black	Langa	18
N.S.	57	Black	Langa	25
T.M.	30	Black	Langa	25
T.P.	23	Black	Langa	23
A.C.	66	White	Stellenbosch	33
J.C.	58	White	Stellenbosch	41
M.K.	58	White	Stellenbosch	8
R.M.	69	White	Stellenbosch	24
Y.C.	54	White	Stellenbosch	33

NOTE: Gender is not included in this table because all the participants were women. The chart is ordered alphabetically by location so as to visually show the correlation between race and location. Participants' initials were used rather than their full names in order to protect their identities.

## **Glossary**

**ANC:** African National Congress

**BEE:** Black Economic Empowerment; a program launched by the South African government that aims to reverse inequitable conditions imposed by Apartheid by providing opportunities previously withheld from certain groups through employment preference policies, among other things

**Policemen:** In this particular study, the word 'policemen' is used to indicate both policemen and policewomen. It is important to note however, that the women in the focus groups generally referred to the police as being male. There were a few mentions of female police officers but as a whole, the SAPS is in fact, male dominated.

**SAP:** South African Police; the SAP was the national police force in South Africa from 1913 to 1994 and enforced Apartheid legislation through brutal methods

**SAPS:** South African Police Service; the SAPS was the product of the reformation of the SAP and took over in 1994 after the end of Apartheid. It is now the official national police force of South Africa

## **Analysis**

The original intention of the research was to discover how race, class, gender, and geographic location affect women's perceptions of police services. The women in the focus groups had some surprising responses to the questions and revealed many unexpected connections. Themes such as feelings of safety, class and its relation to mechanisms of protection, police ineffectiveness, and race all came up in the discussions, again and again. Overall, it can be argued that women in Cape Town do not feel that the police are doing their jobs effectively or are able to keep the women safe.

### **Perceptions of Safety**

In determining women's perceptions of the police services in their area, it is critical to first understand how they feel about their personal safety. A woman's perception of how safe she is will, in turn, affect how much she feels she needs to access the police and thus will reveal how effective the police are at dealing with her issue and why this is the case. A woman's personal feeling of safety is related not only to her gender, but also to her race, class, and the geographic location in which she lives.

#### **Perceptions of safety in the area of residence**

One of the questions that was asked of for this study was whether or not the women felt safe in their areas of residence. Many of the women in the Langa focus group responded with "no," "not really," "not all the time," and "sometimes." T.M. mentioned that she feels safe in Langa, "safer than [in] other townships," yet others disagreed that Langa is safer (T.M. 18/11/2012). One woman mentioned that it depends where you are in Langa, but A.M. stated, "No, I think it doesn't depend where you are. Langa, in general, it's just not safe" (A.M. 18/11/2012). The women in Langa also agreed that it is not safe to go out after dark. In frustration, A.M. added:

"you know the sad thing is that you can't even be safe in your own area, I mean I was robbed right here, right here, you know. You're supposed to feel safe when

you're coming into your own street, then you're robbed right at this corner. Then where are you – where else can you feel safe? (A.M. 18/11/2012)”

The women in Stellenbosch responded somewhat differently. They noted generally that they feel safe, but only with added security measures. J.C. explicitly said she “wouldn't feel safe without my security gate, my alarm system, my burglar bars, my ADT support, my neighborhood watch, and” – her voice raises an octave and she adds airily – “so far, far away, the police” (J.C. 16/11/2012). Her mentioning of the police seems almost as if an afterthought and foreshadows a general consensus of the women that they do not count on the police to keep them safe. In fact, Y.C. adds, “I do think we all tend to think our safety's our own problem, and I think we're not thinking it's ever going back to the good old days,” suggesting that before the liberation, the police were able to make people feel safe (Y.C. 16/11/2012). It can be concluded from this statement that the white women in focus group generally felt safer before the liberation when the police were white. While this is likely true, the black women in Langa would likely feel the opposite. For them, the white police force that was in place during apartheid was an instrument of terror, meant to suppress and control them.

### Conclusion

Thus, perceptions of safety differ among the women, depending heavily on the extra mechanisms of protection to which the women have access. Their ability to access these mechanisms is tied directly to their ability to afford them, which reveals that class is a major factor in how safe women feel. Without the extra security measures that women in Stellenbosch, as members of the upper class, are able to afford, they would feel equally unsafe living in Stellenbosch as women in Langa, who are less likely to be able to afford such measures, feel living in Langa.

