

# Constrained Agency Theory: Understanding the Kairotic Moment as an Opportunity to Navigate Organizational Impediments in Policing

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# Constrained Agency Theory (CAT)

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- **NUTSHELL:** Theory about how power operates and how social change can happen (or the reaffirmation of the status quo).
- **Developed by Herndl & Licona (2007)**
- **KEY CONCEPTS:**
  - ✓ Agency
  - ✓ Authority
  - ✓ Slippage/Intersection
  - ✓ Kairotic Moment



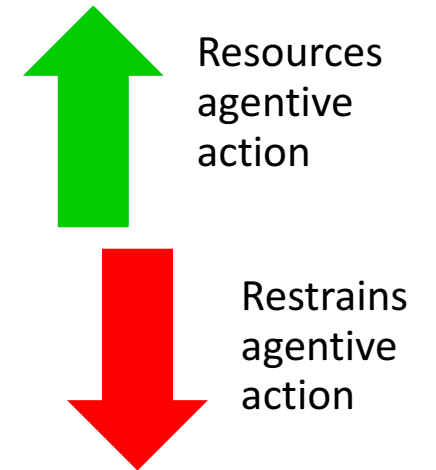
# Constrained Agency Theory: Key Concepts

## AGENCY

- Being heard
- Achieving political legitimacy
- Obtaining influence
  
- KEY: Not a fixed individual attribute but VARIABLE over time...
  
- DEFINED: Contextualized opportunities for action

## AUTHORITY

- Potential RESTRAINT and/or RESOURCE for Agency
  - ✓ Authority most often *constrains agency* particularly in institutions
  
- Authority in policing is nested w/command staff—most often white men (Jordan et al., 2009)

