A uniform gender? Police women and the uniform
Christina Scholten, Ph.D
Swedish National Institute of Working Life
e-mail: christina.scholten@arbetslivsinstitutet.se

The police work is a male labour in transition. The police man in a Swedish context is historically acknowledged as a potent, salient, strong and often harsh person - one to fear, respect and adore. Physical and psychological strength and bodily performance have been quite self evident and non spoken qualifications for a police man. The question is how this bodily performance is achieved and internalised by women joining the force? In what sense or perspective is the uniform a way of legitimize the weaker female body? Does the uniform in any specific terms moderate the understanding within the force and outside in society in large, of the gendered police work and if, in what specific ways? Have more women in uniform had any impact on how police men and police women are met by the public?

The meetings between the police force and the public are spatial organised in different places, and certain places are experienced as more problematic than others. The question is how stressful situations are described and experienced by the police officers? Has the time of the day anything to do with fear? Has the identity of being a police woman any importance in how places are experienced and has the uniform anything to do with the individual strategy according to dangerous spots? What strategies are used and how is the knowledge transformed from one police woman to another? Do police women tackle the stress of danger differently from male police officers?

The paper is dealing with issues that have been under discussion in a research circle with active police women in Malmoe, Sweden. This circle is part of a larger research project on the changing working life conditions within the police force in Sweden and the project is hosted by the Swedish National Institute of Working life.

Keywords: Gender, body, uniform, time, space