### **Class: Mechanisms of Protection**

#### Alternative safety measures other than the police

As demonstrated, class is a veritable marker of how safe women are likely to feel about living in their local areas. Mark Shaw confirms that, according to a national survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, the wealthiest citizens felt the least insecure of those surveyed, likely as a result of their ability to protect themselves with more security measures than the general population (2002, p. 91). This idea was supported by all five women in Stellenbosch, who can be considered middle or upper class, and who use some combination of alternative safety measures, other than the police, to keep themselves and their families safe. As mentioned by J.C., above, these measures can include: ADT support, neighborhood watch support, security gates, alarm systems, and burglar bars, to name a few (J.C. 16/11/2012). The ability to access these added security mechanisms directly correlates to the middle and upper class status of the women in Stellenbosch. In Langa, none of these added security measures were mentioned throughout the course of the focus group. The following responses to one of the interview questions highlights this distinction quite starkly. Both groups of women were asked what they would do in a hypothetical situation in which they were assaulted. In Stellenbosch, the immediate response was to “call ADT first,” which was echoed by several women (J.C. 16/11/2012). M.K. acknowledged that she calls both ADT and the police (M.K. 16/11/2012). In Langa, however, N.M. stated that she would “consult the neighbors first and then maybe the police,” as the police will take a significantly long time to arrive on the scene (N.M. 18/11/2012). There was no mention of ADT in Langa, no mention of any other mechanism but the police and the community. Although neighbors may be valuable assets in a time of need, the lack of additional professional security measures revealed a class difference among the women in Stellenbosch and Langa. In fact, the lack of extra security measures in Langa compared to the

prevalence of such measures in Stellenbosch demonstrates how the increase in private security since the end of apartheid has actually served to help maintain the separation between different areas, whose populations belong to different races and classes. Shaw adds that this focus on private security in many communities “could reinforce rather than break down the divisions of apartheid cities and towns” (2002, p. 104).

One comment made in Stellenbosch demonstrates that the police actually take advantage of the fact that people of the upper class have other safety measures in place. J.C. describes that “if you have a break in, the first thing [the police] ask me is ‘Ma’am I’m sure you have insurance? Just claim the things’” (J.C. 16/11/2012). Rather than addressing the crime themselves, the police also fall back on alternative measures when the victim is of the upper class.

### Conclusion

As demonstrated, class, with respect to its economic implications, is exercised as a means of acquiring different forms of protection. The women who can afford these alternative protective measures recognize their privilege in this capacity and exercise it accordingly to increase the security of their families. Attaining these added forms of security are necessary in the first place, however, because the police are incredibly ineffective.

### **Police Effectiveness**

#### General perceptions of effectiveness

There was a clear consensus among all twelve women who participated in the study that the police are more or less completely ineffective. When asked what the police were like in the area, several women in the focus group in Langa shouted “useless!” “They are so pathetic,” added another (K.D. 18/11/12). F.N. added, “you know you can’t depend on the police to help you out or help you to resolve the problem” so “that’s why people take the law into their own hands” (F.N.

18/11/2012). The women in Stellenbosch also felt that the police were ineffective. M.K. said, “I don’t believe any woman in South Africa expects the police to protect her,” further reinforcing the fact that the police do not make the women in Cape Town feel safe (M.K. 16/11/2012). Both focus groups also mentioned the overall laziness that permeates the police departments in South Africa. In Stellenbosch, J.C. told stories of policemen sleeping on the job, to which the other women affirmed: “yes” (J.C. 16/11/2012). In Langa, stories of policemen sleeping in patrol cars were also reiterated by many. Overall, Shaw provides that according to public surveys, “the police were viewed across racial lines as performing poorly in their fight against crime” (2002, p. 34).

#### Police presence

Both focus groups were asked whether or not the police are present in their areas. In Stellenbosch, M.K. immediately exclaimed “No!” and many other negative responses followed (M.K. 16/11/2012). Y.C. mentioned that the police “do have a huge presence” in Cloetesville, the neighboring coloured area and “drive up and down there” when there are shootings or other disturbances (Y.C. 16/11/2012). But when asked explicitly whether or not the police had a presence in Stellenbosch, the women responded that they did not. Rather the women cite ADT and the local neighborhood watch as being much more present in their neighborhoods, which again, relates back to their class and thus, their ability to afford those measures in the first place. The women in Langa painted a different picture. They agreed amongst themselves that the police are present in the township and are seen driving around, “but not at the right time” (K.D. 18/11/2012). T.M. clarifies: “they’re checking out ladies [as they drive by], it’s not patrolling” (T.M. 18/11/2012). Another woman verifies: “you know you’re walking past and a policeman’s calling you to want to take your [phone] number” (A.M. 18/11/2012). Thus, although the police

are more present in Langa than in Stellenbosch, their motivation for patrolling does not relate to preventing crime. In addition, the lack of visibility of the police, or at least in an appropriate context relates directly to a negative perception of the police. Shaw points out that whether or not the presence of the police actually deters crime, “it may have a critically important impact on public perceptions of the police in general (2002, p. 90).

