

Winter 1959

## A Case for the Promotion of Policewomen in the City of New York

Felicia Shpritzer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Felicia Shpritzer, A Case for the Promotion of Policewomen in the City of New York, 50 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 415 (1959-1960)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

## A CASE FOR THE PROMOTION OF POLICEWOMEN IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK\*

FELICIA SHPRITZER

The author is a policewoman assigned to the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the Police Department of the City of New York. She is a graduate of Hunter College, holds a M.A. degree from the University of Michigan and is currently pursuing graduate work at the College of the City of New York in the field of Public Administration.—EDITOR.

The diamond anniversary of Civil Service in the City of New York was celebrated in 1958. In its pamphlet<sup>1</sup> commemorating this event the Department of Personnel emphasizes sixty years of growth during which "Promotion procedures through examination and service record were established so that competence replaced favoritism as a factor in promotions. Promotion channels," it adds, "were developed as a spur to better service and to eliminate dead-end positions." Under civil service the New York City Police Department offers opportunities through examination for promotion up to the rank of captain, but no policewoman has been permitted to participate in this phase of the merit system.

Information regarding the status of women officers in other cities seems to indicate that the existence of promotion systems for policewomen is somewhat dependent upon the manner in which they were introduced into their respective departments. Whereas cities like Cleveland and Washington have provided legislatively for their Women's Bureaus and women commanding officers equal in rank with the men, New York has added women to its police rolls at irregular intervals, with different titles and requirements, and distributed them through the Department in ways that varied with each reorganization.

### THE POLICEWOMEN IN NEW YORK CITY

In 1888 the first full-time police matron was appointed. Despite opposition and doubts, others were added. Exactly when any of them was

\* The following is a presentation of the author. There should be no presumption (real or implied) that it purports to speak for the Police Department of the City of New York.

<sup>1</sup> 75TH ANNIVERSARY CIVIL SERVICE, The City of New York Department of Personnel, Civil Service Commission, p. 9.

assigned for patrol or investigation purposes is not known, but it is recorded in the *Annual Report of 1912*<sup>2</sup> that recognition for "excellent police duty in connection with an important case" was given to Matron Isabella Goodwin by designating her the first woman "Acting Detective Sergeant." Most of the matrons were assigned to station houses where female prisoners were detained.

As a World War I emergency measure in 1918, Ellen A. O'Grady was named Fifth Deputy Police Commissioner and ten temporary "Policewomen" were appointed to her staff for general welfare work with women and children. Ten more were added the next year. Their services proved so successful that by act of the State Legislature in 1920 they were incorporated into the Police Department as Patrolwomen, without pension benefits, while the matrons were renamed Policewomen equal in grade to Patrolmen. Subsequently, examinations were given for each title which differed in prerequisite age, education, and physical requirements. The women were, however, eventually assigned interchangeably, a situation which led to dissatisfaction and internal conflict. When the 95 Policewomen and 48 Patrolwomen were legislatively "consolidated" under the single title Policewoman in 1937, the former Patrolwomen instituted legal action to protest the downgrading of their jobs.

Each examination beginning with that of 1938 has gained for the Police Department groups of alert, intelligent women—including many college and university graduates—with backgrounds and experience as varied as a population-wide list of occupations. The women are assigned to ever-widening areas of activity, although their number does not increase proportionately. At present there are few commands which have none of the

<sup>2</sup> New York City Police Department ANNUAL REPORT of 1912, p. 3.

Department's budgetary quota of 253 women officers.

The largest group of women, more than a third of the total, comprises the Bureau of Policewomen. Its director, the only woman commanding officer in the Department, is appointed from the ranks. At present there are 64 women, most of them college trained for work with children, distributed among the twelve field units and headquarters of the Juvenile Aid Bureau. The Detective Division has 49 women detectives and 10 policewomen without detective designation assigned in groups of various size to the Pickpocket and Confidence Squad; the Narcotics Bureau; the Bureau of Special Services; the Missing Persons Bureau; the Police Laboratory; the Special Frauds Squad; District Attorneys' squads; the office of the First Deputy Police Commissioner; and the Legal Bureau. One policewoman is secretary to the Deputy Commissioner in Charge of Legal Matters. Assignments to the Police Academy, commands specializing in morals cases, and other special commands account for the remaining policewomen.

