

Negotiating Identity in a Gendered Firehouse Infrastructure:
Female Firefighters' Experience with Gender Separate and Gender Neutral Restrooms

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Chapter One

Introduction and Literature Review

It is a basic fact of biology that everyone requires access to a restroom. Despite this basic biology, American public restrooms have been exemplars of differing types of discrimination (Anthony & Dufresne, 2007). Not only have they represented gender discrimination, favoring males, but also they have paralleled social discrimination among classes, races, levels of physical ability, and sexual preferences (Kira, 1976). The restriction of restrooms against various underprivileged or disenfranchised groups can reinforce marginalization (Kopas, 2012). In recent years, public restrooms have fueled new debates over discrimination in America. In particular, the infrastructure of changing firehouses reflects both the tradition of an all male fire service and the influx of a small number of women entering the service.

In the United States, gender separation is the norm for public restrooms (Kopas, 2012). As one of the few remaining public spaces that are regularly and explicitly segregated by gender, restrooms are often experienced as sites of symbolic and physical exclusion by transgender and gender non-conforming people. For this reason, one focus of transgender activism in the United States has been safe access to public restrooms, often by advocating for “gender-neutral” configurations. Such opposition to the established norm of separation has sometimes elicited strong resistance (Kopas, 2012).

In current feminist research, gender is seen not as something a person has, but rather something a person does. Rakow (1989) has argued that gender is a verb and more recently Butler (1999) characterizes gender as performance. Gender performance is inherently linked to power within an organization. The present study serves to investigate the experiences of female firefighters as they relate to gender performance

and their work within the fire service. The fire service provides an opportunity to observe women in a male dominated workplace where coworkers live together. This study explores how and when women were drawn to the fire service, gendered issues of privacy, and experiences of women in relation to the facilities available.

The purpose of this study was to produce a composite narrative of women's experiences in the fire service in relation to the use of gender neutral or gender specific restroom facilities. This study sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The researcher used a grounded theory approach to analyzing data. After a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted, data were systematically analyzed, and emerging themes were transformed into a composite narrative of women's experiences within a firehouse.

The result is expected to contribute to the overall understanding of women entering a male-dominated career path. Additionally, this research should expand previous scholarship on the relationship between infrastructure and gender performance.

Literature Review

The literature on gender neutral and gender segregated restrooms is limited. While there is not much research on this specific topic area, much work has been done in surrounding areas of study. This literature review draws upon research on women in male dominated professions, particularly the fire service, and on public restrooms and gender.

Researching organizations with a diverse workforce begins with the composition of the team, most importantly when an organization is traditionally male or female dominated. Research suggests that gender composition plays a role in how interaction takes place between co-workers as early as the socialization process into the organization (Baugh & Graen, 1997). For many firefighters, this begins in training programs and continuing into the initiation to the culture of a particular firehouse.

There has been significant work done on homogeneity of a workforce in a variety of settings. One study found that women within a male dominated law firm experienced more conflict among female associates, and gendered stereotypes were significant, more so than in gender equitable law firms (Ely, 1995). A more recent investigation (Baugh & Graen, 1997) taking place within a medium sized state government agency found that teams that were gender-homogeneous were rated higher in teamwork than those teams which were gender mixed. In addition, women employed in traditionally masculine positions are more likely to be victims of harassment than they would be in less traditionally gendered roles (Mansfield et al., 1991), showing that gender imbalance may be a symptom of stressful working conditions. These studies highlight the importance of

studying organizations that currently lack gender balance. Perceptions of group effectiveness and overall attitudes are affected by gender composition in the workplace.

By increasing the number of minorities in an organization, differences in member perceptions may subside between unvaried teams and those with differences of gender and race. In addition to gender composition, this study relies on research that has been conducted on power within an organization, especially those professions that are traditionally male dominated.

Gender identity and power

The ability to explain how identity is developed within organizations is crucial to the understanding of how power is negotiated. Perceptions of men and women seem to be based on stereotypes. A study conducted at Harvard University revealed that participants within a male-dominated firm described women as more sensitive to others, better able to connect with other women, and more coquettish than men (Ely, 1995). Men within the same firm were described as oriented toward monetary resources, better able to be “one of the guys”, have more confidence, and more likely to work longer hours (Ely, 1995). These descriptions are important indicators of how sex composition can affect what identity is constructed. As scholars have noted using social identity theory, it is important for self-fulfillment to have a positive identity of oneself (Greene, 2004), making the study of such utmost in importance.

It is important for research on gender to move beyond static conceptualizations of gender to a more complex social construction (Morley & McFarlane, 2012; Ely, 1995; Foucault, 1991; Kanter, 1977). As such, gender can be seen as a dimension within an

organization's hierarchy (Ely, 1995). Certainly most firefighters are men, so the common stereotypes of the male dominated firehouse has some basis in fact.

People associate images of strong male firefighters and heroes with the fire service. These rhetorical images have implications for how communication occurs about women in the fire service. Postmodern critical theories focus on the notion that power results for those groups that have the ability to locate themselves as essential to the organization through the resources held (Morley & Macfarlane, 2012).

For Foucault, power is produced and displayed in everyday social discourse. According to Foucault (1998), "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart" (pg. 101). Conversations between co-workers in an organization have the capacity to perpetuate power, rendering the communicative behavior crucial to study.

Further, Foucault (1991) explains that power can be so embedded in daily action that it can seem onerous to change it. Thus, it is important to focus on daily narratives and conversation to understand the embedded power structures that relate to gender. Men and women have historically been held to specific gender roles, so the question becomes how women in this male dominated culture negotiate identity in this binary structure.

It may be difficult for a woman within a male-dominated profession to be considered a serious part of the hierarchy. According to some research, a less powerful minority will feel pressure to leave their own identity and try to adopt the identity of those majority-dominated persons (Bell, 1990). Doing this employs a strategy for evaluating the self in accordance with the current requirements for success of the dominant group, rather than changing the system as a whole. When women do this as a

part of a male-dominated organization they may generate new stereotypes such as “butch” or “tomboy” and often be criticized for it more than if they would not have changed their own identity. This is an issue that can be addressed through postmodern and poststructuralist approaches, which seek to change the system not the self.

Although there is currently not a unified organizational discourse on postmodern feminism, some basic assumptions are found in works of many scholars. Most importantly the focus on power and domination in relation to truth, a focus on the “other” with the concern for marginalized and oppressed, and an evaluation of knowledge rooted in binary oppositions (in this case gender) (Mumby, 1996). Through this concern for the marginalized “other”- postmodernism allows gender to be viewed as socially constructed within an organization. Further, taking a postmodernist approach allows for explanation of power as the symptom of an organization’s marginalization processes.

Kanter’s (1977) classic concept of *tokenism* describes the experiences of being marginalized in an organization. Tokenism refers to the numeric disproportion of a minority, meaning that the minority in an organization makes up less than 15% of the total. Kanter found that women who made up the minority in organizations experience similar instances of isolation and were pressured into acting in gender-defined ways. The implications of being a “token” within an organization can provide room for discomfort and stresses that wouldn’t exist otherwise. For the present study, tokenism explains some concerns that women have when in a male-dominated workforce.

Although the research and study of gender complexities within an organization is central to understanding power, it is also linked with race and ethnicity to further consider how complex power relations are. While not the main focus of the current

study, it cannot go without mention that race and gender are principally connected and in future research should be investigated in conjunction.

Although traditionally the fire service has been all male and generally also all white, increasing numbers of women have been training for and joining the fire service. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women make up about five percent of the full time fire service career positions across the United States (2009), making research regarding female experiences imperative to steady the growth in this field. In New York City, the largest fire department in the U.S., women make up less than a quarter of one percent. Although women make up about half of the current workforce, this small percentage of women fire fighters doesn't go without reason.

Several scholars have concluded that some of the most common difficulties women face when entering a male dominated profession, such as the fire service, are physical demands (facilities and proper equipment), job skills, gender stereotypes, and problems of acceptance (Craig & Jacobs, 1985; Baugh & Graen, 1997; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996). These obstacles that are faced by women have potential damaging effects to a woman's career as well as personal wellbeing.