### Inadequate training of police

Across the board, the women in both areas all agreed that the police are inadequately trained to do their job. In Stellenbosch, R.M. provided, “my *perception* of the police is that they are not adequately...” – she pauses while searching for the right word – “...prepared or trained to handle the real serious [issues]” (R.M. 16/11/2012). She later credits the inadequacy of the staff to the fact that “many of the more experienced staff was replaced by inexperienced staff” (R.M. 16/11/2012). The experienced staff she likely refers to is the former white police force that was in place before the liberation. This comment draws an important distinction between how the women in Stellenbosch perceive the capabilities of the former white police force (the SAP) and the mostly black and coloured police force (the SAPS) that has replaced it. Here ideas about race and the superior capabilities of the white race can be detected. According to J.C., this new police force needs a security company to protect itself, suggesting a complete failure to complete its intended purpose of protecting the public (J.C. 16/11/2012). In Langa, a belief that the police are not adequately trained was also prevalent. A.M. went so far as to say that “any ordinary person...[can] become a [policeman] (A.M. 18/11/2012). N.S. adds, “I don’t even think a Grade 12 education matters because if you go there they can not even take your statement” (N.S. 18/11/2012). T.M. also notes that “most people that go into the police force are people that came from township schools and seriously the education here is so poor,” which would explain the

pervasiveness of illiteracy among police officers (T.M. 18/11/2012). As a result of the poorly educated and trained police force, both groups of women relayed that the police have trouble taking statements. All of the women in Langa agreed that if you go to the police station, you would have to write you own affidavit. T.M. adds, “yeah cause I always get confused because ok, must I write it as “I” or write it in the third person” to which everyone agrees “oh yes” (T.M. 18/11/2012). The women cite concern over the irony of this, because an affidavit requires a witness and it is impossible to witness yourself. This sentiment was nearly identical among the women in Stellenbosch. “Taking down statements... takes forever,” said J.C., adding that policeman “can’t spell. They can’t write. Every third word they ask can you spell it” (J.C. 16/11/2012). The women in Stellenbosch were then asked if they thought the difficulty the policemen were having related to language or accents, to which they responded that the problem lies not with language but with literacy, or the lack thereof. The women said that many times they wrote out their own statements and made sketches of the incidents that had happened to them before going to the police station to report the crime, yet they still encountered difficulties. Y.C. attributed the lack of literacy of the police force to “how little they are paid because in a sense you only draw those people who are desperate for jobs. So if they pay policemen more I’m sure they would find a better...” – “...the pond from which they’re fishing will be bigger,” finishes M.K. (Y.C. 16/11/2012; M.K. 16/11/2012).

#### Lack of trust in police

It follows, according to J.C., that policemen would not be so “ready for bribery if they were paid better” (J.C. 16/11/2012). As it turns out, one of the most significant reasons the women in the focus groups did not trust the police was their belief that many policemen are corrupt. Both groups of women believe the police are somehow aware of or involved in the activities of the

gangsters and drug lords. In Stellenbosch, R.M. mentioned, “unfortunately there are quite so many policemen that have been partaking in crime... I think they do take bribes. [With respect to] drugs, they get a cut of the deal” (R.M. 16/11/2012). In Langa, the women had much to say on this topic as well. A.M. began,

“the black... policemen in Langa... know who the gangsters are...” – murmurs of agreement echo around the room – “...they know who the gangsters are. I don’t think they don’t know who the gangsters are. Deep inside, I know they know who it is” (A.M. 18/11/2012).

“And they bribe each other...” added F.N., “...they are criminals,” to which the other women agree (F.N. 18/11/2012). K.D. piped in: “when [the police] get drugs and everything... they sell them again... I mean they confiscate people’s alcohol [and] they drink it ” (K.D. 18/11/2012). Finally T.M. mentioned, “they call each other and they tell [the drug dealers], they say, “We’re coming today” so that person picks up their whole stuff and then by the time the police come everything is cleared” (T.M. 18/11/2012).