According to the City Administrative Code, patrolmen and policewomen have equal status. In practice, this equality applies in all matters except for promotion to sergeant. Advocates of progressive personnel management and police administration agree that promotion is of vital importance in maintaining morale and providing for constantly improving service. According to Dr. Norman J. Powell,<sup>3</sup> "...it (promotion) is also a major attraction for superior recruits seeking to climb in service rather than to settle comfortably and securely in a given niche."

New York, unlike such cities as Detroit, Los Angeles, Washington, and London, has no competitive examinations enabling women to rise to superior ranks. It provides for the designation of 35 women as third grade, 10 as second grade, and four as first grade detectives in the same manner as the men in the Detective Division, with commensurate pay.<sup>4</sup> No formal machinery exists whereby the merit of each can be evaluated, nor is there provision for rewarding a policewoman who does exceptional work in any other command. In-

<sup>3</sup> NORMAN J. POWELL, *PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATION IN GOVERNMENT*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1956) p. 392.

<sup>4</sup> Third grade detective receives \$238 above patrolman first grade: \$6119 per annum; second grade equals sergeant's pay; first grade equals lieutenant's pay. (Budget 1957-58.)

asmuch as many of the educated, capable, well-qualified women are especially selected for assignment to the Juvenile Aid Bureau where they do invaluable work with pre-delinquents and adolescent girls, they are eliminated from consideration for designation as detectives by the very nature of their duty. Regardless of her effectiveness, her self-dedication, or her accumulated skill and experience, a worker in the Juvenile Aid Bureau can anticipate no monetary reward nor change in status for the seventeen years between becoming a policewoman first grade and eligibility for retirement. The lack of a full career service for policewomen who have the qualifications demanded by higher rank is deplored in *The New York Police Survey* of 1952, popularly known as the "Bruce Smith Report."

Efforts have been made to correct the situation. During the time that the policewoman movement made conspicuous strides and various cities throughout the world installed their organizations with immediate provisions for ranking officers, the women in New York tried, unsuccessfully, to alter their status. When all the branches of the armed forces recruited women with promotional opportunities the same as for men the Policewomen's Endowment Association felt encouraged to work towards comparable recognition by suggesting enabling legislation. The "line" organizations were willing to endorse "promotion in the Women's Bureau" but were adamant against the use of the titles, Sergeant and Lieutenant; they would accede to such descriptions as Director and Assistant Director, or Supervisor and Assistant Supervisor. The organization felt that not more than two jobs would result and that further reform would be inhibited. With no eligible list then in existence and the number of vacancies constantly increasing, it was felt that the organization should strive first for additional policewomen and then re-introduce the matter of promotion.

Eight years later, after appointments from two eligible lists had raised to 210 (out of a quota of 240) the number of policewomen in the Department, new legislation was suggested. This time the matter of titles was no longer at issue, but the question of women superiors in commands other than the Bureau of Policewomen became cause for disagreement among the men's organizations. In the meantime, an examination for promotion to sergeant was scheduled. Several women submitted

their applications which were not accepted because of the sex of the applicants. The New York *Herald Tribune* of July 26, 1952 commented on this condition in its editorial lauding the appointment of the present Director of the Bureau of Policewomen.

Until 1953 the Director was designated in the budget as a first grade detective, carrying the salary of a lieutenant. Since that time the position has been granted two rank-equivalent pay rises; but the allotment of women first-grade detectives has been reduced by one.

