

EXPECTATIONS WHICH HAVE SHAPED
WOMEN'S ROLE
IN POLICING NEW YORK CITY

by

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We've all heard of self-fulfilling prophecies -- cases where events were caused by the anticipation of them. It is my theme in this brief talk that policing by women, both historically and today, has been shaped in much this manner by the expectancies or expectations which key actors have held about the appropriate work for women in policing.

I would like to offer as an introduction this documented case of a self-fulfilling prophecy in a somewhat different job area.

"The year was 1890 and the Hollerith tabulating machine had just been installed at the United States Census Bureau. The machine, something like a typewriter, required the clerks to learn a new skill which the inventor, Hollerith, regarded as quite demanding. He expected that a trained worker could punch about 550 cards per day. After two weeks the workers were adequately trained and began to produce about 550 cards per day. After a while the clerks began to exceed the expected performance but only at great emotional cost. Workers became so tense trying to beat the expected limit that the Secretary of the Interior forbade the establishment of any minimum performance criterion. This was seen as a step necessary to preserve the mental health of the establishment.

Then, a new group of some 200 clerks was brought in to augment the Hollerith machine work force. These clerks knew nothing of the work, had no prior training, and had never even seen the machine. No one had told these workers what the emotional cost of the work might be nor of the upper limit of production that could be achieved. This lack of information turned out to be their greatest asset.

Within three days this new group was performing at the level which was reached only after seven weeks by the earlier, "more properly" indoctrinated group. Whereas clerks from the initial group were exhausted after producing 700 cards per day, members of the new group began turning out three times that number and without ill effects."*

The idea that expectations can limit horizons of work is so central to the history and current experience of women in policing - at least in New York City where I come - that I would like to show you how I think expectations have determined not only how women will be used in policing but actually how they will perform as police officers as well.

EXPECTATIONS OF POLICE DEPARTMENT AND POLICE SUPERVISORS:

Back in the days when policemen in New York City were wearing bowler hats, the first woman was added to the force for the care-taking of women and children in police custody. This woman and her successors performed the duty of matrons, which was all that was expected of them, and presumably they did it competently and cheerfully. As the force expanded and as the paperwork grew, women were added to perform clerical work, another task for which the department's leadership believed, as did the wider society, women were particularly well suited. Here again, women did what was expected but a number of them began to resent the imposed limitations. There were a few opportunities for more exciting crime decoy work, but this was only for those who were considered

* Taken from Rosenthal, Robert and Lenore Jacobson. Pygmalion in the Classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968, P. 56

"tough" enough for it. There was little change in these arrangements until 1971 when Neighborhood Team Policing was being tried as a new concept. Because of the receptivity to innovation of the Police Commissioner at that time, the Police Department was responsive to the voice of a policewoman who had risen to high rank in the Department and to leadership of the segregated "Policewomen's Bureau." She urged that women who wished to expand their role in the Department be made part of the new Neighborhood Teams where field supervisors could deploy them in more active roles, including that of patrol officer. The reality of that early experiment, documented in an Urban Institute evaluation report (1974), was that supervisors, especially those at the field level, did not use the women on their teams very innovatively, and that, with the exception of a very high-crime Brooklyn precinct, women officers rarely rode in radio patrol cars. When they did, it was usually as an extra officer rather than as a substitute, or in a special car for the purpose of taking reports of past crimes rather than responding to the run of jobs. While the potential for women functioning interchangeably with men was there, it was not actualized because many in leadership, like the Secretary of the Interior in the Hollerith case, were frightened to go beyond the expected limits.

Somewhat reassured about women's patrol abilities by the team experience, and also somewhat influenced by equal employment legislative changes, Department leadership decided in 1973 to abolish the position "Policewoman," to discontinue that Bureau, and to hire women as Patrol Officers to be used interchangeably with the men. While deployment was not exactly equal in actuality, many women did

begin to acquire significant amounts of patrol experience. But there were still negative expectations about how they would meet the test (especially where violence or physical force was present) and a special performance evaluation, to be conducted jointly with the Vera Institute of Justice, was undertaken. From this study, in which I served as Director, we were able to reassure the Department about the ability of women to perform patrol, although some differences did surface which I would like to discuss in connection with the expectations which the male line patrol officers had about the newcomers to their ranks, and the expectations the policewomen themselves brought to their patrol assignment.

EXPECTATIONS OF MALE PATROL OFFICERS:

Before women began to perform patrol, there were few male officers who were in favor of the concept. Especially among the older officers, a set of long-standing attitudes toward police-women included viewing some as sexual objects, and almost all as "weak sisters." They were expected by the men to need assistance and perhaps protection in strenuous or dangerous situations. They were expected to lose their self control, perhaps to "go to pieces in the crunch." The police union leadership particularly reinforced these attitudes, voicing their darkest expectations about the women endangering the men's safety on the job, and marital stability at home.