In this vein, the women all agreed that their lack of trust in the police also stems from the fact that the police are extremely hypocritical in their actions. In Stellenbosch, J.C. told a story of a couple of coloured students at her campus who said to her, ‘Man, we don’t trust the police. They drink with us over the weekends’ (J.C. 16/11/2012). In Langa, the same perception was described. A.M. stated,

“one problem with the police here is that when [the police are] not on duty, [they] don’t take responsibility that [they’re supposed to]. Like if you’re not wearing your uniform, and you’re all of a sudden not a policeman any more, then you yourself start doing things that when you’re wearing your uniform you tell other people not to do... So what happens is that you have these gangsters here who know you without your uniform and now all the sudden you’ve got your uniform on and you think you’re gonna tell these children, the ones that you usually talk to and are cool with when you’re not wearing your uniform... not to do a certain thing. There’s no way they’re gonna take you seriously” (A.M. 18/11/2012)

T.M. offers a similar sentiment about Langa's policemen:

“the cops here, they are not respected because people sit with them in the taverns and they're drunk and then they're wearing the uniform and they gonna [get] into the police van after and they do stuff that criminals do. Then they would wear their uniform the next day and be like, ‘Today you need to respect me.’ So nobody respects them because they know that, ok, you were with us yesterday” (T.M. 18/11/2012).

As she finishes the last sentence, exclamations of “exactly!” are heard and several finish her sentence for her in unison. This scenario is one with which the women in Langa, and to a lesser degree in Stellenbosch, are all too familiar. Shaw agrees that the public perceives “that the police themselves do not respect the law and are themselves often involved in criminal activity (2002, p. 89).

A third reason the women in Langa mentioned for not trusting the police – not feeling comfortable – was not brought up by the women in Stellenbosch. The women in Langa expressed that “you don't feel comfortable going to [the police]” to report what has happened to you (A.M. 18/11/2012). The reasons behind this are threefold. First, the police often give you “these blank expressions” when you come to them with an issue, as if they don't understand or care about what you are telling them (A.M. 18/11/2012). Another woman added, secondly, that your story “is like gossip to them... like all the police are listening” when you come to the counter at the station to report a crime (K.D. 18/11/2012). N.S. finished that she once witnessed a policeman on duty in the station who was drunk and thus could not adequately help any of the complainants that came to report crimes (N.S. 18/11/2012).

The police are not trusted by the women in Langa and Stellenbosch, because of their perceptions that they are corrupt, hypocritical, and tend to make the women who need their help feel uncomfortable. Shaw provides an explanation that is closely aligned with the perceptions of the women. He notes, “high levels of public pressure and a perception within the police that they had little political support led to a decline in police morale. This was reflected in increases in

police corruption, police involvement in crime and an overall weakening of discipline” (Shaw 2002, p. 37). Even if they do not trust the police, however, the women still sometimes call them in times of need. When they do call, there are various levels of responsiveness displayed by the police.

### Responsiveness

When asked if they felt the police were responsive to their needs, the women had a variety of different answers. M.K., from Stellenbosch reported that she has “always found the police response very quick (M.K. 16/11/2012). When the women in that focus group were asked if the response was always quick, several mentioned that it depended on the crime. In J.C.’s opinion, the police generally respond quickly if the report is of an attack, but “when it’s a break-in, they’ll maybe come tomorrow” (J.C. 16/11/2012). Women in Langa also agreed that the police response is often dependent on the type of crime being reported and noted a general feeling of neglect of their problems by police. The police have a tendency to weigh matters and the women have often been told that the police have other things to attend to before they can help the women. When the women in Langa were asked what is considered an urgent matter for the police to attend to, K.D. responded, “drug busts” (K.D. 18/11/2012). The idea that certain cases are valued more highly by the police is explained by Smythe. She mentions that “cases that are filtered out of the system are not those that are intrinsically weak, but rather those that offend the normative assumptions of decision-makers” (Kerstetter quoted in Smythe 2010). This suggests that many crimes committed against women are not seen to have value by many policemen, who are uncomfortable navigating the new legislation that legitimizes sexual offenses and other crimes women typically face. Prior to the new legislation, many physical or emotional abuses directed

toward women were overlooked by police, and that tendency certainly remains despite progressive legislation that directs otherwise.