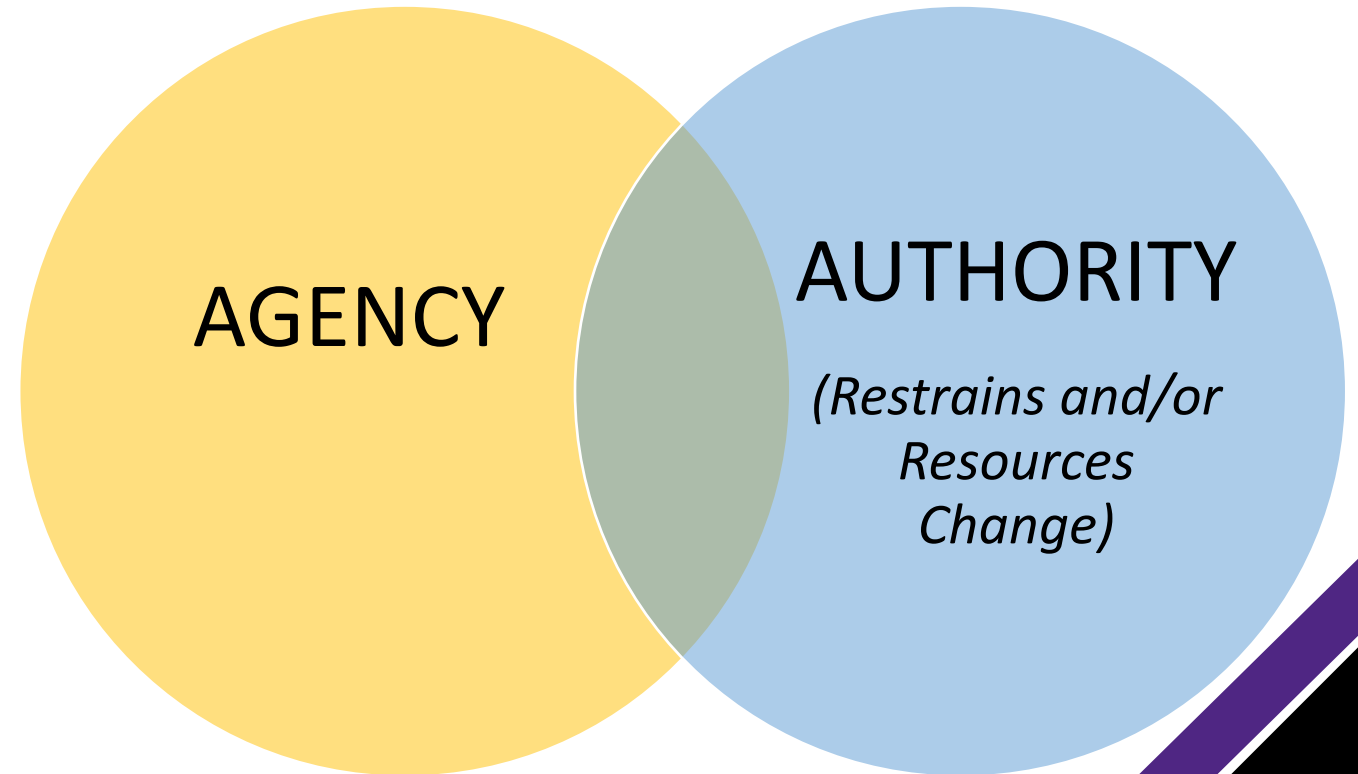


# Constrained Agency Theory: Key Concepts

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## SLIPPAGE/INTERSECTION

- Opportunity for change when individuals are able to take advantage of “slippage” or “intersection” between agency and authority



# Constrained Agency Theory: Kairotic Moments

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- When marginalized populations experience opportune moments (i.e., *Kairos*)
- To unpack the Kairotic Moment, we examined the conditions and opportunities that led to it (conditions + opportunities = Kairotic Moment)
- Kairotic Moments “allow subjects **to ACT to CHANGE** or reproduce social, institutional and discursive practices” (Herndl & Licona, 2007: 137)



# Research Questions

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1. **What are the conditions and opportunities that are associated with Kairotic Moments for women in policing over the duration of a police career?**
2. How do these Kairotic Moments disrupt the dominant narrative in policing, change institutionalized practices that persistently exclude women, and result in promotion?
3. Is Constrained Agency Theory useful for enhancing our understanding of women's experiences in policing?



# Methodology

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- **Biographical Approach** - to elicit detailed narratives from female police officers over the span of their policing career
- **Grounded Approach** - no specific theoretical approach informed the study at outset...Constrained Agency Theory emerged during our coding process
- **Snowball Sample**
  - ✓ Rocky Mountain Women in Law Enforcement
  - ✓ Massachusetts Association of Women in Law Enforcement



# Methodology Continued

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- **Process**

- ✓ Conversational interviews by phone or face-to-face
- ✓ 1 to 8 hours in duration
- ✓ Audio recorded, transcribed, uploaded into NVivo for coding & analysis
- ✓ Used open coding strategy and realized some women in the sample experienced conditions and opportunities that lead to Kairotic Moments for advancement/promotion/disruption of exclusionary practices

- **Coding**

- ✓ Barriers, **Conditions**, **Opportunities**, Advancement
- ✓ **Condition**=something you have/exposed to (*may/may not have control over it*)
- ✓ **Opportunity**=what can be derived or gained from the condition...what is making it possible for change





# Study Sample

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- **47 Female Officers**
- **30 Law Enforcement Agencies**
  - ✓ Municipal, county, state, and campus police agencies
- **7 States**
  - ✓ Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia
- **Rank**
  - ✓ 21 patrol officers, 1 trooper, 2 sheriff's deputies, 2 corporals, 1 detective, 8 sergeants, 1 lieutenant, 1 captain, 1 major, 1 colonel, 1 commander, 1 deputy chief, 1 chief deputy, 1 deputy commissioner, 3 chiefs & 1 interim chief
- **Demographics**
  - ✓ Age (26-62) (mean 46)
  - ✓ Majority White