In no well-organized administration is there so great a gap in delegation of authority and in salary as that in the Bureau of Policewomen today. Because the position of director is appointive and, under present conditions policewomen have little opportunity to demonstrate executive ability, making a selection from the ranks has obviously inherent dangers. There is no chain of command so that, theoretically, even while she is on vacation or sick report, the Director is actively in charge and has no one next lower in rank to act in her stead. The designation of a policewoman-in-charge becomes her responsibility, and the person so designated assumes authority without any monetary differential between the policewoman's and the director's salary. Whereas, traditionally, the senior officer takes command in the absence of a superior, the practice in the Bureau of Policewomen is at the discretion of the Director. Establishment of promotional ranks appointed on a merit system would tend to offset friction, hostility, and envy which the present situation can cause. Commissioner Francis W. H. Adams who instituted many innovations during his service in the Police Department, publicly acknowledged the need for changing the status of policewomen. In the *Annual Report* of 1954<sup>5</sup> he referred to the "archaic double standard" that now exists, and noted that even with her (at that time) captain's pay, the Director's permanent rank is still that of policewoman. He had hoped to institute competitive ranks comparable with the men.

#### POLICEWOMEN ELSEWHERE

Comparison between New York's policewomen and those in other cities might help to evolve the most satisfactory application of a promotion system. Inquiries addressed to fourteen American

<sup>5</sup> New York City Police Department ANNUAL REPORT of 1954, p. 16.

cities and to London, England, with reference to the number of policewomen and their ratio to the total force; where the women were assigned; how their educational prerequisites compared with that of the men; the number of superior women officers and the promotion procedures to attain the positions, as well as the assignments of the superiors, resulted in replies from all but one city. Not every question was answered in uniform manner. Interesting information emerged, however, from the sampling.

In 1956 there were as few as two policewomen in Denver and as many as 523 in London. Like New York prior to 1937, Chicago has both matrons and policewomen. Whereas New York's women comprise approximately 1% of the total force, those in Los Angeles, Detroit, and Cleveland exceed 2% of their police personnel. Of the fourteen cities eight have women superior officers. In Cleveland and Washington<sup>6</sup> the women compete for ranks up to captain in the same manner as the men. Detroit has twelve superior officers; the six sergeants and five lieutenants are competitive ranks, while the Chief is appointive. In Los Angeles there are eleven sergeants, as a result of examination. One lieutenant known as "City Mother" is appointed. While Portland, Oregon, numbers three sergeants and a captain in command of fourteen policewomen, Philadelphia and Chicago each has two sergeants and a lieutenant in command of considerably larger numbers. (At the time of inquiry Chicago was planning to establish competitive promotional examinations.) London's Metropolitan Police Force has seventy-three superior officers among its women, with ranks ranging from sergeant to the equivalent of a deputy chief inspector in New York.

In four of the cities women are assigned to commands other than a women's or juvenile bureau. London has women officers and superiors in all divisions except the River Police. Although women superiors are usually in command of women, situations exist where a male is temporarily assigned to a woman's bureau subject to the superior's command, or where a woman com-

<sup>6</sup> Public employees of Washington, D. C. are in the U. S. Civil Service. The method of selection described in C. S. HYNEMAN'S BUREAUCRACY IN A DEMOCRACY (New York, 1950) p. 392, was made into law by the 69th Congress with regard to the Woman's Bureau which was made mandatory within the Metropolitan Police Department and its members given equal status with the men.

manding officer is assigned to mixed groups of officers. In Detroit, specifically, a squad of male detectives under a detective sergeant is assigned to the Court Department, under the over-all command of a woman lieutenant.

The educational prerequisites vary. Most of the cities do not give the minimum standard, but state they are the same for men and women. Two, however, demand college graduation or college equivalent for women superior officers.

In those cities where women are permanently assigned to one bureau they are lent to others as the situation demands. Basically, the woman's function in police work does not vary greatly from one locality to another, except for the organizational arrangement within each department. With respect to promotional opportunities, however, there are marked differences. There are none in Milwaukee, San Francisco, St Louis, or Cincinnati. In Denver a policewoman can take the sergeant's examination for salary advancement, rather than for a command position. Other cities vary from just one rank rise by competitive examination, as in Los Angeles, to the many steps leading to Chief Superintendent in London.