According to an early study conducted in California (Pantoga, 1977), male fire chiefs viewed females' abilities as different than males' and thus treated them in a discriminatory manner. When a chief does not view females and males equally, a difficult situation could arise when assigning tasks. This is evidenced further with an excerpt from a participant within a similar study done on the perceptions of women in the fire service (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001):

A lot of the times [the men] would take the heavy jobs because I was so “frail.” I’d go to grab a fan [and they would say], “You can’t go up to the roof” or “Oh, you can’t carry that.” [And I would say], “Excuse me, I’m half way up to the house, I can carry it (p. 32).

Clearly, the physical ability of the firefighter is being called into question by her fellow firefighters.

Studies show that white and African American female firefighters experience marginalization and share the perceptions of being an outsider within a male-dominated firehouse (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Mansfield et al, 1991). However, there was a difference in perceptions of physical capabilities. African American females were associated with the “welfare recipient” and “beasts of burden” stereotypes, while white females were thought of as feminine and delicate by their white and African American male counterparts (Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). These findings should lead researchers to study *how* exclusion is differentiated for African American and white women.

In a preliminary study conducted with African American female firefighters (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996) on harassment in the firehouse, results indicated that both African American and white women experienced gender harassment while at work. Harassment in this case took the form of pranks, and the difference was highlighted in the perceptions of the females who were the targets of the pranks. Within the context of the firehouses women who experienced pranks by males thought of them as gender harassment instead of good-natured play.

Not only do women face certain challenges when entering a gender-dominated profession; they are not recognized for it when they do become an integral part of the fire service. No lives have been more drastically affected by the events of September 11th than the rescue workers that worked day and night around the emergency zones. It is disappointing that immediately surrounding these events gratitude is not recognized nearly as often for the women as for the ‘firemen and policemen’ that were involved. The language that was used in the media broadcast to the whole country was gender specific to male workers reifying the notion that firefighters are traditionally male (Willing, 2001). The only women that were interviewed about the events were EMS workers. This may be a traditional representation of the profession, but not an inclusive or current one.

Studies to date have reflected views of men about women firefighters as well as women’s perceptions on male behavior within fire service. No reliable research has compiled women’s experience and attitudes in such a comprehensive way to try to understand why the growth of women in the field is so much slower than in other male-dominated fields (Craig & Jacobs, 1985). This study seeks to begin to explore these unknown perceptions and experiences in relation to the organization’s environment. In particular, the focus is on the significance of gendered infrastructure within the firehouse.

Public restrooms and gender

Historically, public restrooms have been a consistent location for the display of social identity. It seems that there has never been a biological reason to segregate public restrooms. According to Goffman (1977),

The functioning of sex-differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that biologically recommends segregation; that arrangement is totally a cultural matter. And what one has is a case of institutional reflexivity: toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference (pg. 316).

Surely, according to Goffman, toilet segregation is necessary only to promote gender differences. It is crucial to understand when this separation began.

If the arrangement is a cultural matter, then it also reflects how our society views and constructs gender. This difference in gender that is socially constructed has a historical value that is worth noting. Around the end of the nineteenth century, sanitarians developed guides that included gender separation; these guides appeared in sanitary science guides along with cleanliness and waste disposal (Kopas, 2012). After these guides were accepted into legislation and eventually state laws, gender separation in public restrooms has since become an unquestioned norm.

This norm can be further developed into an issue of historic discrimination. Public restrooms that are located in airports (that are used by those who can afford airfare) are much different than those provided for those who use the greyhound station to wait for a bus (Anthony & Dufresne, 2007). Clearly, public restroom discrimination can be the result of not only gender, but also class. Further, race has been a facet of discrimination that is displayed through public restrooms. Laws like Jim Crow, when enacted, displayed racial segregation in public spaces such as restrooms, restaurants, movie theaters, stadiums, etc (Anthony & Dufresne, 2007).

An array of theories inform this work. Soja's (1980) work on Socio-spatial dialectical theory can be used to understand how discrimination can be a result of these spaces. Socio-spatial dialectical theory accounts for the value we place on spaces and geographic locations in our society. This explanation of values can be derived in part from the following excerpt out of Soja's book:

Contextual space is of broad philosophical interest in generating discussion about its absolute and relative properties, its character as "container" of human life, its objectifiable geometry, and its phenomenological essence...Space itself may be primordially given, but the organization, use, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience...The spatial organization of human society is an evolving product of human action, a form of social construction arising within the physical frame of ubiquitous, contextual space but clearly distinguishable from it (p. 209-210).

Thus, space can transcend meaning from the action that is placed upon it or from it. This theory accounts for the social implications that can arrive from use and creation of restrooms within an organization. Also, that it is an *evolving product* of human action means that this idea of gendered restrooms can be a changing form of societal expression. That human action is the means to this expressive dialectic means that we can indeed call for human change in action to create a new social construction of equality.

Social dominance theory offers another perspective from cultural geography, that groups of people are oppressed in terms of individual *and* structural factors. Also, based on the assumption that humans are in search of group-based hierarchy, social dominance can begin to ask why humans demand a group-based hierarchy (Sidanius, 2004). For this

reason, Sidanius (2004) claims this theory focuses on subtle ways in everyday life that discrimination occurs. This theoretical lens can help make sense of the way that gender segregated restrooms may be a subtle everyday physiological necessity, but have enormous implications for those who don't fit the binary norm of gender.

According to Sidanius (2004), group-based oppression is created in part by systematic institutional and individual discrimination. This discrimination is enforced through the non-equal distribution of wanted goods (Sidanius, 2004). Thus, restrooms have continued to privilege certain groups, such as men. Why is it that women tend to stand in line longer than men? Or that woman's restrooms often lack sanitation and enough room for a pregnant woman to fit comfortably in a stall? Further, restrooms have been historically and continue to be places to discriminate in terms of class and race.

Not only do restrooms pose implications for how we view gender, but restrooms can often dictate how we perform our gender. Goffman (1959), describes our everyday life as performance, such as in a theater, where characters play roles. The performance we give is always to an audience of sorts and in a contextual setting where the performance is impressed upon people who are ascribing meaning to it. This performance contributes to the overall identity of the actor. Individuals perform their gender by entering a segregated space that is necessary to use on a daily basis when away from home. By the subtlety of use and the representation of self as a gendered subject entering a gendered space, it is clear that indeed there are real implications for our societal views and ideologies when confronted with the choice: do I walk into the gendered social view of who I am, or do I enter a space of neutrality (not in most cases)

where I am recognized as more than just a member of a marginalized or privileged group?

More recently, Butler has used the idea of performance theory in her pivotal work Gender Trouble (1990). Drawing from early works done by Husserl and Goffman, Butler argues we play both the roles that are expected and roles that disrupt social order. To clarify, gender identity is defined by our daily performative actions – including the spaces we perform in.

Kogan (2007) notes that architectural theory is inscribed by gender dichotomies. Historically, men have been associated with planning and building spaces, while women have been associated with decorating and making spaces habitable. Public restrooms as a symbol of this architectural dichotomy are represented through gender segregation, more specifically in the exact differences in these segregated facilities.

Women are more likely to travel on public transportation than men, and are more likely than men to travel with children or elderly persons (Gershenson & Penner, 2009). While women are more likely to need public restrooms, it remains that women also have to wait in remarkably longer lines in public places to use the restroom. Men often have access to more restroom space and less time to wait in lines (Gershenson & Penner, 2009).

Not only do restrooms harbor gender difference disparities, but they can be a site for violence to occur. In San Diego, November of 1998, a nine-year-old boy was brutally murdered when he was forced to go into a men's restroom alone while his aunt waited outside (Reuters, 1998). Although this may not be the norm, we can see that because of the gender segregation, cases like these may be unavoidable. Gender segregation poses

issues of safety for children who cannot enter a public restroom with a guardian of the opposite sex. The reality of public restrooms does not end with children opposing a norm, but also poses issues for women.

Women's safety is another focus of concern when discussing possibilities for gender-neutral restrooms. It is almost delusional to say that women will be less safe if restrooms became no longer segregated. Gender segregation provides no physical barrier to possible deviants, nor does it prevent sexual assault (SRLP, 2012). There may be a false sense of safety in the belief that women are safer in segregated public restrooms.

Gender separated facilities reflect and expose beliefs from a time when gender rules were at their most extreme. As such they may be seen as a relic of another age. Questioning the biologically necessary infrastructure reflects the overall question of how we construct gender in our society. This question is worth asking to obtain a deeper understanding of how we can effectively alter a society's view on gender, which is not yet equal.