Thus, some women feel that even when given the opportunity to plead their case, they are not taken seriously or treated with respect by the policemen. Smythe & Waterhouse cite an article by Jan Jordan that confirms, at least in the case of rape, “most police officers are perceived by complainants as unable to provide the respect, care, support and ongoing information that victims need” (2008). In Langa, the women felt that the officers are only pretending to care. Instead of giving your case the attention it deserves, the younger women in Langa agreed “you never get the proper attention for what you came there for. It’s always inappropriate” (T.M. 18/11/2012). The inappropriate attention to which the young women in Langa refer takes the form of sexual advances. T.M. states that it “doesn’t matter how I’ve dressed. Because I tried going [to the station] in a skirt, in a jean, whatever, it’s the same thing,” the police continue to hit on her (T.M. 18/11/2012). N.S., 57, mentioned this was not the case in her experience, but “maybe because of my age I don’t get that,” at which the other women laugh and joke with one another (N.S. 18/11/2012).

Despite the various levels of responsiveness of the police that were described by the women in both areas, the actual results the police produce in their efforts to solve the crimes are virtually non-existent in all the women’s experiences.

#### Follow up/ Results of investigations

Another problem is the police’s inability to actually solve the cases brought to their attention. The women in both Langa and Stellenbosch unanimously agreed upon that this was the case. Throughout both interviews, there was only one story of the police successfully solving a case, and even so, it took them twenty-one years. M.K. described the story of her inheritance, a

gun, being stolen from her many many years ago. Just this year, “they found my gun,” she provided nearly hysterical with laughter (M.K. 18/11/2012). The other women, who were familiar with this story also laughed heartily at the one success of the police they had heard of, which seemed to them also a complete joke. Many stories were told in Stellenbosch of times the police arrived quickly on the scene and appeared to be taking the case seriously, yet there were never any results. In Langa, A.M. described a similar story. She went to the police station to report that her phone had been stolen and “they acted almost as though, you know what, they’re gonna catch this person” to which the other women laugh (A.M. 18/11/2012). “They said, ‘You know what, tomorrow we’re coming. We’re going to follow up after school. After school we’re gonna go to that guy’s house [that stole the phone]’” (A.M. 18/11/2012). The police did not come the next day and the day after that they came and A.M. was not at home. The next day she went to the police station to which the police responded they’d come the next day to take care of it. A.M. waited at home all the next night to make sure she would not miss them, but “they *never* came... til today... [the policewoman] never pitched” (A.M. 18/11/2012). In fact, when A.M. went to the police station for another reason after this incident, she saw the policewoman who had said that she would deal with the cell phone theft and the policewoman “crouched” when she saw A.M. to avoid being seen. A.M. says the case of her cell phone is “still floating in the air” and has yet to be dealt with (A.M. 18/11/2012).

Mark Shaw echoes this idea, as he believes South Africans are exceptionally unhappy about the police’s lack of follow-up on cases once they are reported. This, in turn, fosters the “perception that the police do not investigate many cases, or do not investigate them well, and that reporting to the police is likely to be a waste of time,” which was confirmed in the focus groups of women in Stellenbosch and Langa (Shaw 2002, p. 89). Dee Smythe’s study of South Africa’s attempts to deal with sexual violence uncovered the same inadequacy of the police to

achieve results, particularly in the form of convictions in sexual offenses cases (2010). In the study, she cites a 2000 report from the SAPS Crime Information Analysis Center that showed the Western Cape was the worst performing province in the country in terms of producing guilty verdicts in rape cases (Smythe 2010). The report found that in the Western Cape, “347 guilty verdicts were returned out of 4,064 reported cases [of rape]. Of the cases reported, 49% were disposed of by the police. Of the remaining cases referred for prosecution 32% were withdrawn in court” (Smythe 2010). This low propensity for success through the justice system clearly demonstrates why women are skeptical of the police. Y.C. sums its up nicely: “we don’t really expect that [the police] are going to do anything. And... we don’t expect that they would catch the criminal” (Y.C. 18/11/2012).

### Conclusion

Overall, the women in the focus groups expressed a lack of confidence in the police and believed, moreover, that the police were incapable of solving crimes. The responsiveness and effectiveness of the police is heavily related to race as well. The women in Langa told me, for example, that if I walked into the station at the same time as one of them I, as a white woman would be dealt with immediately. Although belonging to a certain race does not guarantee your case will be solved, it does relate closely to the way you are treated or perceive you are treated by the police.