# Findings – Entrance & Academy

CONDITION	OPPORTUNITY	EXAMPLE
Media/TV Shows	Created interest in being a police officer	Cagney & Lacey
Role Model	Encouraged/influenced decision to apply/symbolized it was possible	Exposure to police officer in childhood via family, school program, experience w/CJS as youth; DARE Program
Family Support	Encouragement to apply & trust it was worthwhile to try	Came from parents, siblings, partners
Civilian Position	Insider view of police work; familiarity w/subculture; credibility; rapport	Dispatchers, analysts, community service officers, victim advocates, etc.
Military Experience	Previous experience in male dominated subculture led to confidence at academy, field training, patrol work	Reported more confidence w/shooting during academy
Female Leader/Colleagues at Academy	Created peer support; Exposure to female mentor early in career	Emotional support for harassment; strength in numbers; collegiality; practical information

# Findings – Entrance & Academy

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- **Civilian Position:** “If I could be a dispatcher, I could do just about anything.”
- **Civilian Position:** “I was luckier probably than most females ... because I had been a dispatcher before. I already had some of the **rapport** with some of them. They knew me, they knew how I worked ... I already had some credibility.”
- **Female Leader at Academy:** “The one that stuck out to me—she was so bold—who had the most effect on me, I believe her rank was, I want to say captain or something...She was just bigger than life, professional, straightforward, and I said, “Wow!” Her presence, her attitude, her rank, the way she held herself—I thought, “**That’s what I want to be.**”



# Findings - Advancement

CONDITION	OPPORTUNITY	EXAMPLE
Internal Mentor/Advocate	Expansion of social network; Increased knowledge of informal processes; Encouragement; <b>Authority/seniority as RESOURCE</b>	Sounding board for deciding to apply for advancement
Female Leader	Belief in promotion process; Potential for female mentor	Presence encouraged some to apply for promotion for the first time
Education	Increased credentials & skills for career advancement and promotion	32% of respondents graduate degree; 30% respondents bachelors degree...one more qualification <b>to make it harder to be overlooked</b>
Lawsuit Filed and/or Resolved	Cleared barriers for advancement & promotion opportunities	Disruption of unfair practices and improved working conditions
Family Support	Encouragement; TIME to seek & prepare for advancement/promotion	Family/partner providing child care while studying for promotional exams

# Findings – Advancement

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- **Internal Mentor/Advocate:** “For whatever reason, a deputy chief at the time really, I guess, decided he admired me. I didn’t even know him...As people would find opportunities to insult me publically or say things to me, say something negative in some disrespectful way, he proceeded to take action against everybody that went after me.”
- **Female Leader:** “I actually just got promoted to sergeant last year, and that is because, well, **I think it is because we had a female police chief for the first time in my 18 years,** and I got in the top three after I took the sergeant’s exam, and basically she’s the one who promoted me...some of my commanding officers had told me, *‘Yeah, as long as I work here, you’ll never be a sergeant.’* So I took full advantage of our new female chief coming in.”
- **Education:** “I’m the only one that’s got a master’s degree, I’m writing, I’m teaching, I’m publishing ... and **you can’t ignore that.**”
- **Family Support:** “We actually went through a period when I was first hired where we transferred my son in the parking lot of where [my husband] worked. He was working days, I was working nights and swings, and we’d transfer the car seat and the baby in the middle of the parking lot.”



# Conclusion & Discussion

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- Not all female officers in our sample reported experiencing all conditions & opportunities highlighted in this presentation
- What works for one female officer may not be effective for another even in the same agency
- Female officers did report experiencing *different combinations* of the conditions/opportunities that ultimately led to advancement
- Some of the documented conditions & opportunities were **EXTERNAL** (Family, Education, Lawsuit)...Failure of LE institutions & leaders to use *Authority to Resource* the possibility for Kairotic Moments
- Additional work is needed to document why some women experience Kairotic Moments and others do not...agency structure and characteristics are likely to influence the availability, range, and frequency of the conditions/opportunities that lead to Kairotic Moments



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# THANK YOU!

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