In particular, the fire service offers an ideal opportunity to explore. The fire service is traditionally male. The number of women entering the fire service is distinctly low, even when compared to other traditionally male professions that require similar physical abilities. Women make up about 13% of law enforcement and around 14% of active military members (Jahnke et al., 2012), yet only 5% of the fire service. There is a trend to convert gender-segregated facilities to gender neutral, but some of both are used. All of this raises important questions, including the following:

RQ1: What role does gendered infrastructure play in the negotiation of women firefighters' identities within the firehouse culture?

RQ2: What are women firefighters' experiences with gender segregated restroom and changing facilities within a firehouse?

RQ3: What are women firefighters' experiences with gender neutral restroom and changing facilities within a firehouse?

To explore in depth each of the research questions, a grounded theory approach was used for this study. The next chapter describes the participants, how they were recruited, and how data was collected and analyzed.

Chapter Two Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women within the fire service as they relate to living and working in a gendered infrastructure. The result of which is a narrative of women's experiences. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, which allowed the researcher to better grasp how the participants construct their realities through perspectives and attitudes (Creswell, 1994). These perspectives and attitudes are grounded in experiences of the participants. This study employed a case study format in presenting the data, followed by a composite narrative of the women's experiences.

This study used a grounded theory approach. The researcher conducted a series of interviews with women who have been a part of the fire service in a Midwestern state. Upon completion of the interviews, data were analyzed using a systematic process, resulting in a composite narrative of the experience of these women. The grounded theory procedure was useful in developing potential explanations of the phenomena observed and reported.

Corbin and Strauss have outlined the main underpinnings of grounded theory in *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (2008). Grounded theory enables researchers to develop theory inductively from data. Research using this methodology does not seek to test or support a theory that is already developed; instead grounded theory begins with a topic area and relevant conceptual structures emerge. This methodology is based on the assumptions that research necessarily involves getting out into the field to discover subjects' experiences, which are

continually evolving. As such, the main focus of grounded theory is to explain relationships among conditions, meaning, and human behavior.

Grounded theory is particularly useful for an understudied topic, because this method seeks to understand “what’s out there” in the field being studied. Additionally, benefits of grounded theory include ecological validity, novelty, and parsimony, meaning that results represent closeness to the data; theory that emerges is not tied to preexisting theory, and it is a simple way to describe complex phenomena. What emerges may not only describe, but also explain and even predict. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008),

Insofar as theory that is developed through this methodology is able to specify consequences and their related conditions, the theorist can claim predictability for it, in the limited sense that if elsewhere approximately similar conditions obtain, *then* approximately similar consequences should occur (p. 278).

In other words, grounded theory can produce an explanation that may be generalizable to other similar circumstances. Although qualitative measures do not imply generalization, grounded theory is useful in explaining phenomena that occur somewhat systematically throughout the fire service, which should lead to more research in the topic area, and further explanation of such phenomena. By using grounded theory the researcher also hopes to add to the knowledge of women’s experiences in the fire service, aiding in explaining why women make up such a small percentage of the fire service.

Participants

Participants included ten women firefighters who were identified through personal contacts of the researcher. The researcher recruited participants through

personal contacts. These participants varied in years of experience, age, and position held. There was one respondent from a relatively small community, four from a medium size community, and five from a large urban community. Overall, the women fell into two categories of age – six women had twenty or more years of service, four had 19 or less years of service.

McCracken (1990) argues that this number of interviews can be adequate to provide knowledge needed to reach theoretical significance within a homogenous group such as female firefighters. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), focusing on events or experiences that are symptomatic of a phenomena (such as occurs in interviews) may refer to multiple occurrences of the events described. This reasoning made it unnecessary for additional interviews, although three of the respondents were later re-interviewed to gather additional info. The purpose of this study is not to generalize to a larger population but to understand the process that women go through when entering a fire service career with gender neutral or not facilities.

Interviewing women from three diverse cityscapes (small, medium, and large) offers a sampling of what women in the fire service experience regardless of location. The women were divided into two experience categories – those who had more experience and those who had less. This choice was made because those women who had much more experience in the fire service also experienced more discrimination.

Data collection procedures

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured schedule to allow for participants to elaborate on important issues. The study is based on in depth interviews

with ten female firefighters. Upon being interviewed by the researcher, the women had worked in the fire service for a minimum of two years.

It is important to establish that terms female and women are used interchangeably throughout this study. They are meant to describe the traditional binary view of what a biological female is, and not an interpretation on the concept. Further, a complimentary meaning exists when mentioning fire service members and firefighters. The specification on these terms meaning that the person is a career oriented full time employee of a fire department of at least one year.

Participants were identified through personal contacts of the researcher. The researcher became familiar with contacts through referral, phone calls, and various networking techniques of participants. Three types of communities (small, medium, and large) within a Midwestern state were studied. Reasoning resides in the need to study both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas for greater generalization. In addition having three differing locations and three different restroom/changing facilities allows for comparison within the research questions. Also, convenience was a factor in this decision. This strategy allowed for a willing group to interview. A complete discussion of this process was provided within the Institutional Review Board application.

Before the interviews, subjects were sent written information on the purpose of the study, including an informed consent document (Appendix A), a short questionnaire about basic demographic and background information (Appendix B), and a list of potential survey and interview questions for the participants to anticipate (Appendix C).

Interviews took place in person at a location chosen by the subject. Follow up interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviews were audio recorded with written

permission by the participants, and later transcribed. After preliminary data analysis the researcher re-interviewed three participants.

Risks and Protection

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. Interview questions and informed consent are included in the appendices. This study posed little to no emotional stress on the participants other than the discomfort of sharing a possibly painful memory. The confidentiality of the participants was protected through the use of alphabetical pseudonyms. The list of participant names and the pseudonyms is accessible only to the researcher. In a few instances incidental details about participants have been changed to disguise their identity, but substantive data remain unchanged. Audio recordings were transcribed. The audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Data analysis was done on a password-protected computer kept in a locked office. Audio recordings were destroyed upon completion of the study.

Data analysis procedures

Grounded theory provides a systematic way of conceptualizing and analyzing data. In the present study grounded theory was used to explain relationships that arose from the data collected. In grounded theory constructs emerge inductively (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using grounded theory gave the researcher insight into the patterns of interaction and action between the participants- the men and women of the fire service.

Within grounded theory there are three phases of coding that should occur when analyzing the data collected- open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. By reducing the data through coding the researcher can grasp the emerging concepts that

arise and the analysis explores ways the concepts are related. Open coding is the first phase in the coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open coding begins with identifying the major themes that arise from the data. This is the initial coding process wherein large categories are developed. Within these overarching categories the researcher should find subcategories and themes. Identifying dimensions within the categories is also included within this phase to seek out the varying degrees of the categories found (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Open coding in this study yielded five major themes that emerged from the data: recruitment, response to bathrooms, enculturation of lifestyle, men's support, and experience. Each of these themes is explained in further detail in the following chapter.

After the initial stage of open coding, axial coding commences. This phase begins when open coding is centralized and major themes have been found. This second phase of coding seeks to develop relationships or connections between a major theme and its subthemes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition this phase should examine causal circumstances within the major theme. The researcher assembles the data in different and new ways than open coding to seek the interrelationship of each theme and subtheme.

During the axial coding phase, there were subthemes associated the major findings. Subthemes are listed and explained in detail within the following chapter. This phase also involves considering possible relationships among the major themes.

When axial coding is completed the final phase of coding is selective coding. A narrative started to form within this third phase of coding. The narrative is a comparative compilation of the themes, subthemes, and interrelationships among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this point, preliminary theory propositions were generated. Strauss

and Corbin emphasized that these stages of coding may not always be completed in this order. This analysis is a process that sometimes involves going back for more coding and even more data. For the current study, more data was collected in the form of follow-up phone calls. This took place after selective coding.

Once the data were collected and analyzed, the researcher wrote a composite narrative. To clarify, the researcher compiled the major themes and subthemes from coding phases. Following this step, experiences from each participant were expanded into a narrative form more appropriate for a reader to follow a woman's journey into the fire service.

Internal validity was determined in this study through triangulation. Data were collected from diverse sources - three types of communities (small, medium, and large cities). In addition to diverse locations, participants vary in length of employment and facilities available to them. Some themes were then also connected with previous research on gendered communication. In this study themes were rechecked against data and compared to current literature.

