

# WOMEN IN SECURITY

**Paula Mathers** examines the apparent shortage of women in the security industry

**W**ithin the security industry it is common knowledge that female security officers are few and far between. The Office of National Statistics reports that female students obtain higher GCSE and degree results than male students – which could mean that women are more likely to enter employment that relies on academic skills. However, there are more males in senior roles within business, medicine and academics, which should balance out the equation. Maybe the answer is that males are more open to the kind of employment they enter than women; with women being more particular about the kinds of roles they apply for.

Within the cyber security industry only 11 percent of staff are female. Considering the House of Commons reported in March that women are expected to make up at least 25 percent of board members, this leaves employers with a moral dilemma if they wish to adhere to these guidelines; to comply with required statistics, we are expected to employ or promote female staff over their male counterparts regardless of their experience or ability. In many cases, this is the only way these statistics can be adhered to.

While undertaking research for this article, I set up a study. I wanted to see how females perceive themselves in the security industry, how they are perceived by their male colleagues and how the public perceive female security officers. I used several forms of social media for this in addition to monitoring staff from the sidelines and using the ‘mystery shopper’ tactic. My findings were quite interesting.

The majority of women perceive themselves as better at their role than their male counterparts; they believe they have more compassion, are able to diffuse a situation quicker and easier and are faster to react to trouble, reading signs of unrest quicker than their male colleagues. However, when discussing lone working (for example building sites with lone worker processes in place), women are reluctant to take on the role, seeing themselves at significantly higher risk than their male counterparts.

When looking at how my study found male security personnel perceive their female counterparts, I discovered significant differences between what people are prepared to say in public, and what they want to disclose in private. The majority of males are unsure of how to treat female security officers. The belief is very strongly embedded that the female is only in the role so that someone can “check the girls’ toilets” or to make

up diversity numbers. However, in a public forum, those same male officers claim that they see female security officers to be just as good as the males.

The public view of females in security is very different and depends directly on looks; the more attractive female officers make the public wary with comments such as “Is she strong enough to break up a fight?” and “How is she going to stop any trouble?” While less attractive females are considered on the same level as the male security officers.

Despite employing the best person for the job, regardless of gender bias, within our company, we have, what seems to be, a much higher rate of female staff than other security companies; over 30 percent of our licensed staff are female. We seemed to have an influx last year of only female candidates turning up for the scheduled interviews – excelling in all interview areas. This puts us at a great advantage and may possibly be due to our family-friendly policies and stringent lone working processes, or it may be due to the types of clients we work for; whatever it is, it’s clearly working.

The role of door supervisors has changed a great deal in recent years; with the traditional ‘bouncer’ previously perceived as a big scary thug on the door, to the more professional security personnel we have today. This change in image may help more females that want to take on a role in security – whether it is as a full-time career, part time to fit around childcare, or full time in addition to their regular employment. Maybe it’s also down to us females that are already in the role to show other women that the job is actually pretty fun and can be incredibly rewarding.

**Paula Mathers** worked for six years as a cross-cultural psychologist for the British Government. She joined CoverGuard Security in February 2016 as the company manager and was promoted to assistant director in September 2016.

**Women in the security industry is proving to be the exception rather than the rule**