### **Race: It’s effects and it’s relationship to gender**

#### Historical ties

The most common thread that wove throughout both focus groups was the topic of race and how the women perceived it was related to the actions of the police in general and their own

treatment by the police more specifically. As with the other themes that arose during the focus groups, the issue of race as it relates to policing has explicit ties to the past. The historical effects of not only Apartheid, but also the many, many years of racial separation and mistreatment that precluded it, can be observed quite clearly in the way policing is handled today, or at least the way women perceive it to be. Shaw supports this claim, adding “white South Africans often hold some residual respect for the police, which often remain better resourced in the suburbs.” Yet, whites are extremely critical of the government’s method of dealing with crime and are more inclined to believe “government interventions have been damaging to the police” (Shaw 2002, p. 89). Black South Africans, on the other hand, are more satisfied with government’s “commitment and response to crime but much more critical of policing which remains under-resourced in areas where they live” (Shaw 2002, p. 89). In addition, the fact that during the struggle, the police “didn’t give a damn about you” as a black person certainly has residual effects on the mindset of the people in relation to the police and the way police act now (N.S. 18/11/2012). In Stellenbosch, M.K. added her perception that in the past, “I don’t think the Black people saw the police as anything but a tool of the oppressor,” to which another woman verified, “oh yes” (M.K. 16/11/2012). The women’s perceptions of the police and the trust the place in the police certainly have ties to the race of the women as it relates to a range of historical factors.

#### Race of the policeman: Does it matter?

To begin, it must be noted that the majority of the policemen in present day South Africa are black or coloured. For many years before and during the struggle, police were primarily white. The past and present races of policemen has a tangible effect on who perceives that the race of the policeman matters. The race of the victim of the crime can also be incredibly relevant. The women in Stellenbosch had very different perceptions of this topic than the women in Langa.

The women in Stellenbosch tended to think that they were treated the same by the police, regardless of the race of the policeman. In the case of the white women, then, the race of the victim of the crime trumps the race of the officer attending to the crime. M.K. has a

“general perception that irrespective of the race of the policeman, I as a white woman, would be treated with greater respect. No black policeman has ever treated me disrespectfully. No white policeman has ever treated me [disrespectfully]. But, I’ve seen them treat their own people [with disrespect]. So... I think, white people are afforded more respect” (M.K. 16/11/2012).

In Langa, conversely, the race of the police officer tends to be as influential as the race of the victim of the crime. “I think black police treat black people like shit,” provided one woman in Langa (F.N. 18/11/2012). K.D. described the treatment of black people by black policemen as “very bad, VERY bad, very, very bad,” whereas she believed a black policeman would never treat a white person that way. She explained, “I think black police... still feel infuriated by white males and so they take advantage of black men and beat them around like it’s nothing” (K.D. 18/11/2012). F.N. mentioned, “now that it’s post-Apartheid, you don’t expect... black people to be doing this... It’s supposed to be unified (F.N. 18/11/2012). Shaw provides one possible explanation for this. He states, “simply replacing white with black faces at the management level would not necessarily solve the problem – the nature of policing in the country was embedded in a deeply racist culture (2002, p. 23). He adds that one ANC activist asserts: “there is a racist police culture that even black policemen take on” (Shearing quoted in Shaw 2002, p. 23).

Interestingly, the women in Langa also mentioned that when a white policeman is patrolling the area, “the children actually start jumping and running away” and the gangsters start to scatter because they “actually take the [white policeman] seriously” (A.M. 18/11/2012). Thus, in this case, the race of the policeman affords him a greater respect from people as an enforcer of the law. But that does not mean that white policemen do not also treat people differently according to their race. In Langa, F.N. described how her boyfriend and his friends,

who were all black, were stopped and searched by a couple of white policemen. She expressed doubt that the same thing would have happened if the boys were white (F.N. 18/11/2012).

The women in Stellenbosch also pointed out that since the police force has become largely black and coloured in the past eighteen years, the pride and value in being a policeman has decreased. Y.C. described, “the status of the police... is also really much lower now, unfortunately. So when I was a child, actually it was a good job. It was a secure job, you did it proudly, you were loyal to your mates and so forth (Y.C. 16/11/2012). “But those were only the whites... because it was a whites only thing,” provided J.C. to the agreement of the other ladies (J.C. 16/11/2012). One woman from Langa also believes that “the problem... with... black cops [is] they take the power to their heads” rather than committing themselves to do an honorable job (K.D. 18/11/2012).

In another vein, the race of policemen has a lot to do with the adoption of the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment Program). This program, at its very core, seeks to promote employment of those previously left out by the system – black, and sometimes coloured people – and allow them to improve their economic and thus, economic class standing. As noble as the intentions of BEE are, however, its equity targets focus more on the race of the applicant than on the applicant’s qualification. Here, race and class collide with an explanation for the level of preparedness and quality of training of the police force. The women in Stellenbosch were quite vocal on this issue. They argued that BEE equity targets ensure that “you cannot employ the best person for the job” (J.C. 18/11/2012).