Role of the researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was to gather interview data and then systematically analyze it within the mindset of the framework provided. The researcher attempted to minimize bias. Gathering the data involved conducting audio-recorded interviews and documenting experiences of women working within the fire service profession. The researchers' uncle holds a current position in the fire service; he is the contact by which some interviews were initiated. After collecting data, the researcher explored theoretical constructs in relation to gender in a male-dominated workforce. The

researcher's personal experience as a female was used as minimally as possible in contextualizing the data; however it cannot be ignored as a factor.

The researcher has lived and worked in the United States as a female student and professional. Prior to pursuing her master's degree within a smaller rural community, she lived in an urban cityscape. During her stays in two different cultures, she realized that gender complexities exist within workplaces and environments. Her experiences have encouraged her to explore the complexities of gender as a social construct.

In order to minimize personal bias, the researcher has worked to overcome it by incorporating active listening skills, concealing personal opinions during interviews, and restating comments that participants provide to maintain clarity. The researcher has made all attempts to minimize potential biases.

Audiences for this study

This study should be of interest to two general audiences. The results should be useful for the fire service in an effort to better understand experiences of the members. There is an ongoing need to recruit and retain highly qualified firefighters, including individuals with diverse backgrounds.

In addition, this research is intended to explore the theoretical implications of gendered infrastructure in a male dominated workplace. So the results of this study should be of interest to scholars in feminist communication and cultural geography.

As one of the few remaining public spaces that are regularly and explicitly segregated by gender, restrooms are a unique space to explore. The exploration of gender neutral and gender-segregated restrooms within a fire service offers a focused approach to uncover meaning related to this understudied space. The next chapter provides

background on the participants and describes the themes that emerged from the interviews.

Each woman that was interviewed for this study is a member of the fire service and offers a unique perspective. The following chapter provides basic background information on each of the participants. In addition, the chapter reveals the five main themes that emerged from the data: recruitment, responses to bathrooms, enculturation of lifestyle, men's support, and experience.

Chapter Three Background on Participants and Main Themes

The Participants

All ten women interviewed have different backgrounds and varying reasons for becoming firefighters. Unifying these women is the desire to be a part of the fire service and ultimately risking their lives for the greater good. The ways they approach the challenges of the fire service varies based on personality, age, and experience.

Ten women were interviewed for this study. Prior to each interview, each participant was asked to complete a background questionnaire. An overview of the basic information gathered is provided in Table 1. Each woman was given a name to correspond with the letter of the alphabet showing the order of interviews. For example the first interviewee was given the name Ariel.

All of these women have worked in the fire service for a minimum of two years. The longest length of employment was twenty-six years. The youngest participant was twenty-five, while the oldest was fifty-one. All but one participant received education in the fire service. The one exception has been on the job for twenty-one years.

The women were asked about their current career standing. While all of the women were firefighters; seven of the ten were both paramedic and firefighter; three were only firefighters. The type of facilities available and initial experiences vary depending on the time and place of entry into the service.

Table 1. Background information on the interview participants.				
	Facility Preference	Rank	Total Years of Service	Age
Ariel	Neutral	Firefighter/Paramedic	20 or more	41-55
Bailey	Separate	Firefighter/Paramedic	20 or more	41-55
Celia	Separate	Firefighter/Paramedic	20 or more	41-55
Diana	Separate	Firefighter	19 or less	25-40
Ebony	Neutral	Firefighter/Paramedic	20 or more	41-55
Fiona	Separate	Firefighter/EMT-Basic	19 or less	25-40
Gabrielle	Neutral	Firefighter	20 or more	41-55
Hazel	Neutral	Firefighter/Paramedic	19 or less	25-40
Ivory	Neutral	Firefighter/Paramedic	19 or less	25-40
Jada	Separate	Firefighter	20 or more	41-55

Ariel. Ariel had been interested in attending medical school when her circumstances changed in college. She became pregnant and got married – so she decided that medical school was no longer a viable option for her. Instead she became a first responder for an ambulance because of her interest in health care. After continued courses in pre-hospital care, she became interested in the fire service, not knowing if she would really like it. For Ariel her interest in working in the fire service evolved over time – she wasn't hired until her late twenties. She has been with the fire service for more than twenty years.

During her interview, Ariel describes what it was like to not have a facility for herself because she was a woman. She reveals that her restroom was the one that the public could use and was located in the entry of the firehouse.

Bailey. Bailey had been working out in a local gym where a few other firefighters were also working out. She had just graduated from high school and when the idea was presented from one of the firefighters, she thought it could potentially be a good career path.

In her interview, Bailey described the process of getting used to sharing spaces with others, especially men. When she first entered the fire service in her early twenties, there were all men on her shift. Bailey noted that she had her own restroom because only one was needed. She explained that at the time of entry she was very timid, but as time went on she became more comfortable with sharing sleeping quarters and restroom facilities. Despite this evolution, Bailey does consider privacy to be very important to her. For Bailey this means separate facilities for both men and women.

Privacy is not the only concern that Bailey expressed. Bailey talked about instances of sexual comments during her first couple years on the job directed at her. Now, as a firefighter in her forties, she is more outspoken.

Celia. Celia was unemployed looking for a career path when she heard about the fire service through a group of guys. They told her to be aware though that she may not fit the physical requirements. Celia accepted this as a challenge to complete the testing and become a firefighter. Celia's interview offers a unique perspective on size and strength with relation to the fire service. She also tells of the difficulty of women communicating with other women in the fire service.

After twenty years on the fire service Celia feels that women have certainly "come a long way," although it is still openly acceptable for some men to not want women on the service. Celia explored ways that she felt she was treated differently in relation to others on the fire service. Celia has worked in both gender neutral and gender specific firehouses. In her interview she explains that both have positive and negative attributes, but that neutral would be her first choice.

Diana. Diana has the least amount of time on the service out of all the participants. Diana has been with the fire service for two and a half years. She is the second youngest participant – in her mid thirties. Diana, like others was recruited to the fire service by some of her guy buddies. She enjoys physical work and team spirit – so the fire service was a great match for her. In Diana's interview she talked about a time when she was a "cub" in the service. She recalls a situation where one of her male counterparts called her weak during a fire call. This was difficult for Diana to talk about, she wanted to be sure of her anonymity.

When asked about her restroom preferences, Diana definitely preferred separate facilities to neutral facilities. Diana said that women's restrooms are more luxurious because they are specifically for them.

Ebony. Ebony has been in the fire service for over twenty years and she offers the perspective of a relatively masculine female. Ebony prefers to work with all men, rather than other women because of her own personality. She believes that women are more "catty" than men, and would prefer to have a more upfront working situation. Ebony began on the fire service for this reason, and because of the challenging work.

During her interview, Ebony describes how irritating it can be when men use the women's restrooms. She told of a time when she couldn't get into her own restroom because of the men showering and using it for their own personal number two time. Ebony also mentions that it is an unspoken rule that women will not use the men's restrooms.

Fiona. Fiona's entire family has been in the fire service or police force. Her father was a police officer on the West Coast, later becoming a firefighter in the Midwest. At the age of eight, Fiona decided that she would follow in her family's tradition and become a firefighter – that is what she is used to.

Throughout the interview Fiona assured me that restrooms do not have a significant impact on her as a professional. Fiona did not ever feel like she was treated differently or unfairly in relation to facilities. Her ideal facilities would be separate men's and women's restrooms and changing areas so that she can sprawl her things out. Fiona was the youngest of the participants, in her mid twenties.

Gabrielle. Gabrielle's interview provided an interesting perspective of other members of the fire service. Currently Gabrielle is on a unique a fire crew comprised of three women and one man.

Gabrielle recalls an emotional time when she experienced discriminatory treatment. She was on a fire call with three other women and one man. The call was very difficult and one of the women did not pull the tank to pump water – leaving it a very dangerous situation. In a nearby truck was the chief's aide. Later on at dinner with everyone, the chief's aide talked about how he was watching the situation but did not get out to help. Gabrielle felt that he would rather watch and comment than save their lives.

Gabrielle also mentions how the facilities of men and women differ in the extreme with men leaving grotesque bodily fluids and women having a more clean area.

Hazel. Hazel became interested in the fire service through members of a softball team she was on in college. She realized she loved service work, and joined. Hazel offered intriguing insight on restroom facilities.