#### WHERE COULD WOMAN SERGEANTS BE ASSIGNED?

Dispersal of almost sixty per cent of New York's policewomen among various commands gives rise to the question, "Where, other than the Women's Bureau, could a female sergeant be assigned?" Obviously, it would be misuse of policewomen sergeants to assign them to a precinct to direct uniformed men on patrol duty, the image conjured up in the mind of the average patrolman when promotion for women is discussed. If women superiors were appointed in the same ratio as the men, there would be, according to present numbers at least fifteen sergeants. At least six could be used in the Bureau of Policewomen. Just as the Police Department now tries to utilize the previous experience and training of its line personnel in assigning lawyers to the Legal Bureau; chemists to the Laboratory; mechanics to the Building and Repair Bureau; teachers and psychologists to the Juvenile Aid Bureau—at the discretion of the Police Commissioner who determines all appointments—so it could assign as sergeants those women best qualified for nine appropriate positions. Several of these might be in the various administrative branches of the Juvenile Aid Bureau: planning and training; statistics and

records; liaison with courts, social agencies, and educational institutions. Others may be in the Missing Persons Bureau, Bureau of Special Services, or Pickpocket and Confidence Squad where groups of women are assigned. It is not inconceivable to have a woman sergeant on the teaching staff of the Police Academy. Other positions, not necessarily those of command, that require a specially trained person—regardless of rank—could employ a woman superior to advantage. Cities with higher ranks have all found comparable assignments for their women sergeants and lieutenants.

#### CONCLUSION

That women are an important part of the New York City or any large police department has been proved by the constant increase in their numbers since the first matron was appointed. That women can perform police functions beyond matron duty and the care of lost children has been shown by the ever-widening scope of their duties and activities, their assignment to more and more of the bureaus and squads previously all-male in character, and their receiving designations of the several grades of detective. That women are capable of performing their work with courage and efficiency on a par with the male members of the Department has been shown repeatedly by acts of bravery and outstanding police service for which they have received both public and departmental recognition. That women are capable of being executives has been demonstrated in many police organizations, including New York's which has had two women deputy commissioners, as well as four directors of the Bureau of Policewomen since it was established as the Women's Bureau in 1924.

Allowing the women the same chances to advance as the men—a procedure accepted in almost every phase of civil service—carries out the philosophy of good personnel administration wherein "... promotion is an integral part of the task of fitting together employees' talents and assignments. One of the principal vehicles for reaching the goal of career service development, the promotion machinery is of extraordinary importance." It can serve as a means of applying both knowledge and experience for the more efficient operation of the Department.

Inasmuch as the City of New York is proud of its civil service and career opportunities, and the

<sup>7</sup> POWELL, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

Police Department in its aim toward professionalizing police work and elevating standards of administration makes every effort to recruit desirable candidates; to encourage growth and advancement by in-service training and promotion courses; to enable members of the force, both male and female, to further their education by attending college and graduate schools, it is only fitting that the legal status of its policewomen be clarified, so that those capable and qualified can rise by promotion to superior ranks. When the policewoman with education, ability, and police experience can expect to make equal progress with her male confreres and receive the recognition she deserves, she will have the necessary incentives to keep informed and improve herself so that she can be of greater value in her job.

Perhaps the time is not too distant when women sergeants will be accepted as readily as policewomen and female detectives are now. Then, like Lillian Wyles, one of the first five sergeants appointed to the London Metropolitan Police Force, we shall be able to reminisce:

Prejudice dies hard in police circles: it has been dying these thirty years, and is not quite dead today. Now and again a "diehard" gives a convulsive shudder when the subject of women police comes to be raised. The convulsions grow more and more feeble; a few more years will see prejudice not only stone dead, but decently buried.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>LILLIAN WYLES, *A WOMAN AT SCOTLAND YARD* (London, 1952) p. 73.