#### Gender and it’s racialized qualities

How women perceive the police services in their area relates not only to the fact that they are white or black, but also to the fact that they are women. Overall, the white women in Stellenbosch felt that they were treated with respect by the policemen. The black women in

Langa felt that they were not treated appropriately by the police, which although they did not explicitly mention this, demonstrates a tendency of the police to subjugate them for being women. Whether it be asking for the women's phone numbers as they "patrolled," propositioning the young women who came to the police station, or many other scenarios, the police treated the women in Langa in a particular way as a result of their gender.

Yet, the women in both locations all agreed that they, as women, are better received by the police than are the men in their area. In Stellenbosch, M.K. provided, "I think... the police would tend to... would react more quickly to a woman asking for help," to which several other women in the focus group agreed (M.K. 16/11/2012). In Langa, F.N. believed that "sometimes men might get treated more harshly" by the police than women (F.N. 18/11/2012). At the mention of this, N.M. added, "yeah because they get beaten up sometimes" (N.M. 18/11/2012). F.N. added that her boyfriend, who is black, was once searched by the police, to which K.D. responds, "they don't search women... they search the guys" (F.N. 18/11/2012; K.D. 18/11/2012). While these things may be valid, there is certainly much to be said for the mistreatment of women by the police. Since women believe the police to be so ineffective and since there are so many crimes being perpetrated against them as women, there is clearly a disconnect of effective policing occurring somewhere. Statistics show that

"violence has become a part of the daily lives of women, with most of it happening with impunity. Sexism and male domination are reflected in the rapes, femicides, forms of gender based and sexual violence and misogyny that have today reached crisis proportions. One in every three women in South Africa is in an abusive relationship. A woman is killed by her partner every six days and there is a rape every 35 seconds" (Feminist Alternatives 2011).

With this in mind, and a clear proclamation from all the women interviewed that the police are ineffective, there is evidence to support the incompleteness in the thinking that women have it better than men when it come to treatment by the police. One explanation for the gaps between

the women's perceptions and the reality of the statistics provided above, is that there remains a strong legacy of patriarchal structures embedded within the mindset of the women, whether they are aware of this or not. Smythe & Waterhouse also agree that "a continued legacy of patriarchy" impacts policing, especially in cases of sexual offenses (2008, p. 199). Sylvia Walby argues that rather than declining in recent years, patriarchy has "merely changed forms" (1990, p. 19). Feminist Alternatives agrees: "in South Africa today new forms of patriarchy masked as conservative traditionalism and militarism are on the increase" (2011). With this in mind, it becomes clear that women themselves, or at least those who were interviewed, are keeping patriarchy alive in their ingrained beliefs that women are to be protected, and thus are likely to assert better treatment by police as they perceive the police value the protection of women.

One comment in Langa highlights the idea that women keep certain patriarchal constructs alive and thus do not perceive their subjugation as a result of those constructs. President Jacob Zuma's rape trial, in which Zuma was accused of raping the daughter of a family friend and then was found not guilty, was briefly discussed among the women of the focus group. K.D. stated the girl that Zuma allegedly raped "knew what she was doing... what he did was not right but she knew what she was doing and she just took advantage of that... ok he's famous, you'd get money from exposing the case" (K.D. 18/11/2012). This argument places most of the blame on the woman and lessens the crime of rape. Although Zuma was found not guilty, much of the testimony is controversial and sheds light on the patriarchal structures that influence it. Zuma said the woman who accused him of raping her "had signaled a desire to have sex with him by wearing a knee-length skirt to his house and sitting with legs crossed, revealing her thigh" (A Highly Charged Rape Trial Tests South Africa's Ideals 2006). Zuma indicated that he was obligated to have sex with the woman because "in the Zulu culture, you cannot just leave a woman if she is ready," making a plea for his right to practice the patriarchal cultural traditions

of his people (A Highly Charged Rape Trial Tests South Africa's Ideals 2006). Following this, Zuma supporters, many of them women, wore t-shirts that read "100% Zuluboy" (A Highly Charged Rape Trial Tests South Africa's Ideals 2006). This scenario speaks to the ideal that many people in South Africa, and many women in particular, have internalized patterns of patriarchy and are reinforcing them, most likely without even realizing it. This is one possible explanation for why the women interviewed in Langa and Stellenbosch did not feel that they were treated poorly by the police explicitly as a result of their gender.