Initially Hazel appreciated the separation of men and women in the firehouse, because it felt as though women were being invited. Later on though, after several years of service and working in facilities with neutral restrooms she does not think about it as much. Hazel says that the neutral facilities say “we are all equal, we just share this bathroom as if we are at home.” Hazel would like to see neutral restrooms as more of the standard practice.

Ivory. Ivory was recruited through others when she was at her previous job. She was not aware that fire service could be a career. For Ivory, it is important to have a job

that has access to showers and facilities so that she may use alternate modes of transportation (she rides her bicycle to work).

Ivory mentioned in her interview that she thought the clothing for women in the fire service should be rethought. She fits into men's clothing fine, but for some women it can be a real difficulty – especially, as Ivory said, “If they are curvy.”

Jada. Jada thought that the most attractive part of the fire service was that you can use mind and body every day. She was driving by a fire station that says volunteers wanted, she felt lucky that she saw that sign and started as a volunteer. Nineteen years later, Jada is still happy to be in the fire service.

Jada's interview revealed that she does not agree with the standard testing to get onto the fire service. Jada talked about the process of testing – there are no training programs that will get people prepared for the actual test. She says that there is no way for firefighters to prepare new people for the physical tests lawfully.

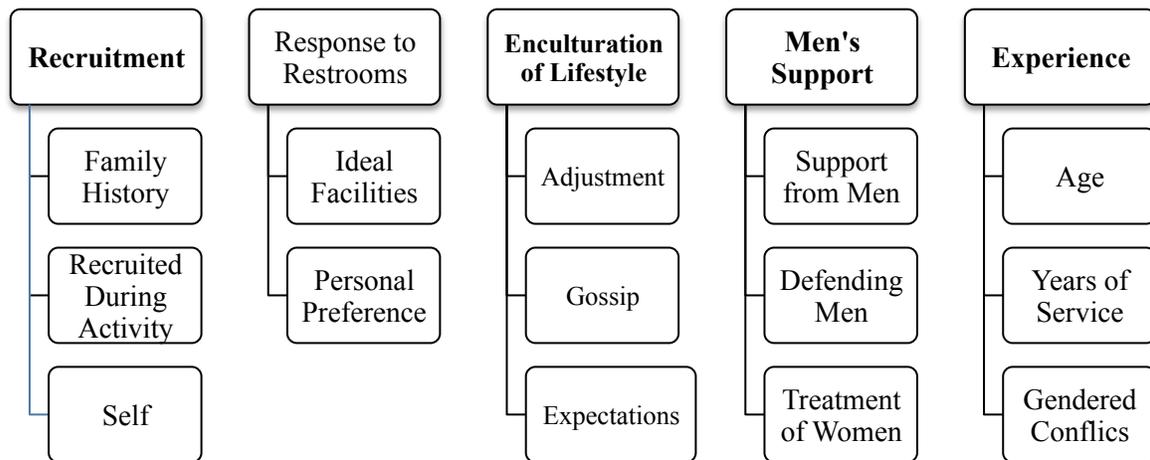
Jada mentioned a particular circumstance in the first seven years of her service, in which her lieutenant required her to begin cooking the meals every time everyone else was training. This prevented her from accumulating experience – affecting her chances for advancement. She was required to cook more often than the men.

Despite some similarities in interest and commitment each interview participant brought with her a unique set of perspectives and cultural beliefs. The differences among them have played out into each of their organizational experiences while on the fire service.

The Data

These experiences were analyzed in an open coding process through which some major themes emerged. Five main categories were developed in the open coding process. They are Recruitment, Privacy, Enculturation of Lifestyle, Men's Support, and Experience. Each main category has a number of sub-categories to describe the organizational differences that women experienced in relation to the fire service (see Figure 1). For most of these categories between four to six interviewee responses were gathered, in some cases more.

Figure 1: Categories Developed from the Open Coding Process



Recruitment. Recruitment is the first category representing various ways the women were recruited to the fire service. The sub categories for Recruitment are: family history, activity, self, and testing standards.

The family history sub category looks at how the history of the woman affected her choice in work environment. Some individuals were born into a family where men worked in the fire service, so it seemed reasonable for the individual to consider this career. A number of individuals met male and female firefighters in a gym or sports activity, and the men and women suggested they consider becoming a career path firefighter. Some women had a desire to be a part of public service and have decided on their own to become a firefighter.

Response to restrooms. Responses to restroom theme encapsulates what women prefer in terms of restrooms, as well as their experiences are with gender-neutral and gender-separated bathrooms. The sub categories identified within this theme are: ideal facilities and personal preference. Most women explained that ideal facilities would be private and accessible. Preferences of the women in the study were divided. About half of the women want gender-neutral configurations, while the remaining half prefer gender segregated. The preference of facility was representative to what the women believed was most private.

Enculturation of lifestyles. This main theme covers how the women firefighters adjusted to the new lifestyle of a career path firefighter. Women's experiences in relation to major lifestyle and relationship changes are decoded here into three subcategories: adjustment, gossip, and expectations. These subcategories reveal the conversations and environment that these women needed to adjust to. Nine of the ten participants described

adjustment as a process. Women and men both gossip within the firehouse to gain relationships. Most of the women had expectations that were partially met when in the fire service.

Men's support. The discourse that emerged through the interview process allowed the researcher to find out about how women and men support each other in the fire service. This major theme represents support from men, defending men, and treatment of women. Nine of the ten women identified at least one male firefighter as an ally to her within the firehouse – revealing support from men sub category. Due to this and the process of fitting in many women defend actions of men even when the actions may not be ideal. Some pioneer women describe treatment of women by men as undesirable in general, but newer women find that they are treated equally.

Experience. In general, this thesis sought women's experiences with the infrastructure within the fire service. This major finding however dives more deeply into how the experiences are shaped. To clarify, subthemes were determined as age, years of service, and gendered conflicts. The age of the participant and years of service highly impact the experiences of the women. Gendered conflicts were discussed in detail by the participants as well. Older participants who entered earlier experienced more gendered conflicts. To clarify, most conflicts described by pioneer women surround hierarchical structure issues and co-worker conflict.

Chapter four is the composite narrative of the women interviewed, describing how they were drawn to the fire service, some earlier than others, how they adapted to firehouse culture, and specifically the role of gendered infrastructure.

Chapter Four Narrative/Analysis

We all have an image of what a firefighter should be like. As young children, we often had in mind that boys want to be like firefighters and policemen and girls want to be models and teachers. For most of us, straying from those traditional gendered roles may be difficult. The decision to pursue this non-traditional career challenges the expectations of society. But, in the case of these women, they are less concerned with societal norms than with building a career for themselves. Although these women are willing to break some of these norms by entering the fire service, it does not come without struggle.

When a woman enters into the fire service, her identity is altered and expanded. She is expected to maintain the same diligence as men within the fire service, and to handle situations as effectively as men. She is also expected, at least by some, to remain a woman as conceptualized in the culture at large – fragile, caring, obedient. She accepts these obligations in order to build her career, and to minimize conflict.

Women who choose the fire service are not likely to align their gender roles with traditional femininity; they understand that they are entering into a man's world. They are aware that working in the fire service means they will be sleeping, living, eating together in the fire station. A woman transitioning into a fire station culture needs to be a very self sufficient and self-reliant person. Though most women entering the service understand the implication of this move, society as a whole and some people within the fire service do not.

The process begins with what attracted each woman to the fire service, particularly whether or not others influenced her. Then, recruitment influences in part

what her relationship with the organization looks like. Those recruited by peers were affected differently than those who came to this choice on their own. This relationship is shaped by gender values, as women firefighter recruits negotiate their identities as firefighters and as women.

This thesis is an exploration of the experiences of women in the fire service as they adapt from one identity to another, and then maintain the latter to adapt and integrate into the firehouse culture. Since many of these women were initially influenced by friends or family to join the fire service, they were already aware of how their lives would be changed. In some ways, they were prepared to deal with negative aspects of the job. Each of them learned to establish a form of camaraderie among both men and women within the fire service.

Drawn to the fire service

Women in this study were drawn to the fire service in three major ways. The three major ways include recruitment, family, and self. Some were recruited by peers in the service, sometimes while involved in shared physical activities. Others had family role models in the fire service. Yet others thought through their own career goals, and came to the possibility on their own.