Actual experience showed many officers that they could work safely and effectively with women partners, and keep their marriages as well! And the Vera study refuted the bleak expectations about

women's propensities. Indeed, women were found to perform ably as patrol officers, and to be more similar to the men in their patrol activity than they were different. However, the Vera study did find that women who patrolled in two-person teams with male officers were slightly less active and more likely to hang back from physically strenuous activity; they were less likely to drive the patrol car, they were less apt to try to exercise control over citizens, to assert themselves in patrol decision-making, and less often credited with arrests than their male counterparts.

These differences in patrol performance appear related to the negative expectations their partners held about their performance potential. The partner of a female officer was likely to take over more than his share of responsibility for the patrol: to make decisions on his own, to perform the central tasks, to rush into the physical fray, sometimes leaving the woman to do the paperwork and stand-by. The activity and assertiveness of a woman was diminished by the over-compensating activity and assertiveness of her male partner who expected less from her than she was capable of doing. The fact that women patrolling with other women did behave more actively and assertively lends support to the limiting effect of behaviors shaped by negative expectations. However, it would appear that the women may have unwittingly conspired to limit themselves by their own expectations and it is to this area that I turn in conclusion.

EXPECTATIONS OF POLICEWOMEN:

There has been wide variation in the attitudes of policewomen in the New York City Police Department. While many of the old-timers were bored and resentful of their limited duties, others

were more ambivalent about them, or were resistant to the idea of patrolling the streets and subjecting themselves to the public. Those policewomen who have welcomed patrol work (and this is true of almost all newcomers policewomen) do not seem to expect insuperable difficulties on patrol, especially after their initial period of training and some favorable early experiences on the street. On the other hand, they are unlike the second group of Hollerith employees in being aware of others' limiting expectations for their performance. And the Vera study, which comprises women who had been assigned rather than chosen their patrol job, suggested that women lacked a sense of self-confidence about their own patrol abilities. A pattern was observed of the women deferring to their male partners, whether or not those partners were more experienced than themselves. The women sometimes behaved as though they had a subsidiary role on the team. They sometimes appeared to yield to their male partners, and to expect the men to take the larger role which, in fact, the men were doing. Thus, if the men's negative expectations led to a high level of activity that limited the women, it was also the women's acceptance of men's expectations for them that led them to adopt a relatively passive role in the face of this greater activity.

MODIFYING EXPECTATIONS THROUGH SENSITIZATION:

The Vera study concluded that various training devices could improve the parity between men and women in New York City policing and these devices might work essentially because they modify the expectations of the relevant actors.

Training could first be directed at Department field supervisors whose negative expectations limit women's potential by leading them to deploy women differently than men and to supervise women with inadequate understanding for their special concerns.

Second, training directed at male line patrol officers could break down their negative expectations about women's abilities, and make them aware of and curb their tendency to take on more than their share of the patrol job when partnered with a woman.

Finally, the women themselves could benefit from training to bolster their confidence and to develop their abilities such as the ability to be assertive with citizens, and to learn how to insist on taking their proper share of the patrol job.

Policewomen might never reach the "sky's the limit" expectations of the second cohort of Hollerith employees, given the realities of training limitations; but given the improved expectations of the wider society for women in general (and women patrol officers in particular, according to the Vera study) there is certainly promise that women will be able to transcend some of the limits created by expectations, and to better actualize their potential in policing.

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Title: WOMEN ON PATROL - A PILOT STUDY OF POLICE PERFORMANCE IN NEW YORK CITY, 95p, 1977 NCJ- 44148
Authors: J.L. Sichel; L.N. Friedman; J.C. Quint; M.E. Smith
Sponsoring Agency: Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
ORDER FROM: Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office *Price: \$2.50
Washington, D.C. 20402
Stock No: 027-000-00531-1
Subjects: Planning and Evaluation; Police Internal Affairs; Police Patrol Function

ABSTRACT: The patrol performance of 41 female police officers was compared to that of 41 male police officers in New York City in 1975-1976. The males and females were matched by length of time on force, patrol experience, and type of precinct. Direct observation by police and civilian personnel was the principal research method. In general, male and female officers performed similarly: they used the same techniques to gain and keep control and were equally unlikely to use force or to display a weapon. However, small differences in performance were observed. Female officers were judged by civilians to be more competent, pleasant and respectful than their male counterparts, but were observed to be slightly less likely to engage in control-seeking behavior, and less apt to assert themselves in patrol decisionmaking. Compared to male officers, females were less often named as arresting officers, less likely to participate in strenuous physical activity, and took more sick time. Some of the performance disparities appeared rooted in morale and deployment problems resulting from departmental layoffs, social conventions,

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and role expectations. Situationally and socially engendered differences between the performance of male and female officers might be remedied by different deployment and training policies. The study concludes with suggestions for the improvement of the patrol performance of male officers as well as female police officers. (Author abstract modified)

*Price subject to change.

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