When the women were asked about whether the police treat men and women the same, the women chose to focus the discussion around men. This discussion again revealed links to race, as the women in Langa cited several examples of black men being searched or attacked by police, whereas they believed white men would not be treated in this way. Although the women in Stellenbosch did not explicitly confirm this in their focus group, there was no mention of any police misconduct directed at the males in their lives. However, both focus groups agreed that men are less likely to go to the police than women, mostly because, in the women's perception, the men do not believe the police will help them and they prefer to take matters into their own hands.

### Conclusion

Race is shown to play a clear role in how women perceive the police and the way they are treated by the police. White women generally feel their race affords them a certain respect, regardless of the policeman's race, where in Langa this was not the case. The women also made interesting comments about gender that shed light on some of the underlying patriarchal factors that still affect the way people think.

## Conclusion

This research was originally inspired by a lecture given by Lwando Scott during our lecture series. During the lecture, Scott mentioned that in South Africa, many women who are raped do not feel comfortable going to the local police to report the crime. In fact, Scott argued that the police often contribute to the trauma of the victim rather than assuaging it. He mentioned that sometimes the police point to what the woman is wearing, for example a skirt, implying that she was asking to be raped. This idea infuriated me and led me to want to study how women access the justice system and how they perceive they are received by the police when they do. The research question that I developed was: “how do women in Cape Town perceive the police services in their area with respect to race, class, gender, and geographic location?”

After reviewing the literature around policing in South Africa and the prevalence of violence and crime, especially against women, I came up with several assumptions for my research. I expected that the women in my focus groups would perceive their treatment by the police to be negatively affected by their gender. I also assumed that the police services in the wealthier white areas of the Cape would be more adequate than those in the poorer black areas. As the focus groups demonstrated, neither of these expectations adequately encompass women’s perceptions of the police.

Both groups of women felt unsafe in the areas where they live and both expressed that the police are completely ineffective. The location of the women was revealed to be irrelevant, as the police services in the wealthier white areas are not perceived to produce better results than those in the poorer black areas. Although there are differences in responsiveness that show a greater respect for and attention to the white areas, the ability of the police to follow up and solve the crimes was equally dismal regardless of where the women lived. This defies the dominant

perception that women who live in wealthier, more developed areas are safer and have access to better police services than do women residing in poorer areas where crime and poor police performance are expected.

I also found that women do not perceive that they are treated poorly by the police as a result of being female. Although there is some merit to the argument that men can sometimes be treated more aggressively by the police, women's perceptions that they have it better point to an underlying system of patriarchy that still affects the way women think. The hundreds of years of patriarchal tradition, on which modern South African society is built, sets up men as the superior protectors of women, who are subordinate and subject to whatever treatment the men so choose. Despite an incredibly progressive new Constitution that awards equal rights to women, the mindset of many women has not shifted. Rather than asserting their rights and taking note of the ways they are mistreated as a result of their gender, many women tend to keep patriarchy alive without even realizing it. Yet, with respect to their perceptions, women do not believe their treatment by the police is negatively affected by their gender.

This study demonstrates that regardless of race, class, gender, or location, women do not feel safe and do not expect that the police will protect them. The only distinction is that women who possess more economic power - those who belong to a higher class - have the means to afford alternative mechanisms of protections that less economically privileged women cannot. Although this study revealed many intriguing implications that race, class, gender, and location can have with respect to police services, the overall consensus is that the SAPS are incapable of doing their jobs and women simply do not count on them to keep them safe.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

This study could be expanded by including more focus groups of women from different areas and communities in and around Cape Town. As this study only considered women in Stellenbosch and Langa, it only included the perceptions of white and black women. Further study could incorporate the perceptions of the coloured and Indian communities as well as immigrants. The perceptions of women who belong to the LGBTQI community could also be a critical addition to round out the findings of the women who participate in a variety of communities and have multifaceted identities.

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R.M. Focus Group Interview. 16 November 2012

T.M. Focus Group Interview. 18 November 2012

T.P. Focus Group Interview. 18 November 2012

Y.C. Focus Group Interview. 16 November 2012

## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. How many years have you lived in this community?
2. Do you feel safe living here?
3. Where is the safest place you have lived?
4. How do you feel about the police in your area? / What are the police services like in your area?
5. Are the police present here? Do you often see them driving by or checking on things?
6. If, hypothetically you were to be assaulted, what would you do? Would you call the police? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. How do you think the police would deal with your complaint if you called them? Would they be helpful?
8. Do you think women in other areas of Cape Town feel the same way about the police that you do? If so, why? If not, why not?
9. Do you think the police treat women and men the same?
10. Do you think the police treat people of different races, classes, or locations the same?