Three of the women in this study were involved in an activity that led them to meet others who were in the fire service. Bailey was working out at a local gym. Gabrielle was on a rugby team, and Hazel was on a softball team. Both Gabrielle and Bailey were approached by a female firefighter about joining. Bailey met a man who was working out in the same gym, and he talked to her about an upcoming test. These three

women share a similar recruitment process, and took their friends' advice in pursuing a career in the fire service.

For Fiona, it was a matter of watching family members in public service as she grew up. She decided when she was eight years old that she would be a firefighter. She described her father, a police officer, as an important influence in this decision.

Some of these women analyzed their own personal strengths and preferences and discovered the fire service more or less on their own. Diana said that she was attracted to the fire service by her own nature. She described wanting to be physically active and hands on when she works, and appreciates being part of a team. At the time, she had a few male friends who were firefighters and always talked about how they enjoyed the work. She was looking for a change in career path, so she took the test and passed.

Ebony offered a unique explanation of what attracted her to the fire service. She discussed her desire to work with men and fire to accomplish a challenging task. Ebony had previously worked with women that were particularly "catty," and she believed that men would be easier to work with.

None of the respondents expected an easy transition into the service. In fact most of the women describe their enculturation as a process, determining their role and deciphering how to act in their new environment. In this process that the women describe, two groups emerged. Those who entered the fire service 20 or more years ago were really the pioneers – the first women fire fighters. They faced the greatest challenges and broke the greatest barriers. Those who entered more recently came into a culture where women had already proven themselves and, not surprisingly, their experiences were different.

The table below shows two categories – the pioneers and those that entered later.

Table 2. Pioneers and Later Entry into the Fire Service.

Pioneers (20 yrs or more in the fire service)	Later Entry (19 yrs or less in the fire service)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ariel •Bailey •Celia •Ebony •Gabrielle •Jada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Diana •Fiona •Hazel •Ivory

Experiences upon entering the fire service were shaped by the years in which they entered. Those who entered earlier had to prove they could do the job. They had to be especially and remarkably determined and self-reliant. In addition to the physical challenge, they encountered symbolic obstacles: beliefs about how disruptive women would be to the firehouse, trying to fit into the masculine culture of banter and pranks, and learning to not lose control or respond emotionally.

Ariel shares what her experiences were like 20 years ago as she went through the transition. She felt as though women were not well received in the service and weren't always entirely capable of doing the work – meaning that it can be a complicating factor in an already stressful position. To clarify, Ariel experienced instances of gender discrimination in addition to the intense mental and physical demands of the fire service. Bailey highlights a similar experience when she was new on the job about 20 years ago. She talked about the sexually explicit language that men would use around her. In particular, she recounts a man talking about her performing a sex act. At the time she felt offended, but would not acknowledge it. Bailey says that there was a different culture 20 years ago, and now she would not tolerate this type of language.

Those women who entered later had an easier transition. They have experienced less overt discrimination. The women in this group are less concerned with gender discrimination as a factor in evaluating their experiences. As an example, the youngest respondent, Fiona, reiterated several times throughout the interview her lack of concern about gender inequality within the fire service. She could not recall any situation that would relate to gender discrimination of any kind. She also mentioned that the facilities in the firehouse did not have any impact on her as a woman. Understanding when the women entered the fire service led to better understanding of how women negotiate their identity in the fire stations.

Being determined to identify as both woman and firefighter can cause questions on how to create a support system. During her interview, Celia described a group of women that would always hang out together. It was described as almost like a clique in high school. Celia was not a part of this small clique consisting of only a few women; however she did participate in an organized and unifying event.

One year, when there was an election for union officials, the women in the clique wanted all women in the fire department to become organized and all arrive together in a limo. Celia, along with nine other women went to this event dressed in jeans and a black sweater. The union was about nine hundred strong, and ten women showed up together, all dressed in jeans and black sweaters. Celia mentioned that a couple of the men made comments like, “oh, are you guys taking over?” She thought that is was an unusual sight for the men to see. For these women, this was a way of showing unity that was much needed because – as three respondents reported independently of one another – the union did not support women in those days.

To clarify, the women refer to unresponsive behavior from the union when they tried to contact representatives, and a lack of empathy towards women. In the early days, women felt as if the union would not be able to help them should they raise a concern. Gabrielle says, “I think the old regime had quite an animosity towards women...the old one just supported him and his buddies...I tried to contact the union on a couple things and never heard back.” Gabrielle is confident that the new union will encourage women to be heard during future meetings. The only thing Celia has seen with regard to the former union is, “there is always a group of guys arguing...I’ve never experienced women’s issues being discussed.” Further, Jada knows of an issue that is continually a problem, but has never been addressed, “Some curvy women need to really get clothing that doesn’t fit right...I fit into men’s clothing well but some women really have problems.” This is an issue that the union really could address. These women, in a follow-up interview, said that the new president has really come a long way and is standing up for women in a way that the old president never did.

Being able to identify as a woman and as a woman firefighter can be a challenge to negotiate. Celia feels that when you are in the firehouse you are “stripped of who you are outside of work,” but they are still women. For example, Hazel described her first few years on the job. Early on in Hazel’s career she thought of herself, and still does, as a very feminine woman. She would always wear makeup – and especially lipstick. One of her commanding officers would always call her “lipstick”. Although she was not feeling harassed by this nickname, she did mention it when talking about identity issues. This experience contributes to the profiling of women within the fire department. In this case, a member of the team is labeled by a characteristic of their gender.

In this study, women fell under two main categories in relation to appearance and interaction. First, some women are quite feminine – meaning they may wear makeup and engage in commonly recognized feminine rituals. Second, women can be relatively masculine – meaning no makeup, tall, more like men. Women in this study acknowledge that appearances matter in the complex communication within firehouse culture. Celia explains that women who are taller than 5’10” or bigger in size have more problems. They look like they may equal the men in the firehouse. She has “watched the guys interact with women differently with respect to size.”

Diana recalls a male firefighter within her house that was rough on her. She is taller and bigger than most women in the firehouse. On a call that Diana was on, she remembers feeling called out by this man. Someone was needed to jump through a window to unlock the front door of the building. Before Diana could jump through, a male counterpart took the lead and went in. Another man who was with Diana turned to her and said, “you are so weak.” It is this comment that threw Diana into an uncomfortable rising blood pressure. She feels that it is because of her gender and size that she was called out. Although she realizes that usual attacks in the firehouse are jokey and goofy, this was not one of them. It is significant that appearance and demeanor relate to communication patterns in this study.

The women talked in specifics about what it is like to enter into a “man’s world”, to strive to be a part of the group, and to be comfortable in their new career path. The need to counter negative assumptions about being a female firefighter is strong – meaning the women must build a sturdy sense of belonging in the firehouse. During this

transition, women get used to the basics of life – eating together, sharing a restroom, living together in shifts.

It is a common theme that these women were concerned with looking comfortable during the rookie stages of becoming a firefighter. In the firehouse it is a sign of strength to be able to remain calm when jokes are made, not get easily upset, and to ultimately be able to relate with peers. It is important to note that these speech patterns are masculine in nature.

New hires in any organization, for the most part, will feel they need to be compliant until they can claim the identity that is necessary to survive. This holds true for the women in this study. In this case the women must adapt and converge with masculine communication patterns. Almost all of the women interviewed used language that evidenced their compliant attitude with superiors and male colleagues.

Diana conveyed her experience with some more seasoned women in the fire station. During her shift the ground floor toilet became clogged. Her boss at the time came to the conclusion that tampons were the cause and wanted her to create signs for the women that stated tampons must not be flushed. Although she may have had her doubts, she willingly put up the signs. Then in response to the signs, her female counterpart that had been on the job for twenty years – demanded that she take those signs down. “That is bull, we have been flushing them for nine years!” Diana expressed her respect for her female counterpart, but she was too new to create tension with her boss.

Some women in this study also shared the language of “being one of the guys”. Ariel explicitly stated that she “didn’t have to prove anything more than any other person that worked there did. I was just one of the guys.” For several women knowing they

would be entering into the male dominated profession, being one of the guys is an achievement. Along with masculine communication patterns women experienced issues with the firehouse infrastructure.

Perhaps the most vocalized issue of women transitioning into the firehouse was privacy. This was an issue because when the women first entered, the infrastructure of firehouses was not designed for a gender-integrated workforce. Since these early days, different firehouses have adapted in different ways. At this time there is no single standard for either gender-neutral restrooms or gender-separated restrooms in the firehouse. It is left to the chiefs and administrations to decide what type of facilities will be affordable and equitable for their employees.

The first women to enter had no restrooms for their use, so they had to rely on public toilets during their shifts. Ariel talked about when she first began as a firefighter twenty years ago. She was unable to use the second floor restrooms; they were designed specifically for men. Ariel was instructed to use the first floor restroom, which was the public restroom. She was uncomfortable with this because the public was coming in and out, which also meant she was unable to store her personal belongings in the space. Ariel was told she could use the deputy chief bunkroom if she had to shower, but she was uncomfortable with that as well. She said, "I just didn't have the privacy." This experience highlights the significance of infrastructure in the marginalization of women within not only the fire service but other male dominated careers as well.

Bailey recalls her initial experience with the facilities that were available in her firehouse 21 years ago. "I was happy about having my own bathroom, only one was needed. I think I have evolved; I was timid at the time. To me it didn't matter because I

had my own space.” And having her own space made the adjustment to firehouse culture easier for her.

As more women entered the fire service, separate facilities were added in some firehouses. This process is analogous to “separate but equal” facilities during Jim Crow. The difference is the women’s facilities were generally nicer, and more private, and the women kept them cleaner. This may be because to the women’s restrooms in general are newer.

It is significant that it has been common practice for men to use the women’s restroom, but never vice versa. Ivory, Fiona, Gabrielle, Celia, and Ebony explicitly stated that men would use the women’s restrooms. Fiona argued that this was just because there were more men. Half of the women interviewed in this study acknowledge that men consistently use the women’s restrooms when women are not present. This is a norm and a pattern within the firehouses studied.

However from the perspective of cultural geography, the way space is used reflects and reinforces the social hierarchy. Higher status individuals have access to all spaces while lower status individuals have little space to claim as private (Goffman, 1959). Those with more power access more spaces; those with less power are restricted in their use of space. Sometimes, there are negative outcomes to this pattern. According to Gabrielle, “Men are filthy pigs. You can’t believe how dirty they are. It is nice to know that we have a cleaner space, but men will use the women’s restroom.” Using the space and leaving it dirty is an expression of power and disregard.

In a follow up interview with Hazel, Gabrielle, and Celia this common experience was explained further. One of these women of ten moves around from one firehouse to

another each shift; she has been in almost every firehouse within her department. She explains that most of the women's restrooms are more private than the men's restroom is the same firehouse. For example, in the particular firehouse experience she described the men's restroom was a room filled with a few stalls and a row of sinks and mirrors. The women's restrooms were two individual locking rooms with toilet, sink, and mirror. She feels that the reason men use the women's restroom so often is for the privacy.

However, she did add that she was not entirely sure that this reason stands alone. The men would also wait for the boss to leave, and use the boss's private bathroom. She used to ponder why the men take this action, and would like to know why. The pattern she describes may be seen in relation to use of space as an act of power.

Celia told of an experience she had within a firehouse that rarely has women in it. During her shift she was the only female in the house, and there is only one restroom available for women. Sometimes the entire shift went by and she could not get into the restroom because of the men's traffic using it. Towards the end of the shift, she went to find her boss for that day, and he was in the female restroom. Celia understood from this experience that men were just not able to change their actions because they were so used to being able to use whatever facilities they like. From the perspective of cultural geography, this is an exercise of privilege. The marginal status of the woman fire fighter was encoded into the use patterns of the facilities. She was not only marginalized; she was practically invisible.

Hazel and Gabrielle also noted that the women's facilities are more private than those the men use. They say that women's facilities in general are more private, although the sinks are generally smaller and the showers are never bigger in size. They all agree

that men appreciate the privacy, but are not sure this can explain the heavy of traffic of men in their designated restrooms.

Half of the women interviewed in this study recall negative outcomes from the misuse of gendered restroom space. The women describe dirtiness, lack of access to use their designated space, and seemingly purposeful messiness.

Hazel, who has been with the fire service about 6 years liked the idea of having gender separated restrooms initially because it meant that women were welcome there and could have the privacy they needed. However, she has come to prefer gender-neutral firehouses, meaning individual non-designated spaces. She would much rather be in gender-neutral restrooms because it emphasized the idea that everyone is equal, everyone is home attitude. For Hazel, it feels more like sharing a restroom at home.

In practice, the private restrooms for women have essentially become gender neutral facilities. Yet the men still have access to the men's restroom, but women do not. Perhaps the ultimate solution will be all gender neutral restrooms, so both men and women have access to private facilities at any time.

Gender neutral facilities for both men and women would eliminate a piece of "gender binary" infrastructure that poorly reflects current conceptualization of gender as not binary but multifaceted and even changing. Hazel recalled a time when she was in the gender-separated restrooms with her female counterparts. One of the men in the firehouse made comments about them having a pillow fight in their panties. Hazel felt insulted, especially because she is gay. She explains, "I'm gay, so they always think you are in there with a girl like ooh ooh ooh. Imagine my situation now – like do the straight girls want to be in the bathroom with me..." The restrooms that Hazel talked about have

since been remodeled to the more modern gender-neutral design. Hazel thought that this has helped, “the bathrooms are all the same, now there are none of those jokes.” This may become more important as increasing number of people identify as transgender.

Of course, there are also problems with gender-neutral restrooms. Diana talks about having to constantly put the toilet seat down. She said that it really doesn’t bother her and that she knew it was a male oriented profession. She says it is just something she has to deal with. Ebony can relate to this experience as well. She recounts that she is from the generation where her father did what he did and everyone worked around it. Ebony said she doesn’t mind putting the seat down either. This is a minor inconvenience to exchange for the greater privacy for all.

But not every woman believes gender-neutral restrooms are the best option for the firehouse. Fiona, one of the newer recruits, wants gender separation so that she may sprawl out all of her “stuff”. She doesn’t hear of any dialogue regarding restrooms, and she is not bothered by the situation at all.

Some of the older, more experienced women show that there has been a long evolution in how gender identity evolved in the fire service. The younger, less experienced women in this study show the promise that the fire service is headed in the direction of equality. Regardless of age upon entry and masculine and feminine demeanor, women in this study describe privacy as playing an integral role in their daily lives within the firehouses.

Restroom configuration is key to the issue of privacy. In the early days there were no facilities for women other than a small public restroom near the entrance. The acceptance of women into the fire service is reflected in modifications to the

infrastructure, which reflects the degree of openness of the institution to equal opportunity regardless of gender.

Chapter Five Conclusion

This research was an exploratory study of experiences of women within the fire service. All of the women interviewed worked within one of three fire departments: in small, medium, or large cities. All but one woman received some educational or formal fire training prior to entering the fire service. This study explores ways in which these women have become integrated into the traditionally all male firehouse culture, specifically in relation to what type of restroom facilities were provided – gender separate or gender neutral. Some clear patterns emerged from the data, suggesting that this is a worthwhile direction for future research.

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method. Ten female firefighters were interviewed and audio recorded to reveal their experiences in the fire service. After the researcher transcribed interviews, three phases of coding took place – open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. By completing this process the researcher was able to develop a composite narrative to describe the experiences of these women.

These women were recruited into the fire service in three major ways. Some individuals were born into a family where men worked in the fire service, so it seemed reasonable for the individual to consider this career. A number of individuals met male and female firefighters in a gym or sports activity, and the men and women suggested they consider becoming a career path firefighter. Some women had a desire to be a part of public service and have decided on their own to become a firefighter. The pioneer women, those who entered earlier, needed to prove they could do the job. The women who entered later experienced less overt discrimination and are less concerned with

gender discrimination. In the earlier days within a firehouse women's restrooms were likely non-existent or created from a public facility. Now, there are increasingly more women's restrooms available. Since they were designed more recently, the women's restrooms tend to be newer and nicer. Men tend to use the women's restrooms in addition to their own for two reasons. First, men like privacy just like women. Also, men are exercising a form of male privilege. However, as more women enter the service, gender neutral restrooms are becoming more and more popular to match the needs of new conceptualizations of gender. Gender neutral restrooms are preferred in this study by half of the women, while the other half prefer gender separate. This choice is due mostly to how the participants interpret privacy.

Several perspectives are useful in theorizing this phenomenon. It's useful to conceptualize gender as performance. Some scholars have challenged scholarship to produce knowledge about gender within an organization as a more complex social construction rather than a biological or objective part of an individual (Morley & McFarlane, 2012; Ely, 1995; Foucault, 1991; Kanter, 1977). Performance theory has been useful in sorting through and understanding the experiences of the women interviewed through their performance within the firehouse – especially the relationship with facilities available.

Socio-spatial dialectical theory is valuable as a way to understand the significance of gender performance in structural spaces. This theory focuses on how space is divided and labeled, who is allowed to use which spaces, who violates the rules, who doesn't, and how people communicate verbally and nonverbally in the context of spatial hierarchy. The structures and hierarchy in the social system are encoded into the infrastructure.

Infrastructure has a significant influence on the communicative behaviors of those who occupy it.

Deriving meaning from infrastructure aligns with the underlining principle of socio-spatial dialectical theory. When the women ascribe meaning to their infrastructure, we can see that gender harassment, discrimination, and privacy are all issues that these women work through. This theoretical lens helps make sense of the way that gender segregated restrooms may be a subtle everyday physiological necessity, but have enormous implications for those who don't fit the binary norm of gender.

This binary or dualistic structure is problematic for women in general who work in a male dominated culture. The infrastructure reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the organization – encouraging a less welcoming outlook for women joining the workforce, and further privileges men above the women. This binary infrastructure is especially problematic for lesbians, and in the future will be totally unacceptable for transgender people.

The purpose of this study was to explore women's experiences in the fire service in relation to the use of gender neutral or gender specific restroom facilities. Privacy has emerged as the predominant theme within this narrative. Not surprisingly, the participants in this study discussed the struggle of assimilating into the firehouse culture in regard to living and working in less private conditions than encountered in most other careers.

Privacy

According to the interviewees, one of the most difficult aspects of the enculturation process is the adjustment to limited privacy. The interviewees found themselves working within an organization where they work and live together with

colleagues. The women knew about the working conditions prior to entering the service, but actually adjusting to the environment proved to be a process.

Women in this study prefer the most private space available in restroom design. Half of the women view gender-separate facilities as most private in the context of the traditional territoriality of men and women. These women experience the necessity for sprawling out their “feminine items”. For example Fiona prefers to leave her hair and body products rather than packing them up each time she leaves the restrooms. Conversely, other women prefer private spaces that are not gender labeled. These spaces are not labeled – anyone can use them, and they include one toilet, sink, and usually a shower in a completely enclosed space, available for anyone to use. Hazel mentioned that she feels more “at home” when she uses these facilities because it is more welcoming to everyone and it’s more like at home.

The ten women in this study do not mention any negative aspects associated with the use of gender-neutral restrooms, other than their preference for the contrary. However, women in this study did refer to patterns of harassment, lack of privacy, and gendered communication when referring to gender separate facilities.

A significant finding in the study was that women deal with a different set of organizational challenges than men. It is no secret that gender plays a significant role in the organizational culture of firehouses. It is important to uncover implications that restrooms pose for women within the firehouses. It would be useful to expand the current study with men in addition to women to find out how the men experience gender separate or gender-neutral restrooms. Interviewing both men and women might give further insight into the infrastructure as a whole.

Some of the interviewees have encountered unequal treatment in the form of sex discrimination. Several women reported harassing or discriminatory language and behaviors from their male counterparts. However, it is important to note that the pioneer women experienced these situations differently than those women who entered the fire service later. For the pioneers, reactions to gendered conflicts could have resulted in confrontation or disciplinary action. Even those women who entered the fire service more recently have found that the most effective way to react to certain gendered conflicts was often to ignore it or to downplay the situation.

Significance of the study

In the fire service, there is currently no standardized policy that addresses the provisions and use of fire station facilities (bunkrooms, showers, and restrooms) by different genders. However, it is in state coding that employers are expected to maintain facilities for both sexes – male and female. We know that restrooms must be provided to both men and women in the workplace. However, this study served to investigate whether separate is really equal – or if there can be an alternative facility to maximize equality. As this conversation continues, it is important to hear from the people who live and work in the firehouses.

Gendered infrastructure reflects beliefs about masculinity, femininity, and androgyny; and these beliefs are changing rapidly. There is a need for scrutiny not only of facilities, but also of the test currently used for admission to the fire service.

Three of the participants in this study mentioned that they were not well prepared for the physical test and that they felt that men may have had an unfair advantage. To make this more clear, men have a better idea of what to expect in general on account of

being in a male-dominated career. Men traditionally have more access to knowledge about this career, and probably do have at least indirect access to information about the test and how other men have prepared for and passed the test. Although it is technically not allowed to discuss the test with recruits, women may indeed be at a disadvantage.

The current physical test (Candidate Physical Ability Test or CPAT) for firefighter candidates still reflects beliefs that link traditional measures of masculinity with success in the fire service. According to the Fire and Criminal Justice Services Committee Chair, Elizabeth Crowley (2014), “There are still concerns that excessive testing methods within the Fire Academy are being used to keep women probationary firefighters from graduating.” Although recent changes, such as more preparation for the physical test and online manuals, in the physical test nationwide seem to be allowing for more women to enter, still 95% of men pass the test, while only 57% of women do. The test is important and worth discussing because it is what determines who gets in – and it’s a gendered artifact reflecting performance. Of course, creating an ideal physical test to meet the needs of every candidate is difficult; however it is important to strive to understand these hurdles that women face. Gendered infrastructure plays a key role in experiences of women firefighters, as do the entrance testing standards and procedures. The fire service and the culture of firehouses offer rich opportunities for further study.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subject Research

Amanda Ferrante, candidate for a Masters degree in Communication at the University of Wisconsin--Stevens Point is conducting a study to explore the experiences of women firefighters in relation to gender neutral and gender specific restroom and changing facilities. You are being asked to participate in this study.

As part of the study, Amanda will ask you about your experiences using a brief questionnaire followed by an interview with the researcher. The questionnaire will provide demographic information relevant to the study, while the interview will provide an in depth exploration. The entire process should take roughly 30-60 minutes depending on answers and follow-up questions.

Risk exists if specific details discussed represent such a specific situation that readers of the final research project would be able to identify you. It might possibly be uncomfortable for you to describe a stressful situation. Aside from these two possible scenarios, participating in the study should pose no emotional or harmful risk to you.

As a result of your participation in this study, you will have contributed to the research within gender studies and women's issues as well as the fire service.

The information you provide will be kept confidential. For the purpose of this study, your interview and questionnaire responses will be coded so that your name will not appear on any of the forms used for data analysis. Only Amanda Ferrante will have access to the names associated with the codes and this information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in her office and destroyed at the end of the study. No information about you will be released to anyone. When details of your experience may possibly be identifiable to a reader who knows you, the researcher will change some details in a way that protects your identity without changing the overall meaning of what you said.

If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty. Any information collected on you up to that point would be destroyed.

Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like to receive these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Amanda Ferrante
Communication Department
University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(608) 432- 1434

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:

Dr. Jason R. Davis, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

School of Business and Economics
University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4598

I have received a complete explanation of the study and I agree to participate. Amanda has my permission to audio record the interview.

Name _____ Date _____
(Signature of subject)

Appendix B**Questionnaire**

1. City where you currently work _____
2. Other city where you have worked in the fire service _____
3. Your current rank _____
4. Your total years of service _____
5. Your education in fire science _____
6. Where have you trained or worked that has gender specific bathrooms or changing rooms for men and women firefighters? _____
7. Where have you trained that has gender neutral bathrooms or changing rooms for men and women firefighters? _____
8. Can you share names of other women firefighters that I might interview?

9. Age _____
10. Gender _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What initially attracted you to the fire service?
2. Please describe what it is like when you get a call, meaning the process of getting ready to go on a call?
3. How does the type of restroom/changing facilities impact the process of getting ready to go on a call, if at all?
4. What does it mean to you as a woman to use the facilities available in the firehouse? How does it/would it change your experience as a professional to have access to facilities that are gender neutral?
5. Do you believe that you have been treated differently in relation to the facilities that are available? If so, please provide examples or instances of that difference?
6. How do members of your firehouse talk about the facilities? Is there joking about the facilities?
7. What would be the ideal facilities? How would individuals' need for privacy be met in the ideal facility?
8. Is there anything that I haven't covered in relation to gendered or gender neutral facilities within your firehouse that you feel would be necessary or helpful?

These questions are a guide and may be asked and may emerge in a different order than presented above. Follow up and probing questions will be generated within the interviews.